

NTRLS 2009 Expanding Accessibility in Libraries Pilot Program

The goal of this phase of the program was to help libraries identify members of their communities whose access to library services and programs is limited due to special needs and to determine ways the library could extend services and programs to that population.

Eight libraries voluntarily studied the special needs within their own communities, submitted to NTRLS proposals for related accessibility tool purchases and used funding assistance from NTRLS to purchase the approved items. Thus the Pilot Project Libraries began blazing a trail which we believe other libraries will be able to follow in moving toward Universal Access.

Thanks to the Pilot Project Library program, personnel at those libraries and NTRLS staff are learning more about the following:

- Best sources for affordable accessibility tools
- Which product vendors provide the best customer service
- Which vendors ship quickly
- Which products are most user-friendly
- Which products don't live up to their promo and which are better for individual ownership than for public use
- Which products are most or least popular with members of their communities

Since vision impairment is the disability most likely to affect a great number of persons in any community, Arlington, Bedford, Colleyville and Hurst Public Libraries are focusing primarily on Low Vision/No Vision services; each of those has added, also, software which will prove useful to people with limited hearing and/or reading disabilities.

Wichita Falls Public and Fort Worth libraries are focusing on Assistive Technology (AT), and Krum Public Library is focusing on all AT as well as appropriate furnishings, not only for the user but also for the limited space available. Watauga Public Library is focusing primarily on helping children with developmental needs while adding AT similar to that offered at the other Pilot Project libraries.

In August 2009 a representative of our partner organization, Easter Seals of North Texas, visited each of the eight Pilot Project Libraries, using the NTRLS universal access workstation to demonstrate software which patrons may access at those libraries.