

## Original question:

*Hi all, hoping for a little help. We have a staff member who has some cognitive impairment, that limits what work they can reliably take on. They've been here for a long time, and handle shelving for a couple of easy areas, straighten up shelves, simple tasks. The problem is, there is far less for them to do than there used to be, so they are frequently running out of tasks they're familiar with. I need more for them to do, but am having a hard time figuring out what else they can do. Anyone else with a similar staff member, what kinds of tasks do you have them work on?*

*Yes, I am well aware that every person is unique, and that something one person can do may not be possible, or feasible, for another. I'm looking for ideas, and can determine if they would work well for our situation or not. I'll be pursuing other leads as well. I appreciate any suggestions, thank you!*

## Responses

Can they help at all with prepping materials for children's programs; cutting, painting etc.? Also could they assist at children's programs, especially when there is a craft or project involved? Just a thought off the top of my head.

Dusting shelves, adding to displays, removing stickers, wiping down books.

We've had people with the same thing. We would have them bag crafts to go, stamping due date cards, but the most helpful was cleaning books, cds, etc. That's something we normally don't have time for and it's amazing how by just using a slightly damp cloth can clean things we don't even see are there.

We have a group of developmentally disabled adults who come in each morning to work. They wipe book covers, front books to the edge of shelves, dust, vacuum, and wash toys. It takes about 9 months for them to get through our 6000 item picture book collection with 5 people working an hour a day. They make sure the books are dry before putting them back on the shelves.

Other tasks that are helpful here:

Sharpening pencils. (Especially colored pencils by hand!)

Testing pens and markers.

Checking scrap paper bins, cutting more scraps.

Could you have them help with some cataloging? We have a staff member who helps put number stickers on series (she is provided with lists of the series and what order

they are in). Could your staff member help by putting the stickers on books for cataloging or anything like that? Do you have a space where this person could be a greeter? Sometimes it is just nice to have someone there welcoming people to the library (if there is staff availability). Are they mobile enough to do some walk throughs in the library?

Are there opportunities to help other staff with tasks, such as prepping program materials, cutting out bulletin board decorations, pulling from lists for displays? I'd look for smaller items that can be delegated off from other staff (with care to ensure you're not taking away something they enjoy) so that you're making the most of everyone's skills and time.

Hi Don,  
Here are some suggestions that may be helpful:

Clean surface of library materials  
Dust shelves  
Count number of pieces in kits to ensure all there  
Serve as a greeter  
Wipe down tables, chairs, windows  
Organize board books and other collections that may be out of order  
Pull library materials to the front edge of the shelf (we call it "fronting")  
Litter pick up  
Cut out shapes for craft programs  
Keep children's room toys tidy  
Wash children's room toys to reduce germs  
Check cd and dvd collections for very scratched materials  
Create a 'coupon exchange' where the person can cut out coupons and organize for patrons. There are still plenty of old skool patrons that like paper coupons.  
Develop a relationship with Better World Books. Then have your employee scan the isbn barcodes to see if the item can be accepted.  
That's what I can think of for now. If you have questions, please let me know. I commend you for seeing how to make things work for your employee!!

We have our specials needs people help with the following depending on their skill level:

- Gather our paper recycling from various bins in the building
- Shred documents in our Admin office
- Stuff bags for give a-aways, student tour gift bags

- Dusting of shelves
- Wiping of program tables and public tables

Don - We have a relationship with the school system whereby some post-secondary students with autism come to volunteer. Some of the things we've been able to ask them do include:

- pulling pull lists
- scanning weeded books to see if Better World Books will accept them (This was done with a job coach. Let me know if you'd like more specifics on this.)
- crossing off barcodes on weeded books and boxing them up
- putting labels on *Bookpage* magazines and *MI Gardener* magazines before they are put out for patrons
- cutting out and taping things for displays
- sorting letters that were used for the sandwich board sign that now need to be re-alphabetized
- dusting
- wiping/cleaning toys used in baby play sessions and/or out for play

Hope there might be something here that's of help; I empathize with your challenge.

Hi Don

We have a couple people in a similar situation. Cleaning, greeting people coming in, picking up trash outside, checking for damaged books, etc are what we usually do.

