



Speech IFLA conference August 2009  
Mechelen/Maastricht

The inclusion of the library service to visually-impaired people in the Dutch public library system.

### **Introduction**

On the first of January 2007 an important change in the library service to visually-impaired people was introduced. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science reorganized the Libraries for the Blind and integrated the service into the public library system.

In the Netherlands the library service to visually impaired people developed separately from the public library system. Public libraries serve a general public, but although most of them stock large print books, large collections of audio books are rare. Neither was there an easy access to the libraries for the blind collections. There was however a growing awareness that public libraries could and should do more for the steadily increasing group of print-handicapped people. Access to mainstream services was felt to be desirable for this target group for purposes of social inclusion. The aim was to improve the availability of material in alternative formats.

We have had almost three years of practice with the new system. Has it been a success? Are materials in alternative formats more widely available in public libraries? What are our aims for the future?

Before I answer these questions I will try to give you an idea of our Dutch system and the way the service is organized.

I would like to start by introducing The Netherlands Public Library Association I work for.

The Netherlands Public Library Association has been playing its part in the Dutch public library service for exactly hundred and one years now. All 177 public library administrations which maintain 1055 library buildings are members of the Association. The Association represents the libraries and promotes their interests. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science subsidizes the Association to further the cohesion, quality and innovation of public libraries. This means funding for a host of projects and several national tasks e.g. the library service for the visually impaired, which brings me to the subject of my talk.

### **Target-groups**

First of all the visually impaired (blind or partially sighted) of which there are approx about 160.000 - 200.000 in the Netherlands to a population of about 16 million. But dyslectics, people with some form of mental handicap or those unable to hold a book or turn a page due to a physical handicap and even illiterates have a use for the audio book as well. So in a wider sense we use the term print-handicapped people.

### **The Dutch Structure**

The Dutch structure for library service to print-handicapped people is based on a network of local, provincial and national facilities and activities that support and strengthen one another. Given the fact that it is not in the nature of the Dutch to slavishly follow centrally devised rules and regulations, this network policy works on the whole rather well. We can and do agree upon a certain common strategy, provided we are allowed to develop our own policy locally and regionally. This agreeing on a common strategy can be helped along by ministerial grants.



*promotion film*

### **Local activities**

*A local library should offer:*

- An introduction to the adapted materials and how to use them
- Collections of large-print book, Daisy cd-roms
- Daisy players to lend
- Adapted workstations
- referrals to the national centre for adapted materials for those clients that are likely to need talking books on a regular basis.
- promotional activities to other relevant parties other than the individual clients, like old age homes and voluntary workers etc. (leaflets, coffee mornings, demonstrations).

### **Regional activities**

The regional support centres are set up differently in every province. ( the Dutch individualism operating here again).

So you have to bear in mind that my forthcoming list of regional tasks does not describe the actual activities in all the Dutch provinces. Most of them carry out some, but not all of the tasks.

Regional tasks could be:

- a background collection of daisy cd-roms to be borrowed by local libraries
- the giving of support and advice to local libraries
- the developing of promotion leaflets to be used collectively
- promotion campaigns
- staff training
- the facilitating of regional consultation.



*promotion film*

### **National tasks**

I will focus in the rest of my speech on the national tasks because other speakers this afternoon will tell you more about the regional (paid for by the provincial authorities) and local activities (funded by the local councils).

### **Association**

As from 2007 the Dutch Association of Public Libraries has been given by the Ministry the responsibility and the means for the execution of the general library service to the visually-impaired. Which means roughly that the Association distributes the available money (nine million euro's a year) among the producers of adapted materials, the Central Office for Adapted Reading, the Client Advisory Board and the public libraries. Contracts for the amount of yearly production are entered into.

Together with the main producer the Association has negotiated a three year agreement regarding the producing and lending out of adapted material with the Dutch Association of Publishers. We look into renewal of this agreement in 2010.

The Association sees to it that the service is carried out well and answers to the Ministry for its spending and its general policy.

The public libraries are stimulated to enlarge their services to print-impaired people by giving them grants for that purpose. In the past two and a half years a regional service has been created in most of the provinces in the Netherlands and about 350 libraries have started services for this target group. Leaflets and a promotion film

have been made about the service in cooperation with the Centre for Adapted Reading and the representatives of the regional service centres. Staff training was developed for front-office library staff. A five-day course by a Vocational Training College offers information about library services to the elderly, print impaired people and people who lack basic reading and writing skills.

### ***Production centres***

Three production centres produce the adapted materials. One of the aims of the Ministry's administrative reorganization was the separation of the production side from the collection choosing and client contact tasks.

Standard print is converted into Braille, into audio (read for a large part by volunteers) and put onto Daisy CD-Rom, into electronic text, or on request into large print. A wide range is on offer: fiction, non fiction, periodicals, papers, children's books, music scores, raised maps and study and vocational material.

Adapted materials for study and vocational purposes are not included in the above mentioned organizational changes. The execution of this service stays with Dedicon, the main producer of adapted materials.

Dedicon distributes the material to the users, does research into new techniques, carries out projects on a variety of subjects and does client surveys.

I would like to mention one project which may be of interest:

5.000 spoken book titles were inserted in the digital catalogue of two public libraries and the print-handicapped library users could either order these titles to be sent by post to their home address or download them. This project was successful and we are now looking into the possibility to do this nationwide.

### ***Centre for adapted reading (Loket aangepast-lezen)***

One of the most important changes in the system was the merging of the existing Libraries for the blind client-contact departments into one Centre for adapted reading, "Het Loket aangepast-lezen".

This office is the national supply and information centre for the alternative forms of fiction, non-fiction, papers and periodicals. They choose the titles and instruct the production centres to make them. Clients can order their books by phone ( 24 hours) or on Internet by consulting the digital catalogue.

In addition the Centre for adapted reading serves as an information centre for public libraries about reading impairments and library services for these target groups.



*promotion film*

### ***Some numbers***

<b>available audio titles ( Daisy) approx.</b>	<b>60.000</b>
<b>new titles added yearly</b>	<b>1.800</b>
<b>papers and periodicals</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>braille titles</b>	<b>8.000</b>

**distribution of digital texts is a growing market.**

**Loans in 2008 by post:**

<b>audiobooks</b>	<b>1.000.000</b>
<b>braille titles</b>	<b>7.000</b>
<b>registered users</b>	<b>32.000</b>

**of which 40 percent are male and 60 percent female.**

**1100 people read braille.**

### **Conclusions**

Our aims for the next couple of years are, apart from ensuring that the existing service keeps going on:

1. ensure that more people learn about the service on offer ( only about 20 percent of the target group makes use of the Centre for adapted reading).
2. Keep on stimulating the public libraries to participate in our scheme ( still two-thirds of our public libraries to go)
3. Keep on experimenting with new download and streaming audio book distribution methods.

To answer my questions at the beginning of this speech: Did we succeed in our aim to enlarge the availability of adapted materials, yes we certainly did.

So far the reorganization has been a success, public libraries are on the whole more aware and on the right road and the clients are very content with the services of the central office, but there still remains a lot to be done!

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