

How County Library Can Help The Blind

By HELEN RICE

"Hello, this is the North Pole. Santa's Helper speaking. And what would you like for Christmas?"

This greeting is given out by older blind persons to youngsters calling on the "hotline" to Santa's Workshop, part of Detroit's Christmas Carnival.

They are pictured in Metropolitan Society for the Blind leaflets describing recreational programs that include blind persons from all over Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

Blindness is a terrible human handicap. Even poor eyesight cuts one out of the "pursuit of happiness." There are special schools and social services to help children with little or no vision.

BUT FOR OLDER PERSONS, feelings of isolation and uselessness that often accompany declining vision are a double handicap. Most blind people are between 55 and 80, and their sight loss is recent.

"Sprint culture" is the name coined by sound communications people to describe today's youthful emphasis on "sprint for sound-print."

Best known among various aids to sightless persons is the Braille printing with raised dots that utilize fingertip sensitivity.

Even pictures in thermofax bas-relief are used in some books such as Charlie Brown and other such imaginative publications. These are available to patrons of all ages through the Wayne County Federated Library System.

BLIND AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED patrons have a special department located in the library's service center at 33030 Van Born east of Wayne.

Large print books and periodicals, Braille books, tape recordings and talking books running into the millions circulate among handicapped persons. Visual handicaps are the most obvious reasons for this service.

But persons who have lost their arms or cannot use them, or those whose muscle and nerve controls are severely impaired, qualify for these library services.

For people who are so visually limited as to be unable to read; stroke patients; those in advanced stages of cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, polio and severe arthritis -- all may find ordinary reading difficult to impossible. To them, the library's division for the blind and physically handicapped can be a godsend.

Patrons can get this service whether they are at home, in schools, hospitals or other institutions. However, it is not for cases where functional disorders are due to brain damage.

"For people who always liked to read and suddenly or gradually lose their ability to do so, we really have a wonderful service," says Mrs. Eleanor Blair, assistant director of the department.

"But don't forget, only about 10% of the general population are what you could call really dedicated book readers. So you don't take care of a blind person's problems simply by supplying reading in forms he can use."

HOLDING A RESPONSIBLE professional position despite he own extremely limited vision, Mrs. Blair sees the expanding use of tape playback equipment.

It has more acceptance than other media for newly blind persons, both young and old.

Besides about 20 college students currently using the library's various services for visually handicapped persons, Mrs. Blair estimates at least 3,000 persons are using the large print books and magazines, Braille publications and Talking Books.

Mail service to the library patron continues regularly once the person gets on the list and indicates what type of literature he'd like.

Pickup and return of the recordings and books are done either by mail or by way of the library system's 52 affiliated libraries. These include Farmington, Garden City, Livonia's two branches, and the Plymouth and Redford Township libraries.

The actual count of books circulated by the department for the blind and physically handicapped comes to more than 14,000 in a year. Special materials from the department totaled some 61,000 last year and each year this total has crept up about 10,000.



"SPRINT CULTURE" -- Print merged into sound is a concept evolving from such special services to blind persons as this cassette tape recorder. Mrs. Eleanor Blair inserts one of six small cartridges that contain an entire book that will take about eight hours of "reading by ear." (Observer photo)

HAND COPIED books are supplied by volunteer Braille transcribers such as the women's groups from several churches and synagogues in Livonia and Farmington.

Press editions of many books are available from the state library at 735 E. Michigan, Lansing. But Braille readers may request lists of the hand-copied collections in the Wayne County system.

"Of course, textbooks are those most requested. The great volunteer group that supplies this service is Readings for the Blind, you know," Mrs. Blair explained.

Mrs. Carolyn Gundlach of Franklin heads this effort. Other volunteers come into the service center of the Wayne library to make records on special request especially from students. The subjects are often scientific, and the facts on research in some fields are expanding so rapidly that textbooks would be obsolete before they could be printed and then transcribed into Braille.

ELIGIBILITY FOR THESE special services is simple to obtain.

To register, a written statement is needed from any member of the medical or allied professions, professional persons in the fields of public health, education, library service, rehabilitation, social work and public welfare.

But the referral should be from a non-relative. Walter Halstead, department director points out.

The written statement explaining the person's need for the library's service should be on official letterhead stationery. The requirements are that the disability be physical in nature and that it prevents the patient from reading conventional printed materials.

Books and talking book machines are mailed postage free and are returned in their original containers with mailing label reversed. The three-speed record player is gradually being replaced by the even more



HOBBY PURSUIT -- Benjamin J. Pumo of Westland makes good use of a special service for visually handicapped persons -- the periodicals from Wayne County library put out in Braille editions. He proves a careful worker can continue to enjoy woodworking and other apparently visually-oriented activities, even when his eyesight fails.

compact cassette tape sets. Most patrons furnish their own.

OTHER AIDS besides the library service for blind persons, whatever their degree of blindness, range from job re-training, help with moving around and integration into community recreation.


This kind of more general assistance is furnished by the Metropolitan Society for the Blind, 1401 Ash, Detroit 48202. A call to 964-1234 will connect one with their consultants.

"Alerting doctors, especially pediatricians and eye specialists, to our variety of services is a continuous job," says Annette Cook, education director of the society.

"Take our Project Restore program. It concentrates on continuing assistance for a newly blinded person to get the re-education needed to function with self-confidence.

"You had an example of one of the financial assistance programs in the Observer Newspapers recently. Delta Gamma sorority

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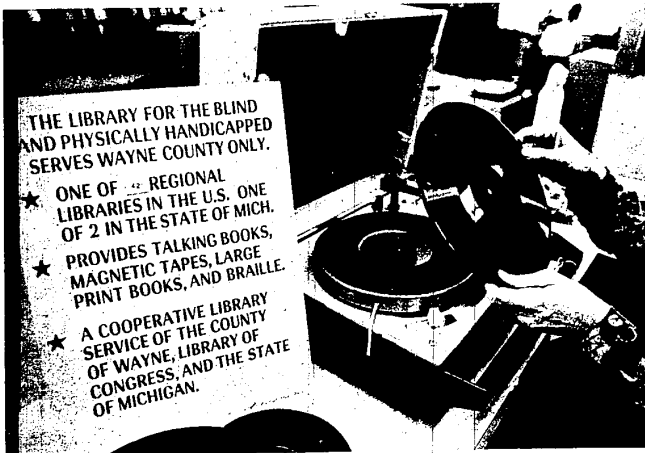
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TALKING BOOKS -- Light-weight record-players provide up-to-date literature of all kinds for patrons of the Blind and Physically Handicapped Services of the

Wayne County Library system with which most Observerland libraries are affiliated.