

Braille and Talking Book Library User Advisory Council Meeting

Date: March 5, 2022 10AM to 12 noon (Held using Zoom)

Chair Jana Littrell called the Meeting to order at 10:01am

In attendance:

Jana Littrell – Chair, Shannon Dillon - Vice Chair, NFB liaison; Maria G. Smith – Secretary; Connie Bateman - CCB Liaison; Diane Uebelhart – Member at Large, Janet Snow – Member at Large

Absent: Lenore Presley, represents the deaf/blind community; Alan Smith – Member at Large; Richard Rueda - Member at Large

BTBL Staff:

Laura Kellen- Reference and Outreach Librarian; Mike L. Marlin- Director, BTBL patron; Donna Scales- Reader Advisory Supervisor

Approval of agenda:

Jana asked if everyone had a chance to read the agenda and asked for comments, additions, deletions, or other changes.

Shannon moved to adopt the agenda as is. Diane seconded it. All were in favor.

Approval of Minutes from 12/4/21 meeting:

Jana asked if everyone had a chance to read the minutes. Everyone did. Jana asked for a motion for approval. Janet motioned. Shannon seconded. All in favor.

Remarks from the Chair:

Jana opened with housekeeping business. Mike reminded everyone of the ground rules: be courteous, state your position respectfully, try not to interrupt, please state your name if you have something to say and the Chair can call on you or put your question in the chat.

BTBL Director's Report:

Mike opened with a discussion of statistics: the BTBL patron base is decreasing. This has been noted locally, and has also been a topic covered by the NLS Director in recent months. Nationwide, the patron base is decreasing. This has been happening since before the pandemic and has been accelerated by the pandemic. There is more patron attrition than new patrons coming on board. The library currently has around 7,000 patrons. When the pandemic started, there were closer to 8,500 patrons. Analysis shows 40% of that loss is due to patrons becoming deceased. Laura has been working on retention communication to current patrons. The library will continue to focus on patron retention, as well as bringing new/prospective patrons into the service. NLS is working on ways to try to increase readership.

Connie asked if there was any speculation as to why the numbers are dropping.

Mike responded that BTBL is working on analyzing that. The pandemic is likely a factor. Isolation may have led to fewer applicants as well. There are also competitors for the patron base: public libraries, social media, television. Pew Research studies indicate that people are not reading as much.

Maria asked if the library is able to work with undocumented Californians.

Mike responded that NLS network libraries including BTBL provide service to anyone who is a resident of the United States, as long as they have the requisite print disability.

Mike suggested that the BUAC may want to reboot the outreach committee in order to do more outreach to these specific populations.

General BTBL updates: the studio is still not actively recording local books, and the library is anticipating bringing back in-person volunteers in the Fall. There has been a delay due to the CSL Volunteer Policy being revised. There were eleven teams in the studio prior to COVID, and it is unclear how many will be returning. BTBL will likely need to reconstruct the studio volunteer program. Meanwhile, Studio Coordinator Christopher Duran is still working on analog to digital conversions, and he has produced approximately 150 so far. Laura has been rewriting the A2D archive annotations for better clarity.

BTBL is going to have a Summer Reading Program again this year, with cool prizes including earbuds and plush puppy stuffed animals. In the past, the Summer Reading Program has averaged about 50 participants, BTBL is hoping for even more this year.

Then there is the Conversation Club, which is still going and will be advertised again in a forthcoming patron newsletter. There are a number of important issues that will be addressed in the forthcoming BTBL newsletter, slated for an April release.

First, the Braille e-Readers. These will be offered soon, and BTBL will be rolling them out over the next several months. At this point it appears BTBL will receive the Zoommax model. We BTBL will train the staff so that to perform tech support for patrons. BTBL currently has 200 very active Braille readers and hundreds of occasional or inactive braille subscribers. Patrons on the waiting list will be getting one of these eReaders soon.

The assistive technology pilot is getting closer to launch. BTBL just hired an Assistive Technology Coordinator who will be starting in the middle of April. This person will be coordinating loans of the wi-fi hotspots, magnifiers, and Victor Reader Streams.

The newsletter will include a patron survey. The BUAC's help in getting the word out and encouraging patrons to participate in the survey is needed. Typically, there is a low response rate for surveys. This survey will be a little more individually customized. BTBL is asking patrons to put down their names and indicate which services they are interested in, which assistive technology devices they may be interested in, and how they want to interface with the library.

