

Interregional Advisory Committee  
for Library Accessibility (IACLA)

# Activity Report

2022-23



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# Welcome Message

On behalf of the Interregional Advisory Committee for Library Accessibility (IACLA), we invite you to read our 2022-23 Activity Report, covering the period of April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023.

We are proud of the progress our member regions have made this past year and look forward to more advancements in the coming year. The IACLA plan is an evolving document allowing each region flexibility to prioritize action areas. With this approach, the committee benefits from a shared learning environment.

We remain committed to working towards our libraries being welcoming, inclusive, and accepting public spaces for all people.

In closing, we want to acknowledge the support of Catherine Kelly, Communities Librarian for Nova Scotia Provincial Library.

Best,

Lisa Mulak, Co-Chair  
Peter Hansen, Co-Chair

# What We Believe

**Human Rights** – We recognize the many barriers which limit full participation of persons with disabilities and we uphold accessibility as a fundamental human right to be modelled on our library service.

**Inclusion** – We commit to creating equitable and inclusive learning, social, and working environments within public libraries, where community members and employees are treated with respect and dignity.

**Creativity** – We will advance accessibility with creativity, adaptivity, and forward-thinking. Public libraries commit to being proactive and flexible in our approach.

**First Voice** – We will listen to and be informed by the unique experiences of individuals and communities that public libraries serve, and commit to advocating for all the people we employ and all those we work for and work with.

**Community-Led** – We recognize that creative solutions come from new connections and are committed to connecting, consulting, and working collaboratively with our communities to understand their needs.

**Diverseness of Disabilities** – We recognize the complex nature of disabilities and acknowledge the impact to accessibility individual differences of identity, perspective, circumstance, and experience can have. Disability is regarded as part of diversity and this will be reflected in Public Library policies, programs, and services.

# **2022-23 Committee Members**

## **Annapolis Valley Regional Library**

- Ann-Marie Mathieu, Chief Executive Officer (until May 2022)
- Angela Reynolds, Interim CEO (June 2022 to December 2022)
- Jai Soloy, Coordinator of Public Services (January 2023 - )
- Alnoor Rajan Talwar, Community

## **Cape Breton Regional Library**

- Lisa Mulak, Regional Librarian
- Michelle Bartram, Community

## **Colchester-East Hants Public Library**

- Tiffany Bartlett, Chief Executive Officer
- Amanda Priest, Community

## **Cumberland Public Libraries**

- Denise Corey, Library Director
- Amanda Lawless, Community

## **Eastern Counties Regional Library**

- Laura Emery, Chief Executive Officer
- Danielle Pellerine, Community

## **Western Counties Regional Library**

- Erin Comeau, Executive Director and Regional Librarian
- Peter Hansen, Community

## **Special Resource Person to the IACLA**

- Catherine Kelly, Communities Librarian, Nova Scotia Provincial Library

# Do You See Me?

A Poem, by IACLA Community Member Alnoor Rajan Talwar

As you go about your tasks  
                                  behind your hypnotic masks,  
I find myself compelled  
                                  to ask...  
                                  Do you see me?

Do you really see me?  
    I am the different one  
                                  I may be disabled,  
                                  I may walk slowly,  
                                  not quite able to lunge, plunge,  
                                  bend, tend, defend  
                                  or even fully comprehend  
    I may not be able to see,  
    I might speak differently,  
                                  move asymmetrically  
    or have some unnoticeable malady

Are you so very consumed with your own life  
that you see nothing beyond yourself?

    I certainly see you,  
                                  your curiosity,  
                                  your pity,  
                                  as well as your ignorance and insensitivity  
                                  and will ask again...  
    Do you see me?  
    Do you see me for who I really am  
                                  or do you judge me  
for who, what and where you think I should be?  
Any deviation from your physical or mental norm  
does not mean  
                                  a divergence  
  from moral forms

I am equally (if not more) capable, intelligent,  
mentally and emotionally strong

and definitely quite competent

Treat me the way you would want  
to be treated yourself

I have the same fears

The same things make me happy, sad,  
upset and mad

I may sometimes need preferential treatment

But then, so do you (what a revelation!)

So, how really different are we?

Sometimes living and trying to fit in,  
requires a strength and bravery  
that is quite unimaginable  
and all I want is to be treated  
with some sense of normalcy

\*\*\*

Potential employers? Please!!

