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## Looking to the Future: A Librarian's Perspective



**Alice L. Hagemeyer**

After 34 years of service to the D.C. Public Library in Washington, D.C., Alice Lougee Hagemeyer retired in December, 1991. For the last 15 years she served as Librarian for the Deaf Community, a position which was the first of its kind in the library field. A popular keynote speaker, she has also made presentations throughout the United States and Australia, has been published in several journals, including *Library Trends*, and her resource guide for librarians and library programs, "The Legacy and Leadership of the Deaf Community."

In 1974 Ms. Hagemeyer initiated Deaf Heritage Week, and created *The Red Notebook* in 1979 at the D.C. Public Library. As chair of the Friends of Libraries for Deaf Action (FOLDA) of the Maryland Association of the Deaf, she and her committee are presently working on a structure for establishing a deaf cultural library in Maryland.

Since her retirement she has served as a consultant on library for deaf action. Spare time pursuits include bridge, travel, reading, and attending meetings and activities related to the deaf community and literacy. She and her husband, Ted, reside in Silver Spring, Maryland. They have two grown up children, David and Noreen.

### Introduction

A new library image for the deaf community and a new deaf image in the media are in the making. In this article use of the terms "the deaf community" or "the deaf" refers to all people with hearing disabilities (deaf, Deaf, hard of hearing, deafened, and hearing impaired).

For many years, I have been fortunate in having the backing of several National Association of the Deaf members, including Hubert Anderson, Henry Buzzard, Mervin D. Garretson, Bill Kautzky, and Jackie Stover. I have also received support from several American Library Association (ALA) members, including Phyllis Dalton, John Day, Emily Ferren, Sue Galloway and Irene Hodock. All of these people share my view that the deaf should take responsibility for collection development in their area of interest in the library, and should speak up about what should be included in library programming and training to benefit the deaf.

As we all know, some of the current problems include exposure to negative labels about the deaf through the media, libraries with biased and inaccurate information about the deaf, a limited interest in libraries, reading, and books by deaf people, and differing opinions on methods of teaching or determining appropriate communication modes.

Who should take the responsibility to prevent such problems? Both the deaf and library communities are now working together to eliminate these and other problems by developing guidelines that will benefit everyone.

### Guidelines

The American Library Association (ALA) is currently developing guidelines that will help the nation's libraries provide cost effective and efficient library and information services for the deaf. The NAD is also currently working to establish the Friends of Libraries for Deaf Action-USA Section to assure the involvement of each state association of the deaf in local friends-of-the-library groups to promote legislation and/or appropriations to address deaf needs at local, state, and national levels.

The ALA and FOLDA-USA will work together to ensure the rights of all Americans — deaf and hearing — to participate in the democratic process and be productive and literate no matter where they live.

In 1931 the National Library Services to the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) was established by Act of Congress to serve blind people, including those blind readers with hearing disabilities. The program was expanded in 1952 to include individuals with physical disabilities that prevent the reading of standard print.

## The Current Role of the Library in the Community

Whenever library administrators and members of the Library Board make resolutions for the library to expand or improve services to students, faculty members, staff, clients or to the general public, they must plan effectively. They must address facts first and be cautious in order to insure that money (from taxes, tuition, and donations) will be well spent and that their resources will be useful.

They are also expected to be familiar with the needs of various interest groups, from African Americans, children, and older adults to the blind. There are standards and guidelines available to help them with programs revolving around these special needs groups. Library policy makers are expected to know what services the library should provide in order to meet the needs of all interest groups, including members with disabilities in each interest group.

The Reference and Adult Services Division at the ALA defines "library" as an entity that provides all of the following:

1. an organized collection of printed or other library materials, or a combination thereof.
2. A staff trained to provide and interpret such materials as required to meet the information, cultural, recreational, or educational needs of clientele.
3. An established schedule in which services of the staff are available to clientele.
4. The physical facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff and schedule.

The library and information needs of the deaf as an interest group have not yet been fully addressed in *any* library in the nation because of lack of guidelines to help them.

