Australian Braille Authority

Report of the Chair

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# Australian Braille Authority Report of the Chair

## Introduction

Through online meetings and blended activities conducted by our Regional Braille Forums and member organisations, the Australian Braille Authority has had a successful year as our members grow accustomed to new ways of working together. Our 2021 national meeting was held online for the first time, and although a new experience, it ran successfully with good attendance and participation. Our braille music transcription online workshop during conference was also well attended with a combination of transcribers and braille reading musicians present.

Our braille guidelines continue to be updated, and it is heartening to see the involvement of members when decisions are made internationally around contractions in UEB via our Ozbrl email list.

In 2021, we celebrated three new holders of the Trans-Tasman Certificate of Proficiency in Unified English Braille.

We would like to acknowledge two strong advocates and users of braille in the blind community who passed away this year. We also congratulate a recipient of an Order of Australia Medal.

## In Memoriam

We sadly acknowledge and remember two people in the braille community who passed on since our last meeting. Thank you to Bruce Maguire for providing these obituaries.

* Kathryn (Kathy) Arch died in June 2021. She was born in March 1956 and attended the North Rocks Central School for Blind children. She quickly became a fluent braille reader and maintained a voracious appetite for reading books in braille on a wide range of topics throughout her life. She also excelled in English, ancient and modern history, languages and singing. After completing her education Kathy worked with the Royal Blind Society of NSW and the NSW Department of Education. We will always remember Kathy for her wisdom, her love of literature, her encyclopaedic general knowledge, her zest for life, her irrepressible sense of fun and adventure, her enduring friendship, and her passionate belief that braille is the key to literacy for blind people.
* Ivan Edwin Cribb was born in Sydney on 2 March 1929. He lost his sight at the age of four after an eye infection and six unsuccessful surgeries. He attended the school for blind children at Darlington for most of his primary education, and then went to Canterbury Boys' High. Ivan was the first blind person to be a solicitor in NSW, and for a time he also practised as a barrister. Ivan was offered a position with the major legal firm Dawson Waldron Edwards and Nicholls (now Ashurst Australia). While he was studying at university, Ivan's family and friends read him the textbooks and he would make notes in braille.

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 When he was a barrister he would transcribe affidavits into braille when he represented clients in court. In addition, when he was a solicitor he used braille for making notes about all aspects of his work. In 1994, Ivan was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in recognition of his significant voluntary contribution to the blind and vision-impaired community.

May our two 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 on 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 to report on forum activities.

As Chair of ABA, I am a member of the executive committee of the Round Table, which meets monthly by phone and holds face-to-face meetings when possible. 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

In 2021, we called for nominations for the 2021–2023 term. Leona Holloway stepped down from the ABA executive to pursue further studies and work around tactile graphics and 3D printing with Monash University. We are extremely grateful for Leona's continued assistance with social media and the ABA website. Sam Taylor also stepped down this year due to expanding work commitments; however, we are happy that he has remained in the position of Australian representative to the ICEB Technology Committee. We welcome Melissa Fanshawe and Scott Erichsen to the executive committee this term, and welcome back Josie Howse and Tristan Clare. The 2021–2023 committee now stands:

* Kathy Riessen—Kathy has recently retired from her position as the coordinator of Accessible Format Production at the South Australian School for Vision Impaired. Kathy is the Code Maintenance officer for the International Council on English Braille: a role which calls for great attention to detail and an advanced working knowledge of all aspects of UEB. Kathy continues to update guidelines and ABA publications.
* Tristan Clare—Tristan works as a Braille Transcriber and proofreader for NextSense. 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 has also marked up materials for touch readers for the Trans-Tasman Proficiency exam for several years. Tristan has also served as Secretary for the Sydney Regional Braille Forum.

