# 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.

● **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 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 benefitted 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.

## 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/.](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/.](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/.](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/.](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

● 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.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 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.

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 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/.](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.

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

## 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 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 SBF

## Australian Braille Authority (Queensland Forum) Annual Report 2019 & 2020

### Braille Club

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.

### 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.

## 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.

## NextSense

### ABA Report for 2020-21

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-dimentional 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 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.

## 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.

### 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.

## Statewide Vision Resource Centre–Department of Education & Training, Victoria

### Report for ABA National Meeting

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.

### 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

## 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