

ALEKSANDRA SZTAJERWALD
Member of the Management Board
The SYNAPSIS Foundation
e-mail: a.sztajerwald@synapsis.org.pl

LIBRARY ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM



Aleksandra Sztajerwald is a pedagogue and socio-cultural animator cooperating with numerous institutions and non-governmental organizations throughout Poland, opening them to the needs of people on the autism spectrum and people with intellectual disabilities. She participates in teams consulting and developing accessibility solutions for people with disabilities in Poland. Co-author of guides, standards and recommendations, Ms. Sztajerwald popularizes and creates materials with texts that are easy to read and understand, as well as developing and coordinating

original and innovative projects, testing new solutions, training and advising. Between 2022-2023, she was a member of the Council for Supportive and Alternative Communication and Easy-to-Read and Understand Text, established by the Government Plenipotentiary for Disabled Persons. Co-author of the social innovation "Culture in easy text – patterns for institutions", i.e. guides for teams working on materials with text that is easy to read and understand. Since 2008, she has been associated with the SYNAPSIS Foundation and is currently a member of the Management Board.

KEYWORDS: Autism. Autism spectrum. People with disabilities. Intellectual disability. Accessibility.

ABSTRACT: Thesis/goal – The purpose of the article is to outline the contemporary challenge of creating libraries accessible to people on the autism spectrum. **Method** – In the first part, I focus on explaining what autism is, presenting statistics on the frequency of occurrence and the main needs of affected persons re-

sulting from autism. Then, referring to the applicable legal documents, I describe what solutions have been developed for readers on the spectrum as part of the project "Librarian, make friends with a person with autism". **Conclusions** – The project was implemented by the Association of Polish Librarians in partnership with the SYNAPSIS Foundation. Finally, I present various initiatives of Polish libraries aimed at creating friendly conditions and increasing the awareness of the local community regarding people on the autism spectrum.

INTRODUCTION

A modern library is a place for everyone. When we hear such a statement, we usually first think that everyone will find something interesting in it. However, even if it is the best-stocked library in the region, it will not be a place for everyone if accessibility is not ensured. In the governmental *Accessibility Plus Program 2018-2025*, accessibility is defined as "a property of the environment (physical space, digital reality, information and communication systems, products, services) that allows people with functional difficulties (physical, cognitive) to use it on an equal basis with others. For many people, accessibility is a condition for leading an independent life and participating in the social and economic life of the country, local community, school or workplace" (Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, 2023).

Libraries as public institutions should be accessible. Therefore, when planning their activities, they must take into account the capabilities and needs of current and future readers to provide them with free access to the premises and resources. They must also prepare staff to effectively support readers in using the library's offer. Over recent years, we have seen an intensification of various activities aimed at older people, people with disabilities and people on the autism spectrum. Creating a place accessible to this last group of people is currently the biggest challenge. The development and implementation of solutions ensuring the availability of the offer for these people is a complex and long-term process.

People on the autism spectrum want to participate in cultural life and develop their passions and interests, just like their peers. Unfortunately, for most of them, leaving home is associated with a lot of stress. Most often, it is caused by fear of unpredictable situations, new places, and the judgments and reactions of other people. Therefore, they need places where they will feel understood and safe, and which they can use as independently as possible. It is worth taking a look at what has been developed so far in Poland and in other countries, and to ascertain which initiatives have been best received by people on the spectrum and their families, as well as by librarians. Only then will we be able to plan further activities regarding library accessibility.

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a different way of thinking, knowing, and feeling the world. In the International Classification of Diseases ICD-10, still in force in Poland, childhood autism, atypical autism, and Asperger's syndrome are listed among pervasive developmental disorders. Work is underway to introduce a new version of the ICD-11 classification in Poland. The new classification will not include the previously mentioned distinctions, but will use the term "autism spectrum disorder" (ASD). For the purposes of this article, I will use the terms a person on the autism spectrum and an autistic person interchangeably. Both are indicated by people on the autism spectrum as the most acceptable (Autism Europe, 2022; National Autistic Society, 2021).