Laura went through the patron survey, question by question, for the benefit of the group. Laura's comments: We're collecting basic patron information, we're soliciting interest in the assistive technology program, we're asking patrons why they are not on BARD and what help they need to get on BARD, asking patrons their preferences for the way that the library should contact them, soliciting

interest in Conversation Club, Summer Reading Club, potential book club. Asking patrons if they have friends and family who are interested in the program. We also have an open-ended question where we are asking patrons how we can make the library work better for them.

Since BUAC last met on December 4th, 2021, BTBL has implemented BoD, or Books on Demand. In the 12/4/21 meeting, Mike mentioned that the library was still in process of receiving supplies and in the testing phase. Since then, Reader Advisors have identified patrons who would be good candidates, and presently 250 patrons are enrolled in BoD. This is a new model that offers multiple titles on a cartridge, anywhere from 1 to several. There is an audio leaflet which explains how it works for first-time users. BTBL has the ability to put books unavailable in hard copy on these cartridges, because they are pulled from the cloud. This may be challenging for a few patrons, because of the generic label on the cartridge. The titles of the books are on small print on a second mailing card. There is a library return address label that is actually glued on to the mailing container, so that patrons do not need to flip the mailing card to send the book back. The loan period was adjusted to be three months, since there are so many more books on each cartridge now. There will be an adjustment period as patrons get accustomed to this new model. The plan is to have all patrons transitioned to this model over the next six months. BTBL will start moving patrons over to this new model several hundred people at a time. The Council can assist BTBL in answering any questions they may get from their networks.

Diane gave feedback that she finds Books on Demand very enjoyable and that this new model works for her.

Talking Book Topics catalog (TBT): BTBL was informed by NLS in January that there would be no January/February large print Talking Book Topics due to a supply chain backlog and paper shortage. BTBL further learned there would be no large print Talking Book Topics for fiscal year 2022 and likely through fiscal year 2023. There will be an article in the newsletter informing patrons. There are some work-arounds. There are many ways to get TBT online. It is also available as a magazine on cartridge, and BTBL can also add it as an audiobook on a Books on Demand cartridge. There are approximately 6,500 patrons subscribed to the large print format of Talking Book Topics. Staff has internally discussed solutions. For example, BTBL could print out just the mystery subject section of TBT and send it to a patron who loves mysteries and who requests this information from us. The library has yet to receive major patron feedback about the loss of TBT in large print.

There was a security change to the BARD website recently. When patrons logged in, there was nowhere to put a password. When the user ID was input, the patron would be directed to a second page to enter the password. It caused confusion. Patrons contacted their local libraries and NLS about the confusion. In response to this feedback, NLS reversed the process to the original login procedure. NLS will be making this change again in the future, but they will do it with better messaging next time.

For android users, the BARD Mobile app is not compatible with electronic Braille. There is a new Android app called BrailleBack. The refreshable Braille is working well for android users with newer devices.

Marrakesh Treaty update: As of January, NLS has nearly 2,000 foreign language Marrakesh titles on BARD. BTBL concluded its Marrakesh pilot with minimal response from patrons, but there is potential for more Marrakesh book activity with many ESL and multi-lingual patrons, i.e. Lots of Russian, Spanish, and Chinese speakers in the patron base. BTBL anticipates a better discovery tool for patrons to look at what foreign language titles are available.

The NLS Patron Engagement Division, part of the Patron Network Engagement Section is implementing two programs rolling out this summer. First is a quarterly session with information about the network for NLS patrons, including Q&A. Second is a monthly BARD session on various BARD related topics, for all patrons around the country to participate.

Connie asked how Reader Advisors determine which patrons might benefit from Books on Demand. Mike gave a history on patron centric cartridges, a precursor to BoD. Around 1700 patrons were receiving these PCC cartridges. The most active of these patrons were switched to BoD. Reader Advisors also identify patrons on the spot, as they are connecting with patrons throughout their week. BTBL is in the process of teaching patrons how to be comfortable with multiple books on a cartridge. The policy now allows a maximum of 10 cartridges per patron. Eventually, BTBL will move patrons over to BoD in bulk.

Committee Reports

**Recruitment / Selection Committee (Chair: Vacant)

Janet said that there was not much new to report. BUAC has vetted new applicants, i.e. Diane. Mike commented that BUAC is always looking for new members, and urged the current BUAC members to advertise within their networks. The Council could use a veteran, youth, and reading disability representative.

**Outreach (Chair: Vacant, Janet, Laura)

Diane was asked if she wanted to chair this committee. Diane expressed interest in outreach, but since she is new, she declined to be the chair. If Diane wants to join this committee, she will email Mike and Jana.

