Australian Braille Authority

Annual Meeting Minutes

Saturday, 15 May 2021

Held online via Zoom

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# Australian Braille Authority Annual Meeting Minutes

## Saturday, 15 May 2021

### Held online via Zoom

Chair: Jordie Howell

Minute Takers: Leona Holloway and Sam Taylor

Meeting Commenced: 10am

# 1. Welcome and Personnel

Chair Jordie Howell gave a Welcome to Country and outlined the meeting protocols.

## 1.1 Roll call

Annette Sutherland—Braille and Large Print Services, NSW (observer); Sydney RBF

Christine Simpson—Information Alternatives (delegate)

Clive Lansink—Accessible Information and Communications (observer)

Debra Lewis—SVRC (delegate)

Debra Murphy—Vision Australia (observer)

Frances Gentle—SPEVI (delegate); NextSense (observer)

Hattie Douglass—SASVI (observer)

Jane Wegener—Vision Australia (delegate)

Jamie Kelly—Vision Australia (observer)

Jordie Howell—ABA Chair; Vision Australia (observer)

Josie Howse—ABA Executive member

Kate Stephens—Monash University (observer)

Kathy Riessen—SASVI (delegate)

Kim Barber—Braille and Large Print Services, NSW (delegate); Sydney RBF

Leona Holloway—Monash University (delegate)

Leone Carroll—VisAbility (delegate)

Maria Stevens—Blind Low Vision NZ (observer)

Mary Schnackenberg—Accessible Information and Communications (delegate); BANZAT (observer)

Michael Zannis—RSB (delegate)

Paul Price—RPH (delegate)

Ramona Mandy

Richard Barker—Braille House (delegate)

Robyn McKenzie—Blind Citizens Australia (delegate)

Sam Taylor—Pacific Vision (delegate)

Scott Erichsen

Sonali Marathe—NextSense; Round Table President

Sondra Wibberley

Tristan Clare—NextSense

Wendy Sara—Braille House (observer)

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## 1.2 Apologies

Melissa Fanshawe—Queensland RBF Convenor

## 1.3 In memoriam

### Nicole Donaldson

We were deeply saddened by the loss of our dear friend and colleague, Nicole Donaldson, in June 2019 after a long battle with a congenital heart condition.

Nicole was a tireless educator and advocate for people with vision impairment. We are deeply grateful for the many contributions that Nicole made to the fields of braille and education for students with vision impairment.

Nicole was first appointed as Convenor of the Queensland Regional Braille Forum in 20210, holding the position until 2016. During this time, she was largely responsible for instituting and running the popular and now long-running braille club, bringing braille reading students together to support a love of braille. As the Convenor, Nicole also attended ABA executive meetings and she assisted with the ABA annual meeting minutes in 2014. In 2015, Nicole was elected as Vice-President of SPEVI, the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment.

– With thanks to JuleeAnn Bell

### Edie Watkins

Edie Watkins died shortly after our last ABA annual meeting in May 2019. Edie was a teacher at the North Rocks Central School for Blind Children during the late 1960s and 1970s. Edie taught Braille basics, introduced her students to typing, encouraged her students to explore the environment around them and made her lessons interesting and enjoyable. She was a stickler for correct spelling, grammar and pronunciation; and concerned to ensure the basics of mathematics were understood. Her teaching of blindness-specific skills set her students up for lifelong success.

Not only was Edie one of the pioneers in the vision education arena in our part of the world, she was also a wonderful friend to our community. She never lost interest in her students—a number of whom continued to maintain contact with her.

Edie was a wonderful teacher who had a quiet, gentle and definite manner about her. She contributed significantly to the field of vision education in NSW and—quite possibly—more broadly.

– With thanks to Sondra Wibberley

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### Peter Evans

Peter touched the lives of many who are blind or vision impaired through his leadership of RVIB Children's Services (1977-1991) and then as Executive Director of the RVIB from 1991 to 1993.

Peter brought considerable expertise and a commitment to a high educational standard and community integration to his work at the RVIB School in Burwood Victoria. Under his leadership the organisation moved residential services from an institutional model to a series of smaller family style group houses. He also oversaw the establishment of the reverse integration program where blind students spent part of their school week in a local school setting and students from participating schools were integrated into the RVIB education program.

– With thanks to John Simpson

### Julian Lee

Julian Lee was blind at birth and was involved in music since the age of six. His first major involvement after University was as band leader and arranger for the New  Zealand Broadcasting Service, leaving for Sydney in 1956 to work as an arranger for the Australian Broadcasting Service and Channel Seven. He later formed his own company, producing commercials for radio and television.

In 1963 he left for Los Angeles and in the following years arranged for "Greats" such as George Shearing, Frank Sinatra and Peggy Lee. Julian attended the national braille music camps from 1995 to 2000 and mentored and inspired young braille reading musicians, sharing his knowledge in a humorous humble way. Julian died in December 2020.

– With thanks to Jordie Howell

### Denise English

Denise English was a teacher at the RVIB Burwood School from 1967 or '68. She inspired a love of reading in her students.

Several of her students were present at the meeting.

Thanks to Ross de Vent for this contribution.

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# 2. Administration

## 2.1 Meeting arrangements

## 2.2 Arrangements for ABA workshop Wednesday 19 May

An ABA workshop will be held as part of the Round Table Conference this Wednesday on the topic of braille music.

## 2.3 Confirmation of meeting agenda

Confirmed.

# 3. Minutes of 2019 Annual Meeting

## 3.1 Tabling of meeting minutes of 5 May 2019

The 2019 minutes have been circulated and are available on the ABA website at <http://brailleaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/3-2021-Report-of-the-Chair-Jordie-Howell-12pt.docx>.

Jordie moved that the minutes be accepted. Seconded by Tristan.

## 3.2 Business arising from 2019 minutes not listed elsewhere

Ramona asked about braille paper supply, which was discussed at the 2019 meeting. This will be added to the agenda under Other Business.

# 4. Reports

## 4.1 Round Table Update—Sonali Marathe, Round Table President

Sonali emphasised that everyone in ABA is a part of Round Table and has played a part in its success.

Congratulations to ABA on its 40 year anniversary. So many things have changed over this time!

The Round Table Conference 2020 was unfortunately cancelled due to the COVID pandemic. We have seen a lot of collaboration nationally and internationally throughout the pandemic. Round Table has partnered with the UK Association for Accessible

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Formats (UKAAF), who produce a large number of short guidelines. By working together, we hope to avoid duplication in the future.

Round Table has created a strategic plan for the next three years. We are invested in research into accessible formats. We need to keep reviewing our guidelines to remain current. We also need to work with publishers.

The Guidelines for Producing Accessible Graphics is at its last stages of review. It will be a very comprehensive document.

The Guidelines for Producing Chinese Braille have also been under development. It is a great initiative by Deb Lewis and her team.

Inclusive publishing—Sydney University Press put out two reports last year on accessible formats. The first was a survey on what are the barriers to accessibility, and the second looked at the value of accessibility to publishers. The TROVE project is being re-started to create a catalogue of accessible format materials. A list of trusted entities has been forwarded by Round Table to the Australian Publishers Association so that they will be more comfortable sharing their files for accessible production. Sonali asked us to imagine a world in which publishers only used double quotes (not single quotes). What if they used a style for footnotes and margin notes that would make accessibility easier? Round Table are using a top-down and bottom-up approach to educate publishers around what is needed to create a utopia of accessibility.