The word spectrum emphasizes how diverse autistic people are and how differently autism can affect their lives. Features of autism appear in early childhood and accompany the person throughout his or her life. The skills and needs of each autistic person are very individual and may change over time. Autism spectrum disorder can be diagnosed both for non-speaking people, i.e. those who do not use verbal language, who need constant care and support throughout their lives and who function at the level of intellectual disability, as well as for people who communicate efficiently with speech, start families and pursue professional life. Another characteristic feature is that people with autism perceive sensory stimuli in a specific way. Many of them are excessively sensitive to sensory stimuli, e.g. light, sound, touch, smell.

Autism does not have to be, but it can be a cause of disability if it limits a person's independence in various life functions. People with such a diagnosis due to their lack of independence in various areas may apply for a disability certificate in Poland (Act of August 27, 1997 on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled people, 2023).

STATISTICS

The number of autism spectrum diagnoses is constantly increasing, with preschool and elementary school children most often diagnosed. According to WHO data, it is assumed that 1 in 100 children has autism. This is an estimate because there is no uniform way of keeping statistics in individual countries (WHO, 2023). There are also different levels of access to diagnostic tests.

The most accurate statistics are provided by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. According to recent research, among children born after 2012, 1 child in 36 was diagnosed with autism. The study covered 11 American states and was conducted in 2020. The research report was published in 2023 (Maenner, Warren, Williams, 2023).

In Europe, the estimated rate of autism is approximately 2% of the population, i.e. 7 million people (Autism Europe, 2024). There is no single reliable source of data in Poland. In the textbook "Standards for functional assessment and planning of educational and specialist support (...)" prof. Ewa Pisula estimated, based on her own calculations, that the group of children aged 0-18 on the autism spectrum in Poland is approximately 73.1 thousand. (Pisula, 2022). However, statistics from the Educational Information System show that in the 2019/2020 school year, among people with a certificate of need for special education, 40% of children in preschool institutions and 20% of students in schools were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, with a total of 48,091 children (Podgórska-Jachnik, 2021). Considering current statistics, it is obvious that society should take into account the needs of people on the autism spectrum and provide equal access in all areas of life.

AVAILABILITY

Creating a more welcoming and open environment is key to building a society that accepts and supports diversity, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in society. In Poland, there is increasing social awareness about the needs and lives of people with disabilities. Actions are being taken to ensure equal access to public spaces and services for everyone. The document that contributed to this and changed the way of thinking about disability is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of December 13, 2006. The Polish Government became a signatory on March 20, 2007, and Poland ratified the Convention on September 6, 2012. The convention ensures that people with disabilities have the right to participate fully in society on an equal basis with other citizens. Most importantly, it obligates states party to it to implement its provisions in their own legislation:

"Art. 30 Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sports

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities:

- a) Enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;
- b) Enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;
- c) Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.

The implementation of the provisions of the convention by Poland is confirmed by the Act on Accessibility (Act of July 19, 2019 on ensuring ac-

cessibility for persons with special needs, 2022). The Act together with the Act on Digital Accessibility (Act of April 4, 2019 on the digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities, 2023) obliges public entities to take specific actions in the field of accessibility for people with special needs. This term emphasizes that accessibility applies not only to people with disabilities, but also to older people and people with baby carriages.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

Before the introduction of legal acts, ensuring accessibility was associated only with architectural interventions, e.g. installing driveways and elevators; tools supporting people with hearing or vision disabilities; and care for people with intellectual disabilities. Ensuring accessibility to public services for people on the spectrum is something new in Poland. It is also a challenge due to the great diversity of needs of this group.

In Western countries, the idea of autism-friendly spaces has been developed for many years. An example of such action in Poland was the project “Culture friendly to people with autism” implemented in 2013 (SYNAPSIS Foundation, 2014). It was the first project focusing exclusively on increasing the accessibility of cultural institutions to people on the autism spectrum. The project was an initiative of the SYNAPSIS Foundation. This foundation was established in 1989 as one of the first non-governmental organizations in Poland working for people on the autism spectrum and their families. Currently, the foundation deals with diagnostics, therapy, training and advocacy.

