

SSU Annual Report
State Fiscal Year 2013
July 1, 2012-June 30, 2013

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 & 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 movies. SSU contracts with Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library in Watertown, MA, to serve Vermonters with braille materials. SSU also purchases books and magazines for six institutions.

This annual report presents a brief summary of our activities for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2013.

STATISTICS

SSU serves 1,439 active individual readers, including 30 juveniles, and 188 institutions, 148 of which are public libraries utilizing large print. Total circulation in FY 2013 was 69,815 items, which includes downloaded materials.

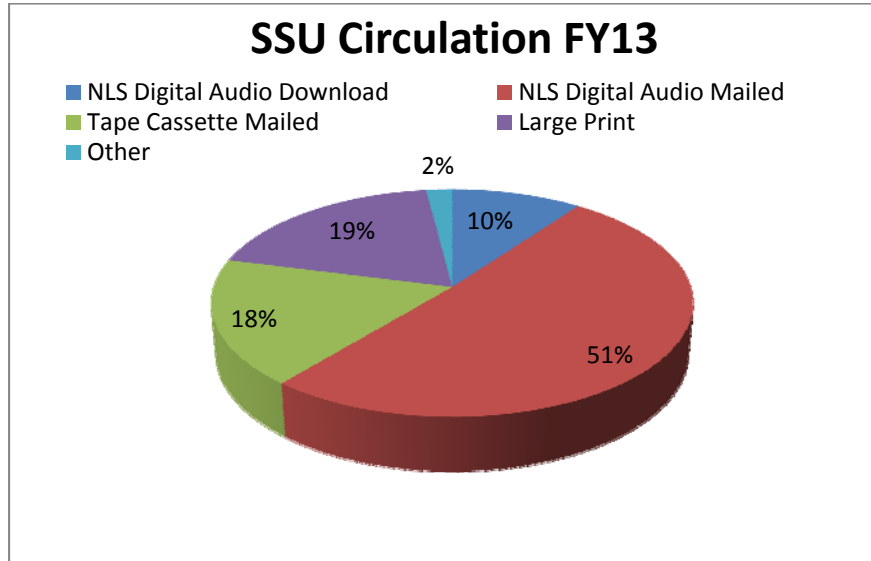
Trends—Circulation

Circulation of NLS digital audio books through the mail is up 4% over last year, and downloading of NLS digital audio books is up 17%. Total circulation is down 2.6% from last year, with recorded cassettes down 25%, and large print down 3%.

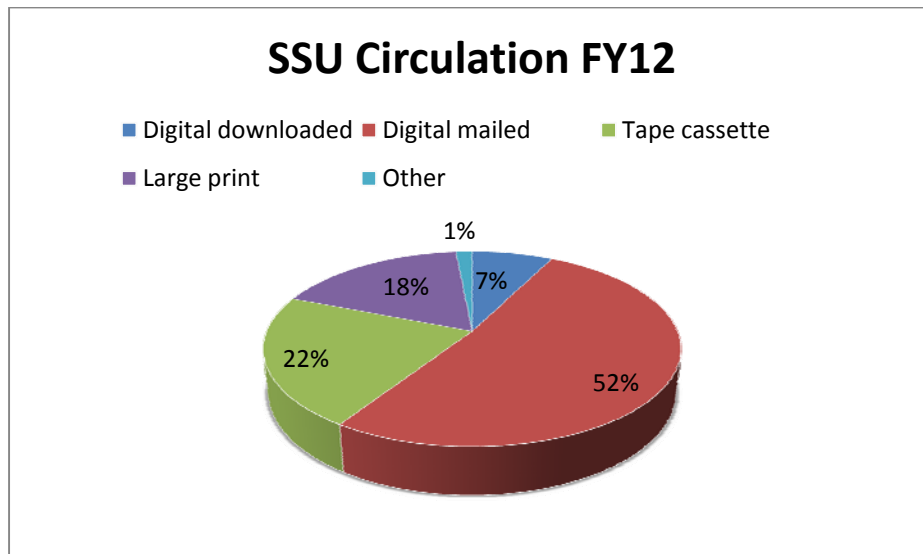
Downloading constitutes 16% of digital audio circulation; last year it was 14%.

