
Library programming for people with special needs, including autism spectrum disorders, is more common than ever. But the increase in the level of programming corresponds to an increase in the number of questions that library staff must ponder: What is the best way to serve people with autism spectrum disorders? Should libraries offer special programs for people with disabilities or provide programming that serves users with and without disabilities? And, once goals have been established, what resources are needed to accomplish them? Some previously published books have offered tips on programs such as sensory storytimes, but Barbara Klipper’s book Programming for Children and Teens with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ALA Editions, 2014) is a stand-out on this topic.

Written by a librarian who is also the mother of two sons who have autism spectrum disorders, the book offers much for the practitioner who would like to start programming or expand upon offerings for children and teens on the spectrum. In addition to the author, other notable consultants—including doctors, speech pathologists, and music therapists—played a role in putting the book together. In addition to defining terms and introducing best practices, the book is well indexed and includes quite a few appendixes and resources (booklists, rhymes, sensory activities, autism-specific vendors, and websites).

Divided into various sections by age group, the book addresses the expectations, visual supports, seating, inclusion tactics, outreach, marketing, transitions, and other factors that librarians must consider when planning such special events. Klipper’s writing is extremely down-to-earth and accessible, and she includes a reminder about using “people first” language in events and marketing.

The author clearly has put an impressive amount of effort and research into this endeavor. She not only offers great program and craft ideas for all ages (even for the tricky tween and teen years) but also provides caveats that might be unfamiliar to many librarians, such as the fact that Play-Doh is not appropriate for use by those with gluten allergies, a condition common to many people with autism spectrum disorders. Pull-out boxes in each chapter add to the clean layout and also provide excellent tips and anecdotes from successful programs in libraries nationwide. Photos and visual storyboards add to the ease of use—kudos here goes to ALA Production Services for putting together an attractive title, not just a useful one.

This book is a must-read for any librarian seeking to begin or enhance programming for those on the spectrum—it is a great get-started guide that is thoroughly engaging.—Sharon Verbeten, Children’s Librarian, Brown County Central Library, Green Bay, Wisconsin


Organized, comprehensive assessment of a library’s infrastructure (broadly defined as its programs and personnel) is a necessity but one that can too easily fall by the wayside. Most libraries will run the occasional user survey, but how many gather assessment data with a focused, systematic plan? Lack of time, expertise, training, administrative support, and staff are common barriers that prevent libraries from engaging in assessment.

Sarah Anne Murphy, currently the coordinator of research and reference for the Ohio State University Libraries, has compiled eleven interesting and useful examples of how some academic libraries and information organizations have addressed these universal problems. There is certainly no shortage of useful materials on academic library assessment; see, for example, Joseph R. Matthews’ Library Assessment in Higher Education (Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2007; 2nd edition forthcoming in Fall 2014) and SPEC Kit 303: Library Assessment.