

SSU Annual Report
State Fiscal Year 2016
July 1, 2015-June 30, 2016

The Special Services Unit (SSU) of the Vermont Department of Libraries (VTLIB) is the regional network library of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) for the state of Vermont. In addition to NLS audio books and the equipment on which to play them, SSU offers large print books, print braille books, and audio described videos and DVDs. SSU contracts with Perkins Braille and Talking Book Library in Watertown, MA, to serve Vermonters with braille materials. SSU also purchases books and magazines for three institutions. This annual report presents a brief summary of our activities for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2016.

HIGHLIGHTS

These are a few of the highlights that occurred during FY16:

Local Recording Program – Our local recording program provides print-disabled patrons nationwide access to Vermont content that would not otherwise be available. Recordings are done in two studios – one in our library building in Berlin, and one in space donated by the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in its South Burlington offices – using desktop computers and Audacity digital sound recording software. In the late Fall of 2015, we acquired a professional 6’x6’ free-standing recording booth for the Berlin location. We also purchased new microphones and audio interfaces for both the Berlin and South Burlington locations, and we upgraded the computers and recording software at both sites. In February, we held a gathering/training for our seven local recording volunteers, and we have since recorded three books using the new booth in Berlin. In total, we have completed seven books which are currently in circulation and also available for download via our WebOPAC web-based local catalog. They are also included in the NLS Union Catalog, making them available for interlibrary loan to Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (LBPH) patrons in other states. There are currently seven more Vermont books in process. Our volunteers put in an excess of 530 volunteer hours during FY16.

Patron Satisfaction Survey – SSU included a Patron Satisfaction Survey in our Spring 2016 newsletter that was sent to 945 active individual talking book patrons. To date, we have received 205 responses. 200 patrons said they were satisfied with

the materials they receive from our library. 188 patrons said they were satisfied with the quantity of books they receive. 43 patrons said they used the BARD downloadable book and magazine service, 155 said they do not use BARD, and 7 did not answer. 186 patrons said the staff is courteous, prompt and helpful when they contact the library. 181 patrons rated their overall service as excellent, 20 rated it as good, 1 rated it as fair, and 3 did not answer.

The following are just a few of the comments patrons wrote on their returned surveys:

“One of the best services we get for our tax dollars.”

“Many thanks for a wonderful service that got me through a difficult time in my life.”

“I would be lost if it were not available! Your service of many years has always been excellent!”

“My husband enjoys much of his day listening to books on tape and would like to thank you so much for this wonderful service. The staff are always pleasant and helpful. I thank you as well as this occupies so much of his time every day.”

“I have always had a positive experience with T.B. This is a service that is very important to me.”

“I loved reading books before my eyesight failed – this is so great for I can continue to read through the audio books and not put a lot of strain on the eyesight that I have left. Thank you to everyone who makes this possible for me.”

“This is a wonderful service and has helped to improve my quality of life.”

“Understanding. Helpful beyond belief! I do not know how I could survive without the talking books. I am grateful. Glad to read that more Vermont authors will be recorded soon.”

“Life without access to these talking books would be very difficult. Thank you so much for this service.”

“This service has helped my father for many years. Our family is extremely appreciative. Thank you.”

“They are all we have for entertainment. We were avid readers and talking books filled the void. Thank you.”

“Really enjoy books, reading is impossible without my eyesight and I’ve always been an avid reader. Books help pass the time in the assisted living home.”

“This has enabled my mother – an avid reader – to continue ‘reading.’ Excellent job – so easy!”

“I really love this service because I’m a voracious reader. I love books and the fact that my sight is failing really depressed me, so this service is a godsend. Please continue your wonderful work!”

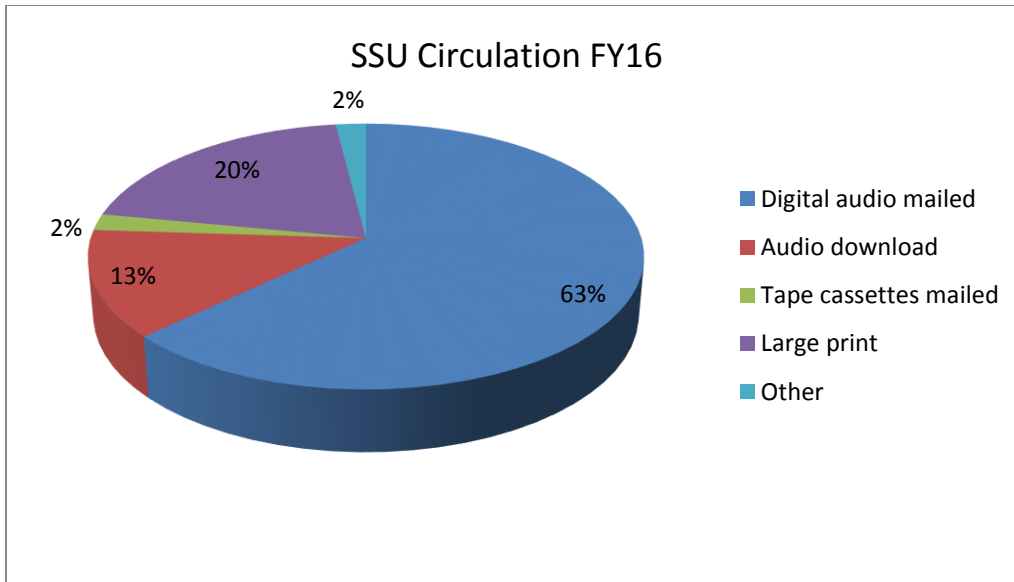
Discontinuation of Four-track Cassette Circulation – Circulation of four-track cassette books and machines has stopped as of the end of FY16. We have begun a major weed of the 38,000 cassette books still in our collection. Weeded cassette books are sent to a reclamation center in Pennsylvania and each one must be labeled individually, so it is quite an undertaking for SSU’s small staff. Fortunately, we have received help from other VTLIB employees and we have already made some good progress. Cassette book machines that are no longer in good working order are sent to a reclamation center in California. Most of NLS’s retrospective collection of books on cassette tape have been converted from analog to digital format. Those that haven’t are still available to patrons via interlibrary loan.

