

SSU Annual Report  
State Fiscal Year 2015  
July 1, 2014-June 30, 2015

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, 2015.

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

These are a few of the highlights that occurred during FY15:

**Local Recording Program** – Several new volunteers were recruited for narrating and monitoring. There are now three teams, each consisting of one narrator and two monitors, who put in an excess of 195 volunteer hours during FY15. Five books have been completed and are currently in circulation, and three more books are in process. 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 laptop computers and Audacity digital sound recording software.

**Currency Reader Distribution** – SSU was instrumental in connecting eligible Vermonters with free iBill currency readers offered by the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing to all legal residents who are unable to read regular print because of blindness or visual impairment. The iBill reader announces the denomination of U.S. paper currency by speaking, vibrating, or playing distinctive tones.

**ZoomText** – ZoomText magnification and reading software for the vision impaired has now been installed on three SSU computers and is available for use by both patrons and staff. Ai Squared, a Vermont company and the creator of ZoomText, generously donated the software for use in our library.

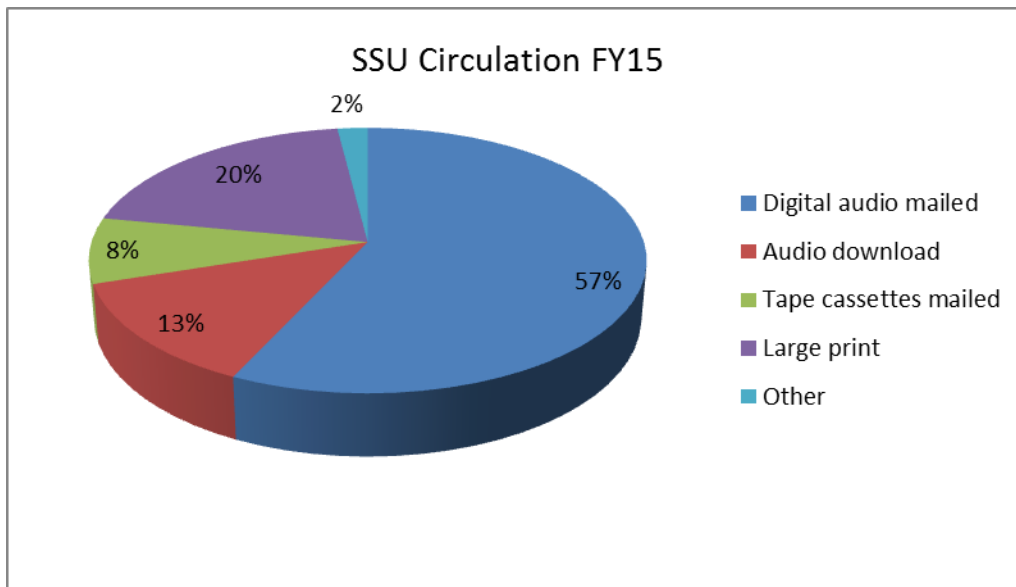
**Space Reorganization** – A major reorganization of SSU’s office space took place, making it far more efficient and patron friendly.

