

ASD in the Library: Making Daedalus Public Library System an Inclusive Space

Ryan Downie

LIS Program, University of Denver

LIS 4015: User and Access Services

Professor K. Walker & Professor P. Organisciak

August 17, 2020

Introduction

Library users on the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are a large, quickly growing, and underserved user-base that requires special accommodation that can easily be implemented into our library services and programs. People with ASD have different sensory needs than other individuals, and they often feel that “all tasks can seem to have the same level of urgency” (Remy, 2014, p. 25). They may also feel uncomfortable with their behavior and sensory needs around other library patrons (Kaeding, 2014). For these reasons, as well as unfamiliarity with libraries, many people with ASD have had negative experiences in and involving libraries (Okyle, 2015), turning the ASD community into a “disenfranchised library user group” (Kaeding, 2014, p. 320) despite libraries having great potential for this community. Libraries can benefit ASD patrons through programs targeting various age groups, from childhood to pre-teens to teens and adults, as well as through additional basic services such as acting as a much needed central information hub for ASD users and their families.

In 2010 one in 68 children in the U.S. was diagnosed with ASD (Barack, 2014; Centers, 2020; Remy, 2014), increasing to every 1 in 54 children as of 2016 (Centers, 2020), or just under two percent of the total population. This, however, covers a wide breadth of symptoms and severity, including many high-functioning individuals who may not openly identify as having ASD and are unlikely to attend ASD programs (Okyle, 2015). As ASD becomes more prevalent, individuals with it and their families find a greater need for information, but a greater difficulty in finding it (Barack, 2014). A commonality across all families of ASD individuals is a difficulty in finding and accessing information on services and activities, as well as a lack of a single source for their information needs (Gibson, 2019). This paper proposes that the Daedalus Public

Library System (DPLS) adopts services and programs to improve access, familiarity, and information services for the ASD population of Minoa through the incorporation of reading programs, collaboration with local ASD organizations, and information outreach.

Needs Assessment

Prior to any potential new implementations for ASD users, a needs assessment must be conducted to identify the number of people with ASD in our served community, as well as their ages, school affiliations, and needs. Ideally this should be conducted in concert with local and statewide ASD organizations and schools (Adkins, 2015; Connell, 2016; Gibson, 2019; Winson, 2010), preferably those with pre-existing strong connections to the target user group and substantiated data on user sub-groups. If the possibility arises, questionnaires can also be distributed to ASD individuals and their families to identify themes of interests in collection material, services, programs, and “areas of specific information need and preferred information sources” (Gibson, 2019, p. 556). The overall goal of the needs assessment should be to assess the normative needs of the ASD population and the unknown needs of our community’s ASD user population in order to plan and implement solutions to their needs within DPLS goals and capabilities.

Services

There are a variety of approaches for providing services for ASD patrons that require little to no investment on behalf of the library, but which can enhance ASD accessibility and comfort within libraries. The following selections are deemed to be the best choices for

promoting accessibility to the ASD population with the most reach while maintaining relatively low resource investment.

Low Sensory Stimulating Space

One approach is to designate a room or space of the library for library users with ASD as well as for other patrons with sensory overload challenges. Individuals with ASD have different sensory needs, with some preferring less light and noise whereas others might be loud and disruptive to other patrons, which can create negative events that inhibit ASD patrons from returning to the library (Kaeding, 2014; Remy, 2014). Therefore, creating a room or section with dimmer lighting and less outside noise can avoid unfortunate negative incidents.

Checkout Options

Self-checkout is already an increasingly popular trend among some libraries, and is a useful addition for some members of the ASD community who may “not want to interact” (Barack, 2014, p. 29). However, this is only representative of a portion of the ASD community, and standard assisted checkout should still be present, especially for new library patrons unfamiliar with the process.

Autism Spectrum Disorder Apps

A very cost-efficient way of providing outside aid to the ASD community is by providing apps on already present electronic devices in the library, such as tablets and iPads. These apps can be common apps and games such as Angry Birds, or they can be ASD focused apps, for

which recommendations from Autism Speaks, Autism Apps, Autism Plugged In, and other local and national ASD organizations are helpful for (McGrath, 2013; Okyle, 2015). ASD focused apps are those which are designed to “help an individual learn about social practices and explain the hidden curriculum of life” (McGrath, 2013, p. 21). Many specifically ASD-orientated apps require customization for individual users, as well as having relatively large costs associated in comparison with most apps. These apps, therefore, should be recommended to families and individuals who can most benefit from them (McGrath, 2013).