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* Scott Erichsen—Scott is a lifelong user of braille with particular strengths in braille music. His knowledge of technology is exemplary, and he has worked for a number of adaptive technology companies. We welcome his technical and braille expertise onto the executive.
* Josie Howse—Josie retired in 2019, however she still finds time to answer queries received from the UEB Online website. Josie has developed and taught many braille-training programs both in Australia and abroad. Josie has also marked and coordinated the Braille Proficiency Examination for Australia since its inception. She co-edited the UEB Training Manual—Australian Edition and assists with updating formatting guidelines.
* Melissa Fanshawe—Melissa Fanshawe is a mathematics lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Southern Queensland. She has over twenty years' experience within Queensland schools as a teacher, advisory teacher, deputy and principal. Melissa is an inclusive education researcher and a mother to vision impaired children. Melissa has served as Queensland Regional Braille Forum Convenor and now joins the executive as well as continuing in this role.
* Kim Barber—Kim remains on our committee as the Convenor of the Sydney Regional Braille Forum.

## Regional Braille Forums

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

In 2022, the Sydney RBF held a new look "hybrid" meeting with both zoom and face-to-face participation. They also held a very successful online Braille Awards Night on 17 November 2021, celebrating students' achievements in the Braille Writing Competition. This annual competition is designed to promote braille literacy among students and is continuing to grow in popularity every year.

Queensland Braille Club held one online event. While we did not meet face to face, the online catch up provided a way of enabling students to keep in social contact and increased audience as they included our rural and remote participants. In 2022, the first Braille Club event for the year will be a visit to the EKKA.

Our first forum supported event is the Variety Braille music camp. This is available to braille club members PLUS young adults aged 18–25. ABA Queensland group will assist at the camp through volunteering of all committee members over the five days, as well as a financial contribution as a sponsorship for one student who otherwise could not afford to attend.

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## Communications

### ABA Website

Leona has kindly volunteered to continue the administration of the ABA website, and the executive committee will provide her with content and updates.

The News feed can be accessed at <https://brailleaustralia.org/2021/> 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. It 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/>.

If you would like to publicise your braille-related event, please contact ABA and we will promote it on our website and Facebook pages.

### ABA Facebook page

The ABA Facebook page continues to be an important conduit for the sharing of braille-related resources and information. At the time of writing, our page has been liked 956 times. Women aged 35–44 made up the highest concentration of likes at 20.2% and the most engaged city was Sydney, Australia, at 12.7%. There are no statistics for gender non-binary participation. This may be a Facebook fault but should be looked into in the interests of inclusion.

As well as Australia, the ABA Facebook page has reached people from New Zealand, North America, Greece, the Philippines and Nigeria.

Post topics include innovations in braille technology, interviews with leaders in the field of braille production and human-interest pieces, such as an Australian brewery's decision to create accessible beer using braille labels and a QR code. Now that is a bit of universal design that would interest many of us!

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This year we have seen a significant reduction of Braille Fail posts. It would be wonderful to think that this is due to an increase in the quality of braille signage. However, it is more likely a combination of factors, including new administrators of the page and the fact that people have been staying closer to home during the pandemic.

If you do encounter a Braille Fail, please don't hesitate to send it our way. In the past, these posts have been the most engaging and amusing. As well, it is important to know about issues with the quality of braille signage so that they can be reported and fixed. Remember though, if you send a picture, please include a description so that everyone can join in the discussion.

If you have not already, please do not hesitate to follow our page. You can do so by accessing the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/BrailleAustralia/>

### Ozbrl

The ozbrl list is open to anyone with an interest in braille in Australia. It is the primary official channel for communications from the Australian Braille Authority, as well as a place where anyone can ask or respond to questions about braille and post information about braille-related events. Official messages from Round Table of relevance are also posted to ozbrl.

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. As of 24 March, Ozbrl has 127 members.

### Publications

ABA's publications are highly used by braille transcribers and producers, and our guidelines are a vital reference for candidates completing the Trans-Tasman Proficiency Certificate in UEB. Publications include the Rules for Unified English Braille 2nd Edition, and the UEB Braille Training Manual. They can be accessed at the ABA website: <http://brailleaustralia.org/resources/>

## 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 spot, translation from print to braille and translation from braille to print. In 2021, there were reduced numbers due to the global pandemic. Out of the three candidates who submitted, two were successful, gaining a credit and a high distinction.

