# Australian Braille Authority

A subcommittee of the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities Inc.

[www.brailleaustralia.org](http://www.brailleaustralia.org)

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# Report of the Chair – Jordie Howell

## Introduction

This year, ABA has continued to support its members with discussion and consultation on the Ozbrl email list. Our Regional Braille Forums have undertaken work involving consumers, educators and producers in areas of interest relating to braille, holding meetings both online, and once again, face to face. The ABA would like to sadly farewell and acknowledge three highly valued colleagues who were great ambassadors and advocates for braille. This year, we welcome one new successful candidate who has passed the trans-Tasman Certificate in 2022. Our member organisations have produced some very exciting resources and run activities in the area of braille which will be outlined in the following paragraphs.

## In Memoriam

It is with sadness we farewell three colleagues who have passed on since our 2022 national Meeting:

* Ivan Molloy passed away in July 2022.

In around 1957 Ivan was working with the Braille Library of Victoria as a braille teacher and welfare officer.

Ivan served as President of the Victorian Blind Cricket Association in the 1960s and was active with the game and its administration at the national level.

In 1981 Ivan led a group of 16 to Sri Lanka where he had already developed close connections with the local blind community This tour, which incorporated blind cricket, swish (blind table tennis) and many opportunities to experience the local culture, formed the basis for Ivan’s long running commitment to supporting blind people in Sri Lanka and in other Asian countries.

With his life-long partner Lorraine, Ivan worked tirelessly to provide financial support and material aid to the Ratmalana School for the Blind and to similar organisations. Much of this work was undertaken through the BCA Overseas Cultural Branch, which Ivan led until its closure in 2016. The branch’s major project over many years was to cut to size and package paper that was provided by the then photo processing company Kodak. To accommodate this work Ivan gave over the workshop at his Mount Martha home and had his driveway reinforced to accommodate the heavy vehicles that delivered the paper as weighty rolls.

* Neville Kerr died on 26 May 2022, after a long struggle with Parkinson's Disease.

Neville was an avid user and advocate for braille which he used extensively in both his professional life and his radio work.
Over many years, Neville was a major contributor to the work of Blind Citizens Australia, and to the Radio for the Print Handicapped movement, particularly through his work with the establishment and ongoing functioning of 3RPH Melbourne. Neville produced and presented more than 1100 editions of BCA's weekly radio program, then called Horizons, and was heavily involved with the recording and broadcast production of material from BCA conventions and other major events.

Neville also served on the board of the Association for the Blind (now Vision Australia) for around five years in the late 80s early 90s.

* Dr Peter Goebel passed away in April 2022.

Peter mastered braille as an adult, using it as the literacy medium for record-keeping (including patient notes) in his demanding medical practice and associated wellness products business. Peter was gifted with a dogged determination and a meticulous diligence, enabling him to complete a Diploma of Chiropractic’s and associated further qualifications, becoming the first blind person to complete such training in Australia. Peter later obtained a qualification as an O&M instructor and in 2001 was invited to join the board of Seeing Eye Dogs Australia. Over the next four years he served as chair of the board and as acting CEO.

May Ivan, Neville and Peter rest in peace.

## Structure and Accountability

The ABA is a subcommittee of the Round Table on Information Access for People with a Print Disability. Our purpose is to maintain and oversee the development of braille codes and standards and best practice across Australia. We also promote braille as the primary literacy medium for people who are blind, deafblind or who are severely vision impaired.

## ABA Executive Committee

As this is my last national meeting as Chair, I would like to thank my executive committee who have assisted me to ensure that ABA is a vibrant and productive organisation to be a part of.