Lastly, Sonali extended her thanks to Jordie as ABA Chair and Round Table Executive member. Jordie thanked Sonali for the work she is doing with publishers and as Round Table President.

## 4.2 ABA Annual Report—Jordie Howell, ABA Chair

Refer to [Appendix A.](#_Appendix_A:_2021)

Jordie read highlights from her report.

The report was tabled by Jordie; seconded by Sondra Wibberly.

## 4.3 Regional Braille Forum reports

### 4.3.1 Queensland Braille Forum—Sam Taylor

Refer to [Appendix B.](#_Appendix_B:_Australian)

### 4.3.2 Sydney Braille Forum—Kim Barber

Refer to [Appendix C.](#_Appendix_C:_Report)

## 4.4 Music working group report—Jordie Howell

Jordie briefly discussed the MakeBraille project. Vision Australia has been involved in MakeBraille, an international project to convert print music to braille. There is still some development to be done but impressive headway is being made.

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# Five Minute Feature—Queensland RBF braille games

Five minute features are a new feature at the 2021 ABA Annual meeting, to provide brief interludes highlighting stories about braille.

In this five minute feature, Convenor of the Queensland Regional Braille Forum, Melissa Fanshawe, spoke with members of the Queensland Braille Club about what braille games they like to play and what other games they would like to see available in braille format.

Several attendees of the meeting commented on games that they have in braille format, such as Cluedo and Snakes and Ladders.

## 4.5 Member reports

### 4.5.1 Statewide Vision Resource Centre (SVRC) Victoria—Deb Lewis

Refer to [Appendix D.](#_Appendix_D:_Report)

### 4.5.2 NextSense (formerly the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children)—Tristan Clare

Refer to [Appendix E.](#_Appendix_E:_Report)

### 4.5.3 Department of Education and Training NSW—Kim Barber

Refer to [Appendix F.](#_Appendix_F:_NSW)

Scott Erichsen praised the initiative rejecting procurement of textbooks that are not accessible. Kim commented that to qualify for procurement, products need to be able to be used without vision, colour, hearing, and motor abilities.

Frances Gentle wondered whether the declaration of accessibility is online, as it would be helpful for others. Kim will check whether she is able to share this.

Sondra Wibberly said that BCA would support the initiative.

### 4.5.4 Braille House—Richard Barker

Welcome to Richard Barker, who joined Braille House as the General Manager just eight weeks ago. He looks forward to meeting everyone in person in the near future.

Refer to [Appendix G](#_Appendix_G:_Report) for the Braille House report.

### 4.5.5 Vision Australia—Jane Wegener

Refer to [Appendix H.](#_Appendix_H:_Report)

Frances Gentle asked whether Vision Australia is still a member of the Accessible Books Consortium, and do their library members have access to Bookshare? Jamie Kelly

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confirmed that this is the case. Sarah Bloedorn and Andrew Furlong will report on this at a presentation at the RT Conference on Monday.

## 4.6 Publications

### 4.6.1 Australian UEB Training Manual—Kathy Riessen

The last revision was in September 2016.

In October 2019 Section 7.6 of the rule book was rewritten. This relates to quotes and apostrophes.

A third edition of the Australian UEB Training Manual was required due to updates to UEB. The main changes are in lesson 8, lesson 23, lesson 24, the glossary and index. The examples and explanations have been updated but the exercises themselves have not changed. The print version is complete and the braille version is nearing completion. The updated manual will be placed on the ABA website and notification will be given on ozbrl and the ABA Facebook page.

UEB Online uses the Australian manual as the basis for its literary lessons. It will be updated to reflect the changes to the manual.

Kathy recommends printing out the manual for hard copy reference.

Frances Gentle asked whether we need to have Australia in the title. The document is used worldwide as support for UEB Online and there are questions about why Australia is in the title. Kathy said that the Training Manual includes formatting concepts that are specific to Australia. These have been omitted from UEB Online.

### 4.6.2 Chinese Braille—Kathy Riessen

We are very excited that the Chinese Braille guidelines are almost ready for publication, to add to our collection of guidelines on treatment of foreign languages. If there is anyone who is able to contribute to guidelines for other languages such as Arabic, please let us know.

Mary Schnackenberg asked ABA to share this work with ICEB. People coming to new countries need to have the opportunity to continue to receive braille in their native language. Kathy clarified that the guidelines are being written for students learning a second language. For a native speaker, they should use braille in their full original code. She offered to write an item for the ICEB newsletter.

Tristan clarified that Doreen Liu and Zhi Jin, who contributed to the new guidelines, are native speakers of Chinese.

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## 4.7 Trans-Tasman Certificate of Proficiency in Unified English Braille

### 4.7.1 Josie Howse—Australia

Sadly the 2020 Trans-Tasman Examination was cancelled due to Covid restrictions.

In 2019 there were 8 registrations. One candidate withdrew and 7 sat the test. 1 braille reader, 2 large print readers and 4 print readers.

All candidates received an itemised list including where marks were lost.

We have a total of 77 candidates to date who have successfully passed the certificate.

Cathy mentioned there are practice papers available on the Brailleaustralia website for those looking to sit the test.

### 4.7.2 Maria Stevens—New Zealand

Australia and New Zealand colleagues plan to meet in early June 2021 to discuss the certificate process, sharing updates with Jordie, Josie, Kathy, Kristin, Mary, Lee and myself.

New Zealand had 30 candidates who sat the Trans-Tasman Certificate of Proficiency in UEB. This included 1 braille user, 1 large print and 28 print users. Of these, 29 passed. New Zealand also offered the re-sit option.

We also did some work on the true cost of setting, marking, administration and report writing involved with the certificate with a view to ensuring what BANZAT does, and is accountable for in the future.

BANZAT celebrated 10 years of BANZAT’S work at our November 2020 meeting. Two highlights of our celebrations were a brief musical presentation by four adult learners of braille, who had been musicians prior to losing their sight, and had learned their musical parts from braille scores.

With support from BLENNZ teachers we ran a poetry writing competition for primary and secondary school braille students. Some of these poems were read aloud at the ten year celebration.

Australia and New Zealand will meet in early June to discuss the joint running of the Trans-Tasman Certificate in Braille Proficiency. New Zealand held the exam in 2020 whereas Australia did not.

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## 4.8 Communication with members

### 4.8.1 Facebook page—Leona Holloway

As of April 2021, the ABA Facebook page had just under 1,000 followers. Our typical follower is female (76%) and Australian (62%). Other countries with ten or more followers are USA, New Zealand, UK, Pakistan, India, Greece and the Philippines.

The most popular posts in the last two years were:

* Braille fail (hot surface do not touch)—4K
* Braille fail (unisex accessible lift)—2.7K
* Tactile Rubiks cubes available from Spotlight stores—1.8K
* Onkyo Braille competition announcement—1.2K
* Thanks to Fox Creek Wines for sponsorship and provision of wine (with braille labels) at SPEVI Conference—1.1K
* World Braille Day—1.1K
* Blindfolded Twister available with tactile symbols 1.1K

It should be noted that our love of braille fails has a more serious side, and has led to raised awareness of braille signage standards. Australian Building Codes require uncontracted braille at key access points, however there is no requirement for signs to be checked by a braille reader. If you find a braille fail, please alert the building owner, ask them to contact the signage company and provide contact details for ABA or a local organisation that can assist with proofreading.

### 4.8.2 Ozbrl Listserv—Sam Taylor

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. In December 2019, it was necessary due to a closure of services for our group to move away from YahooGroups, hence, Ozbrl's home was moved to Groups.io, which overall appears to have been a smooth transition in our community.