## Tricia D'apice Awarded OAM

The ABA would like to congratulate Tricia d'Apice, who received a medal in the Order of Australia Honours in January for her service to education for people with vision impairment. Tricia works at NextSense as the Lead Consultant—Vision Impairment. She is also the author of DAP Dots, a program to help young braille readers learn and understand UEB through books and resources.

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<https://dapdots.ridbc.org.au/about/>

As well as teaching braille to children both in person and remotely through Teleschool, Tricia has undertaken research in the braille reading fluency rates of children.

## Queensland Braille Music Camp

In July 2021, Dotted Beats presented a proposal to Variety, the Children's Charity aimed at receiving financial support to deliver a Braille Music Camp for kids in Queensland. It was then suggested that camp registrations open up to students from New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory to help fill the 30 spots. In addition, it was suggested that the camp also be open to adults who are braille users.

To better support students and education staff in schools, the camp is also open to Music Teachers, Vision Support Teachers and Teacher-Aides as professional development.

The camp will be held from 2 to 5 April at St Joseph's Nudgee College in Boondall, Brisbane. The camp will have daily braille music lessons as well as music workshops that offer participants the opportunity to learn unique instruments such as the Japanese Koto (which was originally only played by people with a vision impairment), group percussion and drum workshops, and DJing craft. A major focus of the camp also includes the teaching of accessible music computer software to best support students in their music lessons at school. Lessons and small group tutorials will include Reaper, Logic Pro, Garage Band and Braille Music Editor 2. In addition, choir and vocal coaching also comprise the makeup of the camp.

Further information can be found here: <https://www.variety.org.au/qld/variety-kids-braille-music-camp-2/>

## Reports from Member Organisations

Our organisations continue to support braille readers from all aspects of our community. More detail will be included in ABA's documentation for the national meeting.

### Statewide Vision Resource Centre

SVRC reports that Ozzie Dots has been updated to the end of Set 10—now featuring 10 or more books to introduce each contraction! The SVRC Transcription team are keeping busy with 16 secondary maths textbooks and mountains of braille music for students who are studying at AMEB levels 4 and 5.

### NSW Department of Education Vision Education

The NSW DOE supports more than 1100 students who are blind or have low vision attending public schools. The department provides:

* 149.1 FTE positions for Itinerant Support Teachers Vision (ISTV) across 25 itinerant teams
* two classes for students who are deafblind

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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.

### NextSense

Since the launch of the UEB Online website and first UEB training programs at the Round Table Conference in May 2014, more than 23,000 people have registered for the UEB literacy training programs and 5,000 for the three UEB mathematics programs.

Fresh off the NextSense press is Version 4 of the Literacy and Learning Profile. This open access profile, co-authored by Tricia d'Apice, Michelle Knight, Frances Gentle and Sue Silveira, summarises information drawn from a range of sources to promote the full and equitable inclusion in education of learners with blindness and low vision. To download the profile, go to <https://www.spevi.net/training-courses-and-educational-information/>

### Vision Australia

Vision Australia has recently purchased a UV printer and the Laser Cutter, and has created a wonderful new service offering for our clients that we have not been able to provide previously. The quality of the tactile images and the options to add raised lines and textures to almost any surface has enabled our clients to experience a new world of accessibility.

The Transcription Team also continues to support the Global DAISY Music Braille Project as they move towards the development of the Make Braille translation software and are participating in a global trial to improve access to music braille for agencies around the world that do not have the resources to produce the material themselves.

### Queensland Department of Education's Statewide Vision Impairment Service

The Queensland Department of Education's Statewide Vision Impairment Services team is pleased to announce that our braille letter songs are now available online. The 26 Braille letter songs include the braille dot numbers and alphabetic word sign contractions for each letter of the English alphabet. Dot numbers are linked to consistent musical pitches to ensure that each song has a unique melody and to assist with the memorisation of each letter's braille formation.

The songs can be found at: <https://soundcloud.com/dete-4/sets/queensland-department-of-education-braille-letter-song/>

## International Council on English Braille

The International Council on English Braille coordinates and promotes the use of braille throughout the English-speaking world. 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.