#### The 2021-2023 committee:

* Kathy Riessen – Kathy has recently retired from her position as the coordinator of Accessible Format Production at the South Australian School for Vision Impaired. Kathy has served as the Code Maintenance officer for the International Council on English Braille: a role which calls for great attention to detail and an advanced working knowledge of all aspects of UEB. Kathy has updated guidelines and ABA Publications. Sadly Kathy has decided to step down from her role as CMC Officer, and also from the ABA Executive this term.
* Tristan Clare – Tristan is a Braille Transcriber and proof-reader for NextSense where she has worked for 13 years. Tristan brings a detailed knowledge of UEB, braille maths and language to the ABA executive. Her work on the executive has included assisting with the development of ABA's Foreign Language Guidelines, formatted mark-up materials for touch readers for the Trans-Tasman Proficiency exam, and administered the ABA Facebook page. Tristan has also served as Secretary for the Sydney Regional Braille Forum.
* Scott Erichsen – Scott is a lifelong user of braille with particular strengths in braille music. His knowledge of technology is exemplary, and he has worked for a number of adaptive technology companies. Scott always has his ear to the ground updating us at executive meetings of the latest in braille technology news.
* Josie Howse – Josie retired in 2019, however she still finds time to answer queries received from the UEB Online website. Josie has developed and taught many braille training programs both within Australia and abroad. Until last year, Josie marked and coordinated the Braille Proficiency Examination for Australia. She co-edited the UEB Training Manual–Australian Edition and assists with updating formatting guidelines.
* Melissa Fanshawe – Melissa is a mathematics lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Southern Queensland, recently receiving her PHD. She has over twenty years' experience within Queensland schools as a teacher, advisory teacher, Deputy and Principal. Melissa is an Inclusive Education Researcher and a mother to vision impaired children. Until recently, Melissa has convened the Queensland Regional Braille Forum.
* Kim Barber – Kim remains on our committee as the Convenor of the Sydney Regional Braille Forum. She has also taken on the job of coordinating the Trans-Tasman Proficiency Certificate in UEB in her role with the Department of Education NSW

## Regional Braille Forums

Regional Braille Forums are a direct link between the ABA executive and individual members such as braille users, teachers, parents and braille producers. Our two forums operating currently are in Queensland and New South Wales (see reports attached)

## Communications

### ABA Website

Melissa has taken on the task of administering the ABA website and is assisted by Leona as she becomes familiar with the process.

The News feed can be accessed at Australian Braille Authority ([brailleaustralia.org](http://brailleaustralia.org))

The website includes news and events, resources, upcoming or past events, awards and opportunities.

An important part of the website is the dissemination of Unified English Braille code resources to assist teachers, parents and transcribers in learning and understanding UEB and its use in Australia. This includes foreign languages, phonetics, braille music and tactile signage and graphics. You can also find a list of Braille in public places. This is an important means of affording equity and independence for touch readers and also helps to raise awareness about inclusion and access.

In 2022 there were 20 published articles/ updates/ news items.

### ABA Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/BrailleAustralia/>

The ABA Facebook page has reached a significant milestone. Yes, we now have over one thousand followers – 1084 at the time of writing. It’s a significant jump from last year’s figure of 956 followers. Many thanks to whoever is spreading the word about our page – the more engagement, the better.

Unsurprisingly, our top country continues to be Australia, with a grand total of 701 followers. Other interested countries are New Zealand, the US, Pakistan, India, Canada and the Philippines.

Our followers are mostly people aged in the 35-54 age group. 78% of followers are female, 22% male and again, no statistics for people identifying as gender non-binary.

This year we have had a variety of posts, both local to Australia and from overseas.

* At the time of writing, our top post was the “Story in a box” kits with Braille and Auslan supports. Currently they are available to Queensland playgroups through the Ipswich Public Library.
* Earlier this year, World Braille Day inspired a plethora of thought-provoking contributions from Braille consumers and producers, including the admins of this page. Of course, we should celebrate Braille every day of the year, but January 4 is often a time when people reflect on the benefits of Braille for everyone who is lucky enough to know it.
* 2023 is an exciting year for refreshable Braille displays, with the imminent release of the Canute Console and the Cadence. Both these multi-line displays have enormous potential to revolutionise the way consumers access refreshable Braille.
* On a lighter note, another one of our more popular posts was Jessica’s Choc O Yum, a small business who is trialling the production of Braille sugar cookies for celebrations such as Valentine’s Day. Braille dots and sweet treats are always a popular combination.

As well as all of these exciting posts, the ABA Facebook page continues to be an excellent resource for information about Braille-related news and events in the field. If you haven’t already, we would love it if you could follow our page. There’s a link at the top of this report, or you can type “Australian Braille Authority” into the Search feature in Facebook. Please, spread the word to anyone you know who might be interested in our page.

### Ozbrl

The ozbrl listserve is an email list for sharing information on braille in Australia. Posts to this list include messages from the ABA Executive and news and questions from braille producers, teachers and consumers.

The ABA executive wishes to thank Sam Taylor for continuing to moderate the group since April 2019.

OZBRL has hosted a wide variety of topics in the last 12 months, including some lively discussions on maths, music and other technical materials as well as requests for books or organisations that can assist with transcription work.