The SYNAPSIS Foundation invited the cooperation of Warsaw cultural institutions, including the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, the Copernicus Science Center, Baj Theater and Multikino Ursynów. Close cooperation with cultural institutions resulted in the development of universal solutions and tools that make it easier for autistic people to participate in cultural life. The solutions were co-created and tested by autistic people, their families, therapists and employees of various cultural institutions. After its completion, other cultural institutions began to use these materials. The National Institute of Museology and Collections Protection (currently the National Institute for Museums) and the National Center for Culture Poland have also begun organizing training for the needs of people on the autism spectrum. In 2015, the publication “ABC Guest with a Disability in the Museum, Part 2 – Intellectual Disability, Autism and Diverse Groups” was published by the National Institute of Museology and Collections Protection, and events created with the needs of autistic people in mind are increasingly included in the educational activities of cultural institutions across Poland.

PROJECT “LIBRARIAN, MAKE FRIENDS WITH A PERSON WITH AUTISM”

The next major action towards the accessibility of cultural institutions was the project “Librarian, make friends with a person with autism”. The initiator and leader of the project was the Polish Librarians’ Association in partnership with the SYNAPSIS Foundation. The project was implemented in 2015-2016. The aim of the project was to improve librarians’ competences in serving readers on the autism spectrum and to show autistic people and their families that the library is a friendly place where it is worth spending free time (Grzecznowska 2016).

The previous experience of the SYNAPSIS Foundation, conversations with library workers and people on the autism spectrum, and foreign initiatives such as “Libraries and Autism: We’re Connected” and “Targeting Autism” played an important role while working on the detailed concept of activities. Therefore, the decision was taken to conduct parallel activities aimed at library employees and autistic people.

ACTIVITIES WITH LIBRARIANS

Nine libraries were invited to participate in the project. The facilities were selected to represent different types of collections. They included university, school, local, district and modern media libraries. During the entire project they provided a place for testing tools and observing the behavior of employees and participants on the autism spectrum. Therapists checked what constituted difficulty in communication, where support was necessary, and where it was enough to use an additional tool. Each visit was completed with an evaluation, separately with participants and library employees. A total of 19 visits took place. During the meeting summarizing all the visits, many librarians admitted that they had changed their perceptions of autistic people. Previously, they considered people on the autism spectrum to be unpredictable and withdrawn. They were afraid that they would not know how to talk to them and whether they would be able to communicate with such a reader at all. This was due to numerous stereotypes and lack of previous experience. After meeting the participants, the librarians became confident and were ready for direct contact.

In turn, participants on the autism spectrum were asked why they hadn’t used libraries before. The most common answer was that they did not know about the wide range of additional activities they offered. They perceived libraries as places only for borrowing books. They were also afraid that they would not be able to cope with the new situation and that the library employees would not help them. Previously, when using other public institutions, they felt very anxious and felt judged by employees

and by other users. Therefore, they preferred to spend their free time at home.

A similar situation was described in the report “National Autism Census of 2016” (Platos, 2016). It presented a summary of survey research in which 360 parents, 129 autistic people and 73 normally developing individuals took part, the last constituting the control group. In answer to the question: “Where do you most often spend your free time?” people on the autism spectrum were less likely to declare spending time outside of the home either in public places or with friends and colleagues than people from the control group. According to the data, only one fourth of autistic people indicated that they spend time in public places (e.g. a library, park, community center or cafe), while every second person from the control group did. Time spent at the home of friends or colleagues was indicated by 12% of autistic people and 40% of people from the control group. However, as many as 20% of autistic people stated they liked to spend their free time with their family compared to 6% of people from the control group.

TOOLS FOR PEOPLE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM – PROTOTYPE DEVELOPMENT, TESTING, PRODUCTION

For the process of preparing tools, it was very important to take into account the diversity of needs of people on the autism spectrum, as well as their interests and motivation to use library resources. As part of the project, five communication tools and six instructional videos were created.