STATISTICS

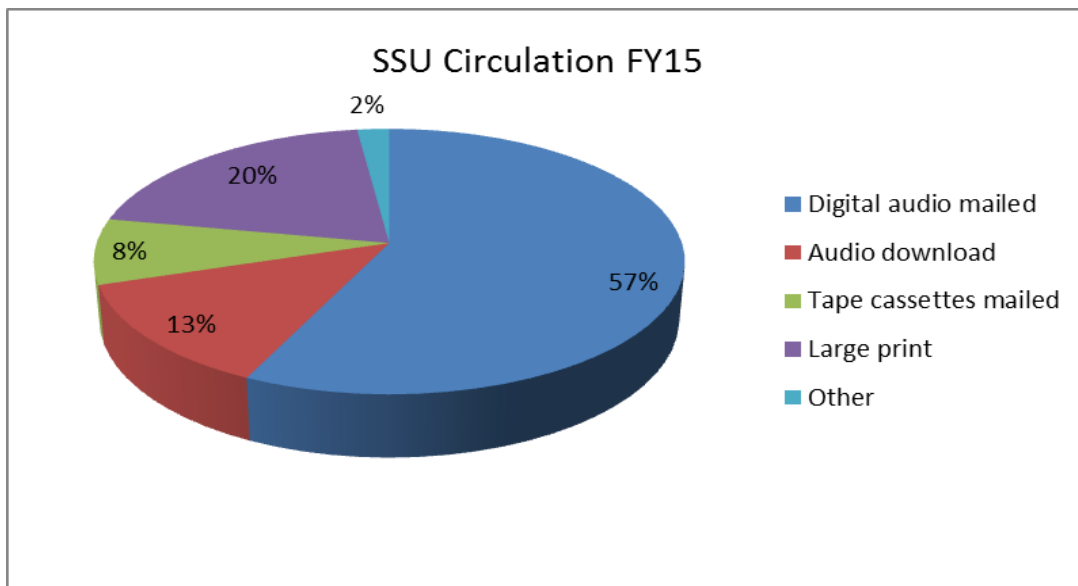
SSU serves 1,368 active individual readers, including 17 juveniles, and 207 institutions, 151 of which are public libraries utilizing large print. Total circulation in FY 2016 was 66,975 items, which includes downloaded materials.

Trends—Circulation

Circulation of NLS digital audio books through the mail is up 9% over last year, and downloading of NLS digital audio and braille books is up almost 5%. There was an 81% decrease in cassette book circulation, which has been phased out as of the end of FY15. Large print circulation is down less than 1%. Total circulation is down only 1% from last year, despite the large decrease in cassette book circulation. Downloading constitutes about 18% of digital audio circulation, the same as last year.



Pie chart indicating the types and proportions of materials making up circulation in FY16: Digital Audio Mailed 63%, Audio and Braille Download 13%, Tape Cassettes Mailed 2%, Large Print 20%, Other 2%.



Pie chart indicating the types and proportions of materials making up circulation in FY15: NLS Digital Audio Mailed 57%, NLS Digital Audio and Braille Download 13%, Tape Cassettes Mailed 8%, Large Print 20%, Other 2%.