Announcements from the ABA executive are often posted as well as information of interest such as articles about Braille from around the world.

From the OZBRL group page, we have the following stats for interested readers:

* 138 Members
* 426 Topics,

To subscribe to ozbrl, send an email to ozbrl+subscribe@groups.io. The message can be blank, but it must be sent from the email address that you wish to use to send and receive ozbrl messages.

### Publications

ABA's publications are highly utilised by braille transcribers and producers, and our guidelines are a vital reference for study for proficiency in braille transcription. Publications include the Rules for Unified English Braille 2nd Edition, and the UEB Braille Training Manual. They can be accessed at the ABA website:

<http://brailleaustralia.org/resources/>

The DBT Producers Manual (2011) is our priority to be updated this year. We encourage transcribers and other DBT specialists to contact us to assist.

## Proficiency in Unified English Braille

These open-book examinations, offered annually, test a candidate’s working knowledge of the UEB code. They also set a high standard of braille production to which we believe all braille transcribers should aspire.

The examination consists of three parts.

* **Part A:** Transcription of three print passages to braille in three different genres, totalling approximately 1500 words in all.
* **Part B:** Transcription of a braille passage to print.
* **Part C:** Proofreading, i.e. identifying the errors in a passage. A braille passage containing errors is provided, together with an error-free copy of the passage (in either print or uncontracted marked-up braille).

The examination package also includes instructions and marking criteria for each section. Touch readers completing the examination are provided with uncontracted mark-up braille format of Part A and Part C print materials and also a list of the mark-up codes which are used.

In 2022, out of the three candidates who submitted, one candidate was successful, gaining a pass.

## Reports from Member Organisations

Our organisations continue to support braille readers from all aspects of our community. Please see attached reports detailing new resources, activities and services available to consumers and educators around Australia.

## International Council on English Braille (ICEB)

ICEB promotes the use of braille throughout the English-speaking world. Australia is very active in the work of ICEB and we highly values support from the Round Table. The other member countries are Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, USA and the United Kingdom.

The Mid-Term meeting of the ICEB Executive was held online in June, hosted by Canada. This involved many country and committee reports, and included fun tidbits about Canada and Canadian culture. The meeting always inspires us to achieve more and direct our work to implement new ideas around braille production and teaching.

### ICEB Code Maintenance Committee

Kathy Riessen

The Code Maintenance Committee (CMC) consists of voting representation from all member countries of ICEB plus a number of observers (who are free to enter all discussions). As the use of language and technology evolves, the role of this committee is to ensure that Unified English Braille continues to meet the needs of braille readers.

The Code Maintenance Officer, Kathy Riessen in 2022, chaired this committee and Australia’s voting representative is Jodie Doolan. There is a separate committee to look specifically at technical material. This committee is chaired by Clive Lansink from New Zealand. Jodie Doolan is also Australia’s representative on this committee.

### Rulebook changes

In 2022, following extensive discussions by the Code Maintenance Committee and with the endorsement of the ICEB Executive, 3 sections of the Rules of Unified English Braille (2013) were updated.

These changes clarify how and when indicators (just the capital at this stage) may occur within a longer word containing a shortform. This follows the approval of DeafBlind (Capital Deaf, capital Blind) in 2020 as an exception. The updated rules now means that this word is no longer an exception but falls within the rules.

The updated sections are 2.6 Standing Alone, 10.9 Shortforms and Appendix 1: Shortforms List. In summary:

* **2.6:** Previous additions to this section have been included. Section 2.6.4 has been expanded and reworded and 2.6.5 has been added to clarify standing alone for non-alphabetic symbols such as punctuation.
* **10.9:** New sections 10.9.4 relates to words with an interior capitals indicator or terminator, 10.9.5 clarifying the addition of “s” or “apostrophe s” to shortform words; 10.9.6-10.9.9 give greater clarification with regards to avoiding confusion with shortforms than was previously stated.
* **Appendix 1:** The shortforms list has been reworked, adding rules for specific words where appropriate and removing words which already meet these rules. Longer words are now listed alphabetically under each shortform. The rules for list construction which the Code Maintenance Committee must follow when considering words to be added have been updated to allow for longer words with interior indicators.

### New symbol

In addition to the above updates: a new symbol has been approved for the German sharp s, and German capital sharp s. A new section numbered 4.6 has been approved for addition to the Rulebook.