Two downloadable services, downloadable NLS braille books and audio books from the commercial service OneClick Digital, are counted as “Other.” Braille books numbering 202 were downloaded from NLS after WebBraille merged with BARD this year. In previous years, WebBraille download figures were not shared with the regional network libraries. In the charts below, the term “NLS Digital

Audio Download” is used instead of “Digital downloaded” to indicate that figure does not include non-audio or non-NLS downloads.



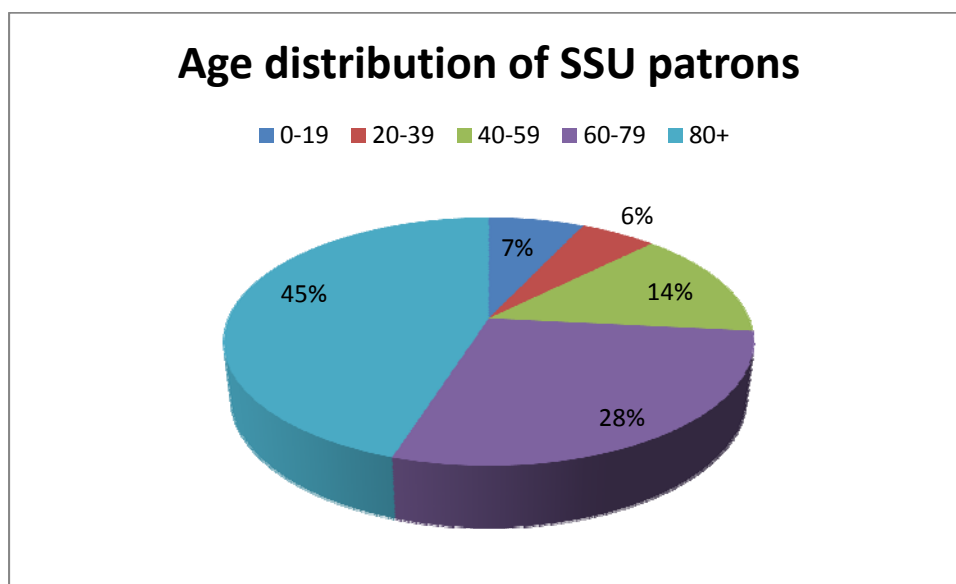
Pie chart indicating the types and proportions of materials making up circulation in FY13: NLS Digital Audio Download 10%, NLS Digital Audio Mailed 51%, Tape Cassette Mailed 18%, Large Print 19%, Other 2%.



Pie chart indicating the types and proportions of materials making up circulation in FY12: Digital downloaded 7%, Digital mailed 52%, Tape cassette 22%, Large print 18%, Other 1%.

Trends—Patrons

The total number of active patrons increased 4% over last year. Registrations of new patrons increased 10% over FY12. Other agencies serving the blind and visually impaired are also experiencing an increase in clients. However, the number of patrons discontinuing service, including deaths and transfers to other states, increased 15% over last year. It is also disappointing to note that the number of active juvenile patrons has decreased 29%, due in part to juvenile patrons “aging out” and now being counted as adult patrons, and to the prevalent use of sources other than NLS for student needs.



Pie chart indicating the age distribution of SSU patrons: Ages 0-19 7%, ages 20-39 6%, ages 40-59 14%, ages 60-79 28%, ages 80 and above 45%.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Magazines

NLS converted all of its magazines to digital cartridge and download this year. Patrons are required to return the digital cartridges, unlike magazines on tape, and magazine service will be suspended if cartridges are not sent back. Talking Book Topics, the bimonthly catalog listing NLS audio books, is currently also being treated as a magazine and must be returned, although it may take some time for

patrons to go through. Questions during the magazine conversion process and the suspension of magazines due to non-return have created additional work for staff.

