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# Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship



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## The Delivery of Library Materials to End Users: Taiwanese Libraries Address Special Information Needs

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### Abstract

To help enhance the delivery of materials to end users, Taiwanese libraries launched four major programs to disseminate information and promote the widespread public usage of library materials. These programs, *BookStart*, *Book Express Service*, *Cross Campus Delivery*, and *Delivery for the Visually Impaired*, have proven to be quite successful in reaching their diverse population targets by addressing the specific needs for information services of those populations. This paper will focus on the various operational aspects of those outreach projects, their accomplishment, and future prospects.

The *BookStart* program brings books to parents and their children so that they may benefit from materials pertaining to parenting and children's reading needs. The *Book Express Service* sends books directly to homes, a great convenience for housebound people or those who are too busy to visit a library in person. *Cross Campus Delivery*, in effect, means cash savings to students requesting and obtaining books other than those readily available to them in their local library. *Delivery for the Visually Impaired* includes Braille and audio materials made accessible to the visually impaired throughout the entire national library networking system.

These four programs portray an overall picture of our library delivery services in Taiwan. As a whole, they are representative of the pro-active role libraries in Taiwan are taking in meeting the public's needs for information. The performance of these four programs has been remarkable in "outreaching" those with special needs. What is

shared below is our experience in implementing these programs and the obstacles we still need to overcome.

## **Introduction**

Modern technology has advanced greatly. With this advancement, the information needs of the people of Taiwan have changed, also. People require information faster and faster, not only electronic resources but also books and other materials in libraries. To respond to these needs, Taiwan libraries have launched innovative delivery services to ensure the continual expansion of their readership base, particularly with regard to those who have special needs. The innovative delivery services integral to accomplishing the goal of maximum information accessibility have proven to be quite a successful reaching out to the diverse population targets and addressing their specific needs for information services. What follows is a delineation of the four major delivery services Taiwan libraries have aggressively provided for end users with special needs.

These delivery services include *BookStart*, *Book Express Service*, *Cross Campus Delivery*, and *Delivery for the Visually Impaired*. This paper's goal is to focus on the operational aspects of these four programs and their future prospects.

## **BookStart Project**

*Bookstart* was first brought up in 1992 by an English children book expert, Wendy Cooling, and the director of Birmingham Public Library, promoting parents reading with newborns to build their reading experiences from as early age as possible. They collaborated with the Booktrust foundation, Birmingham public health institutions, Birmingham public libraries, and the school of education of University of Birmingham to have a pilot run with 300 babies involved. From 1992-1997, there were 60 projects alike in the UK. In 2004, UK government started to include *Bookstart* in the budget. An evaluation report in 2002 shows a satisfactory result. Among 300 participated families, 71% families continuously buying books for their children, 57% parents joined study groups, 29% parents applied library cards for themselves and their children<sup>1</sup>. Besides UK, projects of similar nature have been in operation in other countries such as Japan, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

In Taiwan, inspiring by the success of the *Bookstart* project in UK and the *Read-Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease, Director Chen of Shalu Library, subordinated to Taichung County initiated the *Bookstart* project in 2003. The concept was to encourage the reading experience as early as possible by delivering books to parents with newborn children. Apart from giving a series of public lectures on the topics of

parenting, libraries sent out materials in packs to parents to help kick start their reading life together with their children.

Implementation strategy for BookStart in Taiwan, however, differs from those used in other countries. The success of BookStart-like programs elsewhere depends very much on health professionals who are able to spend some time promoting the importance of reading to parents as they bring children in for routine checkups and care. The visitations scheduled for such health follow-ups for parents and children are simply too brief to allow this to happen. Therefore, BookStart relies on volunteers who can be flexible enough to meet with parents in appointed times to go over reading matters and related issues. Those volunteers come from a wide spectrum of professions, including teachers, principals, homemakers and businesspeople. Libraries would provide training sessions in which volunteers are taught skills relevant to storytelling and reading. Moreover, they are taught to deal with children's reading patterns, aiming to make improvements over their reading behaviors.