On the new platform, moderators can continue to circumvent spam before it's received by list members.

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.

We currently have 124 members on list, sharing hints, tips and resources, and according to the website, 225 topics have been discussed since December 2019.

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### 4.8.3 Australian Braille Authority Website—brailleaustralia.org

In the past two years, the ABA website has been updated with a News Feed, a Directory of braille in public spaces, a Transcription page, and a page about the Dickinson Memorial Literacy Competition.

The News feed can be accessed at <http://brailleaustralia.org/2020/>. It provides a space for details about upcoming or past events, awards and opportunities.

The Directory of Braille in Public Spaces was launched on 4 January 2020 as part of World Braille Day celebrations. Located at <http://brailleaustralia.org/finding-braille/public/>, the directory serves to help touch readers find available resources and to acknowledge organisations that have provided braille or tactile accessibility. The directory includes a list of restaurants with braille menus, cities with braille street signage, locations with braille and tactile maps, braille in playgrounds and parks, and products with braille labelling. A list of public art that is accessible by touch is also available from the Australia and New Zealand Accessible Graphics Group (ANZAGG) at <http://printdisability.org/about-us/accessible-graphics/publicart/>. Contributions are welcome. Please contact aba@printdisability if you know of further items that should be added to the Directory.

The Transcription page was launched in June 2020. Located at <http://brailleaustralia.org/about-braille/transcription/>, it provides links to the main sections of the ABA website of value to transcribers and also houses materials from the online workshop on transcribing apostrophes and quotation marks.

The Dickinson Memorial Literary Competition page gives information about this 100 year old competition, including a summary of key events throughout the years. The page can be found at <http://brailleaustralia.org/events/dickinson/>. Our thanks are extended to Braille House for conducting the competition and sharing their information.

As always, the Events page has been kept up-to-date with information about upcoming events relating to braille, such as training opportunities, conferences, technology displays, accessible art exhibitions and ABA meetings. See <http://brailleaustralia.org/events/>.

# 5. Elections

This year is an election year.

[Leona read slate.]

Thanks to outgoing members—Sam Taylor & Leona Holloway.

We have two vacancies in our Executive. We have interest in these positions and the incoming executive will co-opt one touch reader and one other person.

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# Five Minute Feature— Judy Dixon, ICEB

Judy Dixon, President of ICEB, warmly greeted the meeting, and presented on her very impressive braille slate collection. She also introduced us to the structure and work of ICEB.

# 6. International Reports

## 6.1 Braille Authority of NZ Aotearoa Trust—Maria Stevens (BANZAT Chair)

Refer to [Appendix I](#_Appendix_J:_Report).

## 6.2 Braille in the Pacific

Report not present.

## 6.3 ICEB

### 6.3.1 ICEB Executive—Jordie Howell

The International Council on English Braille coordinates and promotes the use of braille throughout the English-speaking world. ICEB developed Unified English Braille and continues to oversee its use, improvement and documentation.

Australia is a proud and active member country of ICEB, with support from the Round Table. The other member countries are Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, USA and the United Kingdom.

The ABA executive would like to thank Leona for her tremendous work representing Australia on the ICEB Executive over the last four years, in the role of Public Relations Officer.

In October 2020, the ICEB Seventh General Assembly was held online.

At this meeting, a new executive committee was elected: Judy Dixon (President) Christo de Klerk (Immediate Past President), Ilka Staglin (Ireland), Maria Stevens (New Zealand), Kathy Riessen (UEB Code Maintenance Chair, deterritorialised), Frances-Mary d'Andrea (Secretary, USA) Jen Goulden (Treasurer, Canada), James Bowden (UK), Ntshavheni Netshitune (South Africa). Since the assembly, two people have been added to the committee for their expertise: Mary Schnackenberg (New Zealand) and Natalie Martinello (Canada).

## 6.4 ICEB Music Committee— Jordie Howell (Chair)

Jordie and her committee have populated the music committee webpage outlining the way in which member countries are using braille music and technology and music programs.

The ICEB braille music page can be found here:

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<http://iceb.org/music.html>

Currently, the committee is drafting a proposal to encourage a collaborative approach with international organisations to update the New International Manual of Braille Music Notation (1996) by Betty Crollick.

## 6.5 UEB Code Maintenance Committee—Kathy Riessen

I was honoured to be appointed as the new ICEB Code Maintenance Officer and chair of the Code Maintenance Committee (CMC) at the virtual General Assembly, October 2020.

UEB is not a static code. As language changes or as issues arise with UEB, the CMC discuss these with the view to updating the Rules of UEB accordingly. The work of the CMC is mostly carried out via an email listserve that consists of numerous observers which include braille readers, teachers, transcribers, proofreaders etc. Each member country of ICEB has an official voting representative on this committee. As Code Maintenance Officer, I do not represent any particular country and Australia has a separate voting representative who votes on behalf of the ABA.

Since the Rulebook was completed in 2013, there have been some additions and updates, which can be found at iceb.org/ueb.html. It is planned for a new edition of the Rulebook to be ready for release at the General Assembly 2024.

In April 2020, the word DeafBlind (with the interior capital) was added to the Shortforms List as a special exception to the "standing alone" rule. The CMC is now in discussion of how this affects the Rulebook and what needs to be added to the "standing alone" rule. Further discussion has also occurred in relation to whether or not interior capitals may be further used in longer words containing shortforms.

The CMC also has a subcommittee, whose role is to update the Guidelines for Technical Material. Initially I took on the role of chair of this as well as the CMC, but the decision has been made to appoint a separate chair and so spread the workload. Dónal Fitzpatrick from Ireland has volunteered to take on this role, and we look forward to his leadership in this regard.

To date only one section of the Guidelines for Technical Material has been finalised, Section 3: Signs of Operation and Comparison. This can also be found at the above web address. In current discussion is a new section on Omissions.

If you have any queries or suggestions regarding UEB, literary or technical, please refer them to the ABA executive, who can then determine whether or not these should be passed onto the CMC for discussion. To keep things manageable, the CMC does not take direction from individuals, but via the braille authority of each ICEB member country.

Kathy Riessen.

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### 6.5.1 Unified English Braille—Guidelines for Technical Materials—Kathy Riessen

## 6.6 ICEB Braille Technology Committee—Sam Taylor

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. The initial bulk of this work, with fixes to over 2,000 words, was implemented in version 3.12 of LibLouis in December 2019. Each technology using LibLouis will have its own timeline for updating to this new version. APH uses a separate version of LibLouis within Braille Blaster, however the list of updated words has been sent to them for incorporation.

The latest stable version of LibLouis was released on March 10 2021 and it's V3.17.

LibLewis V3.16 released Dec 2 2020 contains the following salient points relevant to the committee's work:

* Improvements to contraction use in UEB thanks to James Bowden. In particular the checkmark (U+2713) is added, the em dash (U+2014) is fixed, the right single quote used as apostrophe between letters is fixed and finally some more accented letters have been added.

James is still working on the letter to send out to technology companies re keeping up to date with LibLouis. He is also working with Dave Williams on the letter and Judy has also offered assistance.

* The next fix is the decimal point: there is an issue when you have, for example, NO.3 and it puts the numeric indicator in the wrong place.

In terms of electronic braille technology we have seen change in terms of new displays and notetakers. This includes Orbit Research Company who has recently released the Orbit Reader 40, HumanWare with a new line of Brailliant displays, and HIMS who are shortly due to release the BrailleSense 6.