The purpose of the tools and videos was to facilitate activities such as:

- asking for help,
- finding one’s way in a new space,
- initiating a conversation with a librarian,
- transitioning from one activity to the next,
- taking action (e.g. joining the library, borrowing a book).

All tools were designed in such a way as not to stigmatize people on the autism spectrum. They were intended to be universal and able to be used by any reader. Thirty-one autistic people and five therapists took part in the tool testing process.

COMMUNICATION BOOKS

Many autistic people find it difficult to cope with new social situations. People on the autism spectrum feel good when they are in control of the situation and know what will happen. Therefore, they avoid situations that require flexibility and quick adaptation to new and unknown circumstances. If changes occur, they feel a strong need to restore the previous state through rituals, the positioning of objects, and even in the behavior

of other people. In new situations they may experience anxiety, fear, and frustration, have difficulty concentrating or be withdrawn, aggressive, or self-aggressive.

Any hints on how to behave in a given situation and what will happen are helpful. "Library Toolbox" is a two-part scenario of a visit to the library. The first part contains the most important information about the first visit, including how to prepare for it, what you should take with you, and what you should ask the librarian about. The second part is a collection of the most frequently asked questions and matters dealt with in the library, e.g. borrowing, extending a loan, returning a book. The tool helps you initiate a conversation with a librarian and choose the right words.

A simpler version of the "Library Toolbox" are the "I want to borrow" and "I want to use" books. Each of these contains an example of dialogue regarding a given activity. Single sentences are placed on separate pages with instructions on what to do, e.g. hand over the reader's card or wait for the librarian's response. The books contain "hints", i.e. cards with selected types of collections or devices available in the library (e.g. book, audiobook, newspaper, game, computer, film, Internet, tablet), enabling the reader to choose what he or she wants to borrow or take advantage of. A sticky note with the selected item can be attached to the indicated place in the sentence.

The third communication tool consists of two boards with pictograms. The inspiration for this tool came from communication boards used by people using alternative communication methods. On one board there are boxes with pictograms of items to be borrowed, on the other there are pictograms indicating information and rules applicable in the library, for example "Please be quiet", "No eating or drinking", "Wait", "Help me". The reader can point to the cardboard with the pictogram or tear it off the board and hand it to the librarian. In the same way, the librarian can point or give a card in response.

MAPS

Even people on the autism spectrum who have great difficulties in functioning can independently find the book or equipment they are interested in. However, in a space they do not know well yet, they often feel lost. The map helps them master and understand the space of the library they intend to go to and then use. Maps make your destination more predictable and therefore safer. As part of the project, sample maps and instructions on how to make a map for your own library were prepared.

MOVIES

People on the autism spectrum often have difficulty imagining a given situation. Illustrating and showing how it will take place helps them prepare for it. The advantage of films is the ability to watch them in a safe place, such as at home. As part of the project, films were created presenting the most common situations in the library: What is a library, I apply for a library card, I want to borrow, I want to borrow using pictograms, I want to use, I am returning books. The films are posted on the YouTube channels of the SYNAPSIS Foundation and the Polish Librarians' Association. In total, the films have been viewed 21,000 times (as of May 3, 2024).

Each film consists of two parts. The first is an introduction containing the most important information. The second one shows how a conversation between a person on the autism spectrum and a librarian may go. The roles were played by autistic people and by librarians.

"LABYRINTH" GAMIFICATION

Paweł Tkaczyk is a recognized specialist in Poland dealing with marketing and brand building, mainly through gamification and storytelling. He defines gamification as turning everyday activities into a game, adding such elements of game mechanics as collecting, using leaderboards, having a specific goal, moving through sequential levels, facing challenges and gaining achievements and rewards (Tkaczyk, 2014).

While the project was underway, gamification was just gaining popularity in Poland. The Highlight/Inaczej Foundation was responsible for creating the "Labirynt" gamification tool. The tool was intended to help motivate autistic people to use the library at least once a week. The prototype was created specifically for the project. It was the first use of gamification for people on the spectrum in Europe.

