

# At the Library, for the week of February 19, 2018

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## Freedom to Read

Censorship versus freedom of expression in all forms – whether it's in newspaper and magazine articles, books, news media, or creative online content, sadly continues to be a very current discussion and debate. Since 1984, Freedom to Read Week in Canada has been celebrated the last week in February and serves to remind us of many things we take for granted today, that being able to read and choose what we read is a right under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is the right to know, the right to self-educate, and the right to choose. And yet, it remains a privilege too. We have done well in encouraging the discussion of whether it is the content, topic or language that people may object to, although, how often do we consider the physical accessibility as a great a barrier to freedom of information? What if you wanted to read, the reading material was freely available in print – but, you cannot read print?

This year, the awareness campaign puts the spotlight on examining the physical barriers to the accessibility of information. “Worldwide, more than 300 million people have visual disabilities, and 90% of them live in developing countries. Yet only 5% to 7% of published works are made available in accessible formats such as electronic text, large print, audiobooks, Braille and described movies.” (Jaclyn Law (2018). A world of reading. *Freedom to Read*, 34, p.11.).

As defined the Canadian Copyright Act, a print disability is a learning, physical or visual disability that prevents a person from reading conventional print. A print disability can also be a learning disability (an impairment relating to comprehension), a physical disability (the inability to hold or manipulate a book), or a visual disability (severe or total impairment of sight or the inability to focus or move one's eyes). This definition of print disability included in the Act also permits CELA (Center for Equitable Library Access) and NNELS (National Network for Equitable Library Service) to reproduce published materials (books, magazines, movies) in alternative, accessible formats for their collections (such as audiobooks, and movies with descriptive video captions). Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library is a member of both national equitable library services, and PARL library patrons (when self-identified as being print-disabled) can access both services through their local library.

The library also has a DAISY reader lending program funded through community donations and grants, and extends special thanks to local business owners, Drs Nathan and Melanie Reid from Reid Optometry for their recent gift to the program. A DAISY reader machine is designed for persons who are visually impaired to help them read audiobooks with ease, and has large, high-contrast colored buttons and a built-in speaker. DAISY readers are made in Canada, and cost about \$600 per device. The library is currently maintaining a waiting list for library patrons who would like to borrow a DAISY reader. For more information about these programs, please contact your local library, or Susan at Regional Library Headquarters, (902) 755-6031.

One of the most difficult challenges people with vision loss face in their day-to-day lives is access to information, such as, office location directions on a building entrance sign to the dosage label on a medicine bottle. Fortunately, technology is helping to bridge those barriers. Coming up this week on Friday February 23 at 1:00pm, we welcome Chris Judge, an Assistive Technology Specialist with the CNIB's Vision Loss Rehab Centre to the New Glasgow Library for a discussion and demonstrations of modern technology, and how it can help those who are visually impaired. Learn how to access books, web sites and much more - through the use of a simple hand-held device. All are welcome.

For more information on upcoming library programs, special events and services, please drop by your local library branch, follow us on *Twitter*, find us on *Facebook*, or visit us online at [www.parl.ns.ca](http://www.parl.ns.ca).