James Bowden is Chair. Sam Taylor is Australian rep. James has been leading intensive work updating LibLouis UEB translation tables.

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## 6.7 ICEB Promotions Committee—Leona Holloway

The Public Relations Committee works to share the work of ICEB and to promote braille for literacy, access, education, employment and daily living skills. Maria Stevens is the Chair of the Public Relations Committee. ICEB news is shared through a quarterly newsletter, the iceb-announce listserv, Facebook and Twitter. For links, please refer to <http://iceb.org/icontact.htm>. The work of Australians and the Australian Braille Authority was shared through the ICEB newsletter with articles on the 2020 SPEVI Conference, the National Braille Music Camp, Tricia d'Apice's research into braille reading rates, Monash University's research into art gallery accessibility, UEB Online for math, and the 2019 Round Table Conference.

Please note that the ICEB Facebook page differs quite significantly from that of the Australian Braille Authority. The focus of the ABA page is on local news, products available in Australia, and informal discussions. The ICEB page has more braille news from around the globe and matters relating to ICEB and UEB. The ICEB page can be joined at <https://www.facebook.com/ICEBbraille/>.

## 6.8 ICEB Research Committee

The main role of the research committee is to share research as it is published, firstly within the committee and then through social media for significant work.

# Five Minute Feature—ABCBraille by Gonzalo Ernst

Gonzalo Ernst shared his work on ABCBraille, a new website that can convert a scanned image of contracted UEB braille to text with speech feedback. The website is located at <https://abcbraille.com/>.

Gonzalo joined the meeting to answer questions.

# 7. Other Business

## 7.1 Australia New Zealand Accessible Graphics Group (ANZAGG)— Leona Holloway

Leona reported on the work of ANZAG, and advertised the workshop to be held on Wednesday.

## 7.2 Braille Paper supply

The meeting discussed the difficulties agencies are having with poor quality paper producing dots that are not durable. Nigel said he would provide some options and report next meeting.

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## 7.3 World Blindness Summit

The meeting discuss the World Blindness Summit, a combined venture between ICEVI, WBU and ONCE that all are welcome to attend online.

The World Blindness Summit is held every four years and is promoted by the World Blind Union (WBU) and ICEVI, and for the first time in history, it has been postponed because of the global COVID 19 pandemic. At the WBS Madrid 2021, focus is placed on the challenges and goals involved in raising and intervening in the public reconstruction policy agenda, in company strategies and in raising awareness in civil society.

# 8. Meeting Close

approx. 2:00pm.

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# Appendix A: 2021 Report of the Chair—Jordie Howell

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

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

## Introduction

It has been two years since the ABA has been able to hold its national meeting, and 18 months since our regional braille forums have met regularly in person. In this report, we will share ways in which our organisations and braille forums have adapted to meet the needs of our braille readers, teachers and families. The 2019 ABA national meeting ran smoothly, assisted by the warm and welcoming staff of Braille House who hosted our meeting in Brisbane. At the ABA workshop, Transcribers and consumers were introduced to ABA's newest publication, Guidelines for Transcribing Foreign Language Material. Over the past two years, our guidelines have continued to be developed, in particular the Guidelines on the Transcription of Chinese Braille. Very sadly, we farewell and acknowledge three colleagues in braille who have passed on recently: a former Regional Braille Convenor, a braille teacher and a retired leader of a blindness agency. We also celebrate the achievements of one of our executive members who has been made a life member of SPEVI for her services to braille and the vision impaired.

ABA continues strong involvement with the International Council on English Braille. The Seventh General Assembly of ICEB was held online which brought together braille producers, researchers and consumers. In 2019 it was Australia's turn to organise materials for the Trans-tasman Certificate, however unfortunately, the examination was not conducted in 2020 owing to restrictions brought on by COVID.

## In Memoriam

We sadly acknowledge and remember three colleagues who passed on in 2019.

* **Nicole Donaldson** convened the Queensland Regional Braille Forum for six years and was largely responsible for instituting and running Braille Club. Nicole also held the position as Vice President of SPEVI.
* **Edie Watkins**, a teacher at the North Rocks Central School in the 1960s and 1970s. Edie taught many people Braille basics, introduced children to typing, encouraged her students to explore the environment around them and made lessons interesting and enjoyable.

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* **Peter Evans** was Head of RVIB Children's Services (1977−1991) and Executive Director of the RVIB for three years. Under Peter's leadership the organisation moved residential services from an institutional model to a series of smaller family style group houses. He also oversaw the establishment of the reverse integration program where blind students spent part of their school week in a local school setting and students from participating schools were integrated into the RVIB education program.

May our three highly valued colleagues and friends rest in peace.

## Structure and Accountability

ABA's 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. The ABA is a subcommittee of the Round Table on Information Access for People with a Print Disability, with our national meeting held separately as the first day of the Round Table conference each year. The executive committee is made up of the Chair and five members who are elected at the national meeting every two years. Convenors of our Regional Braille Forums attend ABA executive meetings as "members in attendance" and to report on forum activities. 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. As Chair of ABA, I am a member of the executive committee of the Round Table which meets monthly by phone and holds two face-to-face meetings annually. At each meeting I deliver a monthly report on ABA activities as well as contribute to the general work of the Round Table committee.

## ABA Executive Committee

The executive committee for 2018–2021:

* **Leona Holloway** (Correspondence Secretary)—Leona has worked extensively in the field of accessible information, most recently as a research assistant at Monash University improving access to graphics for people with a vision impairment. She administers the ABA webpage and Facebook page as well as helping develop guidelines, update ABA publications and answer queries and correspondence through the ABA website. Leona has served as Australia's representative to the International Council on English Braille for the past four years.
* **Kathy Riessen**—Kathy is the coordinator of Accessible Format Production at the South Australian School for Vision Impaired. Kathy's work with ABA includes assisting with developing braille formatting guidelines as well as running workshops on the Duxbury Braille Translator and ABA guidelines. Kathy's thoroughness and attention to detail enables her to troubleshoot Duxbury queries and find answers to complex braille matters. Kathy is a skilled music transcriber. She co-wrote the Braille Music Australian

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Addendum which is published on the ABA website and recently completed work on ABA's newest publication, Guidelines for Transcription of Foreign Language Material.

* **Josie Howse**—Josie has developed and taught many braille training programs both within Australia and abroad. Each year, Josie works tirelessly marking and coordinating the Braille Proficiency Examination for Australia. She co-edited the UEB Training Manual—Australian Edition and assists with updating formatting guidelines. Josie may have retired in 2019, however she still finds time to answer queries received from the UEB Online website. Learners both locally and internationally have benefited from Josie's support and tuition in braille.
* **Sam Taylor**—Sam is a lifelong user of braille and braille technologies. He has worked as blindness products specialist for two major adaptive technology companies and represents Australia on the ICEB Technical Committee. Sam has worked as a braille transcriber specialising primarily in music and is highly proficient in the braille music code.
* **Tristan Clare**—Tristan works as a Braille Transcriber and proof-reader for NextSense (formerly the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children) for 12 years. Tristan brings a detailed knowledge of UEB, braille maths and language to the ABA executive. In 2018, Tristan assisted with the development of ABA's Foreign Language Guidelines. She also undertook the task of marking up materials for touch readers for the Trans-Tasman Proficiency exam for the past two years. Tristan has also served as Secretary for the Sydney Regional Braille Forum.

**Sandra Robertson** stepped down this year as Sydney Braille Forum Convenor. We would like to thank Sandra for her attendance at executive meetings, and leadership of the Sydney RBF.

