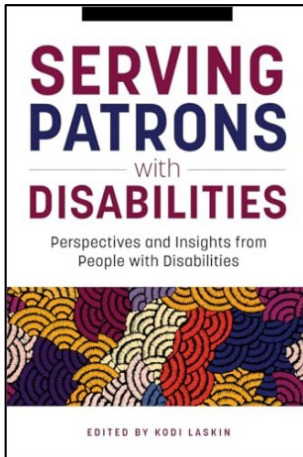


IJIDI: Book Review



Laskin, K. (Ed.). (2023). *Serving patrons with disabilities: Perspectives and insights from people with disabilities*. ALA Editions. ISBN 978-0-8389-3731-0. 88 pp. \$39.99 US.

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With this compilation of articles by American library users with disabilities, Laskin provides a useful resource for library workers. These compelling first-hand accounts are designed to help library staff understand the importance of creating access for disabled people and the best ways to make that happen. The contributing writers, including Laskin herself, cover aspects of disability like using service dogs, mobility aids, and speech-assisted technology. They also cover opening communication and access channels to those with visual, hearing, and learning disabilities.

The topic of service dogs can be challenging for public library workers. Laskin reminds library staff that dogs must be trained, but their tasks may vary and not depend on their breed. Her advice on communicating with service dog owners is to be patient and professional. Keep national or local disability guidelines nearby and know the legally proper questions to ask. There are two questions staff of libraries and other establishments can ask: Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability? And what work or task has the dog been trained to perform? Laskin mentions how happy she is answering those questions because it means she won't have to fight for the right to use her service dog.

But not everyone is as enlightened as Laskin. As someone who has dealt with difficult people bringing dogs into the library, I know library workers must be ready for pushback. Laskin mentions that patron pushback can sometimes be based on misinformation. Some dog owners might believe they can purchase a service dog ID or vest (which does not exist in any official capacity) and automatically be allowed to enter libraries and other buildings. Some might reject any questioning, thinking it is an inappropriate invasion of their privacy. Sometimes, service dog owners do not know that the animals must be housebroken and well-behaved in libraries and other public places. They should not bark uncontrollably, jump on furniture, or lunge at people. Communicating with people who are defensive or dismissive can be very challenging for library staff. Still, Laskin says library staff should not hesitate to ask the handler to remove the dog if there are behavior issues or unsatisfactory answers to the required questions.

Various types of disabilities are addressed explicitly in this book. Leah Keevan's chapter on mobility aids is enlightening. Library staff can accommodate patrons who use canes, crutches, walkers, and wheelchairs through planning. For example, library administrators must consider the size of walkways, parking stalls, ramps' slope, handrails' height, accessible book drops, doorways, shelving height, and computer stations. Some steps can be taken without the need to find the funds and resources to change existing spaces; staff can make efforts to communicate more fully with disabled patrons and can be more available to help.

In her chapter on speech assistive technology, Jackie Kruzic describes the importance of using augmentative and alternative communication methods for those who have problems communicating with natural speech. The "aided" version employs an external device, while the "unaided" version relies on talking, gesturing, pointing, and other physical actions. Kruzic is a children's librarian and the mother of a nonverbal child and, as such, is in a unique position to advise library staff. When she says staff should make strong efforts to be patient, attentive, respectful, and supportive, it should be taken seriously.

Patrons who are blind or have low vision need accessible materials, according to visually impaired author Katherine Schneider. Materials in braille or audio formats make the written word accessible. American resource organizations like Learning Ally, Recordings for the Blind, the Xavier Society, Bookshare, and the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) are invaluable. Helping the visually impaired register for NLS services and resources is one crucial way staff can assist. In addition, library staff can communicate more actively and descriptively by being thoughtful and respectful and asking patrons about formats and resources they prefer.

Cecilia James's article reminds us that libraries, particularly in the United States, are not fully accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Even though more than 30 million people have some degree of hearing loss and American Sign Language (ASL) is a vital, dynamic language, accommodations like interpreters are not easily or readily available. Communication is, of course, the central issue. With more staff training and increased efforts to access interpreters or related technologies, libraries can be friendlier environments for deaf people.

The needs of people with learning disabilities should also be addressed in public libraries, according to writer Alex Kerr. Kerr describes his struggles with learning and how disheartening and frustrating the journey can be. Understanding different learning styles and providing appropriate tools for each style can be very helpful in a library setting. Bookmarks can be a powerful tool for people who are visual learners. Reading along to audiobooks can be a productive tool for those who learn better through listening. Additionally, staff can be trained to help those overwhelmed by information by practicing patience and being calm and encouraging when interacting with learning-disabled people.

Serving Patrons with Disabilities: Perspectives and Insights from People with Disabilities deftly covers the issues disabled people face in public library environments. In addition to addressing a broad scope of problems disabled people face in a library environment, the book includes helpful tools in each section. "Next Steps" and "What Librarians Need to Know" provide good summaries and practical advice for library workers. The book combines descriptions of concrete procedures and admonitions for planning more accessible facilities. Its utility and size (only 88 pages long) make it a vital addition to any library's desk reference collection!

Baron Baroza (baron.baroza@librarieshawaii.org) is the managing librarian at the Hawaii State Library, the largest branch of the Hawaii State Public Library System. From 2018 to 2022, Baroza managed the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled in Honolulu, where people with visual and other physical impairments can find materials in braille, audio, and large print. Hawaii's Library for the Blind and Print Disabled is part of a nationwide network of libraries coordinated by the Library of Congress and committed to providing materials and equipment to make the written word accessible.