Accessibility Kits

Individuals with ASD often do not like change, preferring to do what’s familiar instead (Winson, 2010). Accessibility kits are tools used to make libraries more familiar before the patron arrives at the library or as they enter, used as physical kits either sent via mail or available at the library, or as digital media that can be emailed to individuals or found online. Through the use of visuals and stories the kits show ASD patrons what they can expect at the library from the collection, services provided, and ASD programs (discussed below) (Winson, 2010).

Information Provision

In an extension to one of the most foundational pillars of libraries—the provision of information for library users—DPLS can address the serious difficulties encountered by ASD individuals and families in their information seeking. Parents of children with ASD, especially ‘high functioning’ children, report having “unmet information needs” and find libraries neither as “a useful source” for information on ASD nor as a useful place for information on community

services and activities (Gibson, 2019, pp. 560-561, 569-570). To address this issue the needs assessment must identify what specific information is being sought and produce an appropriate addition to the collection's material to accommodate these needs. General research and information on ASD in the library's collection should be expanded upon as well, and additional resources both online and on-site for ASD programs, activities, organizations, and other related items should be created. People with ASD often have strong interest and knowledge in "niche topics" which they devote great deals of time into researching (Remy, 2014, p. 25). Therefore, for this more user specific information seeking, ASD users might be asked in the needs assessment questionnaire or upon checkout from the library about topics they are interested in so that staff can help them find what they enjoy.

Programs

Two programs of book reading and discussion for different age-groups are proposed. The first program is orientated for infants and children, ages zero to ten, with the second program providing for individuals 11 and older in two sections—one younger and one older. However, the age divisions and number of sections for both programs is subject to change based on the number of attendees. To promote awareness of these upcoming programs DPLS will provide online flyers on the library website, send emails with program materials and schedules to local schools and ASD organizations, and post flyers in and around the library, all done at least a month prior to the programs' start dates (Adkins, 2015; Connell, 2016; Leon, 2011). An important caveat of note, however, is that a level of attendance comparable to other library programming should not be expected at the onset of either program, nor should it be expected to develop quickly.

Attendance is regularly low for new ASD programs due to user trepidation and a difficulty in advertising promotion (Adkins, 2015; Connell, 2016), but show impressive attendance increases and success with time (Barack, 2014). Therefore, a minimum period of two to three months should be considered before assessing the quantity of attendees as proof of program efficacy.

Children's Activities

A sensory storytime reading program, Pandora's Sensory Storytime (see Appendix B), for children ages zero to ten will be held on the first and third Saturdays of every month for children with ASD. It will consist of a traditional storytime with quiet music, paired with visuals to portray the story and coloring activities of paint and crayon, followed by time devoted for play and discussion (Barack, 2014; Connell, 2016; Kaeding, 2014; Leon, 2011). This program, like other children's storytime programs, will seek to improve child "interaction and involvement with literacy" (Kaeding, 2014, p. 322), but with the additional goals and benefits of improving the comfort and familiarity of ASD children and their families with the library (Kaeding, 2014; Leon, 2011).

Teens & Adults Services

Hercules' Comics and Novels (HCN) (see Appendix C) is the teen and adult counterpart to Pandora's Storytime. Meeting the first and third Saturday of every month, Hercules' Comics and Novels will be held to discuss the topic comic of the session, with a novel assigned for every other first Saturday. Comics and graphic novels, due to being quick reads, allow for consistent attendance of users who have read the topic title, leading to a more engaged discussion (Baur,

2012). Used in combination with regular novels producing more developed discussions, HCN can lead to “benefits of socialization and skill improvement” in reading skills for attendees (Okyle, 2015, p. 49) through encouraging reading and discussing what was confusing and enjoyable. Due to the large differences in ages (and consequently the differences in reading level, viewpoints, interests, and so forth) that are covered by HCN, several different groups may be necessary. That is, however, reliant upon how many individuals show interest in participating, which is why pre-registration should be encouraged—but not required. For individuals with stronger sensory needs, physical activities will also be present, such as LEGOs and drawing material to stimulate their needs and encourage creativity (Barack, 2014).