We welcomed Kim Barber to the position of convenor this year. **Kim Barber** and **Melissa Fanshawe** (Queensland Braille Forum Convenor) attend executive meetings and we are most grateful for their contributions and updates on forum activities each month. Thank you to this highly motivated and dedicated executive for your work and support this term.

## Regional Braille Forums

During 2019, Queensland RBF organised a day for students to attend the Ekka and participate in fun activities such as an audio described wood chop and egg cracking. Phia Dansma from Sonokids was also invited to a meeting of Braille club to introduce the concept of coding to students. In Sydney, the RBF held three online meetings via Zoom, and conducted a very successful Awards Night online.

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## Communications

### ABA Website

In the past two years, the ABA website has been updated with a News Feed a Directory of braille in public spaces, a Transcription page, and a page about the Dickinson Memorial Literacy Competition.

The News feed can be accessed at <http://brailleaustralia.org/2020/>. It provides a space for details about upcoming or past events, awards and opportunities.

The Directory of Braille in Public Spaces was launched on 4 January 2020 as part of World Braille Day celebrations. Located at <http://brailleaustralia.org/finding-braille/public/>, the directory serves to help touch readers find available resources and to acknowledge organisations that have provided braille or tactile accessibility.

The directory includes a list of restaurants with braille menus, cities with braille street signage, locations with braille and tactile maps, braille in playgrounds and parks, and products with braille labelling.

A list of public art that is accessible by touch is also available from the Australia and New Zealand Accessible Graphics Group (ANZAGG) at <http://printdisability.org/about-us/accessible-graphics/publicart/>. Contributions are welcome. Please contact aba@printdisability.org if you know of further items that should be added to the Directory.

The Transcription page was launched in June 2020. Located at <http://brailleaustralia.org/about-braille/transcription/>, it provides links to the main sections of the ABA website of value to transcribers and also houses materials from the online workshop on transcribing apostrophes and quotation marks.

The Dickinson Memorial Literary Competition page gives information about this 100 year old competition, including a summary of key events throughout the years. The page can be found at <http://brailleaustralia.org/events/dickinson/>. Our thanks are extended to Braille House for conducting the competition and sharing their information.

As always, the Events page has been kept up-to-date with information about upcoming events relating to braille, such as training opportunities, conferences, technology displays, accessible art exhibitions and ABA meetings. See <http://brailleaustralia.org/events/>.

### Facebook page

As of April 2021, the ABA Facebook page had just under 1,000 followers. Our typical follower is female (76%) and Australian (62%). Other countries with ten or more followers are USA, New Zealand, UK, Pakistan, India, Greece and the Philippines.

The most popular posts in the last two years were:

* Braille fail (hot surface do not touch)—4K

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* Braille fail (unisex accessible lift)—2.7K
* Tactile Rubiks cubes available from Spotlight stores—1.8K
* Onkyo Braille competition announcement—1.2K
* Thanks to Fox Creek Wines for sponsorship and provision of wine (with braille labels) at SPEVI Conference—1.1K
* World Braille Day—1.1K
* Blindfolded Twister available with tactile symbols 1.1K

It should be noted that our love of braille fails has a more serious side, and has led to raised awareness of braille signage standards. Australian Building Codes require uncontracted braille at key access points, however there is no requirement for signs to be checked by a braille reader. If you find a braille fail, please alert the building owner, ask them to contact the signage company and provide contact details for ABA or a local organisation that can assist with proofreading.

### Ozbrl

Ozbrl is the primary official channel for communications from the Australian Braille Authority, as well as a place where anyone can ask/respond to questions about braille and post information about braille-related events. Official messages from Round Table of relevance are also posted to ozbrl.

The ozbrl list is open to anyone with an interest in braille in Australia. To join the list, send an email to [ozbrl+subscribe@groups.io](mailto: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. It is wonderful to see the way in which the Ozbrl community shares ideas and resources and even the way in which list members help each other in times of crises, such as when deadlines are looming and a transcriber is met with a difficult braille dilemma. As of April 7 2021, Ozbrl has 123 members.

## Publications

ABA's publications are highly utilised by braille transcribers and producers, and our guidelines are a vital reference for candidates completing the proficiency test. These 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/>

## Proficiency in Unified English Braille

The Trans-Tasman Proficiency Certificate is conducted in the first two weeks of October each year. It consists of three sections: a proofreading passage containing errors to find, translation from print to braille and translation from braille to print. In 2019, we congratulated seven new holders of the Proficiency Certificate. Sadly, in 2020, the

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examination was not conducted due to concerns regarding requirements to emboss hard copy materials, quarantine times needed for transfer of materials, and the difficulty of marking remotely.

## Braille Music in Australia

On the ABA website with our directory of products and services, we have a list of braille music transcribers to aid communication between braille music specialists and provide contact information for individuals or organisations seeking braille music transcription or advice.

A successful National Braille Music camp was held in the 2019 June July school holidays with 32 students in attendance. The absence of Music Director Ben Clarke last year was a big change for camp, however two young university students took the bulk of the choir conducting and camp was enjoyed by all, culminating in the Friday night showcase concert.

### Josie Howse made life member of SPEVI

ABA extends our congratulations to Josie Howse, ABA executive member and coordinator of the Trans-Tasman Examination in Australia, who was awarded Honorary Life Membership of SPEVI in recognition of her significant contribution to the field of vision impairment in Australia and internationally during the past 41 years. In bestowing Honorary Life Membership, SPEVI recognises Josie's passion for education and braille literacy for children who learn by touch.

### Another tactile bank note in circulation

Australia added a new tactile bank note to our currency in October 2019. The $20 displays three small tactile bumps along both edges running lengthwise. Following the $50 in 2018, this is the fourth in our new generation of tactile bank notes. Thanks to Connor McLeod who launched a successful change.org petition in 2014, Australian bank notes are now recognisable by touch.

## International Council on English Braille

The International Council on English Braille coordinates and promotes the use of braille throughout the English-speaking world. ICEB developed Unified English Braille and continues to oversee its use, improvement and documentation.

Australia is a proud and active member country of ICEB, with support from the Round Table. The other member countries are Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, USA and the United Kingdom.

The ABA executive would like to thank Leona for her tremendous work representing Australia on the ICEB Executive over the last four years, in the role of Public Relations Officer.

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In October 2020, the ICEB Seventh General Assembly was held online. At this meeting, a new executive committee was elected: Judy Dixon (President) Christo de Klerk (Immediate Past President), Ilka Staglin (Ireland), Maria Stevens (New Zealand), Kathy Riessen (UEB Code Maintenance Chair, deterriorialised), Frances-Mary d'Andrea (Secretary, USA) Jen Goulden (Treasurer, Canada), James Bowden (UK), Ntshavheni Netshitune (South Africa). Since the assembly, two people have been added to the committee for their expertise: Mary Schnackenberg (New Zealand) and Natalie Martinello (Canada).

### UEB Code Maintenance Committee

I was honoured to be appointed as the new ICEB Code Maintenance Officer and chair of the Code Maintenance Committee (CMC) at the virtual General Assembly, October 2020.

UEB is not a static code. As language changes or as issues arise with UEB, the CMC discuss these with the view to updating the Rules of UEB accordingly. The work of the CMC is mostly carried out via an email listserve that consists of numerous observers which include braille readers, teachers, transcribers, proofreaders etc. Each member country of ICEB has an official voting representative on this committee. As Code Maintenance Officer, I do not represent any particular country and Australia has a separate voting representative who votes on behalf of the ABA.