Trends—Patrons

During FY16, 221 new patrons established service, while 301 patrons discontinued service, some due to death or transfer to other states. Registration of new patrons decreased about 12% over FY15, as compared to a 15% decrease the year before, while the number of patrons discontinuing service increased almost 17% over FY15. Some of this increase is attributable to our efforts to weed out inactive patrons (no activity for more than a year) in an attempt to have a clean and current patron database prior to our conversion to NLS's Patron Information and Machine Management System (PIMMS) prior to October 1, 2016. There was little change in the total number of active individual patrons and institutions – from 1607 in FY15 to 1,575 in FY16 – for a decrease of only 2%, the same as last year. This seems to be the experience of other libraries for the blind across the country.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

The local recording project referred to earlier is, again, the major event in collection development this year. The aim of local recording is to make available books of Vermont interest that are not being recorded nationally. This may include books by Vermont authors, books set in Vermont, books on topics important to a large number of Vermonters, magazines on Vermont, and magazines published in Vermont. Patrons are encouraged to suggest titles for recording, although titles will not be recorded for individuals. Most of the titles in current circulation or production were recommended by patrons. We are also in the process of converting several Vermont Folklife Center recordings from our analog cassette collection into digital format.

During FY16, 322 new large print titles, and 9,533 new digital book titles were added to the SSU collection. As of the end of FY16, there were 65,990 titles and 78,962 items in the SSU collection.

PATRON SUPPORT

SSU sent out two patron newsletters – one in the Fall of 2015, and one in the Spring of 2016. A Patron Satisfaction Survey was included in the Spring 2016 newsletter. Circulation of both Vermont and national titles listed in the newsletters increased dramatically.

SSU participated in several outreach events, which serve as both opportunities to meet SSU patrons and answer their questions on the spot, and also to discuss and

demonstrate SSU services to qualified individuals who are not yet patrons. The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired's Technology Fair was particularly successful in both areas, as was this year's Greater New England Multiple Sclerosis Society meeting and expo.

The SSU Library Advisory Council (LAC) met four times during this fiscal year, with meetings focused on staffing, budget, outreach, collection development, public libraries, book groups, local recording, assistive reading devices, renaming/rebranding, and the future of SSU. The LAC also organized a panel presentation, "Accessible Formats and Beyond," on library services to persons with disabilities for this year's Vermont Library Association conference.

OUTREACH

SSU staff participated in outreach events whenever possible. During FY16, SSU staff exhibited and/or presented at Disability Awareness Day at the Vermont Statehouse in Montpelier, at the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired's Technology Fair in Lyndonville, and at the Greater New England Multiple Sclerosis Society meeting/expo in Stowe. The Interim Director also addressed two smaller groups: The Vermont Association for the Blind's Montpelier PALS Group, and residents of Montpelier's Westview Meadows assisted living facility.

CONSULTING FOR LIBRARIES

While consulting for libraries has been minimal this past year because of the absence of a Librarian/Consultant, the interim director participated in a panel presentation on library services to persons with disabilities at the Vermont Library Association conference in Stowe in May.

PARTNERSHIPS

In the past year, SSU has worked with public and school libraries across the state, as well as the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Vermont Council of the Blind, the Vermont Assistive Technology Program, the VA Medical Center in White River Junction, the Vermont Agency of Education, the Vermont Department of Labor, the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the State Independent Living

Council, and the Vermont Humanities Council. The Interim Director is a member of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Vermont Unified English Braille Transition Committee.

STAFF

SSU operates with a staff of two. The program services clerk position responsible for talking book circulation was vacated in October, 2014, and has since been eliminated. The director's position was vacated as of July 1, 2014, and has since been eliminated. Assistant Librarian Jennifer Hart has been serving as interim director since July 1, 2014, and Sara Blow is the program services clerk.

During the course of the year, SSU staff participated in the Booklist Readers' Advisory webinar, two NLS Library Toolkit webinars, and the New Jersey State Library webinar, and attended the Vermont Division for the Blind's Great Expectations program for young adults. SSU staff also participated in monthly conference calls with NLS.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Support continues for the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH), the Vermont Veterans Home, and the Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. In FY16, 178 books, 35 magazine subscriptions, and two sets of MP3 players with wireless headphones were purchased at a total cost of \$3263.92. SSU and other VTLIB staff visited the new Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital facility in September and consulted with VPCH staff on continued development of their patient/staff library.

LOOKING AHEAD

SSU has been operating without a Librarian/Consultant for the entire fiscal year. It would be detrimental to SSU to continue for another year without a director in place. While day-to-day operations are not suffering greatly because of this, other areas are lacking, such as outreach and patron communications (e.g. newsletters).

There is great interest among SSU staff and VTLIB administration that the local recording program continues to expand. This is another area that would benefit by SSU having a full-time Librarian/Consultant. Our attempt to recruit and train

additional local recording volunteers is ongoing, particularly in the area of sound editing. While the first phase of sound editing is done by a local volunteer, the second phase of sound editing has been temporarily outsourced to the Perkins Braille and Talking Book Library in Watertown, MA.

Sometime before October 1, 2016, SSU will be converting to NLS's Patron Information and Machine Management System (PIMMS), which will provide real-time updating of patron and machine records in the national database. Our KLAS software has already been upgraded in preparation for this change, and we have completed our BPHICS (machine records) reconciliation. Our CMLS (patron records) reconciliation should be completed by the end of July, 2016, at which time we will schedule our conversion to PIMMS.
