
Blind to have Access to National Library Books Online

The National Library of Jamaica (NLJ) is converting books and other printed materials in its possession to digital audio format to benefit visually impaired persons.

Funding for this project is being provided by the Culture, Health, Arts, Sports and Education (CHASE) Fund in collaboration with the Radio Education Unit at the University of the West Indies (UWI). Speaking at the agency's head office in Kingston, Executive Director of the NLJ, Winsome Hudson, said the initiative, which is in the implementation phase, will allow the visually impaired to have access to materials that were once only accessible to those with sight. "The National Library is leading in this to ensure that we narrow the gap by converting print resources to a format that the blind can access," she said. Work is underway at the UWI, where selected textbooks are being converted to benefit visually impaired students. A portal has been created on the NLA's website, which will provide access to the Library's materials. Mrs. Hudson informed that because of copyright issues, "these books can only be available to persons, who have been validated as truly blind and so we are working with the Jamaica Society for the Blind and using their membership, so those are the persons, who will have access to the digital talking books." The Executive Director explained that before copying the books, the NLJ had to get permission from the publishers, so as not to breach the copyright regulations. She said that Ian Randle Publishers, the Institute of Jamaica and LMH Publishing have consented for the copying of selected publications and titles for conversion. "Of course, where books are out of copyright, it is not an issue and so we will be including things by Claude McKay, because his works are now in the public domain and also Roger Mais, because both authors have been dead now, 50 years," she informed. - JIS