



## That All May Read

April 8, 2015 by [Erin Allen](#)

*(The following is a guest post by Karen Keninger, director of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.)*

There are times when a “best-kept secret” is exactly what you want. But not when it comes to one of the most highly valued services provided through the Library of Congress – namely the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS).



<http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/files/2015/04/Digital-players.jpg>

Digital talking-book players are available in basic and advanced models.

This free public library service provides books and magazines in braille and talking-book formats to half a million residents of the United States and U.S. citizens living abroad who can't read standard print because of visual or physical disabilities. However, statistics indicate that even more Americans could benefit from the service if they only knew about it.

That's why NLS has launched a public education campaign to spread the word about NLS and its network of more than 100 cooperating libraries throughout the U.S. and its territories. We particularly want to inform people who are students, veterans or seniors who either cannot see well enough to read print or who have physical disabilities that make it difficult for them to handle a book or access print in other ways. Our goal is to make sure that all may read,

regardless of disability.

The first completed portion of the campaign is a new set of [web pages \(http://www.loc.gov/thatalldmayread/?loclr=blogloc\)](http://www.loc.gov/thatalldmayread/?loclr=blogloc) presenting information about NLS and a video featuring NLS patrons describing their experiences with the Library of Congress braille and talking-book program. The video is accessed through the Library's new, accessible video player and is narrated by Kate Kiley, a veteran NLS narrator.

The new pages form the hub of a digital marketing campaign that will include digital media such as banner ads and text ads and search engine optimization. We also plan to use Facebook and YouTube, with video accompanied by audio description and text files.

NLS has a long history of using technology to meet the needs of our readers. In 1934, when vinyl records were the cutting edge of technology, NLS developed the talking book by recording narrations of books and distributing them on vinyl records. While most records were spun at 78 rpm at the time, NLS slowed it down so more minutes of

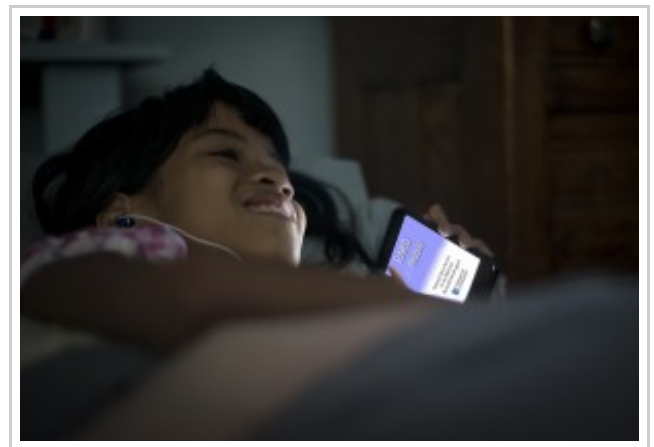
recording would fit on a single disc. NLS also gave its patrons the talking-book machine, a record player capable of playing the unusually slow 33-1/3 rpm format of talking books. As vinyl technology improved, so did talking books, packing more and more onto smaller records until the advent of the cassette in the late 1960s edged out the vinyl.

Today the cassettes have been replaced with state-of-the-art digital technology, giving patrons the option of receiving their books on flash-memory-based cartridges for use in the latest version of the NLS talking-book machine or of downloading their books directly to play on their smartphones or tablets.

NLS has a lot to offer. Whether a patron chooses to receive books free through the mail or download them from NLS's Braille and Audio Reading Download ([BARD \(//www.loc.gov/nls/reference/guides/bard.html?loclr=blogloc\)](http://www.loc.gov/nls/reference/guides/bard.html?loclr=blogloc) ) site, and whether they choose to play the books on the latest version of the talking-book machine or on their smartphones or tablets using the BARD Mobile app, the talking book with human-voice narration is the centerpiece of the service. Talking books provide millions of hours of listening enjoyment to NLS patrons every year. And for those who want to read instead of listen, we provide books in braille. Braille can also be received through the mail or downloaded from BARD or BARD Mobile as digital files to be played on refreshable braille devices.

Braille and talking book titles cover the gamut of subjects you would find in a public library – from true crime to romance, westerns to world history. And they cover all ages, from six-minute-long tales for kids to full-blown sagas for seniors.

One of the most oft-repeated comments we hear from patrons is, "I wish I'd known about this five years ago." So we're working hard to spread the word. The new web pages are the beginning of a focused effort. They will direct visitors to additional resources, contact information, eligibility criteria and application forms. Help us spread the word [that all may read. \(//www.loc.gov/programs/national-library-service-for-the-blind-and-physically-handicapped/about-this-service/?loclr=blogloc\)](http://www.loc.gov/programs/national-library-service-for-the-blind-and-physically-handicapped/about-this-service/?loclr=blogloc)



[\(/blogs.loc.gov/loc/files/2015/04/Light\\_Up\\_small.jpg\)](http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/files/2015/04/Light_Up_small.jpg)  
Young patron reads at bedtime using her smartphone.

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