Other collaborative factors contributing to the success of Taiwan's BookStart project involve fundraising specifically for this purpose. Many industries and local business communities have responded to the need and pitched in generously with their sponsorship. As a result, Tachia Township Library, for instance, has received an amount of 165,000 NTD for its 2005 BookStart Project. The library used the money to purchase books and distribute them to families participating in the project. Additionally, foundations have budgets and personnel specifically allocated for BookStart. Hsin-Yi Foundation, for example, has been dedicating their work to early childhood education for over three decades. They have graced BookStart with their experience, expertise, and resources. With financial and management helps available from private foundations such as this, public libraries in Taiwan townships have been able to implement BookStart in their locales with much acclaim. Over the past five years, the number of libraries involving with BookStart has grown from 1 to 21; the number of participants has an increase of 98%, impressive growths to show how well accepted and welcome the program has been. Based on the performance in 2007, it is estimated that at least 4,000 babies, about 40% of the total population of newborns in Taichung County, will benefit from Bookstart in the year of 2008<sup>2</sup>.

### **Book Express Service**

*Book Express Service*, a delivery service developed by public libraries in Taiwan is designed to meet the needs of three groups of people. The first group is the people who are too immersed in their work to go visiting libraries. The second group includes those who reside in remote places far away from libraries and commuting would take hours. The third group is comprised of those who are severely disabled, unable to travel to libraries. For these 3 groups of people, libraries would deliver books and

audiovisual materials to their homes. The service operates by a paid membership model. With their accounts established, users can request for the service on-line 24/7. Usually requested items are delivered to users' homes on the day they are available or the following day. The maximum number of requests for each user is 5 items each time. A charge of 40 to 120 NT dollars per item is applied, depending on the distance and member status. The fees charged help to compensate the cost incurred for carriers contracted by libraries to deliver the requested items. Users, however, can choose their own carriers to ship books back to the library. It should be noted, however, that in such cases users would be held responsible for any damage incurred during the return shipping<sup>3</sup>.

A 2005 survey conducted by the Taipei Public City Library yielded the following interesting statistics about this delivery service: there were more female than male patrons; most patrons ranged about 30-40 years old; children literature ranked as the most popular subject; the longest distance books travelled was about 350 kilometers, from Taipei to Kaohsiung, from the northern to the southern end of the island, while books had been transported all over the island through this service.

For such delivery service to achieve its maximum performance, further improvement must be done in the two major areas. Firstly, libraries should take extra effort and care in selecting and contracting book carriers, using the criteria of dependability and reliability as well as cost consideration in the screening process. This is to ensure the quality of this service in deliver punctuality and accuracy. Secondly, libraries would invest to come up with a computerized account system that would be able to handle details of transactions for individual users efficiently. This would save much time for librarians who would otherwise be tied up with the immensity of bookkeeping tasks.

More critically, however, the issue of funding for hiring library staff members should be addressed. Apparently, more librarians are needed to run the service operation, especially in the circulation and collection departments where inter-library communications and loans take place between branches. Taipei Public City Library, for instance, has forty branches. Imaginably, the volume of traffic in requesting and shipping books back and forth among those branches demands a tremendous amount of logistics, resources, and time. In order for such Express Service to live up to its name, extra funding would be required not only to keep up with the growing usage of the service but to make upgrading possible for the overall infrastructure in its hardware and software aspects, including purchasing additional library shuttle min-buses and vital high-tech gadgets to deal with the increasing databases related to this service.

## **Cross Campus Delivery**

Now let's look at how academic libraries enhance their delivery service with *cross campus delivery*, whereas the two aforementioned services are provided by city public libraries. Users in academia are requesting more comprehensive library services including faster delivery. To respond to the request, universities have implemented a new delivery service across campus that delivers books from a campus library that owns the title requested to a campus library that the user chooses. For cross campus delivery service, we will look at two implementation cases: The University System of Taiwan (UST in abbreviation) and the National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU).

