

Kansas Talking Book Service is Developing Better Service with New KLAS System

by Toni Harrell, Director, Talking Book Service

The National Library Service and local Talking Book libraries are celebrating 75 years of service to persons unable to use standard print due to impairments such as vision loss, paralysis, dyslexia or other conditions that affect one's physical ability to hold, read or decode text. The collections and the mission of Talking Books are similar to public libraries across the state of Kansas. The uniqueness of our services lies primarily in two areas:

1. the talking book program loans resources including books and magazines in recorded and Braille formats; and
2. services are primarily provided remotely, rather than face-to-face.

Due to the nature of the service, Talking Book staff members often provide direct hands-on assistance in the day-to-day management of patron accounts. This generally is accomplished through manual entry of patron-initiated requests or through the development and maintenance of request lists based upon patron reading preferences for such areas as genres, titles, authors, languages, grade level, general or specific subjects, or series. Likewise, the patron may pose certain restrictions to exclude books written by a particular author or materials that contain strong language or violence. Talking Book staff members evaluate patron accounts to insure that patrons do not receive previously read materials unless they are specifically requested. Many considerations go into each item circulated to a patron through the six service centers.

Seventy-five years ago, these daily tasks were performed and maintained by hand. In 1989, the Kansas Talking Book libraries automated many of the processes to better serve the eligible residents. Since that time, the development of technologies to assist staff in the multi-faceted aspects of Talking Book services has matured.

Keystone Systems, a company that provides accessible library systems that meet the unique needs of talking book programs, has developed and maintains a service that incorporates the advantages of new technologies. This October, Kansas Talking Book service centers will begin to implement KLAS (Keystone Library Automated Systems). This implementation will allow for the integration of holdings within each site into a unified state-wide database. The unified database will allow for resource sharing among the six service centers. Patrons are currently placed on a waiting list if a copy is not available in the home library. KLAS will allow libraries to automatically check availability in the other Talking Book centers and initiate a direct checkout to the patron. The KLAS program also allows for a high degree of specificity in patron reading preferences and exclusions. Resource sharing and the KLAS program will assist staff as they manage resources to insure that patrons receive the materials they want, when they want them.

Another key element of KLAS is the web OPAC. The web-based search function of the OPAC is operational for public use. Registered patrons and caregivers may view and search the collection or log-in and directly add titles to request lists, place holds, confirm availability, modify reading interests and submit address changes. KLAS is fully accessible to users of assistive technologies, including screen readers.

For all who have or are considering automation or migration of automation programs -- it is not an easy process. It involves a high degree of stress. The staff within each of the Kansas Talking Book service centers is bravely progressing through the process to reach the ultimate goal of improved library services. We look forward to working with the Kansas library community to make KLAS a truly integrated library system that better serves the residents of Kansas who need our program.

To learn more about KLAS and view other state Talking Book library web OPACs, visit www.klas.com.