

Talking Book Voices Podcast Transcript: Episode One

NARRATOR:

Welcome to Talking Book Voices, the podcast. Get ready to embark on an adventure with us as we dive into and celebrate the magic of the Texas Talking Book Program. Let's raise our voices together and make the world of literature accessible to all. The Texas Talking Book Program is a division of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, and it serves as a regional library for the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, a division of the Library of Congress. The Talking Book Program provides specialized library services to individuals who have qualifying visual, physical, or reading disabilities, such as dyslexia.

In each episode of Talking Book Voices, we will delve into the heart of this program, uncovering its history, sharing inspiring stories, and exploring the vast collection of materials it has to offer. We will bring you the latest updates, interviews with program experts and patrons, and useful tips to make the most of this invaluable program for Texans and beyond.

So, whether you're an avid reader, someone with a print disability seeking accessible materials, or just curious to learn more about this great program, this podcast is made for you!

Don't forget to visit texastalkingbooks.org for more information. So, let's begin Texas Talking Book Voices, a podcast by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

JACLYN:

Hi, my name is Jaclyn Owusu, and I am the Public Awareness Coordinator for the Talking Book Program and joining me today is our director, the Talking Book Program newish Director, Ann Minner.

ANN:

Hi, I have been here for almost a year, 11 months yesterday. I think that is right. And I really excited to be here and excited to have the podcast up and running.

JACLYN:

I am excited as well. I am not saying that because you are my boss, but you are my boss looking directly at me, so I am so glad you are here. So, Ann can you tell me what is the Talking Book Program?

ANN:

Sure, the Talking Book Program division of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and has been a regional library for the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, since 1931. NLS is a division of the Library of Congress.

The Talking Book Program provides a free library service for Texans of any age who have a qualifying visual, physical, or reading disability, like dyslexia. We give them access to reading materials, in digital audio, braille and large print formats whether the need is temporary or a lifelong need. We are Texans' other library.

JACLYN:

Nice! So, you can start the program let's say in middle school and stay part of the program into adulthood?

ANN:

Yes, that is correct.

JACLYN:

Oh, awesome. So, I know when I go out and do outreach there is a common misconception that some people have is that the program is just for people who are blind, but from what you mentioned that is only partially true. So, I think some people seem to think blindness is binary. You are either completely sighted or completely blind. The

truth is that there are infinite ways to be legally blind or have a print disability. Can you elaborate on what qualifies people for the program.

ANN:

Sure, an individual who is blind. They qualify for the program.

An individual who has a visual disability that makes them unable to comfortably read standard print books. This includes macular degeneration, or diabetic retinopathy. Basically, folks that need a magnifying glass to read, for example, can be part of our program.

Also, a person who has a physical disability that makes it hard to hold or manipulate a book or to focus or move the eyes as needed to read a print book. This could be someone who has had a stroke, has Parkinson's or a traumatic brain injury or someone who has broken their arm recently and cannot lift a book.

An individual who has a perceptual or reading disability, like dyslexia. They are also eligible for our program.

JACLYN:

Nice! That is really broad, in a sense, when it comes to eligibility requirements. So, I read NLS came up with some numbers recently for us. And I recently read that the population of Texas being almost 30 million people and a common figure used to determine eligibility is 1.4% of that 30 million people means that around 450,000 Texans could qualify for our program.

ANN:

Yes, that is right.

JACLYN:

Ann, can you tell me about some of the relevant elements of the program?

ANN:

Of course. One is our program is free. Patrons may borrow books and magazines in digital audio for 60 days and, braille, and large print for 45 days. Materials and playback machines are mailed to our patron's door, completely free of charge through the US Post Office and priority service is offered to our veterans who have been honorably discharged.

JACLYN:

That is great that you give priority service to veterans. You mentioned something about equipment? Is there equipment needed? Or does it come with the program?

ANN:

Playback equipment includes a Digital Talking Book Machine or DTBM. The machine is essentially a computer that has no moving parts, uses high-capacity flash media, so books come on cartridges and the machine stays with patrons as long as they are part of the program. However, if you prefer to just use the mobile app, I will talk about in a moment, you do not have to keep the machine. It just depends on preference.

We also provide a refreshable braille display called the Zoomax braille e-reader for individuals who read braille.

JACLYN:

laughter I get giddy talking about TBP. How do you get the books and magazines?

ANN:

Books and magazines are placed on cartridges that are mailed directly to a patron's home. Each cartridge can have one book or have multiple books on it. With our system called duplication on demand, patrons can even have a series on one cartridge, and they have 60 days to listen to them with the option to renew. So, a total of 120 days. 45 or 90 days for Braille hard copy books and large print. Patrons of our program can also use BARD.

JACLYN:

So, you mentioned BARD. What is BARD?

ANN:

BARD stands for braille and audio Reading download. BARD allows you to download books on to a flash drive or cartridge and then play with your machine. With BARD there is No wait time, no limit to how many you can download, no due dates, no pesky “overdue” notices. You sign in, browse, download, and go. Patrons of our program have access to thousands of titles 24/7 with new titles added regularly.

JACLYN:

BARD sounds kind of great, but I understand that is an app that you can use on a smartphone or tablet that transforms your phone into a personal and portable library, called BARD mobile. Can you tell me about that?

Ann:

Yes, in the app to keep a consistent feel, the controls on the app are like Digital Talking Book Machine player. The fastest way to get books is using BARD or BARD mobile. The BARD mobile app is easy to use. With BARD there are more than 160,000 titles 60+ digital magazines, 53 eBraille magazines. New materials added daily. Read by professional narrators, of course. Collection: 65% fiction, 35% nonfiction and we have best sellers, biographies, and how-to books. No textbooks.