Since the Rulebook was completed in 2013, there have been some additions and updates, which can be found at iceb.org/ueb.html. It is planned for a new edition of the Rulebook to be ready for release at the General Assembly 2024.

In April 2020, the word DeafBlind (with the interior capital) was added to the Shortforms List as a special exception to the "standing alone" rule. The CMC is now in discussion of how this affects the Rulebook and what needs to be added to the "standing alone" rule. Further discussion has also occurred in relation to whether or not interior capitals may be further used in longer words containing shortforms.

The CMC also has a subcommittee, whose role is to update the Guidelines for Technical Material. Initially I took on the role of chair of this as well as the CMC, but the decision has been made to appoint a separate chair and so spread the workload. Dónal Fitzpatrick from Ireland has volunteered to take on this role, and we look forward to his leadership in this regard.

To date only one section of the Guidelines for Technical Material has been finalised, Section 3: Signs of Operation and Comparison. This can also be found at the above web address. In current discussion is a new section on Omissions.

If you have any queries or suggestions regarding UEB, literary or technical, please refer them to the ABA executive, who can then determine whether or not these should be passed onto the CMC for discussion. To keep things manageable, the CMC does not

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take direction from individuals, but via the braille authority of each ICEB member country.

Kathy Riessen.

### ICEB PR

The Public Relations Committee works to share the work of ICEB and to promote braille for literacy, access, education, employment and daily living skills. Maria Stevens now chairs the Public Relations Committee and coordinates a team of people monitoring social media and the ICEB newsletter. This news is shared through a quarterly newsletter, the iceb-announce listserv, Facebook and Twitter. For links, please refer to <http://iceb.org/icontact.htm>.Over the past year, the work of Australians was shared through the ICEB newsletter with articles on the 2020 SPEVI Conference, the National Braille Music Camp, Tricia d'Apice's research into braille reading rates, Monash University's research into art gallery accessibility, UEB Online for math, and the 2019 Round Table Conference.

Please note that the ICEB Facebook page differs quite significantly from that of the Australian Braille Authority. The focus of the ABA page is on local news, products available in Australia, and informal discussions. The ICEB page has more braille news from around the globe and matters relating to ICEB and UEB. The ICEB page can be joined at <https://www.facebook.com/ICEBbraille/>.

### 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. The initial bulk of this work, with fixes to over 2,000 words, was implemented in version 3.12 of LibLouis in December 2019. Each technology using LibLouis will have its own timeline for updating to this new version. APH uses a separate version of LibLouis within Braille Blaster, however the list of updated words has been sent to them for incorporation.

### 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

Jordie and her committee have populated the music committee webpage outlining the way in which member countries are using braille music and technology and music programs.

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The ICEB braille music page can be found here:

<http://iceb.org/music.html>

Currently, the committee is drafting a proposal to encourage a collaborative approach with international organisations to update the New International Manual of Braille Music Notation (1996) by Betty Crollick.

## Conclusion

I am very proud of the work ABA has continued to do over the past two years and under extremely challenging conditions during 2020. We have seen Braille production often being delayed with staff working from remote locations and the postal services meaning further delays creating restrictions on timeliness of sending out materials to students. Regional Braille Forums have found ways to continue providing support to braille users across Australia through online delivery. Executive committee members have taken on new roles, developed guidelines and organised online workshops as well as kept up to date with the queries that come to us via the email address and website.

We have now come to the end of the 2018–2020 term for our committee which extended to three years as we did not conduct an ABA national meeting in 2020. I would like to extend my thanks to our ABA executive for your resilience over recent months, and your continued dedication to braille. I have highly valued your contributions during meetings and your support as we work together to promote an celebrate braille. I look forward to continued collaboration in whatever capacity you can give.

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 the work of ABA, the work of ICEB, and also to me as Chair. ABA is proud to be part of the broader focus of Round Table in the field of Information Access, and we celebrate how highly valued braille is as the vital literacy medium for people who are blind or have low vision.

Jordie Howell

Chair, Australian Braille Authority

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# Appendix B: Australian Braille Authority Queensland Forum Annual Report 2019 & 2020

2019 was a busy year for the ABA with 4 events:

### Term 1—Saturday 9th March 1–4pm Braille Games.

Seen students turned up to play braille games. Students played braille uno, braille cards, braille monopoly and braille scrabble. There was great discussion, particularly around what braille devices and technology the students used.

### Term 2—Saturday 25th May 1–4pm Coding.

A guest speaker, Phia from Sonokids was invited to Braille club on 25th May to introduce the concept of coding to our students. USQ Makerspace kindly printed tactile 3D models for the students to feel and understand the directions required in the coding on the iPad.

Phia was "very excited with the day and very happy with the learning outcomes of the workshop, and the wonderful feedback from your whole group". She was particularly chuffed how "one student clearly voiced his disappointment and frustration with first only being an observer when his classmates were coding, and his joy in now being able to be in control and independently do this".

More information can be found on:

<https://www.sonokids.org/ballyland-early-learning/ballyland-game-apps/>

The apps we used in the workshop were

* Ballyland Code 1: Say Hello,
* Ballyland Code 2: Give Rotor, and
* Ballyland Code 3: Pick Up

### Term 3—Saturday 17th August 1pm

We took the students on an excursion to the Royal Brisbane Show. Aka the Ekka Excursion. Students had hands on experiences with chickens, goats, cows, listened to the audio described wood chopping and got to cook their own quiche. The day was carefully mapped out with the Ekka and made possible with an O&M instructor, who came with us. This day was a big success as we got to eat Strawberry ice-creams.

### Term 4 Busking

In term 4, 7th December (10-1pm) our ARIA nominee, Lee Strickland, took the students Junction Festival in Annerley to busk! This followed on from a very successful QLD music camp that Lee had organised. The students had a very successful day, raising just over $100. After treating the musician to lunch, this event raised $90 for ABAQF.

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## 2020

In 2020, we just got in our AGM before being shut down for Covid 19.

At our AGM, Kurt came and showed us some braille graphics that he had been working on. Everyone enjoyed them and we suggested he get in touch with Leona. Terry also put forward to reinvigorate the tactile graphics team into 2020.

### Braille Club 2020 activities

* Audio Described Shrek—Touching Tour.
* Safe Dance—term 3 September—disco, Renee happy to do music and braille.
* Term 1—28th March—sport and games taster—adult and students 2pm.
* Saturday 13th June, 2pm.—adults and students.

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# Appendix C: Report from Sydney Braille Forum (SBF) 2020/2021

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, three online zoom meetings were held on the Wednesday evenings. We also held a very successful online Braille Awards Night on 18th 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. Samples of feedback from the event include:

* Congratulations on a fantastic virtual Braille Awards night last night. I thought and the quizzes and extra bits were great. The Perkins concerto was fabulous! Thanks again for inviting Quantum to be part of it.
* Thanks so much for running the zoom ceremony. We loved it, Jackson sat still for 90 minutes, he was enthralled. Kel, the principal opened the school and he attended along with me, Jackson's class teacher and his parents. His dad had tears in his eyes, he was so proud. We are all so proud of Jackson! We really appreciate your time and efforts especially in this difficult year. You have absolutely made a huge difference for Jackson
* Congratulations on last week's Braille Awards event! What a great celebration of the students' achievements. It was really well run, so personal, positive and affirming, loved the sound effects too! Warm regards, Jane

We had 33 students who participated this year and the theme was "Celebration". 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, Independent schools and the RIDBC Tele-School. 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

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Australia, HumanWare and Pacific Vision. 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, when not under COVID restrictions.