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### ICEB Code Maintenance Committee

The CMC is responsible for the ongoing development of Unified English Braille as language changes and evolves. In the past 12 months the CMC have been active in the following:

* Four words were added to the Shortforms List: aftertheater, aftermentioned, beforementioned and mustardy.
* Following the addition of DeafBlind (with the interior capital) to the Shortforms List in 2020, discussion has been held on how to amend the "Standing Alone" rule to accommodate this. Therefore, the CMC have looked at allowing interior capitals in certain other shortform words. Proposed changes to the Rulebook have been drafted for Sections 2.6 Standing Alone, 10.9 Shortforms, and Appendix 1, Shortforms List. These are nearly ready to be tabled for open discussion and a vote on whether or not they are adopted.
* Work has begun on expanding Appendix 2, Word List to include known words where the choice of contraction is not always clear. Following consultation and a vote, it has been decided to contract "th" in the name Beethoven. More words will soon be put up for consultation.
* Currently up for consultation is a proposal to assign dots 46, dots 2346 as the German sharp s, which currently does not have a UEB symbol.

Leona Holloway stepped down, after a number of years as the Australian representative on the CMC and has been replaced by Jodie Doolan. Jodie liaises with ABA executive, consults with the wider braille community via Ozbrl and votes on behalf of Australia on the CMC. As the Code Maintenance Officer, I remain neutral when it comes to voting.

Under the umbrella of Code Maintenance but separate to the CMC is the Technical Codes Committee, which looks specifically at Unified English Braille in relation to technical notation. Donal Fitzpatrick from Ireland chaired this committee, but for personal reasons was unable to continue in this role. Clive Lansink from New Zealand has recently been appointed to take on this role. Jodie Doolan is also Australia's representative on this committee.

Kathy Riessen

Code Maintenance Officer

### ICEB Public Relations

The Public Relations Committee shares the work of ICEB and promotes 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. This news is shared through a quarterly newsletter, the iceb-announce listserv, Facebook and Twitter. For links to social media, please refer to <http://iceb.org/icontact.htm>.

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### 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. James has received several replies to letters from manufacturers. James has been following online discussions regarding Braille Blaster aligning more closely with LibLouis for Nemeth and other math codes. A new draft for the E-BRF specifications by William Freeman has also been circulated.

### ICEB Research

The committee operates via listserv, sharing news of braille research published through conferences and journals. On average, two or three emails are sent per month. Natalie Martinello of Canada now chairs the ICEB Research Committee. Recent discussions concerned with inappropriate and outdated language that is used at times in research articles that mention blind people and braille (such as "suffering" and "victim," etc.). There was a consensus that ICEB should create a document that sets some guidelines for language use for research related to braille and blindness.

### 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>

The committee is hoping to collaborate with other international entities to create a supplement to the New International Manual of Braille Music Notation (1996) by Betty Crollick. It was felt that a rewrite of the entire manual is not feasible. There is also discussion about changes in music instruction during the pandemic.

## Conclusion

The preceding paragraphs show just how much the ABA and its members have squeezed in to one year. I am proud to be a chair of such a proactive organisation and enjoy the challenges and can-do attitudes of both the Australian Braille Authority and Round Table executive committees. Our member organisations and Regional Braille Forums have blended online delivery with some in person contact to continue support braille users across Australia at a very high level. I look forward to the new ventures this next two-year term brings.

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Thank you to the ABA executive for your proactive and dedicated work over the past 12 months. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the President of the Round Table, Sonali Marathe, the Administration Officer, Marjorie Hawkings, and the Round Table Executive for your support of ABA, the work of ICEB, and 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 continue striving for greater awareness of braille nationally as well as celebrating how highly valued it is as the key to literacy for people who are blind or have low vision.

Jordie Howell

Chair

Australian Braille Authority

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# Report from Sydney Braille Forum (SBF) 2021/2022

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 that were held on the Wednesday evenings. In 2022 we have held a new look "hybrid" meeting with both zoom and face-to-face We also held a very successful online Braille Awards Night on 17th November, celebrating our students' achievements in the Braille Writing Competition. This annual competition is designed to promote braille literacy among our students and is continuing to grow in popularity every year.

We had 30 students who participated this year they could choose from a story starter or write a creative story of their choice. They were also asked to identify braille errors in a passage to encourage proof reading of their work. We had entrants from Department of Education and Catholic Education. 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.