### District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL)

Two D.C. Public Library (DCPL) employees and I tried for about a year to persuade DCPL administrators and the Board of Library Trustees to create a new library position that would focus on the needs of the deaf community. On April 1, 1976, two months before I received my master's degree in library and information science

from the University of Maryland, I became the first public librarian responsible for promoting both deaf and library awareness in the Washington, D.C. community. When I accepted this challenge, I knew there would be no model for the DCPL to follow. In spite of my training as a librarian in all areas, from legislation, collection development, and organization to programming, I often had to look beyond the limited resources about library services to the deaf at the University of Maryland and even at Gallaudet University by seeking examples of existing library and information services provided to other special interest groups around the nation, the Hispanic community, for example.

While serving the public, I knew that I was dependent upon both deaf and hearing people to provide me with their insights as users of library resources. This was necessary because I have never known what it was like to grow up hearing and become deaf later in life or to become deaf due to the aging process. I also had not had the experience of a deaf child who has good communication using American Sign Language (ASL) at home or in the classroom. My parents are not deaf and they do not know sign language. The school that I attended as a child used the oral method at the primary and intermediate levels, so I was unable to gain much from the classroom until high school when I had four excellent teachers who used ASL. I have also never had the opportunity to mingle with people of different cultures and beliefs. Thus, it was essential for me to gain input from deaf patrons with various educational and cultural backgrounds and also from deaf people who are legally blind or have other disabilities. Having access to their insights and needs was essential for me to develop a collection for the deaf that would be unbiased, updated and accurate.

### Knowledge is Power

"Knowledge is of two kinds, we know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it." Source: Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, April 18, 1775.

Although I recognized the importance that each D.C. public library branch have unbiased and comprehensive information about the deaf, it was difficult to develop a list of the then limited number of books and other library materials that should be included in the collection. My library colleagues, patrons, and I were also confused about who constituted the "Deaf Community" and were bothered by the way materials about the deaf were categorized on the shelves. For instance, books on sign

language may be entered under the same subject as hearing loss or "handicapping conditions."

Consequently, we decided to develop a reference source for the deaf community to be made available at each library. In 1979 a monograph, *The Red Notebook: Communicating With Hearing People* was produced at the DCPL. This loose-leaf publication with pull-and-replace information sheets on various resources and library and information services to the deaf community has recently changed to *The Red Notebook: Library and Information Services to the Deaf Community*.

This resource has been well received by patrons. Librarians and library advocates outside of D.C. heard about it and requested copies so an arrangement has been made with the NAD to make such copies available to them at cost. Today there are over 3,000 public libraries, organizations and individuals on *The Red Notebook* mailing list, who will soon begin receiving two free supplements every year directly from the new NAD section, FOLDA-USA. Such services will be made possible through donations and fees for advertisements.

Future plans include establishing a collection of materials at a FOLDA Center. These materials will address each of the following five areas: Library, Auxiliary Aids, Diverse Populations, Hearing Disabilities, and *Crossroads*. (*Crossroads* is the title of a FOLDA-USA publication which focuses on activities of friends of the library and library professionals, and observance of Deaf Heritage Week).

Libraries may encourage people who are new to the deaf to look up information in *The Red Notebook*. It is the initial point of unbiased contact for information concerning people with hearing disabilities. It is also a forum to encourage interest groups within the deaf community to share their perspectives on issues and concerns with the library community.

FOLDA-USA plans to expand *The Red Notebook*, which, hopefully, will reach out to every library, Deaf individual, and others with hearing disabilities and their families in the District of Columbia, the 50 states and U.S. territories. FOLDA-USA will also work with deaf and library communities in Canada and other countries to assist them in establishing their own network.

*The Red Notebook* is striving to provide a guide to every school which offers a deaf studies program. But this cannot succeed without the assistance of trained librarians who have the ability to access, organize, and make

available the many resources necessary to support such a project. Very few deaf people are educated as librarians — the "gatekeepers" of information access to both deaf and library communities. Deaf Studies involves librarians and related professionals with knowledge and training in archives, evaluation, and preservation of materials and resources; information networks; library policies and legislation relating to communication access and auxiliary aids; storytelling, exhibits, and programming; and cultivating and obtaining funding.