### Where to find updates

The updated sections can be downloaded from [iceb.orb/ueb.html](http://iceb.orb/ueb.html) in 3 different formats: .brf (formatted for 30 cells by 25 lines), PDF with Unicode characters for braille examples, PDF with Simbraille characters for braille examples.

There is also a file summarising all Rulebook changes which have occurred since its 2013 publication.

### Going Forward

The work of the CMC is ongoing. Some of the areas that are currently in discussion are

* Expanding Appendix 2 Word List, to clarify contraction of specific words where there may be ambiguity.
* Reviewing Sections 10.10 Preference and 10.11 Bridging. One specific area is to clarify the rules in relation to prefixes and suffixes.
* Looking at the accents list and whether or not other modifiers need to be added to this list.

### Code Maintenance Officer

Due to a number of personal circumstances I made the decision at the beginning of 2023 to resign as Code Maintenance Officer. A new Code Maintenance Officer has been appointed by the ICEB executive, Matthew Horspool from the United Kingdom. Matthew comes highly recommended and I wish Matthew all the best in this role.

The Australian Braille Authority thanks Kathy for her dedicated work for ABA and for ICEB over many years on the executive. Kathy’s guidelines and transcription tips will remain a vital part of the ABA’s website for future transcribers. We are grateful that Kathy intends to stay on the CMC as an observer.

### Public Relations

Maria Stevens from New Zealand chairs the Public Relations Committee and coordinates a team of people monitoring social media. This news is shared through a quarterly newsletter, the iceb-announce listserv, Facebook and Twitter. For links to social media, please refer to <http://iceb.org/icontact.htm.>

### ICEB braille technology

James Bowden of RNIB in the UK is Chair of the ICEB Braille Technology Committee. Sam Taylor is the Australian representative. James continues to lead intensive work checking and fixing errors in UEB translation within LibLouis, an Open Source braille translator that is used to power many braille technologies such as refreshable braille displays.

### ICEB Research

The Committee operates via listserv, sharing news of braille research published through conferences and journals. On average, 2 or 3 emails are sent per month. Natalie Martinello of Canada now chairs the ICEB Research Committee.

### ICEB Music Committee

We recently welcomed two new members to the music committee list. Karen Gearreald has resigned as US representative, and we welcome Bill McCann, founder and distributor of Dancing Dots and the GoodFeel Music Translator and suite of products. Christina Christensen, transcriber from Vision Australia, has also joined our committee as an observer from Australia.

At the ICEB mid-term meeting, the Music Committee featured a presentation from Katherine Rodda, Music Section, National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), Library of Congress, Washington, DC, speaking about Digitizing Hardcopy Braille Music. The following points were raised:

* when considering digitizing old scores ICEB music committee members found that many of them are in an obsolete format, in an old code no longer used, and the paper size is an issue, or the scores were done by slate and stylus with uneven margins and formatting. How does NLS make a decision about which of these old scores to digitize? Katie responded that there are three tiers of decisions. First tier: if a patron requested a copy or if there's only have one copy in the collection. The second tier is for preservation purposes; Katie says she takes the approach that anyone could ask for anything so NLS tries to scan as much as possible to maintain a robust collection. The third tier includes historical reasons which can be a harder to prioritize. NLS wants materials that are useful while also preserving old materials. If a piece of music is only available in one format but is a popular request they will ask for it to be re-transcribed.
* Jordie asked if a student needs a current version of an older piece, how can that get done? Katie replied that some things are quicker to do than others; sometimes creating a new transcription is faster than scanning it and cleaning it up.
* Jordie asked if the Marrakesh treaty will make it easier for NLS to share and borrow braille music materials. Katie replied that she would love for that to happen eventually because it's in everyone's favour that it gets more braille music. Katie suggested that meeting attendees sign up for NLS music reader newsletter or explore the NLS music

braille blog: <https://blogs.loc.gov/nls-music-notes/>

The committee has discussed clefs and their usage. In summary: most feel that they are necessary in examination material, but not for general music learning material/scores.

The committee will publicise our position on the BANA Music Braille 2015 manual.

In previous discussions, we have talked about creating a supplement to the New International Manual of Braille Music by Betty Crollick. Updating the entire manual is not in the scope of this committee or a priority for member countries. We have documentation on areas which need to be updated collated by our UK colleagues and endorsed and added to by this committee. Our next task is to write a position statement stating that we as ICEB endorse the BANA Music Braille 2015 document as our most definitive resource, along with the International Manual of Braille Music.