Conclusion

Through the adoption and implementation of these services and programs, the Daedalus Public Library System of Minoa aims to become a more inclusive library for ASD users. The greatest challenges to achieving this is insufficient staff training and resources (Adkins, 2015). However, the low levels of resource investment required for many of the proposed services and programs in conjunction with the important role libraries have and can play in supporting the ASD community far outweighs the possible challenges. Minimal effort is needed to download free and cheap apps for ASD users on already present devices, or in the creation of accessibility kits. Minor investment is needed for the Pandora’s Sensory Storytime and Hercules’ Comics and Novels programs, or for providing self-checkout and low sensory spaces for users. Indeed, the greatest investment may be in conducting various needs assessments to better understand our

community's ASD population and in expanding the DPLS collection to reflect their needs and interests.

The above outlined services and programs should be considered starting points for DPLS's accessibility efforts for ASD library users. Future requests made by users and their families and caretakers will inevitably allow DPLS library programs and services to better serve its users. A natural malleability is necessary to boost services and programs that are successful and found helpful by users, while likewise reducing those which are not considered beneficial. Heavy outreach and advertising will be required for a "disenfranchised library user group" (Kaeding, 2014, p. 320) to be drawn into a library setting, particularly a user group that is notably timid and wary of unfamiliar scenarios. Yet doing so is a foundational right and obligation of the Daedalus Public Library System, and with the utilization of services and programs a considerably large and growing user group can benefit greatly from DPLS.

References

- Adkins, D., & Bushman, B. (2015). A special needs approach: A study of how libraries can start programs for children with disabilities. *Children & Libraries*, 13(3), 28-33.
DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5860/cal.13n3.28>
- Barack, L. (2014). Bridging the gap. *School Library Journal; New York*, 60(7), 28-30.
- Baur, J., & Lee, J. (2012). Talking comics: Starting your graphic novel book club. *Young Adult Library Services; Chicago*, 10(4), 17-21.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, March 25). *Data and Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder*. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>
- Connel, J. (2016). Taking time to look back. *Children & Libraries; Chicago*, 14(3), 23-27.
- Gibson, A. N., & Hanson-Baldauf, D. (2019). Beyond sensory story time: An intersectional analysis of information seeking among parents of autistic individuals. *Library Trends; Baltimore*, 67(3), 550-575. DOI:10.1353/lib.2019.0002
- Kaeding, J. (2014). Increasing access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families. *The Australian Library Journal*, 63(4), 320-324.
DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2014.951167>
- Leon, A. (2011). Beyond barriers. *Children & Libraries; Chicago*, 9(3), 12-14.
- McGrath, R. (2013). Autism?: There's an app for that. *Young Adult Libraries Services; Chicago*, 11(2), 20-24.
- Okyle, C., & Rogers-Whitehead, C. (2015). Almost adult, with autism: Resources. *School Library Journal; New York*, 61(11), 46, 48-49.
- Remy, C., & Seaman, P. (2014). Evolving from disability to diversity: How to better serve high-functioning autistic students. *Reference & User Services Quarterly; Chicago*, 54(1), 24-28.
- Winston, G., & Adams, C. (2010). Collaboration at its best. *Children & Libraries; Chicago*, 8(2), 15-17.

Appendix A

Annotated Bibliography

Adkins, D., & Bushman, B. (2015). A special needs approach: A study of how libraries can start programs for children with disabilities. *Children & Libraries*, 13(3), 28-33.

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5860/cal.13n3.28>

- A review of multiple surveys, Adkins and Bushman research existing programs for children with disabilities, as well as their initiations, methods of education, and encountered challenges, concluding that few children's librarians are providing programs but those who do show noticeable success.

Barack, L. (2014). Bridging the gap. *School Library Journal; New York*, 60(7), 28-30.

- This brief article examines four different public libraries across the country, along with their collaborative partners, and the children's programs they have established for patrons with ASD. They are primarily targeted towards young children, but includes one which extends to age 23.

Baur, J., & Lee, J. (2012). Talking comics: Starting your graphic novel book club. *Young Adult Library Services; Chicago*, 10(4), 17-21.

- Through outreach to a local middle school, a public librarian at the Berkeley Public Library and the middle school's teacher librarian collaborated to create a graphic novel club meeting weekly during the school lunch hour. Children of all backgrounds and capacity, including those with ASD, convene in a mixed group to discuss their reading material.

Connel, J. (2016). Taking time to look back. *Children & Libraries; Chicago*, 14(3), 23-27.

- Questions the traditional methodology of measuring the success of children's programs for ASD following a one-shot story time program. Attendance was low, artwork was not kept by children or parents, and the featured book received no further attention; however, the librarians found that the event created a positive experience and memory for the children who had previously felt uncomfortable.

