Resources for Creating Materials in Alternative Formats for People with Disabilities
November 15, 2013

Valerie Lewis, Administrator of Outreach Services
Suffolk Cooperative Library System
631-286-1600, x1354 – valerie@suffolknet.org

There are many resources that will assist you in creating materials in alternative formats for people with disabilities. People who are visually impaired or blind may need formats such as large print, audio or Braille. People who have a learning or cognitive disability may need information in formats such as large print or audio. People with a Developmental disability may need information in a variety of formats. Your organization/company/agency is required under various legislation, to ensure access to information.

Often a person with a disability may require the use of assistive technology (AT) in order to obtain full access to the materials you provide. Depending on the circumstances, you may need to provide the AT. Always, you will need to ensure that your materials can be accessed if someone is using AT.

There are many service providers/organizations and agencies that can demonstrate assistive technology that may be used by their consumers/clients. This will enable you to better understand how the individual is receiving their information, and thereby assist you in understanding how to design your materials in the most effective format.

For example, the Outreach Services department at the Suffolk Cooperative Library System provides demonstrations (by appointment only) of assistive technology for people who are visually impaired or blind, such as Electronic Magnifiers, Screen Enlarging and Screen Reading software. Additionally, there are many vendors who will come to your office or a client's home, to demonstrate their products…..at no charge.

Often when we think of AT we think of high-tech, high cost equipment. In fact, AT can be something as simple as a specially designed spoon that would enable an individual with a mobility impairment to eat a meal independently. It may be something as simple as a cane or a wheelchair. It may indeed be something complex and expensive, but of important note, more and more, AT is becoming more available and affordable through various commercial products, such as an iphone or ipad. APPLE products are accessible "out of the box" and enable people with many types of disabilities to communicate effectively and affordably.

When in doubt of how to communicate with an individual who has a disability, **<u>ASK THEM!</u>** Who would know better??????

<u>DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING FOR STAFF</u>

People do not magically know how to provide accessible programs and services to people with disabilities. Providing Disability Awareness Training, at least once a year, will

enable your organization to communicate in a professional, effective, respectful and accessible manner.

Large Print

Probably the most simple accessible format to create is Large Print. Large print can be used by all. When in doubt make it a few points larger. If you are creating promotional or informational materials on your computer, make the font larger. If you already have prepared materials, enlarge them on a copy machine, try to use larger paper so you can fit more words on a page. True large print should be at least 18pt. font, and Ariel or Times New Roman, but 20 is even better. It is important to note that if you are doing mailings to people who you know have a disability that can benefit from using large print, you can mail your materials at no charge, Free Matter for the Blind.

Paper Color

While pretty color paper, such as red or Green for Christmas, is fun and fanciful, it is almost impossible to read if you have a visual, learning or cognitive disability. There is no contrast between black print and colored paper. To produce useful print materials always use a matte finish paper (NO GLOSSY PAPER). It can be white, ivory or bright yellow. This makes a good easy to read contrast. Do not use all CAPS, as that will run all of the letters together and make it visually confusing. Also, do not use Script Lettering or fancy fonts.

Signage

Creating useful signage is similar to creating useful print materials. There should be high contrast and easy to read font. Do not use Script Lettering! Keep signage at a height where people can see it close up. Directional signage is particularly important, in order for people to find where they need to go. If you have signs high on the wall behind an information desk, also have signs lower on the wall or on the information desk. Think about how you can accommodate many users, nothing works for everyone. If you have a sign in sheet, have it in large print.

Audio

Current technology enables us to make recorded materials available easily and affordably. There are free downloadable software that will allow you to record the information in your brochures and on your flyers. You can have an employee or volunteer read the materials, then burn the recorded information on to a CD and send that home with the consumer/client. Always keep at least three (3) or four (4) copies of any recorded materials on hand. If you do not have the recorded materials, find an organization that you can contract with to provide these materials "On-Demand". This will give you the ability to provide the material upon request. When you are creating your materials, always include a statement that lets your consumers/clients know that the item is available in alternative formats upon request. This method will enable you to be compliant and remain cost effective, at the same time.