BARD download service

SSU staff downloaded more than 225 audio titles to add to the collection, or to send to patrons with particular needs. There are thousands of retrospective titles available for download on BARD that were formerly on tape. NLS is not sending us copies of every title, and we are not able to download every one. We do check periodically to see which retrospective titles are requested most by our patrons, and we add those to the collection.

Local interest

The book selected by the Vermont Humanities Council for the 2013 Vermont Reads statewide reading campaign, Poetry 180, was not available in commercial audio. NLS agreed to record it so our patrons could participate in programs held at their public libraries. SSU makes every effort to provide titles requested by patrons who are participating in book clubs.

SSU was also instrumental in seeking funding from Vermont Adaptive Ski & Sports to record a history of Pico ski resort, written by a patron. This year was the 75th anniversary of the Vermont resort. The recording was done by the Perkins Talking Book & Braille Library, Watertown, MA.

SSU has developed a pilot project for recording audio books of particular interest to Vermonters. A small amount of equipment has been purchased for this purpose.

Non-NLS services

The SSU subscription to OneClick Digital commercial audio book download service was not renewed this spring. Although the service was handy for those who wanted to have access to audio books on small commercially-available devices, the cost for the service compared to the usage it had, the impending arrival of the NLS iPod and Android apps, and the relatively small scope of the collection available, were all factors in the decision to drop the service. Many public libraries in the state offer commercial audio book download services, and our patrons are encouraged to make use of these.

SSU was notified of the impending cessation of the National Federation of the Blind's (NFB) newspaper-by-phone service, NFB Newslite, in Vermont. This service had been unfunded in Vermont for a few years, though NFB allowed it to continue in the state. The Vermont NFB chapter successfully pleaded with NFB to continue the service for another six months while it attempted to increase usage, however, SSU is now unable to sign new users up for the service. NFB Newslite offers only three Vermont newspapers.

PATRON SUPPORT

The SSU Library Advisory Council was formed this year, and held two full membership meetings. The Council is made up of patrons representing different segments of our patron population and organizations dealing with blindness and visual impairment. The Council will be another means of communication between SSU and its patrons, and plans to meet quarterly. For more information on the Council, contact the Chair, Mike Richman (South Burlington), at mike.richman@comcast.net. Other members include Barbara Buchanan (Burlington), Linda Gustafson (Essex Junction), Peggy Howard (Berlin/Montpelier), Dee Jones (Middlesex), Dan Norris (Barre/Montpelier), Amy Olsen (Hyde Park), Paula Stevens (Wilder), and Walter Taylor (South Royalton).

This year, SSU visited Peer Assisted Learning & Support (PALS) groups sponsored by the Vermont Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired (VAB) in Brattleboro, Springfield, and White River Junction. SSU exhibited at the VAB Tech Fair in South Burlington. SSU briefly addressed the first Great Expectations meeting of young adults with visually impairments, a group sponsored by the Vermont Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired and the VAB, held in Montpelier. The Librarian participated in White Cane Awareness Day by walking blindfolded with a cane and a sighted guide from the VAB through downtown Montpelier. SSU also attended a National Federation of the Blind meeting in Montpelier.

The third annual Postal Carrier of the Year Award was presented to Faye Hebert of Vergennes, at the annual meeting of the Vermont Council of the Blind, held in South Burlington. The award honors postal carriers who go out of their way to assist their visually-impaired or otherwise disabled postal patrons, and to educate

other postal carriers of the importance of the US Postal Service in the delivery of talking books.

OUTREACH

More public libraries have NLS digital book players to demonstrate to their patrons, as the libraries in Brattleboro, Lyndonville, Middlebury, and St. Johnsbury have agreed to serve as demonstration sites, joining Bennington, Rutland, Springfield, and Woodstock.