From an Australian perspective: Vision Australia is testing the MakeBraille software. There are still areas of improvement needed, particularly when transcribing vocal music with Australian country formatting conventions. We have two new transcription staff who are getting up to speed but have expertise in coding and also typesetting in Sibelius.

### Conclusion

It has been a delight to chair the Australian Braille Authority for the past seven years, and through what has been a term like no other. In 2020 we were forced to postpone our National Meeting, and work completely changed for our members. I have great faith in our organisations supporting both children and adults, and perhaps what these years have taught us is to be even more flexible in the way we deliver services going forward. I predict work ahead for the ABA in updating the DBT Producer’s Manual (2011) which will require adding new codes as well as deleting those that no longer function. I’d love to see more participation from our members both through face to face gatherings and online workshops as we all work to share resources and new ideas. Other important projects ABA will be part of around mathematics include UEB support for programs including JAWS for Windows, and the Raised Math Project to promote born accessible maths textbooks in a form our students can use. Through global collaboration, I am sure ABA will help to implement UEB in many more applications servicing the broader braille reading community.

Thank you to the ABA executive for your proactive and dedicated work over the past 12 months. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the President of the Round Table, Sonali Marathe, the Administration Officer, Marjorie Hawkings and the Round Table Executive for your support of ABA, the work of ICEB, and also to me as Chair. Braille is speeding ahead in its implementation in a wide variety of devices and programs, and I look forward to being part of ABA’s braille promotion and braille development from a little further back from the head table.

**Jordie Howell**

Chair, Australian Braille Authority

# Report from Sydney Braille Forum

The Sydney Braille Forum is an integral part of the Australian Braille Authority; enabling members interested in the production, teaching or use of braille to come together to promote braille and to discuss braille related issues.

It is a forum that encourages both advocacy and discussion on a range of braille related issues as well as fostering social networking among its members. Dinner often follows to allow further informal conversations.

Last year, we were excited to finally have some face-to-face meetings, they were held on the Wednesday evenings. In 2023 we have held ‘hybrid’ meetings inclusive of both zoom and face-to-face and we engaged many new members across the state. We also held a very successful online Braille Awards Night on 16th November, celebrating our students’ achievements in the Braille Writing Competition. This annual competition is designed to promote braille literacy among our students and is continuing to grow in popularity every year.

We had 34 students who participated this year they could choose from a story starter or write a creative story of their choice. They were also asked to identify braille errors in a passage to encourage proof reading of their work. We had entrants from Department of Education, Catholic Education and Independent schools. The Braille marking committee was fortunate to have volunteer touch readers who were former participants in the competition.

It is wonderful to recognise our students’ efforts to not only their parents, but also their teachers, ISTVs and wider school community raising an awareness of the importance of braille reading and writing skills for vision-impaired/blind students.

We were extremely fortunate to have very generous sponsors from DoE, DoE Braille and Large Print Services (who donated braille books as awards), Quantum RLV, Vision Australia and HumanWare. A range of assistive technology, which will equip our students for the future.

Our general meetings, for the first half follows a business agenda discussing events in the field, summary of ABA and Roundtable meetings, accessibility issues, new resources available and braille-related questions. In the second part of the meeting we invite a guest speaker to discuss a topic of interest relevant to the group.

Our first guest speaker for 2023 will be General manager, Jason Stubbs. Jason will share with us all about blind sports and the support available for people with low vision and blindness to access all active Recreation and Sports with the appropriate level of adaptation and to have access to information that supports them across community participation and contribution.

Kim Barber – Convenor SBF

# Queensland Regional Braille Forum

Braille Club Queensland has had some difficulty during 2022 because a lot of the year we were uncertain whether we would be able to meet in person. To overcome this, we planned to meet online, once a month. This didn’t happen every month because we couldn’t get everyone together.

In 2023 we want every school aged braille reader to join the fun online, on the first Tuesday of the month. We are developing some activities and we are also looking for support from the broader braille community to engage more kids.

On Saturday August 13, the Australian Braille Authority (QLD) Braille Club visited the Royal Queensland Show (Ekka), which is Queensland's largest and most loved annual event, attracting on average 400,000 people annually.

The Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland (RNA) is a not-for-profit member-based association that runs the Ekka on behalf of the community each year. The RNA's mission is to celebrate and champion the essential role agriculture plays in the everyday lives of Queenslanders.

The Ekka is delighted to give back to the Queensland community and the visit by the Braille Club was supported by the RNA.