**STATISTICS**

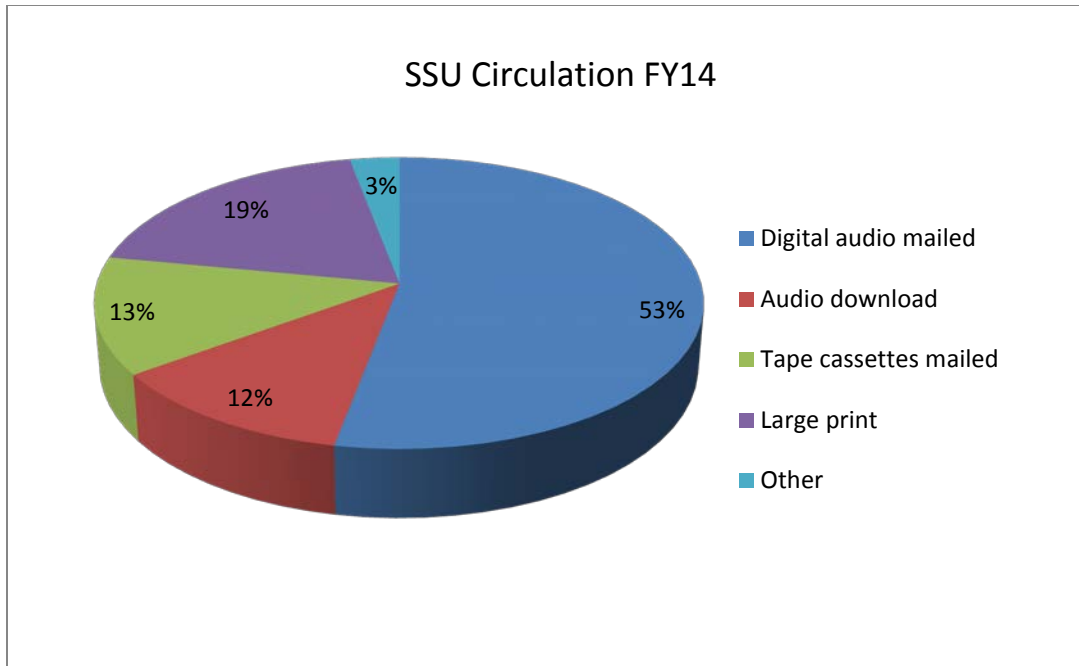
SSU serves 1,404 active individual readers, including 16 juveniles, and 203 institutions, 151 of which are public libraries utilizing large print. Total circulation in FY 2015 was 67,749 items, which includes downloaded materials.

**Trends—Circulation**

Circulation of NLS digital audio books through the mail is up 2% over last year, and downloading of NLS digital audio books is up 3%. Total circulation is down almost 5% from last year, largely due to the 41% decrease in the circulation of cassette books, which are being phased out. Large print circulation is down less than 1 percent. Downloading constitutes 18% of digital audio circulation, the same as last year.



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



*Pie chart indicating the types and proportions of materials making up circulation in FY14: Digital Audio Mailed 53%, Audio Download 12%, Tape Cassettes Mailed 13%, Large Print 19%, Other 3%.*

### **Trends—Patrons**

During FY15, 252 new patrons established service, while 258 patrons discontinued service, some due to death or transfer to other states. Registration of new patrons decreased almost 15% over FY14, as compared to an 11% increase the year before, while the number of patrons discontinuing service also decreased, by 19% over FY14. There was little change in the total number of active individual patrons and institutions – from 1640 in FY14 to 1607 in FY15 – for a decrease of only 2%. 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.

During FY15, 360 new large print titles, and 9147 new digital book titles were added to the SSU collection. As of the end of FY15, there were 68,606 titles and 80,147 items in the SSU collection.

## **PATRON SUPPORT**

SSU sent out one patron newsletter in April. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Circulation of both Vermont and national titles listed in the newsletter 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.

The SSU Library Advisory Council met three times during this fiscal year, with meetings focused on staffing, budget, outreach, collection development, public libraries, book groups, local recording, and assistive reading devices.

## **OUTREACH**

SSU staff participated in outreach events whenever possible. During FY15, the interim director exhibited and/or presented at Disability Awareness Day at the Vermont Statehouse in Montpelier, at the Vermont Council of the Blind's annual meeting in Fairlee, at the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired's Technology Fair in Rutland, and at Greater New England Multiple Sclerosis Society meetings/expos in Rutland and Stowe.

## **CONSULTING FOR LIBRARIES**

While consulting for libraries has been minimal this past year because of the absence of a Librarian/Consultant, the interim director did speak about SSU services at the VTLIB Collection Development workshop held in October in Berlin.

## **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, Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Vermont Council of the Blind, Vermont Assistive Technology Program, VA Medical Center in White River Junction, Vermont Agency of Education, Vermont Department of Mental Health, Vermont Department of Corrections, State Independent Living Council, and Ai Squared in Manchester.

## **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 still not been filled as of the end of FY15. 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 attended training sessions on grant writing, audio book narration, the new state LANDesk system, and VTLIB's new web site. 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 FY15, 158 books and 31 magazine subscriptions were purchased at a total cost of \$2640.25. SSU and other VTLIB staff toured the new Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital facility in November and consulted with VPCH staff on development of their new 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. We are attempting to recruit and train volunteers in sound editing, since both of the SSU staff members who did this have left. Purchase and mastery of the Hindenburg digital book producer software recommended by NLS would be a logical next step in expanding the program.

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