SSU spread the word about its services by speaking at the Lodge at Otter Creek, Eastview at Middlebury, Allenwood at Pillsbury Manor, and Wake Robin retirement communities in Middlebury, South Burlington, and Shelburne. SSU exhibited at the Vermont Optometry Association educational conference at Stowe, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in Burlington, both in partnership with the Vermont Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired. SSU spoke at a meeting of the Brattleboro Kiwanis, and on Royalton Community Radio. Email about SSU services and offers to speak were sent to all area agencies on aging throughout the state.

The Librarian addressed a meeting of the Special Education Advisory Council of the Vermont Department of Education in an effort to increase visibility of SSU among special educators. A chart comparing NLS materials to those of Learning Ally and Bookshare.org developed for this meeting has since been utilized by NLS network libraries in other states and by NLS staff.

Outreach to those who may qualify for SSU services because of physical disabilities was expanded by exhibiting at the Multiple Sclerosis Society (MSS), New England Chapter, annual meeting in Essex Junction, and MSS Education Day in Stowe. Again, these events were in partnership with the VAB. A newsletter article about SSU services was sent to the Northern New England Chapter of the ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) Association, and contact was also made to the Williston office of the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

CONSULTING FOR LIBRARIES

This year, SSU facilitated a workshop for public librarians on accessible technology, including e-readers and computers. Broadcast emails were sent to

librarians' listservs on topics including accessible e-readers, White Cane Day, blind awareness training, recommended apps for dyslexics, a television documentary about blindness, accessible IRS tax forms, and citizenship not being necessary for NLS or SSU services. Responses were made to individual libraries concerning accessible signage, Blindness Awareness Month, and braille.

SSU also conducted a portion of the multi-day Collection Development workshop required as part of the Vermont Librarian Certification Program, covering large print and other accessibility concerns.

PARTNERSHIPS

In the past year, SSU has worked with public and school libraries across the state, the Vermont Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired, the Vermont Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired, the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind & Visually Impaired, the Vermont Council of the Blind, the Vermont Assistive Technology Program, and the Vermont AgrAbility Project (part of the University of Vermont Extension Service).

STAFF

SSU operates with a staff of four. In the past year, SSU staff have attended training sessions on blind awareness, reader's advisory, CPR, ZoomText, Creating a Customer-Centered Culture (training provided by the Vermont Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired and the State Rehab Council for the Blind), downloading from BARD using a Mac, and Supervisory Development. The Librarian attended the Tri-regional Conference of Libraries for the Blind & Physically Handicapped, held in Pittsburgh, PA, and a roundtable discussion on library outreach held in Montpelier.

SSU staff participates in monthly conference calls with NLS.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Visit of NLS network consultant—SSU received its biennial visit by an NLS network consultant in June; resulting recommendations have not yet been received.

Assistance to state-related institutions—SSU purchased books for Lund Family Center and Woodside Juvenile Rehab Center, and magazine subscriptions for these

institutions and Austine School for the Deaf, Vermont Veterans Home, and Laraway School. Subscriptions for the Vermont State Hospital remain suspended until the State Hospital moves into its new building. List of recommended book titles for purchase were sent to the Vermont Department of Corrections for use in prison libraries. SSU conducted a review of its support to these institutions this year.

Donations—SSU has not actively solicited monetary donations, but these have been made from time to time in modest amounts from grateful patrons or as memorials. This year was particularly fruitful, the bulk being in memory of one patron and a particularly generous gift from a current patron.

LOOKING AHEAD

This fall, NLS should be releasing its iPod/iPhone/iPad and Android apps, which will enable NLS BARD downloads to be playable on smaller devices. We expect a lot of interest in these applications, particularly among younger patrons. Once the apps are released, we will be aggressively marketing the service to special educators in particular.

The Library Advisory Council has already assisted us in recommending venues for outreach, and we expect that to continue. We also plan to use the Advisory Council to audition narrators for the local recording program.

As the pilot program for local recording of audio books of Vermont interest successfully proceeds, we expect to garner and create more publicity for the program.

We receive many notes and messages through the year telling us how important our services are to our patrons. We appreciate the reminders these messages bring that our work has meaning.