



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Through education and advocacy, we take steps to eliminate barriers and build community understanding.”

-Mission Statement of the Spencer Americans with Disabilities Act Task Force, Spencer, Iowa (spencerlibrary.com)

On September 12, there was a great article in the *New York Times* about accessibility in restaurants. In it, Frank Bruni tells his story of eating at various New York restaurants, accompanied by a friend in a wheelchair. What passes as accessibility is described in detail, such as when they visit a Manhattan restaurant and his friend finds herself - after exiting a tiny elevator - in a “grim corner behind the bar where she was trapped by a thicket of cleaning equipment, including a mop and bucket.”

The piece appeared at a perfect time because we have been discussing the question of accessibility in my library. I decided to do some research on the topic itself and also take a closer look at our layout.

The Spencer ADA task force has a one-page description of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was enacted on July 26, 1990. According to their sheet, ADA includes providing a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimin-

ation of discrimination against individuals with disabilities; and, clear, strong, enforceable standards addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

Another helpful source is the United States Department of Justice ADA website (usdoj.gov/crt/ada). This packed site includes an information line, a status report, new or proposed regulations and much more.

In addition, it has a lengthy frequently asked questions section that has such questions as: Will the ADA have any effect on the eligibility criteria used by public accommodations to determine who may receive services? The answer to this is yes and one of the examples given is that “requiring presentation of a driver’s license as the sole acceptable means of identification for paying by check could constitute discrimination against individuals with vision impairments.” This kind of explanation helps us all understand the kind of discrimination that

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can exist when we don't think deeply enough about our rules.

The American Library Association approved a Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy on January 16, 2001. They have done an excellent job of describing the need for this policy by emphasizing the importance of public libraries: “Libraries play a catalytic role in the lives of people with disabilities by facilitating their full participation in society...” There are 7 sections to this policy and they range from describing library services - such as extended loan periods, waived late fines and home delivery service - to facilities, collections, assistive technology and employment.

Many libraries have information on their websites describing their resources for people with disabilities. The Alameda County Library has such a page and on it are descriptions of items like special monitors and keyboards, different kinds of print access - books on tape,

Braille children's books - writing aids, audio access and other accommodations, like walkers, headsets and wheelchairs.

I also found “Survey Form 26: Libraries” on the U.S. Access Board website. I was surprised to see card catalogs included in the furniture listed, since I think there are few libraries still using them, but nonetheless their simple to follow chart gives tips on checking if a library meets the minimum ADA requirements. I wheeled my library's wheelchair up and down the aisles and around the book racks, just to see how we were doing. I was glad to see that we mostly have enough clearance, although there are two areas where we will be shifting tables and paperback racks.

Learning more about ADA has been an excellent reminder to me about its importance and has, I hope, made me a better advocate for all our library users.