You may be the worst

because you simply burst

into that familiar song and dance of equal opportunity,  
which actually

seems less of a reality, and more of a strategy

for *'keeping up appearances'*

As potential employers,  
you are actually disguised destroyers  
of morale

for our world has a biased picture of

who and what I must be,

and since clients bring you your income,  
my perceived deformity may offend them  
to affect your highly coveted bottom sum

Or, you'll hire me,

but at a reduced rate...

Greed over pragmatism?

You tell me

\*\*\*

The government?  
You promise to show no bias  
towards hiring disabled employees  
So then, why is it that most jobs displayed  
for unionized operatives first,  
rendering the posting  
just another fake formality?  
- I cannot apply as I am not unionized  
and cannot get unionized  
because I cannot get hired  
Laughable? Decidedly objectionable! Who is  
ultimately culpable?  
I'd love to hear your song and dance  
about this yet another hypocritical farce  
Then,  
you promise to assist  
offering only lip-service  
and a one-size-fits-all solution  
to my unique condition  
So, what exactly are your standards  
when it comes to Accessibility  
and Social Assistance?  
Your one perfect accomplishment?  
-A faultless vicious circle of  
governmental bureaucratic incompetence!

\*\*\*

Organizations and Businesses,  
you too can do better...  
You do not realize that I cannot maneuver  
that ninety-degree turn  
from your entrance to that other door  
Or, how the step or lip  
in your floor  
causes me to trip,



always cause an  
uneasy apprehension

You might have staff to help me (if I can ever find an employee),  
but this is not letting me go about my business  
without having to worry  
about accessibility  
and keeping my dignity

In true fact,  
your facility must be inclusive of all people...  
Even those with disabilities

\*\*\*

As I struggle through the aisles,  
I often see smiles and eyes that are curious  
as well as those of you who are completely oblivious,  
while choosing to remain mysterious, with your unattended carts  
as you hunt for 'deals'  
with delirious delight  
completely disregarding  
how you prevent, obstruct and affect

Then, there are those  
who step right in front of me  
expecting me to stop suddenly  
as you hop away hurriedly  
with a simple, "I am sorry"

Do you really see me?  
I am the otherwise 'abled' one  
So, before you block my passage;  
before you walk in front of me;  
before you stare me down  
because I do not fit into your idea  
of what is ordinary;  
before you judge me based on my disfigurement,  
or because I am different;  
ask yourself if you fully appreciate  
or even get  
how I am affected

There is also that touchy subject

of 'patronizing pity'  
It sure is nice and human to offer help,  
but it can also be wrong to assume that  
a person is incapable

People must strike a balance between deciding when to help,  
when they are in need and not quite,  
without being patronizing

For this can be as prejudicial  
as any other form of discrimination

This is the grey area of humanity where  
you may be damned if you do  
and damned if you don't

But please, certainly do

And, if I refuse your assistance,  
it is not because I don't want your help,  
but because it is something I can and should do  
by myself

I am not a scoffer and

I still very much appreciate the offer

Please continue to extend  
your assistance in every form  
It maintains my faith  
in the 'goodness of man'

\*\*\*

The truth is

that anyone given less opportunity  
is considered to be in a position of inequity  
So, when a facility does not offer complete access  
and any task then becomes too complex,  
this is simply unjustly biased, unnecessarily discriminatory,  
and nothing less than prejudicial bigotry

People with disabilities

get on with their lives as perfectly as they can,  
making adjustments,  
when places they are going to

are easily accessible,  
and when the tasks they perform  
are independently doable

However, if people cannot change how they think;  
If businesses cannot alter their facilities  
to enable better accessibility;  
If employers cannot make adjustments,  
to their financial and budgetary compulsions and liability  
and  
if governments can only offer false concern  
and pious platitudes to this very ignored burden,  
then I am faced with what seems to be  
a fallacious conundrum

I do not choose to be dependent on people or the system,  
but find myself curtailed  
and a victim of a forced-upon circumstance,  
as the world around me  
chooses not to take a stance

I know and hope that most people  
see me for who I really am  
Some do, others leer  
And to a large number, I remain invisible  
even though, I am right here

Businesses, organizations  
and potential employers, undoubtedly,  
need to offer  
more than a token agreement  
to the issues of prejudice and partiality

The government needs to decidedly  
commit and ACT  
to fix this ongoing predicament

I may be disabled,  
but still am a very valuable, capable,

and contributing citizen  
and need to be treated as such

My disability does not define me  
My strength, my shamelessness, my abilities  
and my tenacity in my attempts to fit in  
to reclaim and live with honor and dignity,  
despite my disability,  
are what ultimately define me

Do you see me now?  
Or am I just a crease  
on your very furrowed brow?