The gamification took place in two spaces – in the library and in a place previously known to the participants, e.g. at the foundation, where they had previously attended classes. During the classes, participants were given a mission to complete in the library. The mission was confirmed by a stamp on the report card. At the next meeting, the players discussed the visit and solving the task. For completing the task they received cards with a picture of a part of a corridor. The cards were used to build tunnels in the Labyrinth, at the center of which was the Book of Creation and Doom. Players had to regularly complete missions, cooperating with other participants. An additional element was provided by special missions introducing players to a famous figure from the world of culture, science and art. Each of these characters was a person on the autism spectrum.

The gamification prototype was given a rating by participants of four on a five-point scale. Participants stated that the library became a more

friendly place for them after gamification. Half of the participants answered that they would not go to the library without participating in the gamification.

For a month, tests of various board games were carried out to examine what forms and elements of gameplay bring the greatest joy to the participants. The way of thinking of autistic people was also taught in order to motivate them to act as effectively as possible. It is worth emphasizing that taking part in gamification requires participants to have specific skills such as reading and writing. All elements of the "Labyrinth" gamification together with the user manual are posted on the project website.

WEBSITE

For the needs of the project and with a view to its durability, a website www.autyzm.sbp.pl was created. During the project, reports from visits, articles prepared by various specialists and information about current activities were posted on the website. An important element of the website is an interactive map of autistic-friendly libraries. The map is constantly being developed. A library that meets specific requirements may contact the Polish Librarians' Association (website administrator) with a request to mark it on the map. The website also includes graphics to mark the library as an autistic-friendly place, a reader card template and a publication summarizing the project.

TRAINING

The last element of the project was training for librarians. 49 people from 37 libraries from all over Poland took part in the training. The participants learned about the needs of people on the autism spectrum and became familiar with the concepts behind the tools being prepared. All libraries received sets of printed tools.

Subsequent training sessions were organized independently by libraries or local activists. Training was held for employees of the Municipal Public Library in Andrychów and school libraries in this city, and then the tools prepared as part of the project were implemented. Training was also carried out at the Regional Public Library and Culture Animation Center in Poznań and the Cyprian Norwid Provincial and Municipal Public Library in Zielona Góra, during the international scientific conference "People with Disabilities in the Library – Inclusion in the World of Information and Culture – Theory and Practice".

The project "Librarian, make friends with people with autism" became an inspiration and initiated a number of changes in libraries throughout Poland. It was a great honor to have the opportunity to present the project's premises and results during the IFLA World Library and Informa-

tion Congress in 2017. The project met with great interest and recognition among the congress participants.

Despite the passage of nine years, the “Librarian, make friends with a person with autism” project, in terms of the subject matter and quality of the tools developed, remains the only such comprehensive activity on autism addressed to libraries from all over Poland.

WHAT DOES ACCESSIBILITY LOOK LIKE IN LIBRARIES NOW?

In the reports of Statistics Poland from 2022 (Szlubowska, 2023), the heading “facilities in public libraries for people with special needs” includes such categories as adaptation of workstations for people with physical disabilities, purchase of equipment to facilitate reading: magnifying glasses, and equipment for playing recordings. However, there is no information about what libraries provide for people on the autism spectrum.

Libraries, like other cultural institutions, most often finance investments and purchases in the field of accessibility from their own funds or from grants announced by the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons and from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Today, institutions must make difficult decisions about how to prioritize accessibility investments. Most activities focus on eliminating architectural and digital barriers and purchasing equipment, which contributes to marginalizing the needs of people on the autism spectrum. There is a need to implement a systemic solution under which, along with funds for substantive activities, institutions (including libraries) would receive a pool of funds for accessibility.

The project “Accessibility advocates in libraries”, implemented in 2020 by the Polish Librarians’ Association in partnership with the Culture Without Barriers Foundation, provided great support for libraries. Its main effect was the establishment of a group of certified accessibility advocates in the library community, who gained competencies to share knowledge and to support other librarians in creating and implementing new initiatives for people with disabilities. The website www.autyzm.sbp.pl was also expanded to include information related to the needs of and services for people with autism as well as others (visually impaired, hearing impaired, with psychomotor disorders).

