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Promoting Braille alphabet at National Library of Serbia

It is not able to present everything concerning promoting Braille in Serbia during 20 minutes presentation. I'll specially focus on promoting Braille at National library of Serbia and collaboration of the Library with other institutions, in order to promote Braille among blind people and inform librarians and general public about it.

How do we increase awareness about importance of Braille in every day living of a blind person?

Convention of United Nations about rights of the disabled people have been ratified by Serbian Government in 2009, and since that time remarkable progress in legislation and practice concerning quality of life of visually impaired persons is noticed.

The right to read and access information is one of the basic human rights. National Library of Serbia is devoted to providing conditions for all its users to actualize that right. We do our best to make National library of Serbia accessible to all of its users with print disabilities.

Center for blind and partially sighted users at National Library of Serbia was founded in 2009. Since 2011, Reading room for blind and partially sighted persons has been functioning within Department for visually impaired users. It is equipped with modern devices and softwares for reading, listening, scanning and embossing. The users can use materials in Braille, as well as electronic publications. There is a collection of monographic publications and 33 titles of serial publications in Braille, and also hand-made books from the beginning of XX century.

All services for the users are free, except for embossing which is low cost.

The majority of the Library users are students and researchers. They can reserve a seat and materials from home. The textbooks and literature can be scanned and users often insist to receive the materials in Braille. Since 2011, all the publishers in Serbia have been obligated to send an electronic legal deposit to the National library and it is easier to emboss Braille texts for visually impaired users now.

There are a tactile path, tactile maps, signs in Braille in elevator and it helps visually impaired people to come to the Reading room. Near the reading room, on close wall is table with Braille alphabet to familiarize other readers and librarians with the alphabet.

Students of public schools and guests of our Library also visit the reading room and we show them Braille books and Braille alphabet.

Since the beginning of the XXI century, we've began cataloguing Braille publications in electronic catalogue.

Special Library for the Blind of Serbia is working in cataloging system COBISS that is based on MARC 21 format. So, it is easier to find Braille resources online. In the reading room we have the list of the Braille books in Braille, too.

We plead for accessibility of all forms of cultural events which are organized by National Library of Serbia, thus providing an assistant guidance through exhibitions, embossing

catalogues in Braille, and by providing regular information about cultural events that take place in our Library.

In 2012, during the Museum night, National Library of Serbia have organized exhibition devoted to thirties and we used it as the chance to present Braille books and magazines of that time. During the night blind persons read the books in order to demonstrate Braille. The visitors were excited and many of them wanted to touch the publications and try read Braille text.

In 2013. at the Library, we have organized exhibition «Nova svetlost – New light, devoted to 70th anniversary from death of Veljko Ramadanović, who adapted Braille for Serbian language and founded the first school for blind in Serbia in 1917. He prepared the first ABC book for learning Braille for Serbian soldiers who lost their sight during the First World War.

The exhibition presented the evolution of Braille publishing in Serbia, appliances for writing Braille with many fotos and devices.

There were presented some of the first books written manually and printed in France and the Institute for the Blind in Zemun: the first alphabet book prepared by Veljko Ramadanović for blind Serbian soldiers in the First World War, Facsimile of the approval of the first alphabet book by the Minister of Education from July 6, 1918, Teaching materials, Tactile letters and drawings, Braille music notation system, The literature on pedagogy by Veljko Ramadanović, 'Braille's treasury', the first magazine for the blind in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Publications from the pedagogical library 'New light', Brailles letters in the brochure about The Home for the blind in Zemun, Slate for writing with a stylus, machines for writing in Braille etc.

The exhibition was opened by Serbian minister of culture and it woke significant attention.

In 2015. in our Library and few other libraries gusted Exhibition of sculptures an tactile pictures from Pavle Beljanski legacy.

Catalogues were published for all the exhibitions in standard and Braille alphabet and the legends were in Braille, too.

We are triing to take part in every of the librarian meetings to present possibilities and problems of visually impaired users.

For example, during meeting devoted to serial publications in 2015., we had paper about talking and Braille magazines.

We talk about information services to persons with print disabled, cataloguing Braille and talking publications, helping organize access to information and publications for print disabled persons.

This year we organize courses for librarians about improving of services for print disabled users and workshop about Braille alphabet. These courses aim to give practical advice on accessibility and raise awareness of accessibility among librarians in public libraries.

We organize lectures about Braille in Internet era. In 2014. National Library of Serbia invited a guest from Norway, blind University teacher, Otto Prytz, who gave lecture about Braille and new technologies. He specially concentrated on significance of Braille literacy of visually impaired people in education, employment and every day living.

We collaborate with Union of blind of Serbia and its local organizations in organizing various events.

At the National library in 2014. and 2015. we organized competitions in reading Braille texts for students and elderly blind people. At the same time we organized public reading

of books of our famous writer, Branko Ćopić. It was in “atrium”, and every visitor could hear and see blind readers reading Braille text.

We have organized promotion of Systematics of Braille Alphabet in General Application, published by Union of the Blind of Serbia in 2011. In 2014. National Library of Serbia and Union of the blind of Serbia published “Antology of contemporary Serbian short stories” in Braille and promotion of the book has been held at our Library, too.

These activities change attitudes of librarians and visually impaired people concerning accessibility of information and publications to blind persons and persons with print disabilities in general. Noticable progress has been is apparent in improving of the library services, content of collections of public libraries.

Changes in legislation did a great contribution in improving access to information to visually impaired people.

Many cultural institutions, organize programs and information materials in Braille. It is important that every day we have information about new embossers and Braille display. Courses for learning Braille are regularly organized by the organizations for the blind, and the Ministry of Culture and Education always supports these projects.

Upgrade of library services for the blind and accessibility did a good job improving the quality of life of people with print disabilities.