As we have only had one face-to-face meeting this year the presenter was myself, Kim Barber showcased the development of Accessible 3D prints for use in the classroom to support concept and skill acquisition. Including, the Great Pyramid of Giza, a heart, an iceberg and a sample area of Pompeii. Just to name a few.

We are looking forward to another exciting year for the Sydney Braille Forum for 2021.

Kim Barber

Convenor, Sydney Braille Forum

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# Appendix D: Report from Statewide Vision Resource Centre—Department of Education & Training, Victoria

Despite Melbourne's extended COVID lockdown in 2020, staff of SVRC have been pumping out braille for the 80 or so braille readers across the state in government, catholic and independent schools.

Anticipating the lockdown late in term 1, 2020, we worked swiftly with Visiting/Itinerant Teachers to set up hard-copy production technology in schools, in staff homes and in one case in the home of a high-flying student who was studying Biology, Psychology and English at Year 12 level. SVRC staff, working mostly from home, produced braille and tactile diagrams, emailing the Duxbury files and PDFs of the tactile diagrams for local hard-copy production … or went into "the office" to emboss, stereo, stick, bind and mail.

Staff at SVRC are Project People!!! So we have worked busily on several stimulating and worthwhile Projects during the past 12 months.

## Guidelines for transcribing Chinese braille (UEB)

Zhi Jin and Emma Hall (SVRC transcribers) are currently working with Sonali Marathe & Doreen Liew (RIDBC) and Kathy Riessen (SASVI) to produce this document for the ABA.

## Japanese braille (UEB) workshop

Offered by Emma Hall (SVRC transcriber), this workshop was very well received by an online group of 24 visiting/itinerant teachers, Japanese subject teachers and braille transcribers from around Australia.

## Tactile illustrations of art works at NGV and MOMA

Eva Lewis-Col and Sherryl Orchard (SVRC transcribers), in collaboration with Michael Donnelly (SVRC Art teacher) and Will McRostie (Description Victoria) have produced tactile artworks which are available as audio descriptions on the National Gallery of Victoria and the Museum of Modern Art websites.

Booklets containing braille and tactile graphics were posted to students during term 3 2020 and used to support their virtual tactile/audio tours of the galleries during online Art lessons.

## 2021 braille calendar

Sherryl Orchard (SVRC transcriber), in collaboration with the now-retired Garry Stinchcombe (SVRC teacher), created this great resource, featuring artistic symbols and designs used by Australian Aboriginal people.

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## Coles Little Treehouse books—illustrated braille books

Taryn Radley and Ange McDonnell (SVRC transcribers) created the first 10 Coles Little Treehouse books by Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton as illustrated braille books and posted them out to our house-bound younger readers. Coles included this story in their in-house newsletter.

## Books for Prep students—illustrated braille books

Taryn Radley (SVRC) transcribed the 5 books that are given to every Prep student entering Victorian schools. Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, tweeted this good-news story.

## Tactile maze, spot the difference and colouring books

Responding to cries from parents of bored learning-from-home Victorian students, these books were shared with producers in other Australian states and New Zealand!

## Ozzie Dots 2020

Conceived in 2008 and initially launched in 2011, Ozzie Dots has supported the beginning braille literacy of students in all Australian states, NZ, several Pacific islands, USA, Canada and the UK. Staff of the SVRC continue to write, illustrate and proof-read more new books.

The collection has grown to 10 or more books for each of the first 25 contractions (Sets 1-5), with more almost ready to go. Many of the new titles have been written with the older student in mind and the new books offer a wider range of illustrated, fully editable books, with few or no additional contractions, to engage and support the beginning braille reader. Special thanks to Taryn Radley SVRC transcriber) who has produced laterally thousands of unique illustrations for the new books and to Kathy Riessen (SASVI) for her most generous support and feedback which has improved the accuracy and accessibility of our documents.

Debra Lewis

Transcription Manager, Statewide Vision Resource Centre

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# Appendix E: Report from NextSense 2020-2021

This past year has been one of innovation, creativity and challenge for the staff at NextSense (formerly RIDBC). Challenge because of the need to produce accessible material and a high quality of service during the era of Covid-19. Creativity because the necessity of remote working meant that our teams had to find new ways to collaborate and stay connected. Innovation because of the many exciting projects that were begun and concluded during this period.

The UEB Online Extension Mathematics course was launched in January 2021 at the virtual SPEVI conference. This course is the latest in a trilogy of online programs authored by Josie Howse. It is designed to facilitate the mastery of UEB Mathematics at a secondary school level. Because the course is online, it can be taken regardless of location or financial situation. As with all UEB Online courses, the Extension Mathematics program has screen reader accessibility built in, so both sighted and vision impaired participants can access the course in the same way.

NextSense extends its thanks to the following people:

* Josie Howse and Frances Gentle for creating and promoting the three courses
* Craig Cashmore of PeppaCode for software and website development
* The Accessibility and Inclusion (AI) team for extensive accessibility testing and feedback
* NextSense's sponsors and donors for supporting this innovative approach to braille instruction.

The AI team is excited to announce the launch of an initiative to create accessible, educational resource packs for school-age children. Each pack will focus on a single topic and is equipped with worksheets in braille or large print, tactile, high-contrast diagrams and 3D printed models designed in collaboration with our Design and Innovation (DINO) Team. For example, the resource pack that teaches a student about telling time contains a high-contrast 3D printed clock with working hands, tactile symbols and braille numbers.

A unit on the solar system would contain a 3D model of the planets that can be taken apart and slotted back together in order to give the student a 3-dimensional experience of the shape of planets and their place in the solar system.

The packs have been created in consultation with educators both in and outside the field of vision impairment, to ensure that they adhere to Australian Curriculum standards while offering an accessible, meaningful educational experience to the vision impaired student.

The DINO team completed their first ever 3D printed map with audio described locations. This was designed for a blind student attending a school in rural NSW. They printed a 3D map with raised areas for buildings and different tactile surfaces to

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distinguish the areas that the student needed to know. Inside the case was a rechargeable battery connected to a small computer board with many wires connecting buttons to the board.

These buttons when pressed, activated a sound file that described the area at the button location, such as classrooms, toilets, eating areas etc. This allowed the student, who was new to the school, to better navigate his new surroundings. Headphones were used to keep the disruption to a minimum and he was overjoyed with the final model.

Many of our staff have been visible in the print disability and accessibility space this year. Achievements include:

* presenting papers at events such as the SPEVI Conference and the ICEB General Assembly
* holding a place on the Australian Inclusive Publishing Initiative and
* contributing to the guidelines for the production of Chinese language braille.

We are privileged to live in an era where universal access to braille is an attainable goal, not a distant Utopian ideal.

The emergence of affordable refreshable braille technology, plus key developments in the field of accessible publishing standards have meant that braille has the potential to be at the fingertips of more people than ever.

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# Appendix F: NSW Department of Education Vision Education 2021 update

## Student support

More than 900 students who are blind or have low vision are enrolled in NSW public schools. The department provides:

* 154.6 FTE positions for Itinerant Support Teachers Vision (ISTV) across 25 itinerant teams
* 2 classes for students who are Deafblind

Students across NSW public schools use a variety of alternate formats, informed by their Personalised Learning and Support Plan, developed in collaboration with the student and their families and carers. These alternate formats provide access to the curriculum and support learning.