Braille

Most people become visually impaired later in life, usually as a result of illness or aging. Therefore most people would most likely need their information in large print or audio. While there are not a large number of people who read Braille, it does not mean that if someone requests your information in Braille, that you do not need to provide it to them. Similarly to audio recordings, you may wish to contract with an organization that can provide a Braille version of your materials "On-Demand". Many organizations have Braille Transcription software that enables print to Braille translation, instantaneously. All you would need to do is provide a WORD version of your print materials.

Tactile Resources

While we mostly think of "tactile" resources as being useful to people living with vision loss, tactile items are very useful to people with developmental and cognitive disabilities, as well. It is always helpful to have tactile resources on hand when you need to describe charts, photos or images of any kind. There are many commercial tactile options. There are printers that create tactile images and there are creative ways to use daily living items to create tactile descriptions of the information you are sharing.

Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology (AT) can mean many things. It can mean high cost, hi-tech devices or a sticky substance that

can be used as a tactile way of denoting something. AT that is used for communication purposes can vary just as widely. For example, a simple method of communication for someone who is hard-of-hearing or deaf, is to communicate with a pencil and a piece of paper…two people writing information back and forth. People who are hard-of-hearing or Deaf can use texting, the NYS Relay Service (711), email and if possible Assistive Listening Devices. Of course, if someone is Deaf, you will need to use a Sign Language Interpreter. It is important to know that Sign Language Interpreters are highly skilled individuals, they must be booked at least two weeks in advance of an event or meeting and they charge a fee of approximately $60 an hour. It is to your benefit to place a statement on all meeting and program announcements, something to the effect of: Please let us know at least two weeks in advance if you will need an accommodation that will make this event accessible to you. This will give you time to hire a qualified Sign Language Interpreter and to prepare accessible materials, when requested.

People who are visually impaired or blind may need one or more of various types of AT. Some may need an electronic magnification device, while others may need audio. You may need to provide guided assistance and possibly Descriptive narration. There is a wide variety of options that are available to make things accessible to people who are visually impaired.

People with physical disabilities may have specific communication needs based on their physical condition.

For example, a person who cannot use their hands may need to have information in an alternative format. A person using a wheelchair may need access to a specific device that may not be in an accessible area.

A person with a Developmental or Cognitive disability may need various types of communication devices. Many augmentative devices may be available on an organization's ipad or iphone, that would enable a person to access information while at your location. It is not however the responsibility of the organization to provide personal communication devices for home use, unless that is something you do for people who do not have a disability, but to ensure that the communication process you are using will work with the end user's technology.

How to find Assistive Technology and Other Resources

Once again it is imperative that you reach out to organizations, service providers and agencies who are designated to provide training and education. For example, if you need to provide services to a person who is visually impaired, reach out to your local Vision Rehabilitation organization such as Helen Keller Services for the Blind or your local Veterans Affairs office. If you are providing information to a person with a Mobility Disability, reach out to United Spinal Association, United Cerebral Palsy or your state rehabilitation agency. If you are providing services to a person with a cognitive or developmental disability, reach out to an organization such as the Developmental Disabilities Institute (DDI).

Websites

There is an abundance of information on the internet. It is as easy as going to Google and typing in "assistive technology for people who are blind" or "creating materials in alternative formats for people with disabilities" or assistive listening systems for people who are hard of hearing" or communication tools for interacting with people who have a cognitive disability". It has become very easy to find the exact resource you need. For example, the American Foundation for the Blind has a portion of their website, on how to create large print materials. The United Spinal Association can assist in tracking down adapted vehicles. There are far too many wonderful options to recreate here, but they are out there.

Familiarize Yourself With These Sites

United States Access Board

ADA Homepage

Disability.gov

Northeast ADA

Southwest ADA

Project Access

All of these sites focus on basic disability legislation and access issues. You can sign up to receive email updates and e-newsletters. All of their resources are excellent and keep you up to date.

Legislation

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504 and Section 508) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) / Revised 2010 contain provisions that require access to information and services for people with disabilities. Visit the ADA Homepage at www.ada.gov Google the Rehabilitation Act Sections 504 and 508. Understanding these laws will enable you to be compliant and accessible.