

Harnessing the Power of OrCam

Mary Howard

Library for Assistive Media and Talking Books services (LAMTB) are located at the main branch for the St. Clair County's Library System. LAMTB facilitates resources and technologies for residents of all ages who have visual, physical, and/or reading limitations that prevent them from using traditional print materials. Operating out of Port Huron, Michigan, we encounter many instances where we need to provide assistance above and beyond what a basic library may offer. We host Talking Book services which provide free players, cassettes, braille titles, and downloads to users who are vision or mobility impaired. We also have a large and stationary Kurtzweil reading machine that converts print to speech, video-enhanced magnifiers, large print books. We also provide home delivery service for patrons who are unable to travel to branches.

The library has been searching for a more technology-forward focus for our patrons. The state's Talking Books center in Lansing set up an educational meeting at the Library of Michigan in 2018 to see a live demonstration of the OrCam My Eye reader. This was the innovation we were seeking and I was thoroughly impressed with the compact and powerful design of the reader, the ease of use, and the stunningly accurate feedback provided by this AI reading assistive device. Users are able to read with minimal setup and total control. OrCam readers are lightweight, easily maneuverable assistive technology devices for users who are blind, visually impaired, or have a reading disability, including children, adults and the elderly. The device automatically reads any printed text: newspapers, money, books, menus, labels on consumer products, text on screens, books, or smartphones, etc. The OrCam reader will repeat back any text immediately and is fit for all ages and abilities. OrCam works with English, Spanish, and French languages and can identify money and other business and household items. It can be placed near either the left or right ear. Users can easily adjust the volume and speed of the read text. It can be to either the left or right temple on your glasses using a magnetic docking device. Having a diverse group of users with different needs use the reader as they like is one of the more impressive offerings. Changing most settings is normally facilitated with just a finger swipe on the OrCam device. The mission of OrCam is to develop a "portable, wearable visual system for blind and visually impaired persons, via the use of artificial computer intelligence and augmented reality" By offering these devices to our sight, mobility, or otherwise impaired patrons we open up the world of literacy, discovery and education. Some of our users are not able to read in any other fashion and the OrCam provides a much-needed boost to their learning profile.

We secured a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for the purchase of the readers (CFDA 45.310). We also worked with OrCam to get lower pricing for these units. Normally they retail for \$3,500 but we were able to move this to the lower price point of \$3,000. We also were awarded a \$22,106 Improving Access to Information grant from the Library of Michigan to fund the entire purchase. Without this funding stream we would not have been able to secure the OrCam. However, if you have veterans in your service area please contact the company since there is availability for VA health coverage for low vision or legally blind veterans who may

Mary Howard (mhoward@sccl.lib.mi.us) is Reference Librarian Library for Assistive Media and Talking Books (LAMTB) at the St. Clair County Library, Port Huron, Michigan. © 2020.



qualify to receive an OrCam device, fully paid for by the VA. Please visit <https://orcam.com/en/veterans> for more information.



Figure 1. Close-up of the OrCam device.

The grant was initially set to run from September 2019 to September 2020. We purchased six OrCam readers for our library users, and they were planned to be rotated among our twelve branches throughout this grant cycle. However, due to the pandemic and out of safety concerns for staff and visitors, our library was closed from March 23 to June 15 and we were only able to offer it to the public at six branches. As of July 14, 2020, we are projecting that we may open to the public in September, but COVID-19 issues could halt that. We have had to make arrangements with the grantor to extend the period for the usage of the OrCam from September to December. This will make up for some of the lost time and open a path for the other six libraries to have their turn offering the OrCam to their patrons. The interesting aspect of this is we now have to take our technology profile even further by offering remote training to prospective OrCam users. Thankfully, the design and rugged housing for the reader makes it easy to clean and maintain but the social distancing can prove to be intrusive for training. To set up a user you need to be within a foot or two of them and being very close in order to get them used to how the OrCam reads. There is a lot of directing involved and close contact with the user and instructor. We will use a work-around of providing distance instruction including in-person and remote training. OrCam also has a vast array of instructional videos that we will have cued up for users. We have had over 150

residents attend presentations, demonstrations, and talks on the OrCam. I anticipate that this number will not be achieved for the second round; however, we may be more successful in our online presence since we can add the instruction to our YouTube page, offer segments on Facebook and other social media and provide film clips for our webpage.

The situation has been difficult, but it has opened up LAMTB services to think about how we should be working to provide better and more remote service to our users. Since we cover over 800 square miles in the county, becoming more adaptable to servicing our patrons has become a paramount area of work for the library. The OrCam will bring about a new way of remote training to our patrons, which will bring about more awareness of the reader and how it can be beneficial to users.



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