

Mainstreaming Inclusive Services in Philippine Public Libraries : National Library of the Philippines' Programs and Services¹

by
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Abstract:

The Philippines recognizes the rights of PWDs with the passage of Republic Act 7277, "An Act Providing for the Rehabilitation, Self-Improvement and Self-Reliance of Disabled Person and their Integration" which is cited as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons that grant the rights and privileges for disabled persons.

The National Statistics Office (NSO) defines disability as any restriction or lack of ability (resulting from impairment) to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for human being. Impairments associated with disabilities maybe physical, mental, or sensory motor impairment such as partial or total blindness, low vision, partial or total deafness or oral defect, having only one hand/no hands, one leg/no legs, cerebral palsy, retarded, mentally ill, mental retardation and multiple impairment. As of 2010, NSO posted a record of 935,551 Persons with Disability (PWD), which was 1.23 percent of the household population. (Source:<http://www.census.gov.ph>).

More to this statistics, NSO also revealed that there are more males with a percentage of 50.9 than females with only 49.1 among persons with disability. And that disability was highest among persons aged 5 to 19 years wherein for every five PWDs, one (18.9 percent) was aged 0 to 14 years, three (59.0 percent) were in the working age group (aged 15 to 64 years), and one (22.1 percent) was aged 65 years and over. Of this number, the Resources for the Blind (RBI) estimated a half million people who are blind and many more who are visually impaired to a lesser degree.

These foregoing facts, justifies why the Philippine government need to address empowerment of PWDs, to reduce poverty and to make growth inclusive and to promote full participation in the society. These factors are recognized as key areas for the inclusive and sustainable development. Empowerment of PWDs includes their right to attain education, employment, and to access information. The latter can be provided by libraries which are considered repositories of stored information and knowledge and are considered as information highways. Empowering PWDs will remove barriers that prevent them in participating in their communities and will provide opportunities for them to be heard.

Taking the opportunity of these facts, the National Library of the Philippines (NLP) which has a very comprehensive role in libraries and librarianship in the country, identified key factors to promote learning system for PWDs, in particular, for **Persons with Print Disabilities** through its Library for the Blind Section (LBS).

The NLP's Library for the Blind Section which is in existence for more than two decades have kept its mandate to provide accessible resources for its clients. Services includes: Braille production; Audiobook production; Provision of reading/recording areas; Circulation services. At the age of technology, the LBS also invested on some assistive devices to make information resources more accessible which include screen readers, scanners, recorders and players, Braille memo, embossers, etc. are just some of the equipment provided for the clients.

A special program called, Disability Awareness Training (DAT) which started last year aims to orient librarians on the special needs of blind and those with print disabilities, train them on the different assistive devices as well as techniques on serving their clients. to create a better learning conditions in the library. This is the very first step undertaken in mainstreaming inclusive services in Philippine public libraries which is being conducted in public libraries in the region. The DAT is one of the steps undertaken to spread awareness on the information needs of PWDs, and that blind and other persons with print disabilities are one of the top priorities.

The passage of Philippine Law, Republic Act 10372 "An Act Amending Provisions of RA 8293", otherwise known as "Intellectual Property Code of the Philippines, specifically Section 184, which provides exemption of reproduction of materials for the fair use of blind and those with print disabilities, even more strengthen the campaign of public libraries to mainstream inclusive services.

More so, it is a very great opportune for NLP to be in collaboration with related organizations in promoting same advocacy. The National Council on Disability Affairs, Resources for the Blind, Printing House for the Blind of the Department of Education, Philippine School for the Blind, and other government and non-government organizations are among NLP's partners in promoting and advocating the right to information of Persons with Print Disabilities.

It is the objective of this paper to present the NLP's programs and services and its initiatives in promoting mainstreamed inclusive services in Philippine public libraries. Being a national and a public library at the same time, NLP is expected as the forearm of the government in promoting equal access to information and helping people from all walks of life to be educated. With the current number of public libraries in the region which to date is 1, 377 (as of December 2015), this role is very challenging. But challenges are the things that inspired us most to continue develop and enhance NLP programs and services to be able to cater to the information needs of our Persons with Special Needs.

The government had approved last year my proposal to cascade this 2016 to NLP's affiliated public libraries awareness on PWDs through the DAT, as a start to convince libraries to offer services for the same, in particular blind and those with print disabilities. Along with this training is the donation of Braille materials to selected public libraries. And that, this year, a bigger project for 2017-2021 entitled Development of

Disability Resource and Development Center in the Philippines, was prioritized by the NLP Management to be submitted to our Department of Budget and Management for funding. This 5-year project aims to enhance the existing services and programs of the NLP's Library for the Blind Section, to include training components both for PWDs (i.e. Blind, other persons with print disabilities, deaf) and librarians/library personnel.

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