UST are composed of four outstanding universities in Taiwan: National Central University, National Chiao Tung University, National Tsing Hua University, and National Yang-Ming University. A vital factor contributing to their linking together in this joint service is their proximity to each other, as they all are located in the central region of Taiwan. *Cross-campus delivery* means that users can place requests from any of the libraries located in these four university libraries, and they can pick up the items at the library they select for each service. The items may be returned at any of the libraries.

In the NTNU case, it has 3 libraries situated separately on three campuses: the main, Kongkuan, and Linkou campuses. NTNU launched the new cross campus delivery service February 2008, to allow users to request via the OPAC system up to 5 items and return them from any of these three university libraries. Upon request, the library will send out the items in three days or reply with a negative that they are not currently available. The popularity this service has been received with is reflected in the dramatic increase of circulation in 52 times one month after its implementation. This is an indication that the efforts and resources invested have been richly returned with a great payoff of appreciation.

## **Special Delivery for the Visually Impaired**

National Taiwan Library (NTL), in its dedication to serve the visually impaired, has been collecting since the 1970s Braille documents and materials with a view to set up a special unit for the purpose. With a spacious room and updated facilities in its new location at Junge City, NTL is able to make significant progress towards realizing the goal to secure the 'right of information' for the visually impaired.

In step with such a goal, NTL has a special delivery service for the visually impaired. They can place a request by phone, email, mail, or fax, for the Braille and audio items to be delivered to them free of charge. To minimize possible inconveniences for those visually impaired, a special package with special address card has been designed, so

that they can be used for shipping both ways, from library to the visually impaired and return.

In addition to delivery by mail, NTL has established a Bulletin Board System, or BBS, for those visually impaired to read, download, or make copies of documents through the Internet. What NTL does is to ask publishers for their electronic copies; transcribe them into Braille texts with the Braille Translation software developed by the Tamkang University; after formatting and proofreading, the electronic Braille files are uploaded and organized by categories so that they can be easily searched<sup>4</sup>. The visually impaired receive information on the screen by embossing it on paper or by simply using a Braille display. The Braille cells on the display, standing for phonetic symbols, spell the intended words. When it comes to information input, traditionally the visually impaired use Braille typewriters which have 6 keys; via computers, powerful software was developed to transfer what are typed with S, D, F, J, K, and L keys on the keyboard into Chinese as well as English words. With these new devices, the Internet has become more and more useful for those visually impaired to gain access to library resources. Considering that, creating a learning environment on the Web for the visually impaired has become one of the urgent goals at NTL in recent years<sup>5</sup>.

Another goal relating to improving the delivery service for the visually impaired is to have the service tailored to each individual's needs. In countries like Japan, libraries take the initiative in providing a wealth of information in line with individuals' interests. They directly communicate with those individuals periodically to better understand and update on their situations. Also, those individuals can select carriers of their choice, so that they may have a more meaningful and fruitful time of personal interactions with them when they come to provide services in delivery and pickup<sup>6</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is fair to say that libraries in Taiwan have been working hard to improve information access for its population, having promoted four special delivery services to cover a wide range of needs. Public libraries in towns reach out to the parents and their newborns. By collaborating with experts, industries, local communities, public health institutions, and volunteers, they launched the *Bookstart* project 5 years ago. Public libraries in cities, with resources available, provide delivery services for people who live in remote areas. Thus, they developed the *Book-express service*. In a different setting, university libraries join together to provide cross-campus delivery service, a service much appreciated by students and faculty alike. Then, National Taiwan Library came up with the special delivery pack particularly for the visually impaired. They also have established a BBS to provide electronic Braille materials. Needless to say, these projects come with a hefty

financial tag, but we acknowledge that they are needed in the trend for libraries to become more and more service-oriented. For libraries to take major steps to meet with the challenge in feeding an information craving society, we know we have made the correct decisions and carried out the right projects.

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