

IT Hero: The woman who brought a world of info to people with vision loss

Vicki Mains, former database administrator and now IT director at CNIB, has been involved with the Integrated Digital Library Service project, which provides 100,000 visually-impaired clients with electronic information in various formats. The CNIB is now able to give more information free of charge to clients.

Location: Toronto

In the weeks ahead, ITWorldCanada will be using this space to applaud individuals and corporations who are using information technology to significantly improve the lives of Canadians by profiling nominees for the upcoming Information Technology Association of Canada (ITAC) IT Hero Awards presented by Intel. Winners in both corporate and community categories will be announced at the ITAC Chairs' Dinner in Toronto on June 26.

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) is a nationwide, community-based registered charity that aims to be the leader in promoting vision health and enhancing independence for people with vision loss. The CNIB made history when it became the first charity in the world to undertake digitization of its analog library so its users would have better access to reading materials, supporting the organization's vision of a national, equitable public library service for all Canadians with print disabilities, which includes those living with vision loss.

All the components of the ambitious Integrated Digital Library Services project have finally come to fruition after years of hard work. The aim of the project was to provide the CNIB's 100,000 clients, who previously could access only three percent of published information, with access to radically more information via a variety of formats such as by telephone,

the internet, or on CD on demand. Delivery time on recorded information has been dramatically reduced and the organization is able to offer dramatically more content to its clients, free of charge.

With over 15,000 volunteers reading materials aloud to be recorded, the CNIB now boasts an immense repository of materials, over two million books and information resources, from which CDs are burned on demand and sent to recipients via an agreement with Canada Post at a rate of more than 2,000 discs per day. In addition, CNIB offers access to thousands of titles in Braille, print Braille and talking books, descriptive videos, newspapers and magazines, reference and online services.

Vicki Mains has been involved with the project from the outset, first as a database administrator and later in her current leadership role as director of IT, where she leads the teams that develop and execute the technology applications pertaining to mobility, storage consolidation and infrastructure.

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