

Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

Feb. 10, 2106

To Whom It May Concern:

Will the tragic stories from the past become a reality in the future? I will never forget Sadie. She was elderly. When diabetes resulted in blindness, for her, life totally lost its meaning. She was imprisoned by fear and isolation. She refused to leave her home. During endlessly long nights, voices from an all-news radio station brought her some comfort. There was no CRIS radio then. If there had been, it is likely that the remainder of her life might have been very different!

At age 90, more than anything else, Mr. Johnson wanted to read the newspaper to stay connected with his community. CRIS fulfilled that need.

Can you imagine, or would you be willing to try, for just one day, the experience of not reading a single piece of printed material? CRIS' audience covers the entire age spectrum from young children to senior citizens. The inability to read printed material efficiently affects many people, extending beyond those with limited vision. The scope of the impact of CRIS serving people having difficulty reading printed material is far too extensive for me to cover here. I can only briefly cite instances from my direct experience. For example, through CRIS I can keep up with local news. I prepare my grocery list and place my gift orders during the holiday season. I am eager to visit the Mystic seaport this summer and to use my iPhone for descriptions of exhibits! Through CRIS I can share the experiences of the "sighted world."

Listening is a skill that I have nurtured in my students for many years, including those who had no difficulty reading printed material. Good listening doesn't just happen. Currently I have students whose fluency reading printed material is compromised either because of limited vision or due to cognitive issues. (This includes highly intelligent college-bound students.) It isn't always easy to convince them to get some reading done through listening. Once they begin to do this, it can be life changing. There may be a parallel situation with adults who can no longer easily read printed material. The notion of listening to an entire recorded book may be more than they can handle especially along with other adjustments. CRIS can serve as a gateway for those people to begin to enjoy listening without being overwhelmed and by making available exactly what each listener wants to hear most.

Will the tragic stories from the past become a reality in the future? It's up to you!

Eileen Akers