Gibson, A. N., & Hanson-Baldauf, D. (2019). Beyond sensory story time: An intersectional analysis of information seeking among parents of autistic individuals. *Library Trends; Baltimore*, 67(3), 550-575. DOI:10.1353/lib.2019.0002

- A secondary analysis of a survey of parents of children with ASD, this article looks at the information needs and source preferences of parents, concluding that

those in the survey region “did not perceive libraries as useful places to find information about local community services and activities.”

Kaeding, J. (2014). Increasing access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families. *The Australian Library Journal*, 63(4), 320-324.

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2014.951167>

- Addresses the motivation of a public library’s establishing of a “sensory story time program” for children with special needs (a “disenfranchised library user group”), as well as the programs methodology, efficacy. Results indicated families were more comfortable in the library and had increased usage.

Leon, A. (2011). Beyond barriers. *Children & Libraries; Chicago*, 9(3), 12-14.

- This is a case-study of a public library and its establishment of a “traditional preschool storytime” for children with ASD, and covers the necessary staff training. They concluded with recommendations for initiating similar programs, such as controlling group sizes and requiring pre-registration.

McGrath, R. (2013). Autism?: There’s an app for that. *Young Adult Libraries Services; Chicago*, 11(2), 20-24.

- Written by a librarian halfway through a LSTA grant for patrons with ASD, this article specializes on the variety of apps, programs, media, and activities available to assist patrons with ASD in their use of the library and in “activities of daily living (ADL).” Encourages the usage of generalized apps for patrons and the recommendation of more specialized apps for appropriate patrons.

Okyle, C., & Rogers-Whitehead, C. (2015). Almost adult, with autism: Resources. *School Library Journal; New York*, 61(11), 46, 48-49.

- Okyle exemplifies several programs which focus on teens, younger adults, and adults (who are underserved among an already underserved disability group) aimed at aiding in periods of transition and increased socialization. Due to the dearth of programs designed for patrons with ASD older than approximately five, these examples encourage more libraries to adopt similar services for older patrons with disabilities.

Remy, C., & Seaman, P. (2014). Evolving from disability to diversity: How to better serve high-functioning autistic students. *Reference & User Services Quarterly; Chicago*, 54(1), 24-28.


- With a focus on ASD students and their relationships with academic libraries, this article is less relevant but addresses the young adult population of individuals

with ASD, and additionally addresses many attributes and details of ASD. The authors call for increased training around patrons with disabilities and the removal of “physical and psychological barriers” from libraries.

Winson, G., & Adams, C. (2010). Collaboration at its best. *Children & Libraries; Chicago*, 8(2), 15-17.

- Through a collaborative effort between the Chicago Public Library (CPL), the Autism Program of Illinois, and the Hope Institute for Children and Families, library staff received specialized training for assisting patrons with ASD, paving the way for story time programs for young children with ASD. CPL librarians created accessibility kits to make children more familiar with the program prior to attendance with strong success and other organizations showing interest in them.


Appendix B




PANDORA'S SENSORY STORYTIME

WHAT IS IT?

Children's storytime, quiet music, activities, and dedicated playtime





WHO CAN ATTEND?


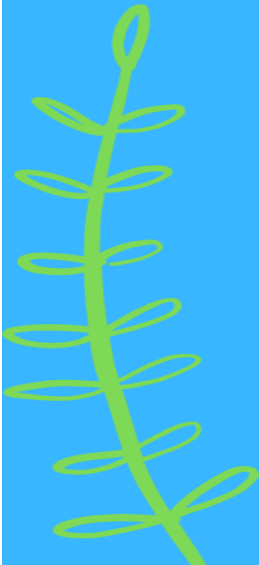
Children ages zero to ten with Autism Spectrum Disorder & other sensory & cognitive differences

WHEN IS IT?

First and third Saturdays of every month beginning at 10 a.m.

Contact DPLS@gmail.com or call 555-555-4040 for more information

daedaluspubliclibrary.com



Appendix C

Hercules' Comics and Novels

WHAT IS IT

Book club meeting to discuss comic books and novels



WHO CAN ATTEND

Individuals ages 11 and up with Autism Spectrum Disorder & other sensory & cognitive differences
- Families welcome -



WHEN IS IT

First and third Saturdays of every month at 2 p.m.
Every other first Saturday will discuss a novel

Come by for a fun environment to discuss your favorite stories, meet new friends, and explore the library!

OPEN
LIBRARY

Contact DPLS@gmail.com
or call 555-555-4040
for more information

daedaluspubliclibrary.com