I agree—they could also wash the toys in the children area which is very helpful. Board books and picture books are a great area to focus on for book washing as are the holiday books that get a tremendous amount of circulation at certain times of the year. Counting the pieces in the games or kits that you have out or that circulate is another necessary task that often gets overlooked.

Hi Don,

Thanks for asking this question. I have a similar staff person here, so I'd be interested in hearing what others have to say, if you're willing to share responses.

Our person does the things you included in your email. Other things include:

- Marking up items for withdrawal (markering over barcodes, stamps, etc.)

- Pulling items from a list for a display, weeding, holds, etc. Anything where there's a printed list and someone has to go pull the materials.
- Answering phones & transferring calls

Don,

We have a group in our area that offers job training to special needs adults, Freedom Work. They come to the library and dust our shelves, wipe down our tables, clean toys and sweep our patio (in good weather). We occasionally ask them to do things like test markers in our craft/programming area, sort supplies that have gotten out of order, etc.

Agree-- Some folks say: "well, we don't want them *cleaning*." Why not? I think it's great work and tasks that do undone otherwise. Makes the library a nicer place!

Dusting shelves. It's amazing the amount of dust that gathers on the shelves behind the books and on top of books in areas that aren't as popular as others.

Washing the storytime toys and children's area toys.

Prepping storytime crafts

Setting up the meeting room for groups

Flattening cardboard boxes and getting them ready for recycle

Bundling newspapers up for recycle

Filling the brochure racks and the bookmark holders

...just some ideas that have worked here over the years.

Hello Don,

I work with [other responder] and she didn't know that our young adult on the spectrum kitted up 500 children's crafts for our system. We provided clear printed instructions, such as 1 paint set, 1 mini easel, 6 slips of paper, 1 instruction sheet, staple the bag. Very easy for him to follow and saved staff so much time. I don't know the level of impairment your staff member has. I also like volunteers to test markers. If they're dried out, throw them away. Count the remaining number of each color. That helps staff know if more need to be ordered. Sort crayons?

Hi Donald,

I coordinate our adults with special needs volunteers and here are some of the tasks that I have had them help with:

- Cutting scrap paper for our computer work stations

- Sharpening pencils
- Testing out the markers in the Youth Department to see if they are dried out
- Assisting with creating our sandwich board sign with event or closing information
- Re-shelving our returned magazines
- Cleaning the Youth puzzles, train table items and bins of building toys like Legos
- Reviewing the Pre-School/STEM kits when they are returned to ensure all items are accounted for and counting any game pieces
- Walking the aisles and looking for any books that are just shoved on the end or on top of other books and depending on their abilities, either re-shelving them or putting them on a cart for Circulation staff to re-shelve.
- Wiping down keyboards, computer mouse and stations in Youth and Adult departments.
- If you have an area for book donations, having them assist in unloading the boxes or bags for the Friends of the Library.

I hope this is helpful!

My experience was that if I showed them a little more of a challenging task several times - they eventually were able to do it. It just took some patience on my part. And ultimately, helped my particular employee move on to a better job earning more money. Other tasks: Printing labels for delivery, doing inventory of supplies or craft items, weeding/recycling newspapers or magazines.

Hi there,

Sorting craft supplies! We have a similar situation here, and I LOVE the help getting my program closet in order. Things like sorting perler beads, paper, and pompoms by color, stickers by holiday/season, rewinding balls of yarn. . . I usually take things out of the closet so they're not overwhelmed and can focus on whatever particular small thing I need help with that day.

Also, cutting things out for displays/crafts.

Hope that helps!

Would book covering be possible? The crystal covers? Stickers such as "do not place item in drop box". Help before and after story time and other programs. (laying out materials, cleaning tables afterwards)

Hi Don,

We have a similar staff member here and are struggling in the same way. Here are some other suggestions:

Cutting/trimming scrap paper

Cutting die cuts

Sharpening pencils

Cleaning monitors/computer mice

Shredding

Processing items (stickers/mylars/stamps, etc.)

Hello,

I had a similar employee who would frequently check out our website for broken links.

They also brainstormed on display ideas and looked for matching items in the collection.