Our first 2022 guest speaker, was Natalie Kaine from Vision Australia who shared with the group some very engaging employability programs and career development programs.

Kim Barber

Convenor SBF

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# Queensland Regional Braille Forum Annual Report 2021–2022

## Braille Club

### 2021

2021 unfortunately saw all four planned events for Braille Club cancelled. These events were

* Busking at Annerley—cancelled
* Online catch up 12/4/21—held
* Ekka Excursion—cancelled
* Safe dance—cancelled
* Online catch up—19/8/21—held
* Christmas party—cancelled

While we did not meet face to face, the online catch ups provided a way of enabling students to keep in social contact and increased audience as they included our rural and remote participants.

One unexpected benefit is that many of the students attending braille club are over 14 years of age. They have created their own VI youth group and have been organising chats and social activities.

### 2022

In 2022, our first event is the [Variety Braille music camp](https://www.variety.org.au/qld/variety-kids-braille-music-camp-2/). This is available to braille club members PLUS young adults 18-25. ABA Queensland group will assist at the camp through volunteer of all committee members over the five days, as well as a financial contribution as a sponsorship for one student who otherwise could not afford to attend.

# Report from The Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust (BANZAT) to the Australian Braille Authority Annual Meeting, 14 May 2022

The Trans-Tasman Certificate of Proficiency in UEB went off very smoothly for us in 2021, despite COVID-19. The paper was set by the Australian Braille Authority and we thank them for being able to continue with this task in such challenging times. In New Zealand, ten candidates sat, and eight passed.

We again ran a poetry writing and reading competition for primary and secondary school braille learners. This was very successful for the 12 competitors who entered with support from the BLENNZ Immersion team, resource teachers vision and their families.

Music making and the reading and writing of braille music continues to be an important focus for BLENNZ learners. Music programmes are often supported by adult braille music users who teach and mentor our young people.

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COVID-19 has inspired creative online options to help learners maintain momentum when they are unable to meet face to face. 2022 marks an important milestone of 20 years for the monthly music school programme held at BLENNZ Homai Campus.

We continue to work 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

# Vision Australia Braille Report to ABA March 2022

### Contributions from Marnie Rose and Jane Wegener

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.

2021 continued to be a challenging year due to COVID19 disruptions but as we were considered an essential service, we were able to continue production and distribution of accessible formats to our clients during the lockdowns, without too many delays.

It was another busy year and in the last 12 months we have produced around 105,000 braille pages, 3,600 pages of music braille and 1,300 tactile diagrams for our Library clients, students and individuals. We produced around 130,000 braille pages in copy jobs. We have embossed hundreds of children's print braille books and many thousands of business cards.

The purchase of the UV printer and the Laser Cutter has created a wonderful new service offering for our clients that we haven't been able to provide previously. The quality of the tactile images and the options to added raised lines and textures to almost any surface has enabled our clients to experience a new world of accessibility. Some of the products we have produced so far with this equipment include: over 500 acrylic tactile rulers for students, tactile representations of personal photos and images, such as photos of pets, tactile shop fittings for retail stores both in Australia and overseas, personal Christmas messages with raised artwork, accessible maps, braille and tactile signage for buildings, tactile aboriginal artwork and sculpture for remote Australian communities, a series of braille and tactile children's books, braille and tactile flash cards, playing cards and puzzles, fun tactile stickers for the participants of the ABA's Braille Writing Competition, and accessible acrylic QR codes for VA offices.

We have a number of exciting projects in the works to produce accessible artworks for Galleries and Exhibitions.

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The Transcription Team also continues to support the Global DAISY Music Braille Project as they move towards the development of the Make Braille translation software and are participating in a global trial to improve access to music braille for Agencies around the world that do not have the resources to produce the material themselves.

Moving onto our Library, as of March 1, 2022 the library holds in its collection 8,844 braille titles, 762 print braille titles, 5,333 music braille titles and 685 Feelix kits. In the last 12 months the library catalogued 38 print braille titles, 70 music braille pieces, 136 braille titles and 120 Feelix kits. 38 of the braille titles were for preschool and early primary school level reading.