*The Red Notebook* was recognized as a valuable resource by the ALA, NAD, Gallaudet University Alumni Association, Quota International, Inc. and many others.

## The American Deaf Community

Throughout the years, many library patrons, DCPL staff and ALA members have helped me turn from bias to belief and from skepticism to conviction. The result was a definition of "the deaf community," proposed to the American Library Association. The current definition (as follows) has been updated several times based on input from members of both deaf people and library communities.

The deaf community (the deaf for short) consists of people from all walks of life who have hearing disabilities. They are a group of people marked by a common characteristic — the lack or loss of hearing either wholly or in part — but living within a larger society that does not share that characteristic. They may have hearing disabilities as a result of hereditary factors, accidents, illnesses, the aging process, drugs or excess medication, birth complications, or exposure to excessive noise.

They are often pictured as a homogeneous group by the general public, as well as by private and public service entities.

However, they may be members or supporters of one or more of the nine following groups. Each group has a different set of auxiliary aids and different library and information needs.

1. American Sign Language (ASL) users
2. Bilingual users of ASL and written English
3. Oralists/hearing impaired individuals
4. Deafened adults (early and late)

5. Elderly people with hearing loss
6. Deaf people who use neither ASL nor written English (Some use home signs; some use speech)
7. Hard of hearing individuals
8. Deaf blind individuals
9. Deaf people with hearing parents, children, siblings and/or spouses.

## Interest Groups

Members of the nine groups listed above may be involved in one or more of the following interest groups as individuals with similar values, concerns or communication needs.

1. Children
2. Young adults
3. Post secondary students
4. Older adults
5. Work-related groups (i.e. career, achievements, Deaf-owned businesses)
6. Leisure activities (i.e. sports, talents, hobbies, travel)
7. Religious activities (i.e. ministry, missionary, community services)
8. Artists (performing and visual)
9. Authors, poets, writers and editors
10. Women
11. People with additional disabilities
12. Homeless people
13. Prisoners
14. Rural communities
15. Americans of Slavic/Eastern European descent
16. African Americans
17. Asian/Pacific Islander Americans
18. Hispanic/Latino community
19. Native Americans
20. Gay and lesbian communities

## The 1991 White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services (WHCLIS)

In the summer of 1991, 700 delegates from the District of Columbia, the 50 states and U.S. Territories, one-quarter of them librarians, met at the second White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services (WHCLIS) in Washington, D.C. They came to vote on a library and information services agenda for the next decade. This resulted in 95 recommendations. Recently, the ALA Ad Hoc Committee on the 1991 WHCLIS, with the help of all 9 ALA divisions, has been developing and advancing strategies to address the six top-priority recommendations from the conference.

These recommendations are:

1. Adopt Omnibus Children and Youth Literacy Initiative
2. Share information via network "superhighway"
3. Fund libraries sufficiently to aid U.S. productivity
4. Create model library marketing programs
5. Have Congress adopt a national policy to ensure the preservation of our information resources
6. Emphasize literacy initiatives to aid the disadvantaged.

On March 10, 1992, Dr. Roslyn Rosen, president of the NAD, gave testimony to the chairman and members of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information during the open forum on recommendations of the WHCLIS. She emphasized that libraries and information networks have perpetuated problems by not increasing public awareness about the deaf and services available to the deaf. Many families with deaf children are also unaware of issues of language and the need for communication at home. While each of these recommendations is of importance to the deaf, number six, literacy initiatives, could be an area of special concern.

## Deaf Culture Library

For many years, my colleagues and I at the DCPL have been discussing the need to establish a model of library

services to meet the diverse needs of both the deaf and library communities and to improve access to information. This model should provide the following elements:

1. Resources to help the deaf be independent library users.
2. Communication survival training for library staff
3. Evaluation and reviews of books, videotapes and other materials related to the deaf or for use by the deaf.
4. Literacy and lifelong learning programs

Something must be done to remove the many communication barriers that the deaf confront every day. It is the library's responsibility to remove communication barriers which prevent the public (both hearing and deaf) from accessing knowledge and information. The time is right now to abolish these barriers to communication. With the passing of the ADA in 1990, every library has been asked to consider the needs of people with disabilities their top priority.