My tolerance for human, corporate and government  
ignorance and hypocrisy  
especially when it comes to respect, empathy,  
compassion and commitment  
to accessibility  
and total equality  
has just about reached  
its all-time low

**Maybe you'll finally hear and see me now**

©AlnoorRajanTalwar

# 2022-23 Activity Highlights

## **Annapolis Valley Regional Library**

The Annapolis Valley Regional Library has completed a ground up redesign of our website ([www.valleylibrary.ca](http://www.valleylibrary.ca)) in order to ensure that our web presence meets or exceeds Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1 AA) and will continue to meet these requirements going forward.

In addition to the redesign, AVRL has installed accessWidget, a SAAS accessibility tool offered by leading web accessibility service AccessiBe.

accessWidget utilizes two applications that work together to remediate a website. The accessibility interface is responsible for the user interface and design-related adjustments, while the AI-powered process handles the complex requirements - optimization for screen readers and keyboard navigation.

accessWidget will also conduct daily checks for WCAG 2.1 compliance and issue regular reports to AVRL staff.

The new site launched on March 27, 2023.

## **Hippocampe Adaptive Equipment Loan Program**

In partnership with Municipality of the County of Kings, Town of Berwick, Sport NS, Nova Scotia Community, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage: Sport and Recreation Division: Valley Region, Mud Creek Rotary, and Active Kids, Healthy Kids, Annapolis Valley Regional has acquired two Hippocampe all-terrain wheelchairs that can be borrowed with a Same Page library card and picked up at any of our eleven locations.

The Hippocampe is an all-terrain wheelchair for use on beaches, in the water, along rugged trails, and on snowy surfaces. It is designed for all ages and different levels of mobility.

Accessories include a Tomato seat (for child use), balloon tires (for beach or snow), and a ski attachment.

We have been promoting the Hippocampe adaptive equipment and are working on a larger public awareness campaign to launch in Summer 2023.

# Cape Breton Regional Library

## Collections

This year we focused on adding new format options for people with disabilities to our collections.

- Large print books remain a popular option for our patrons with visual disabilities. This year we refreshed the collection adding over 400 new titles.
- Playaway, an all-in-one audiobook that allows for seamless use is a relatively new format for CBRL and a welcome addition to our audiobook collection.
- We added picture books with augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices to the collection helping children with communicative disabilities.

## Website

We continue to monitor our library website to ensure it meets accessibility guidelines. Over the past year, we took steps to enhance website accessibility by:

- Incorporating logical headings, consistent navigation, and table of content pages. As a result, optimizing navigation for people using assistive technology like screen readers.
- Adding an accessibility page to our website that highlights the resources and assistive devices available for people with disabilities.

## Awareness and Access

We collaborated with the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate on their **Access Includes Everyone** Campaign to showcase examples of spaces, programs, and groups that demonstrate how accessibility promotes inclusion and the diversity of Nova Scotians with disabilities who are members of our communities. A photoshoot, organized at the Sydney Library featured people with disabilities using various assistive devices. Participants in the photoshoot received an honorarium. The Accessibility Directorate wanted to recognize the importance of libraries as prescribed public sector bodies and champions of accessibility and community.

We partnered with Crohn's and Colitis Canada on their GoHere Washroom Access Program by registering CBRL washrooms on their website and

placing GoHere stickers at library entrances. This program makes it easier for people with inflammatory bowel disease to manage their symptoms and lead more active, productive and fulfilling lives.

### **Employee Training**

- Our community partners at Autism Cape Breton presented at our fall in-service. The session provided valuable learning on best practises when assisting library patrons with autism.
- Designated library staff participated in training to enhance the accessibility of social media posts as well as Accessible Language training through Inclusive Nova Scotia.
- Library staff took part in a training webinar on making presentations more accessible.
- Some staff have completed the Working with Abilities online training offered by Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission.

### **Library Programming**

Library staff presented to CNIB clients focusing on accessibility options for digital resources. A tour of the Sydney Library was provided as well as a demonstration of the Library's loanable Victor Readers.

A Living with Hearing Loss workshop was offered by the Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Topics covered included tips for better communication, reading audiogram and optimizing device settings for hearing loss.