There is a focus on acquiring titles for older children, young adults and emerging adults to boost the number of titles held in Unified English Braille for these age groups.

The Feelix team rolled out a passport programme to encourage re-engagement and increase borrowing for 0-7 years. They also partnered with the Melbourne Recital Centre to offer song sessions for children and their families and developed the tactile resources that were used during the sessions.

The braille library was relocated from Brisbane to Melbourne in February 2022 in order to consolidate all physical item services in the same location. Circulation services to members have resumed.

# Statewide Vision Resource Centre: Report for ABA 2022

Braille Transcription suffered a COVID-related loss of 2.4 staff which has not enhanced the workload of the remaining staff here at the Statewide Vision Resource Centre. And far from the pre-COVID hubbub of happy transcribers beavering away, nowadays one can be alone amid an ocean of empty desks with transcribers currently working 60% from home.

Meanwhile, Ozzie Dots has been updated to the end of Set 10—now featuring 10 or more books to introduce each contraction! Ozzie Dots Sets 1-10 now totals 560 books—410 of which are new! Not that we want beginning braille readers to read every book! Actually 2-3 per contraction is probably plenty! But there is now more choice including books for the older beginning braille reader, puzzles and games books like "Spot the Difference", colouring books and mazes.

This year, we keeping busy transcribing 16 secondary Maths text books and mountains of braille music for students who are studying at AMEB levels 4 and 5. Several VCE students are studying Biology, Psychology and Health & Human Development so that is keeping our diagram-drawers fully occupied! And there's also the usual number of guided readers, novels and other work for the primary and early secondary students.

We have created several 3-D printed kits to support the transition between the real object and tactile diagrams, including animal and plant cells, medieval castles and the solar system.

And finally, a student who studied Chemistry, Maths, English Language, Biology and Psychology in 2021 received an ATAR of 98—quite an achievement!

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# NSW Department of Education Vision Education 2022 update

## Student support

More than 1100 students who are blind or have low vision are enrolled in NSW public schools. The department provides:

* 149.1 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 school, 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 450 students across NSW public schools and have a comprehensive library to ensure timely access to curriculum 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 in collaboration with the Curriculum Reform team.

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. 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.

# NextSense

## Update on UEB Online training programs

NextSense is pleased to advise that registrations for the UEB literacy and mathematics training programs continue to grow. Since launch of the UEB Online website and first UEB training programs at the Round Table Conference in May 2014, more than 23,000 people have registered for the UEB Literacy training programs and 5000 for the three UEB

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mathematics programs. Of the total subscriber group, 5% have used the website's accessibility options to complete lessons, and the four major countries completing the training programs continue to be USA, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada.

## Literacy and Learning Profile Version 4 released

Fresh off the NextSense presses is Version 4 of the Literacy and Learning Profile. This open access profile,
co-authored by Tricia d'Apice, Michelle Knight, Frances Gentle and Sue Silveira, summarises information drawn from a range of sources to promote the full and equitable inclusion in education of learners with blindness and low vision. The profile details the student's vision (section 1), literacy preferences and capabilities (section 2), literacy and technology adjustments used by the student to access the curriculum and literacy activities (section 3), and recommended vision-specific adjustments to facilitate the student's inclusion in education (section 4). Version 4 includes five appendices which offer guidance in completing the profile. To download the profile, go to <https://www.spevi.net/training-courses-and-educational-information/>

## Braille (?) Needs Assessment

Tricia d'Apice, specialist teacher in blindness and low vision with NextSense, originally developed an approach to "keeping braille on the agenda" for students with low vision. This approach forms the basis of a tool now known as the Braille (?) Needs Assessment (BNA).

The BNA incorporates clinical and functional information about the student, their preferences for use of their vision, and the challenges they face in accessing print for sustained reading. The theme of the BNA is to highlight the critical nature of the student's situation, to form the basis for discussions and planning for the introduction of braille. The BNA can be used to establish baseline information which is revisited over time.

Tricia d'Apice and Sue Silveira (from the NextSense Institute) are planning a staged research project—first to gain feedback from the field on the BNA, and second, to validate the BNA with current braille users.