Early Intervention services and post school transition planning in NSW public schools is a student centred, school based collaborative process. The department provides a wide range of resources to support these services.

## Braille and Large Print Services

The NSW Department of Education has a braille and large print service, currently supporting the development of resources in alternate formats for over 500 students across NSW public schools and have a comprehensive library to ensure timely access to school requirements.

Braille and Large Print Services are engaging with interdepartmental expertise to create high quality relevant 3D models for students who are blind or have low vision to support multimodal curriculum access.

Braille and Large Print Services is linked to eleven braille outposts located in public schools throughout NSW that enable the sharing of resources to maintain local deadlines. These outposts are responsible for any miscellaneous classroom handouts in braille, large print or electronic formats required by students within a short turn-around.

## Training pathways

DoE offers Inclusive scholarships for a Master's degree with specialisation in the area of the education of students who are blind or have Low Vision. In 2020, there were 16 applicants for this scholarship.

Scholars are sponsored up to $23,000 towards their degree and offered a permanent teaching position, for temporary and casual teachers, upon successful completion of studies. Scholars must successfully complete a practicum.

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## Opportunities

* Influence of COVID on practice-Learning from Home model, provision of technology to support students without access at home, clear communications and advice to all APVs and ISTVs, responsive and agile provision of support by staff to ensure continuity of learning for students.
* We are interested in the experience of other jurisdictions as a way to share and implement innovative responses.
* Collaboration resources developed by the DoE NDIS team, to support our work with external agencies.
* Streamlining the Access Request process for students with sensory disability.

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# Appendix G: Report from Braille House

Braille House now has a new General Manager—Richard Barker.

Richard has come from a long career in broadcast radio with SCA and has more recently been the CEO of Queensland Rugby Union. Richard commenced his role of General Manager at Braille House in March 2021. This appointment will take Braille House into a new era of Braille, reconnect the organization and continue to grow the valuable work done at Braille House. Richard looks forward to meeting everyone involved with the ABA and other delegate organisations.

2019 and 2020 saw Braille House continue to provide access to Braille Australia-wide. The Specialist Disability Support in Schools Program Grant (formally the Non-School Organisations Grant) was successfully renewed for three years. As the Grant had changed to its new format the process opened opportunities to build closer links and relationships with Education Queensland. Braille house also is planning to form closer alliances with other state education departments around the country to promote our library and transcription services.

Braille House Community Library Memberships have grown partly because of the generosity of the Brisbane Airport Corporations sponsorship in 2019 which funded ten (10) Community Library Memberships. Community Library Memberships are important for Braille House providing an easy and accessible way for organisations to access Braille resources and make them available to their community. These memberships have been taken up by schools, early childhood centres and cafés.

The Braille House Fair celebrated the 123rd Braille House birthday. Braille House started out as the Queensland Braille Writing Association in 1897 and has (not only been a library) but also a place for learning, tuition and production of Braille.

The Braille Challenge (reading and writing challenge for school students) was unable to take place in 2020, we are still planning for this to happen in 2021 and we are waiting on dates to be confirmed.

Over the last 2 years, Braille House has also been undertaking research into better utilising technology to ensure we are servicing our clients in the most effective way by reducing the time it takes to transcribe books and magazines. This can now be done is as little as 5 days.

Because of Covid, we put the technology in place for everyone to have remote access. This enabled everyone who utilised the computer system to still be able to transcribe and communicate with each other. This allowed us to continue to add new publications even when in lockdown. This use of technology has ensured continuity of service and we have had limited disruption to the work done by Braille House. This technology is also utilised today by volunteers and so still has a positive impact.

Braille House also launched a Members' Benefit Program which sees many offers and benefits being available to our Members on an ongoing basis. The members area on the

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Braille House website, communicates the offers and benefits and I members to take advantage of this.

The Dickinson Memorial Literary Competition turns 100 and celebrates the Centenary in 2021. **Growing** is the theme that has been chosen and we invite people from all over Australia to write a piece for this year's competition. Since 1921 this unique literary competition has been providing a platform for authors and writers who are blind or have low vision to showcase their talents to the rest of Australia and we are proud to be celebrating 100 years in 2021.The prize money is $350 for first prize and $150 for runners up. We look forward to your entries. Please visit our website for more details.

None of these achievements could have been possible without the efforts and dedication of the Braille House volunteers and staff.

You can also find out more about Braille House at our website [www.braillehouse.org.au](http://www.braillehouse.org.au) or follow our social media.

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# Appendix H: Report from Vision Australia

Vision Australia's Transcription team includes a dedicated team of specialist braille transcribers experienced in STEM and Music production. We offer free transcription services to our clients which is funded by the Print Disability Grant from the Federal Government. Apart from providing accessible formats to our individual clients, we also provide transcription services to Universities, Government and Corporate entities.

2020 was a challenging year due to COVID19, but the Transcription Team were able to transition most staff to home and establish an office roster to continue embossing braille and tactile products for our clients during the restrictions. We had a busy year and in the last 12 months have produced around 120,000 braille pages, and 3,500 pages of music braille and 1,800 tactual diagrams. We have embossed hundreds of children's print braille books and many thousands of business cards.

The Transcription Team continues to support the Global DAISY Music Braille Project as they move towards the development of the Make Braille translation software.

The arrival of a UV Printer in the last few months has been a very exciting addition to the Transcription team. To our knowledge, this machine has not been used for this purpose before, so it has been a steep learning curve as we learn to adapt our current software to the machine, but we have started to create samples to showcase the benefits of these tactile products to families and schools.

Some of the products we have been making include personal photos, maps, phonetic cards, tactile games, learning cards, and a tactile calendar. Over Christmas, we used the UV Printer to create unique tactile envelopes and reply letters from Santa to blind children under the Australia Post braille letters to Santa project.

Originally we would have produced multi-level prints of an image to get the desired result. With this new machine, we have been able to adapt transparencies and line thickness to produce 1 print which would give the result of multi print. So instead of printing 3 times, we can print 1 and get a similar result. This will give us significant cost and time savings.

We have also recently purchased a laser cutter which will allow us to work with creating jigs, puzzles and game pieces for young children, to develop cognitive and spatial skills.

The aim is to combine both UV printing and Laser cutting to develop new kits for educational purposes.

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# Appendix J: Report from The Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust (BANZAT) to the Australian Braille Authority Annual Meeting 15 May 2021

Very sadly ABA was not able to join with us to run the Trans-Tasman Certificate of Proficiency in UEB because of COVID-19. However, BANZAT was able to push through and achieve for us a first. We now have a very good idea how long it takes to prepare the paper, register the candidates, send out the examination in its various formats, mark the papers, and run the Re-sits process. Even better, we had a record number of 30 candidates, 29 of whom passed. We warmly congratulate the candidates and also their teachers who worked through practice papers with them.

We learned a number of administrative lessons during the Certificate examination. We are very hopeful we can discuss process issues with ABA this year.

We may be able to agree on and introduce some time-saving changes ready for the 2022 round.

We celebrated ten years of BANZAT's work at our November meeting. The highlight of our celebrations was a brief musical presentation by four adult learners of braille, who had been musicians prior to losing their sight, and had learned their musical parts from braille scores.

With teachers from BLENNZ we ran a poetry writing competition for primary and secondary school braille students. At our ten-year celebration several entries were narrated by the poets and one was read by one of the adult new braille learners.

We are working with the founding organisations of BANZAT to explore funding options to secure the future sustainability of our standards-setting and accreditation work.

Maria Stevens

Chair

The Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust  
5 March 2021