Updates from Laura:

Laura.kellen@library.ca.gov

Time for an outreach update on what is new since our last meeting in December.

Superfest Disability Film Festival: took place on January 26th. Sponsored by the Sacramento Public Library, the California State Library, and the Braille and Talking Book Library, and several other partners. There were 172 attendees. 100% virtual event.

Presentation to the Monterey County Free Public Library system. Presented to 34 staff members on Zoom.

In-person presentation to Sun City Lincoln Hills to their monthly Low Vision Support Group. 16 attendees. 4 signed up on the spot.

Up and coming events:

Proposal accepted for the CTEBVI Conference. Mike and Laura will be presenting virtually on April 8th.

Mike will be presenting on June 10th in Spanish to the Well Connected program, which is a phone-in support group.

Will also plan to present to low vision support groups through Well Connected, this is an ongoing endeavor.

Proposal accepted for the California Library Association Conference in downtown Sacramento in early June.

Laura will present to C4A – the California Association of Area Agencies on Aging conference in Glendale, CA in May.

BTBL submitted a proposal to the California Teachers Association Annual Special Education Conference, which will be at the end of September in San Francisco.

BTBL is finalizing the patron survey, discussed earlier, which is designed to get patrons more involved in services and hopefully more engaged. We're BTBL is taking a greater interest in meeting patron needs. The library is focusing on patron retention.

Jana works with students who are newly blinded. Students often don't even know if they are signed up for library services. They are getting overwhelmed with information. They often get confused about BARD and other library services. Jana also asked for clarification about the application. Is it a hard copy application form that has to be filled out visually? Mike said that it can be filled out online accessibly. There is a fillable PDF version on the BTBL website. NLS does not require a wet signature anymore. Mike is trying to get the word out about this, including in the newsletter.

Jana said she would talk to staff at teacher meetings and make sure that students get signed up for services.

Mike suggested an outreach committee meeting be held in the next month, for brainstorming purposes.

****Legislative Committee – (Chair Alan, Shannon)**

Shannon reported that she met with Mike and Alan last week. In the past, their goal for this committee had been to find someone who had contributed to the blind or to a library for the blind. The California Research Bureau researched this and found a legislative candidate, Senator Tom Umberg from Santa Clarita, who had helped to get funding for the Braille Institute Library. It has been a couple of years, because this was a pre-pandemic event. The committee did not want to award this online, because how beneficial would this be? Now that things are opening back up, the committee will work on figuring out whether it is worth it to move forward with the legislator of the year award. The committee is still exploring possibilities. Mike is going to check in with the Perkins Advisory Committee in Massachusetts about how they sustain an annual award and what happens if they don't find a candidate, how do they keep momentum going for the project.

Old Business

None stated.

New Business

First item is council goals. What goals or direction would BUAC members like to see this council go in for the next year?

This topic can be discussed at the next meeting.

Janet commented that it will be much easier to set goals when the Council is able to meet in person again.

What about guest speakers for 2022? Any recommendations?

Mike commented that he sent an organizational chart to the BUAC. If members want to hear from NLS or a related organization in California, let Mike or Jana know. Some of the speakers have included: NLS Consumer Affairs officer Judy Dixon, a CSL communications staff person, NLS quality assurance, NLS head of collection development, NLS BARD mobile team, Internet Archive and Bookshare reps. All A suggestion for speakers is Tamara Rory, former Braille Officer and current Head of Patron Engagement section.

Jana agreed that she would like the idea of Tamara Rory speaking.

Miscellaneous Concerns/Questions/Announcements/Discussion Points

Meeting dates. Traditionally BUAC has met on the 1st Saturday on the 3rd month of each quarter. Will not be meeting on June 4th because Mike and Laura will be at the CLA conference. BUAC unable to meet September 3rd because that is Labor Day weekend, so meeting set for September 10th. Final meeting of the year will be on December 3rd.

Mike mentioned the California State Library will be reopening to the public as of the week of April 4th, that's National Library Week. Gillis Hall will be reopening 9:30-4:00 to walk-in traffic. BTBL is going to continue the appointment-only service model.

Mike is unsure when the BUAC members can meet again in person. The library's conference rooms are not yet open to the public, and the library still is unable to accept volunteers. Mike hopes to possibly hold an in-person meeting by the end of the year.

Adjournment:

Janet moved to adjourn the meeting. Connie seconded. All in favor. Jana adjourned the meeting at 12:05pm.

Next meeting date: Saturday, June 11, 2022, 10am-12pm

Submitted by Staff Member Laura Kellen
August 30, 2022