## Vision Simulation Booklet

NextSense is about to launch the newly revised Vision simulation book, which will feature additional visual acuities and new photos of daily routines including preschool. This book has been a staple for teachers and practitioners in the field of vision impairment and a great resource to help families understand the functional impact of vision impairment. The vision simulation book which has been updated by Alison Byrne (senior orthoptist) and Ana Radis (Coordinator of Early Intervention Vision Impairment) will be available through iBooks.

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# South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI Inc)

## Braille (?) Needs Assessment

Recommending to families and professionals that a student's learning access needs would be well met by becoming a braille user can be challenging. The Braille (?) Needs Assessment (BNA) is a tool that summarises information about the student, how they use their vision and the main challenges they face in accessing print for sustained reading. The BNA allows professionals to consider the student holistically including their diagnosis, their visual functioning and also their preferences.

Although the BNA does not give a score, the answers to a series of questions demonstrate how critical the student's situation is becoming and therefore, the greater the need to consider braille.

Planning for a project that evaluates the BNA has begun by Tricia d'Apice and Sue Silveira, from NextSense (formerly RIDBC). Ethics approval is being sought and once gained, professionals working in the field will be invited to participate. This project offers an exciting opportunity to build knowledge about current braille users and predictors for recommending braille.

# Braille House overview 2021–2022

125 years ago, in 1897, a group of ladies got together in Brisbane and started the Queensland Braille Writing Association because they realised that there was no reading material for people who were blind or vision impaired. Now, in 2022, Braille House is a vibrant organisation that has grown to a national entity with borrowers and clients across the country. There is no charge to join the library as a borrower from anywhere in Australia.

Braille House continues form closer alliances with other organisations and governments around the country to promote our library and transcription services, and is a place for learning, tuition, and production of high-quality Braille. This will also continue after the success of some of our products like the Tactile QR Code Indicator, and the Emergency Evacuation Information Pack which are both available on our website.

Braille House is a specialist provider of Braille and other tactile services and we have also moved into large print and audio recently. We have joined the Accessible Book Consortium (ABC) which is a part of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).

The Dickinson Memorial Literary Competition turned 100 in 2021 and celebrated the Centenary in style with a record number of entries from right around the country.

Since 1921 this unique literary competition has been providing a platform for authors and writers who are blind, or vision impaired to showcase their talents to the rest of Australia, and we are proud to be celebrating 101 years in 2022. The prize money will be $350 for first prize and $150 for runners up in each category and we look forward to your entries. Please follow our social media and visit our website for more details.

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The Braille Literacy Challenge (reading and writing skills for QLD school students) was another success for 2021 with over 40 students taking part. This is a great opportunity for children to get together and meet new friends and is also a way for parents, carers, and teachers to get together and share strategies for Braille usage.

The dedication of the Braille House volunteers, staff and supporters is what allows the organisation to be a valuable resource for people who are blind or vision impaired in Australia.

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.

# Queensland Department of Education's Statewide Vision Impairment Service

The Queensland Department of Education's Statewide Vision Impairment Services team is pleased to announce that our Braille Letter Songs are now available online. The 26 Braille letter songs include the braille dot numbers and alphabetic word sign contractions for each letter of the English alphabet. Dot numbers are linked to consistent musical pitches to ensure that each song has a unique melody and to assist with the memorisation of each letter's braille formation.

The songs can be found at:

<https://soundcloud.com/dete-4/sets/queensland-department-of-education-braille-letter-song/s-VSutmGrt9np?utm_source+clipboard&utm_medium+text&utm_campaign+social_sharing>

We are also pleased to announce that the Queensland Braille Learning Progression (QBLP) and related assessment tool, is now available for download.

The QBLP describes the observable indicators of increasing sophistication in the use of braille to access literacy and enable self-reliance. The progression documents general stages of braille-related skill development unique to those who access literacy through touch from emergent to early independent levels of braille proficiency. The assessment tool provides a clear structure for recording student progress over time.

For further information, or to download the progression and assessment tool, please visit:

<https://education.qld.gov.au/students/students-with-disability/supports-for-students-with-disability/vision-impairment/supports-at-school-for-students-with-vision-impairment>