LIBRARY INITIATIVES

We cannot, however, ignore libraries that on their own initiative undertake activities addressed to autistic people, their families, and specialists. Most often they are addressed to the local community and financed from their own funds or obtained grants. The motivation to undertake this type

of action is often the reported needs of readers and the experiences of employees who are parents of autistic children or have such people in their family.

An example of such an action is the Parents' Club established by the Municipal Public Library in Wrocław. For several years, the group "Asperger's syndrome and autism in the immediate environment: what, where, how" has been bringing together parents and teachers once a month for lectures especially prepared for them. Participants can also benefit from individual consultations with a psychologist. The library offers much more. When creating the first adaptations, it cooperated with experts of the "Librarian, make friends with a person with autism" project. The library branches run an "Autism-friendly library" program. Readers can use library maps and tips to help them find their way around the library and its collections. Every Monday, the lights are dimmed and library visitors are asked to talk in hushed tones. This reduction in stimuli is often called "quiet hours". The library is constantly expanding its collection with the latest publications on autism.

SENSORY COMFORT

The library is often perceived as a quiet, peaceful place with limited stimuli. For some autistic people, specific rules, the artificiality of the situation, and the lack of a clear definition of what it means to "stay silent" cause great discomfort. Sensory conditions must be treated holistically. Sounds include: noises coming from open doors, windows, or when walking, echoes, and sounds of equipment. Sounds are combined with visual stimuli (amount of light, glass spaces, decor), olfactory stimuli (dust, cleaning fluids), tactile stimuli and those perceived by the whole body (temperature). All these stimuli influence the sensory friendliness of the space. Only the elimination or minimization of difficult stimuli will promote work and concentration and make autistic people feel safe in this space (McMullin, Walton, 2019).

Solutions ensuring sensory comfort are currently quite popular among various types of institutions and stores. A large amount and variety of sensory stimuli, especially in new and unfamiliar surroundings, may lead to sensory overload for a person on the autism spectrum. In such situations, the brain cannot cope with such a large amount of information, which leads to difficulty concentrating, fatigue, crying, nervousness or panic attack. Providing sensory comfort is important for people on the autism spectrum due to their often high sensitivity to sensory stimuli.

Initially, it may seem that creating such conditions is impossible. The most popular solutions intended to prevent sensory overload or help cope with a situation that has already occurred are the previously mentioned "quiet hours", as well as quiet rooms, the availability of noise-cancelling

headphones, quiet work rooms and appropriate space arrangements (Sztajerwald, Świeża 2015). Each of these solutions should be selected and appropriately adapted to the conditions and purpose of the institution. The team working on creating concepts and implementing solutions must include autistic people, parents, and therapists. Only they will be able to assess the usefulness and sense of a given solution.

Examples of such cooperation include quiet corners created together with parents and non-governmental organizations in the Beskidzka Library in Bielsko-Biała and the Municipal Public Library in Świecie. In the "quiet corners" there are aids for sensory stimulation, and the decor and conditions are conducive to relaxation. Both libraries also offer sensory integration workshops, meetings with specialists and quiet hours.

SPREADING KNOWLEDGE

The simplest way to spread knowledge about the autism spectrum is to expand book collections with items on this topic and prepare bibliographic lists for teachers and parents. Another group of initiatives are events about autism, which is the most frequently chosen form of activities. This group includes: art competitions, exhibitions about autism, exhibitions of works by people on the autism spectrum from local schools and therapeutic centers, exhibitions of artists on the autism spectrum (Public Library in the Włochy District), meetings with specialists and autistic people (Main Library of the Masovian Voivodeship), conferences (MBP Central Library in Gliwice), film reviews (Hugo Kołłątaj Pedagogical Provincial Library in Kraków) and training (Public Library in Piaseczno). Many of these events are organized as part of the World Autism Awareness Day celebrated on April 2 and co-organized with local non-governmental organizations, schools, and Occupational Therapy Workshops.