The collection includes titles for all ages, including literary classics, fairy tales, poetry, mysteries, sports, science fiction, and biographies, just about everything you can think of.

In magazines Geographic Kids, Seventeen, Sports Illustrated for Kids, Spider, Conundrum. NLS also provides LP and Braille music scores. We also work with the Texas Center of the Book for our patrons to be able to participate in the Texas Great Reads and Read Across Texas.

JACLYN:

Nice, I like the collaboration. So, let’s say that I find that I qualify under a visual disability, what should I do?

ANN:

Signing up is easy to do. The application is two pages. On the application, we just need basic contact information like your name, address, email, and phone number. We need the signature of the applicant and then check the type of disability you have, and you need a signature from a certifying authority that just is a professional who can verify the disability. Applications are available in English and Spanish. We do not need insurance or medical information, just the application. You can find applications at www.texastalkingbooks.org. Under how to apply.

JACLYN:

You mentioned a certifying authority on the application what does that mean?

ANN:

A Certifying Authority is just a non-family member who can verify there is a qualifying disability. They can be a doctor, social worker, O&M specialist, nurse, activity director, clergy, teacher, librarian. A non-family member verifying the qualifying disability.

JACLYN:

Perfect, noted so I cannot sign up directly for my dad, but I can go to one of my mom’s teachers and have them sign the application for me.

ANN:

Right or go to the public library and have them sign the application, as well.

JACLYN:

Lovely, I love that. So I have the application filled out and I can send it in by email, mail, or fax, right? But then, what happens after I send my application is received?

ANN:

Once we receive the applications, someone from our reader services call center will call and go through the whole process, in detail. Readers Services is the main point of contact. TBP staff operates a call center offering direct contact with TBP patrons via a toll-free telephone number making ordering books and getting answers to questions easy and efficient. Reader Consultants and librarians offer patrons help ranging from setting up and maintaining accounts, help choosing books or even venture out to new reading interests, consult on playback machines, and BARD assistance. They can fine tune book selections, ensure books are satisfactory.

JACLYN:

Very cool, you mentioned earlier too that there were about 65% fiction and 35% non-fiction, how are you able to select the books?

ANN:

There are a couple of ways for people to select books. Books can be selected by the patron; they can send a letter or email with the books they would like to have on their request list or sign on to the OPAC that is the Online Patron Access Catalog. It allows patrons to search the collection, request books and see due dates. Books can also be automatically selected. Let us say you like Westerns, books in that category will be selected for you to read, it also works for a specific author.

Or if you have no idea what books you might like you can contact one of our RS librarians and they can help find the right books.

JACLYN:

Very cool. Reader services sounds pretty busy. Are there other parts of TBP that you can tell me about?

ANN:

Well, yes, in addition to Reader Services, we have Circulation and Machine Lending: Circulation staff manages between 8,000 and 10,000 items (both incoming and outgoing books, machines, and magazines) on an average weekday. And our Machine Lending Service staff maintains and loans the playback equipment. So, if you have a machine and it breaks, you send it in, and we will send you another one.

Our Collections department supplements the national collection with a large print collection and collections librarians research, select, and acquire books for the studio volunteers to record.

The Recording Studio, which is where we are sitting right now, has over forty active volunteers recording books every month in the studio. The studio records about thirty books a year that are of regional interest, including some in Spanish that are of regional interest. Volunteers also record Texas centered magazines such as Texas Monthly, Texas Highways, and Texas Parks & Wildlife.

We also have digital literacy training and outreach services. So, if you would like to have someone provide training, give a presentation, or exhibit, you can give us a call.

We also have the DIRC that stands for the Disability and Information Referral Center. Now, this is important. You do not have to be a patron of TBP to use the DIRC. Anyone in Texas who needs disability and/or health-related information can contact the DIRC. Ask the Librarian, any question you have about accessibility, grants, loans, or what local support groups are in your area.

JACLYN:

The DIRC really is a great tool that provides information about disabilities or disability related resources and services.

Sorry to brag, but my coworkers really are an excellent group.

Ann, I saw this quote and I want to share it. It is from the ARC. It says, "The disability community is the only minority group that anyone can join at any time." It hits a poignant point. I am so glad we are helping get the word out about the Talking Book Program.

So, what is next? What do you want people to do with this information?

ANN:

Well, everybody knows somebody, young or old that could and would benefit from our program. One of our patrons wrote me when I started and said, "These books have been an anchor to my sanity." If you or someone you know misses the joy of reading, have them contact us at the Talking Book Program.

JACLYN:

Before we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to add?

ANN:

I have only been here, just about a year, but I am so proud of this program and the work that happens here. And I really think that more Texans need to know about it. And if anybody is listening outside of Texas, there is a whole national resource with regional libraries. If you are looking for the same type of program in your state, give us a call, we will help you find it. Because we can hook you up with them too.

JACLYN:

Absolutely, Fantastic! You can find and visit the Talking Book Program online at texastalkingbooks.org, you can call us up toll-free to 1-800-252-9605, send us and email to TBP.Services@tsl.texas.gov or visit our blog that we have you can get to from texastalkingbooks.org. Join me next time are we take a dive into the Talking Book Program Disability Information and Referral Center.

And I want to thank you, Ann, for joining me on the inaugural episode. And thank you all who are listening, thank you for joining. Ann, do you have anything else to add.

ANN:

Well, I think that everyone should listen to this podcast as often as it comes out. We have so much great information. For even more information about the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, which is pretty great, you can visit www.tsl.texas.gov.

JACLYN:

Awesome, Ann, say bye.

ANN:

Bye

JACLYN:

Bye

End of transcript.

###