# Colchester-East Hants Public Library

## 1. Training

Staff training on accessibility included:

- *Working with Abilities* webinar from the NS Human Rights Commission
- *Disability Confidence on the Frontlines* workshop delivered by Tova Sherman, CEO of *reachAbility*
- Information session on the Centre for Equitable Access (CELA) and the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS)

## 2. Public Policy Development

We started work refreshing our public policies governing library services, spaces and collections.

- We engaged *Inclusion NS* to have the updated/new policies translated into plain language.
- The updated/new policies on our website are machine-readable.
- 'Accessibility' is one of the guiding principles of our updated [Collection Development Policy](#).

## 3. Community Survey

Our first annual community survey included specific questions targeted at accessibility in our spaces, services and programs. Staff are using the community feedback to inform our service planning.

## 4. Disability Awareness Drive

In honor of the *International Day of Persons with Disabilities* (December 3) we ran a two-week Disability Awareness Drive highlighting our region's accessible resources and initiatives.

## **Cumberland Public Libraries**

1. As of June 2022, all seven CPL branches have at least one accessible public access computer. Each computer has magnification and text-to-speech software, a large print keyboard, and trackball mouse.
2. An accessibility tab was added to our website. This tab provides information about materials and services available to patrons with disabilities. The tab also prominently displays our accessibility plan and explains our library's connection to IACLA.
3. Our technology training sessions have resumed after a Covid-19 hiatus. These one-on-one sessions are held at each branch by our Technology Trainer, based on patron interest, who provides help with digital resources and digital literacy skills.
4. We hired Chrysalis Human Rights Agency to audit our existing policies. The goal of this assessment was to provide CPL with guidance on how to improve our policies with respect to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. Chrysalis completed the audit of our Personnel and Operational Policies and have provided us with a full report. The report includes recommendations for improvement and an overview to share with our board.

## **Eastern Counties Regional Library**

1. Implemented an Accessible Collections Policy and Procedure to ensure staff have information about accessible formats and services offered and can better assist users with these services. These services include CELA and NNELS.
2. Major project began to relabel collections to ensure visual accessibility. We discovered that the label printers ECRL was using were resulting in labels that faded very quickly. This project involves relabelling thousands of books and will be ongoing for at least 2 years.
3. Completed the implementation of a new website that is much more accessible. Yearly audits will be conducted on the website to ensure continuous updates and improvements to accessibility.
4. A brand guide was implemented to ensure the visual look of text communications are in line with accessibility guidelines.
5. Implemented active offer(s) of accommodation for both new and current employees.
6. All employees have completed the Working with Abilities online training provided by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission [[workwithabilitiesns.ca](http://workwithabilitiesns.ca)].
7. An accessibility feedback form was added to the ECRL website to allow the community to provide us with their thoughts and concerns. The link is: <https://ecrl.ca/contact-us/accessibility/>.

## **Western Counties Regional Library**

1. Victor Readers for books in the Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) format are now available for people to borrow. Victor readers read the DAISY format, which is a standard for digital talking books for people who are blind or have a print disability. All library staff are trained on how to use the readers making them more accessible to people who are unfamiliar with the technology.
2. Accessible public access computers are now available in all ten of our branches. Each accessible computer has a 27-inch monitor, trackball mouse, large print keyboard, height adjustable desk and Non-visual Desktop Assistant software.
3. We held our first weeklong campaign in December for Disability Awareness month. We promoted accessible library services and featured books written by, for and about people with different disabilities.
4. Our website now has an Accessibility page. The Accessibility page is where people can go to find out about services that are available for people with disabilities and stay up to date with our overall plans activities around accessible libraries and library service.
5. We trained all library branch clerks on how to help people access National Network for Equitable Library Service and Centre for Equitable Library Access. Staff are now better able to help people who want to access these services.

# Contact Information

For more information, please contact your local Library:

Annapolis Valley Regional Library: [www.valleylibrary.ca](http://www.valleylibrary.ca)

Cape Breton Regional Library: [www.cbri.ca](http://www.cbri.ca)

Colchester-East Hants Public Library: [www.lovelylibrary.ca](http://www.lovelylibrary.ca)

Cumberland Public Libraries: [www.cumberlandpubliclibraries.ca](http://www.cumberlandpubliclibraries.ca)

Eastern Counties Regional Library: [www.ecrl.ca](http://www.ecrl.ca)

Western Counties Regional Library: [www.westerncounties.ca](http://www.westerncounties.ca)