Braille maps were also produced by Braille House for the Ekka in 2022 and these were used by the Braille Club as they made their way around the grounds.

All of the attendees had a fantastic day as they took in the atmosphere, picked up showbags, went on rides and enjoyed a famous strawberry ice-cream.

# Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust (BANZAT)

We wrote and completed the first year of BANZAT's three-year Strategic Plan which will conclude on 30 June 2024. Trustees shared highlights of the plan and the outcomes.

**Vision:** High quality braille is available and accessible to all people who use it for work, education, or life.

**Mission:** To encourage widespread usage of braille by anyone for whom it will be beneficial by:

* Promoting a positive message about Braille.

In Raising awareness of literacy through Braille we again ran a competition for children drawing in ten learners. In the current year we have considerably extended the awareness raising into a Braille Challenge and we look forward to reporting a much larger inclusion of learners at next year's AGM.

* Ensure the code is updated to meet the needs of users and reflect current trends in print.
* Setting and monitoring production standards, and
* Collaborating with local and international partners.

We attended over Zoom the meeting of the Australian Braille Authority in May. In June we attended over Zoom the Executive Committee meeting of the International Council on English Braille.

**Values:**

* Access: All New Zealanders who require braille to access information have the right to braille literacy.
* Equity: All New Zealanders who are blind, deafblind, and vision impaired have the right to equal access to print information in Braille.
* Sharing: A spirit of co-operation and resource sharing is fostered among Trustees and those it seeks to assist.
* Respect: Consumer consultation is practised with respect to all aspects of the Trust's work.

There was one candidate who sat and passed the Trans-Tasman Certificate of Proficiency in Unified English Braille.

BANZAT is pleased to announce the results of a nationwide survey within the Braille user community regarding formatting of the word Braille in New Zealand English. A clear majority expressed a desire for the word Braille to be capitalised in all situations, regardless of whether it is being used as a proper noun or not.

# Reports from Member Organisations

## Statewide Vision Resource Centre

SVRC Transcribers, and the Transcription service generally, are doing well in the new (post-COVID) normal! Many of the staff feel that they are more productive when working from home. We even have one full-time staff member working from Queensland's Central Coast.

The drop in braille requests over the COVID years U-turned around rather abruptly in the past few months with a 20% increase in requests compared to the same time last year.

Ozzie Dots is swimming along with recent sales to two very satisfied Canadian organisations; and we have had fruitful negotiations with ViewPlus regarding use of their embossers to emboss our files (Duxbury with PictureBraille). The Ozzie Dots Teacher Resource has been updated so if you don't have the most recent edition, please email me or download your copy from the SVRC website. The next Ozzie Dots instalment will include books featuring the sounds that are typically taught during the first year of school including TH, SH, CH, AR, WH, ED, ER and possibly some of those handy contractions/words such as RIGHT, PART, WHERE, WERE, HIS, WAS, BRAILLE, BLIND etc.

Staff are busy transcribing plenty of diagram-heavy VCE (Year 12) subjects such as Chemistry, Biology, Maths, Psychology, along with the more text-based subjects: Legal Studies, Health and Human Development, Humanities, Politics, Philosophy etc. Braille music is in very high demand with readers from Foundation to Year 12 making requests!

There's also the usual number of guided readers, novels, text books, worksheets and other learning materials for primary and secondary students.

We have embarked on a process to update our existing docx files, adding heading structure and other improvements to accessibility and navigability for students who access these material in alternative formats using devices with refreshable braille displays.

Recent projects have included building collections of:

* books by and featuring Australia's first nations people for primary and secondary students
* artworks as tactile diagrams, particularly those that are featured with audio description on art gallery websites – we plan to make this resource available as a free downloadable file via the SVRC website
* sexuality and relationship tactile diagrams which will also be available through the SVRC website as a free download

We continue to create 3-D printed kits to support the transition from real objects to tactile diagrams and have enjoyed being part of the Monash University ARC Linkage project investigating 3D prints which recently concluded.

At a recent Community of Practice, presenter Professor Cay Holbrook, reminded us that braille readers "deserve consistent, ongoing, direct instruction by qualified teachers of the vision impaired". We support this premise and will continue to develop resources and offer professional learning to support and encourage Visiting Teachers' use of Learning Media Assessment tools to establish the best format(s) for each student. Further, we support ongoing assessment to provide evidence and reporting of students' speed, fluency and comprehension along with their efficient use of the learning media through improved continued liaison with Victorian Visiting Teachers.

