

SUSAN
ODGERS

Adapted in TC



Belonging at the library

Today, I'm in front of the main branch of our Traverse Area District Library. I'm checking the air in my wheelchair tires at the library's public bike stand repair station. As I hang up the air hose, I hear a BATA bus in the street across from the library. At the library, there are north and south BATA stops. For years, I've ridden these ADA accessible buses. TADL and BATA offer a free 31-day Zoom Commuter Card for new riders. There's an info link on the library's website. There's also a discreetly placed metal newspaper box containing free naloxone kits. The kits are provided by Harm Reduction MI-Traverse City to help prevent drug overdoses. I palm the automatic door opener on the front of the building and head through the double doors into the lobby.

In front of me, is a family from out-of-town.

I know this because I overhear one of the young children ask the dad, "Can we spend our allowance in this store?" The dad replies, "This is a library. Like ours back home. Everything is free."

To my left, there's a wall of community service organization brochures, borrowable walkers and wheelchairs, and to my right, the award-winning Larry Gorton Talking Book Library. According to TADL's website, "The Larry Gorton Talking Book Library provides free audio and Braille materials to visually, physically and reading impaired patrons in Grand Traverse, Antrim, Benzie, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford counties. They also helps patrons use assistive technologies like screen readers and mobile devices, and work with area nursing homes and senior organizations to hold outreach events."

Mr. Gorton was important in the community and the extensive work of his namesake is life-changing for many people.

I'm at TADL on a research mission. On Oct. 16 this year I'm a keynote speaker at the annual Michigan Library Conference at the Grand Traverse Resort. My presentation is titled "Making Your Library A Model For Disability Rights".

I'm here to chronicle how TADL is one of those hubs for people with disabilities and seniors.

A few highlights of the many examples include:

Books/online materials regarding Disability Pride Month and the 54th anniversary (July 26) of the signing of the ADA. TADL is now a certified autism center. There's a Bookmobile with a lift. The Bookmobile brings resources to the far reaches of the community. The book bikemobile serves folks at the TC Farmer's Mkt. In the Library of Things, I find a talking tape measure/talking color reader/text to pen/ and light therapy lamp.

The Enhanced story walk is Braille-friendly. There are newly renovated restrooms, chair yoga classes, curbside service and many varied health care kits. One such health care kit is "heart health" and includes a tote filled with books and DVDs to educate a person about heart health and concerns.

Pausing at an accessible study cubicle to review my notes, I run into a friend who was diagnosed with Parkinson's years ago. She tells me TADL kept her going during the pandemic. Her library favorites are the digital streaming services, on-site notary, and public computers.

But as a longtime patron and library trustee, it's what she adds that makes my heart sing.

"At the library, I'm not just included. My right to belong is fostered by everyone here."

Susan Odgers has lived in Traverse City since 1987 and has used a wheelchair for the past 48 years. She teaches at Northwestern Michigan College, is a member of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists, and is the president of Michigan Writers.