SUMMARY

With information on statistics regarding autism spectrum diagnosis, the accessibility of public institutions for this group should be developed and indicated as one of the strategic goals for the coming years. However, it is worth considering what the current needs of readers, employees, and the local community are. We must ask what solutions should be created and recommended taking into account the diverse functions and size of the library, from school and academic libraries to ones serving as local centers of social activity. How do we systematize and ensure the substantive quality of these solutions?

Thanks to scientific research and accounts of autistic people, we know more and more, and the social image and nomenclature are changing. A name that was generally accepted a few years ago may now be con-

sidered offensive. An example of this is the medical term ‘a person with autism spectrum disorder’, used in everyday communication as a stigmatizing term. People on the autism spectrum argue that their development is not impaired, just different. Libraries should promote reliable knowledge and prevent the repetition of harmful stereotypes. Therefore, a solution worth considering is creating free e-learning for libraries. The course of the English organization Dimensions, created in cooperation with the Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians and Libraries Connected (Dimensions, 2019), can serve as a model. Another solution may also be updating and developing the materials created as part of the “Librarian, make friends with a person with autism” project, as well as the promotion of good practices by umbrella organizations such as the Polish Librarians’ Association.

It is worth noting that staff awareness and creating a friendly space are only part of the work on accessibility. In line with IFLA’s values, libraries should promote the enforcement of human rights and social inclusion through their activities. Access to knowledge and information is one of the basic human rights. I believe that the community of Polish librarians should get involved in creating a reading offer for people on the autism spectrum with intellectual disabilities. In Western and Scandinavian countries, adaptations of literature, Internet portals, and information materials in easy-to-read texts are popular. Guidelines for creating content have also been prepared by IFLA (Momura, Skat Nielsen, Tronbacke, 2010). Additionally, readers’ clubs are established at libraries in which people with intellectual disabilities meet and discuss the texts they have read about culture in a broad sense. In Poland, the Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities and several non-governmental organizations are responsible for writing educational materials in language that is easy to read and understand. So far, libraries have not undertaken this type of action. This is, of course, a much broader topic, but it shows how many solutions are still worth improving on or developing from scratch. I am convinced that, as in the case of the “Librarian, make friends with a person with autism” project, thanks to the cooperation of various environments we can meet these challenges and contribute to the development of accessibility of Polish libraries.

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ALEKSANDRA SZTAJERWALD

Członki Zarządu

Fundacja SYNAPSIS

e-mail: a.sztajerwald@synapsis.org.pl

BIBLIOTEKA DOSTĘPNA DLA OSÓB W SPEKTRUM AUTYZMU

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Autyzm. Spektrum autyzmu. Osoby z niepełnosprawnościami. Niepełnosprawność intelektualna. Dostępność.

ABSTRAKT: Teza/cel artykułu – Celem artykułu jest zarysowanie współczesnego wyzwania jakim jest stworzenie bibliotek dostępnych dla osób w spektrum autyzmu. Metody – Przeanalizowano akty prawne dotyczące osób o specjalnych potrzebach, w tym osób z autyzmem, publikacje dotyczące omawianego problemu oraz dokumenty dotyczące projektu „Bibliotekarzu zaprzyjaźnij się z osobą z autyzmem”. Wnioski – W pierwszej części skupiono się na wyjaśnieniu czym jest autyzm, przedstawiono statystyki częstotliwości występowania oraz główne potrzeby tych osób wynikające z autyzmu. Następnie nawiązując do obowiązujących dokumentów prawnych opisano jakie zostały wypracowane rozwiązania dla czytelników w spektrum w ramach projektu „Bibliotekarzu zaprzyjaźnij się z osobą z autyzmem”. Projekt był realizowany przez Stowarzyszenie Bibliotekarzy Polskich w partnerstwie z Fundacją SYNAPSIS. Na końcu przedstawiono różne inicjatywy polskich bibliotek mające na celu stworzenie przyjaznych warunków i zwiększenia świadomości lokalnej społeczności dot. spektrum autyzmu.