**Deb Lewis** – debra.lewis@education.vic.gov.au

Transcription Manager, Statewide Vision Resource Centre

## VisAbility

VisAbility’s Braille Transcription Service operates within the Accessible Information Service. We provide braille transcription and tactile graphics to individuals and organisations, as well as many consultancy requests for information about braille and how to provide access to written information. Our Library services include access to braille books. The AIS are registered members of the Accessible Books Consortium (ABC).

Due to our funding through the Print Disability Services Program (PDSP) for 2021-2024, we provide conversions free to our clients who don’t receive any other government funding.

Within the 2022-2023 year, we continued to provide braille transcription nationwide. Our current braille specialists, Leone Carroll and Samantha Harratt have produced over 7000 pages of braille in the past 12 months. These have included university advanced Maths units, some manual braille music transcriptions, festival programs, labels for displays in museums, signage and packaging labels, business cards, knitting patterns, recipes and menus, braille calendars for various states, braille and tactile birthday cards, in addition to numerous novels and texts specifically requested by individuals. We investigate different ways of representing visual information through tactile graphics.

One of our most popular annual transcriptions has been for a local Christmas Carol event. We provided braille carol songbooks, including tactile Christmassy images, and individual sponsor vouchers.

We have been investigating additional options for obtaining braille paper supplies within Australia.

We continue to work with volunteers who transcribe remotely, increasing our availability of braille books (which we are progressively converting to e-books) for our library service.

We can be contacted at braille@visability.com.au

## NextSense

### NextSense launch of UEB competency exams

<https://uebonline.org/>

NextSense is committed to promoting the right to Braille literacy for children and adults in all regions of the world. After the successful launch of two UEB literary training modules and three UEB mathematics training modules, we are pleased to launch the online competency examinations in UEB Literary and UEB Introductory Mathematics.

The online nature of the UEB examination and certification process provides a pathway to certification in Braille competency, regardless of geographical location–all that is required is a PC or laptop and internet connection. The exams are fully accessible and self-paced, with automated marking on completion of the exam. A single exam fee of AUD 70.00 is required, and candidates have the option to complete the exams at any time during the year. Successful candidates will receive a certificate of UEB competency and letter of results for the completed exam. Unsuccessful candidates will be offered the opportunity to re-sit the exam within a specified period at no extra charge.

### NextSense Courses and VISCON

<https://www.nextsense.org.au/professional-education>

This year, we are offering a wide range of programs and courses for educators, therapists, health professionals, parents, carers and anyone else with an interest in the field.

Topics include the ins and outs of JAWS, Braille literacy, CVI Framework and more. A complete list of courses can be obtained by using the link at the top of this section.

**VISCON 2023:**

<https://www.nextsense.org.au/professional-education/viscon-2023>

This year, VISCON 2023 will be held at our North Rocks site on 31 August and 1 September.

## Accessible Information Service

The AIS team designed and produced a braille and large print version of a book Tassie Rhymes for Little Tigers in collaboration with author/ illustrator Narelda Joy for a Tasmanian Charity Toast for Kids. This book was designed and created to include blind and low vison readers. Being the first of its kind, it will be free for parents of newborn babies in Tasmania. It will be available at libraries and for purchase at major bookstores all over Australia.

## Blind Citizens Australia

* BCA has had no advocacy cases relating to braille in the past 12 months
* BCA has not been required to provide advocacy support to any NDIS participants regarding matters that involved braille transcription, braille devices, or otherwise
* In the past 12 months, BCA produced 2 editions of our magazine, 82 people received a braille copy of each edition.
* For our last AGM, 84 members received their documents in braille

## Vision Australia

### Contributions from Marnie Rose and Jane Wegener

In the last 12 months the Vision Australia Transcription team have produced around 90,000 braille pages, 3,700 pages of music braille and 1,650 tactile diagrams.

Notable braille jobs include information and ballot papers for various elections, AFL fixtures, braille postcards from Santa, Sydney Festival guides, Comm Bank Smart terminal guides, various museum and gallery information, and the Tamworth Country Music Festival Guide.

The transcription team continue to grow their range of tactile products using the UV Printer and laser cutter. We have been working on some exciting projects with the QLD Eye Institute and the Art Gallery of NSW, improving access to the arts. We have also created some great children’s braille literacy resources for Vision Australia’s Children’s services teams, as well some innovating board game and card game products for our recreation and Library teams.

