

Report to the Ulverscroft Foundation Best Practice Development Programme 2012

**Kristina Janc
National and University Library of Slovenia
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Introduction

In the past two years my work in the National and University Library of Slovenia has been in many ways connected to the issues of blind and partially sighted people. In the focus of my interest was the organizational structure of the library for the blind and partially sighted. In a collaboration with The Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted People of Slovenia I was working on a project with a working title Establishing the infrastructure to guarantee the equal access to publications for the blind and partially sighted. As part of this collaboration I've been working in The Library for Blind and Partially Sighted and gained a new perspective on library services, library users and specially library stock. Knowing more about the services for the blind I've realized that we need to improve library services for blind and partially sighted people in Slovenia. I also knew that we have to learn from the best if we want to succeed, so I've decided to visit RNIB. I would like to thank The Ulverscroft Foundation for giving me the opportunity, the RNIB for having me and especially to Jon Hardisty for making my visit not only professionally stimulating but also very enjoyable.

Visit programme

Stockport, London, Manchester, Peterborough (18-22.6.2012)

1 Day

- Jon Hardisty introducing me with National Library Service
- Attending a meeting with presenter of Bolinda eBooks
- Tour of library
- Learn about RNIB web site and Reading Sight site

Jon Hardisty (Digital Services Manager) introduced me with the National Library Service (NLS) in Stockport. He described the structure and services of the NLS and gave me some information of the RNIB organization. The National Library for the Blind merged with RNIB in 2007 and RNIB National Library Service was formed. The NLS in Stockport has books and music resource in Braille and giant print, whereas in Peterborough is the Talking Book Service (and much more: see day 4). The RNIB is a charity organization and the library budget is not dependent on government finances.

Anyone with sight loss can join the library to borrow books in Braille and giant print. Anyone who lives in the UK (due to copyright restrictions) and is unable to comfortably read standard print with spectacles can join the talking book services. The annual subscription fee costs £82 and includes a free Daisy player. People can use library services through their local public library in which case the public library is paying the fee.

BOLINDA publishing house was promoting 2000 titles of e-audiobooks which can be downloaded directly to the users. What was interesting for me in this presentation was the fact that there are many commercial providers of materials (for blind and partially sighted) on the English-speaking publishing market.

NLS daily sends out 750 items of library stock and get 150 calls a week. Their users can select from 25.000 Braille titles and 3.000 giant print titles. They hold 3 copies of books in giant print and 2 or 3 copies of books in Braille. They also have impressive music collection with over 14.000 Braille music scores.

Jess Morgan introduced me to the efforts they make to promote accessibility of web sites and especially with the Reading Sight project. Reading Sight is the web site that has been created to support libraries, teachers and voluntary workers in helping people with sight loss get access to reading and reading services. I think this site (<http://readingsight.org.uk/>) should be among favourites for anyone working with blind and partially sighted people.

2 Day

- British Library
- RNIB Head office at Judd Street, London

Meeting with Stephen King, president of the Daisy Consortium and "Group Director: Prevention & International Affairs" for the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and Helen Gunessekera, Publishing Strategy Officer

While being in London I had the opportunity to visit the British Library and meet Milan Grba, Lead Curator of the South East Europe Collection and Mark Walton, Welcome Team Manager. The presentation of the library and their work was very useful for me and I am grateful to Jon for making this possible.

My main destination that day was RNIB Head Office at Judd Street. I have seen the special library and met Robert Saggars, Research Librarian, and had a tour in the shop with the various products for blind and partially sighted. Karen Street told me about the Action for Blind People Low Vision Centre where they provide a specialist rehabilitation service. I had a meeting with Stephen King and Helen Gunessekera. Mr. King, who is at the moment the president of the Daisy Consortium, was explaining me the benefits of being the part of Daisy Consortium and we all agreed that Slovenian organizations/libraries should join the consortium as soon as possible. Mrs. Gunesequera, Publishing Strategy Officer, introduced me to the collaboration with publishers and their joint projects with others. I was very much impressed by the quantity of the projects, guidelines and documents they have done/published or are in the process. Mrs. Gunesequera emphasized the importance of collaboration with various subjects.

3 Day

- Meeting with Megan Gilks, Marketing Officer
- Meeting with Pat Beech, Manager
- Tour of Manchester Central Library

- Attending a promotional event at Manchester Central Library

Third day of my visit I have learned about the selection and production processes and the promoting strategy in the Library. The Library is organizing various events to promote their services in public libraries. I had the opportunity to participate in one such event in Manchester Central Library. They hosted a known British actor to talk about her experience in recording audio books. She talked about audio books from different perspective. And for me this was another indicator of how well the audio book publishing market is developed in comparison to Slovenia.

4 Day

- Visiting RNIB at Peterborough
- Meeting with Martin Pugh, Senior Operation Manager
- Reader Services Team, meeting with Kathy Teague, Cataloguer and Technical support Librarian

The RNIB Peterborough office is very important part of the library service because that is where the Braille magazines are printed and sent out, it is the place where audio book CDs are recorded, burned and sent out. They also do the cataloguing and have call centre where they take 40/50 calls a day. They have 8 studios for professional readers who work with audio producers and additional 4 'self management' studios mainly for volunteers (they usually read instructions for use). They daily send out thousands of CDs, which they burn on 15 CD burners.

In Peterborough is also the biggest Braille production facility in Europe. It all starts in the transcribing office where everything can be transcribed from the written alphabet into Braille. Mr. Pugh also pointed out the digital format issues, especially the problem of converting the files in xml format. For me as a librarian it was also interesting to see how the cataloguing for users with print disabilities have some additional data that are important.

5 Day

- Meeting with Philip Jeffs, Archivist
- Meeting with Helen Brazier

On my last day I met with the archivist Philip Jeffs who prepared himself for my visit and surprised me with the photo album of picture from Slovenia. In 1940 a delegation from RNIB visited Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted Children in Ljubljana (Zavod za slepo in slabovidno mladino Ljubljana). It was interesting to see that exchanging and sharing the knowledge and ideas was important for ours forerunner too, and I am very pleased that I can carry on this tradition, I hope,

Helen Brazier, Head of National Library Service, gave me the overview of their work and talked about the future plan. One of their future challenge is how to extend their services to people with dyslexia and extend their services to other libraries in the country.