Data from the 1990 U.S. census has shown that the nation's population will continue to grow. It will become more gray and more diverse. Minority groups will become the majority by the year 2002. State policy makers need to plan for the future.

As the current founding chair of the proposed FOLDA-USA section of the NAD and as chair of the Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) FOLDA, I have met with several librarians and interested library supporters for the past year to discuss the possibility of every library and information/referral center to provide cost effective and efficient services to the deaf community.

We believe the deaf must take the control of their affairs, to determine their destinies and happiness. We must also safeguard our deaf resources at all libraries. People come and go but libraries as institutions will always remain.

## A Look to the Future

A look into my crystal ball would leave everyone amazed at how much will happen as we approach the 21st century and beyond.

## A Deaf American Monograph

1. The NAD will establish a FOLDA Center to serve as a resource to people who are deaf through local libraries.

2. Every state association in cooperation with two or three other state associations will establish their own Deaf Culture Library (DCL) forming a partnership with all four types of libraries — school, public, academic and special.

3. The DCL will provide service to all local libraries in the state or the region that wish to comply with the ADA. The DCL will provide auxiliary aids and services, shared cooperative books, videotapes and other library materials.

4. People with hearing disabilities, including those who may be legally blind or have other disabilities (deaf, Deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, hearing impaired, elderly people with hearing losses) will be united under one name — the deaf — and will hold all kinds of jobs; as professionals or as library support staff at the DCL and other libraries, ranging from director, librarian, storyteller, computer operator, business manager and researcher to literacy trainer. There will be many volunteers involved in literacy and lifelong learning activities in all parts of the nation, especially in rural areas.

5. People will continue to look at the library as the first stop for updated and unbiased information on any subject regardless of the format. (for people who cannot read there will be literacy programs and someone at the library to help read or interpret information for them in sign language).

6. Deaf heritage activities will occur every month at libraries in every part of the nation to recognize one deaf interest group at a time, such as African Americans, women, Native Americans, children, young adults, older people, business owners, etc. In December we will celebrate the anniversary of the birth of two deaf education pioneers, Laurent Clerc and Thomas H. Gallaudet, and the anniversary of the death of the third pioneer, Mason Fitch Cogswell who died on Thomas H. Gallaudet's birthday. Cogswell's deaf daughter, Alice also died in December.

## Conclusion

The 21st century is almost upon us with its increased demands for information which the library should help to meet. The library is an institution where diversity is

welcome and where knowledge and cultural programming should be emphasized. The "Deaf President Now" Protest just celebrated its fifth anniversary at Gallaudet University and there is still a lack of deaf resources at most libraries.

*Gallaudet University, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, and other institutions within the deaf community must incorporate library and information services as a separate entry. Departments of education, human needs or social services cannot be expected to function as resource centers or information services providers.*

Dr. Robert Davila, former assistant secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in the U.S. Department of Education has suggested partnerships between community organizations to insure effective programs that will benefit all individuals, not only individuals with disabilities. I believe that every national, state, regional and local organization within the deaf community should attempt to form a partnership with their state or local public library.

*According to the American Library Directory, 1992-1993, and the Digest of Education Statistics, 1989*

*(National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Dept. of Education, 1989), there are 118,385 libraries of all kinds in the United States. There are 1,291 main libraries with 6,093 branches. This makes a total of 15,169 public library buildings (administrative units and branch libraries combined) There are 92,628 school libraries.*

President Bill Clinton in his inaugural address on January 20, 1993, said "It is time to break the bad habit of expecting something for nothing, from our government or from each other. Let us take more responsibility, not only for ourselves, and our families but for our communities and our country to renew America, we must revitalize our democracy." (*Washington Post*, January 21, 1993).

In closing, my crystal ball tells you that America's libraries will play a vital role in empowering people of all ages to learn and grow and to exercise their "rights to know" in a democratic society. We live in a rapidly changing world. The deaf must not be afraid to make changes and confront challenges because there are opportunities awaiting people with disabilities of all ages and their families.

But the future begins with you.