In Library news, as of February 1, 2023, the library holds in its collection 8,483 braille titles, 775 print braille titles, 5,513 music braille titles and 887 Feelix kits. In total there are 14,771 braille titles in the collection.

Between 28/2/22 and 31/1/23 the library catalogued 194 braille titles, 59 print braille titles, 78 music braille pieces and 82 Feelix kits. 101 of the braille titles were for children and young adult level reading. The majority of the braille titles were acquired in response to suggestions for the collection made by library members.

49% of the braille children’s and young adult collection is now in Unified English Braille.

The LEGO braille collection continues to grow with 24 kits available for loan.

The Library holds a small collection of uncontracted braille for adults, currently 28 titles in popular genres. This was created in response to a need expressed by members learning braille who want to practice reading uncontracted titles that aren’t children’s books.

The Library has established a formal partnership with Indigenous Literacy Foundation. The purpose of this partnership is to distribute variety of Feelix sensory kits to playgroups based in remote and rural NT and WA. Our sensory and literacy kits will reach kids with print disability and are distributed by Indigenous Literacy Foundation to over 90 playgroups. This is an ongoing partnership, and we will be focusing on providing books promoting health in a fun and engaging way for children.

Finally, in partnership with Berbay Publishing, Vision Australia Library is proud to present our Big Vision children’s book series with braille and print, designed to encourage and inspire young people to explore their potential and believe what they can be.

We are publishing three Big Vision picture book titles in 2023, which feature three diverse champions and their unique stories and perspectives as they embarked on their varied careers. Matt Formston is a champion Paralympian, Craig Shananan is the owner of ‘The Blind Chef’ café, and Nikki Hind has walked runways in Australia and internationally with her fashion label, Blind Grit. The books will be Australia's first commercially sold book in braille.

Thank you.

## South Australian School and Services for Vision Impaired

### Accessible Format Production Report 2022

2022 has been a roller coaster of a year for AFP. Due to COVID rules, ill health and retirements we finished 2021 with just 3 staff, Janine Land, Tennille Smith and Toni Tiller!

At the beginning of the year two new members joined the team. Michael Walker, who is studying STEM teaching at Flinders University and is very proficient at all thing’s computer. Michael has carried on the work with the AFP Automation program speeding up and streamlining our processes. Oliver Land is studying English at Flinders University. He has a music background and is totally immersing himself in Braille music.

At the beginning of term 2 we were sad to see Toni Tiller leave us after 12+ years. In term 2 Nicole Van Der Borch, a SASSVI classroom SSO, joined our team bringing with her valuable insights into the way students use the resources we create. In term 3 Alice Mussared joined us. Alice has an arts background and is proficient in Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator. Alice also has some experience in music, so is learning music braille this year.

These new team members have all gained the skills required very quickly which has resulted in a strong, dedicated team.

Due to the almost complete change of staff most of last year was spent in training. This resulted in a deeper understanding and a more formalised use of braille code and formatting. This led to a drive to make sure the whole of our service uses the ABA rules and guidelines in a consistent manner for the benefit of VI students especially between Primary and High schools. AFP created a series of documents to clarify and inform and these were sent out to the service. Throughout last year and this we have continued to streamline and clarify our methods of formatting, especially for high school textbooks.

Also, we looked into best practice for large print for low vision students. A lot of discussion was had with teachers, Advisory Teachers and students in conjunction with the Clear Print guidelines for the best results for students.

Also, we revised and recorded our method of producing electronic files for braille users especially for year 11 and 12 students. Making sure we use the most suitable formatting for the correct device. Then disseminating this knowledge out to the service so that teachers and Advisory Teachers know the best format to request for a particular student.

Completing the many braille music requests proved a challenge this year. We invested in “Goodfeel”, a music translating software, which helps to convert print music into a braille music file. This alleviated some of the labour-intensive work and therefore time. A series of training and development mornings were organised with Lucy Mortimer, a vision impaired music teacher and braille music expert, which several members of AFP and the wider SASSVI community attended. These sessions have proved to be very successful for learning and standardising braille music methodology. We will have 3 well trained music braille transcribers.

During 2022 we created 207 textbooks and novels and 308 worksheets.

So, finishing up the year with almost a whole new team we look forward to next year. As always, we will prioritise shorter turnaround times for student requests. We will be balancing this with the need for research into and development of our processes in the areas of accessible documents for electronic devices, improving tactile diagrams, and investigating 3D modelling.