# **Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities Inc**

# **Australian Braille Authority**

# **Report of the Chair - Christine Simpson**

# **May 2016**

## **Introduction:**

The Australian Braille Authority (ABA) continues to grow and strengthen. Since last reporting much has happened. Goals have been reached; friends have been farewelled; and the importance of braille to blind people is becoming better recognised.

* The *ABA Rules and Guidelines for Formatting Braille* is now complete;
* *Ozbrl* and our *Braille Australia Webpage* continue to disseminate information;
* The *Australian Braille Music Addendum* is proving its worth;
* We have two new *Trans-Tasman Proficiency Certificate* awardees; and,
* involvement with the International Council on English Braille (ICEB) continues through our active membership of its working committees.

## **Structure and Accountability:**

The ABA is charged with overseeing the development and maintenance of braille codes and specifications used in Australia. It serves as Australia’s braille accreditation body, and promotes braille as the primary literacy tool for people who are blind, deafblind, or have severe vision impairment.

As ABA Chair, I am a voting member of the Executive of our parent organisation, the Round Table on Information Access for People with a Print Disability Inc. (Round Table). I report on our activities at Round Table Executive meetings and participate in the broader management of the organisation. I thank Round Table Executive members led by Neil Jarvis, for their guidance and support throughout the year.

Our ABA members are Round Table Member organisations, interested in the production, teaching and use of braille. The work of staff and volunteers from member organisations in providing high quality braille to readers throughout the country is invaluable. As braille readers we benefit greatly from the braille code knowledge that they acquire and demonstrate; the enthusiasm they show; and the care and pride they display through the diversity and complexity of transcription projects they undertake.

## **Farewell to Friends:**

Throughout the year we were saddened to note the passing of a number of colleagues:

* Tammy Axelsen, our friend, colleague and a strong braille advocate was Round Table's Administration Manager for almost 20 years.
* Linda Triasmono, a braille user, teacher, advocate and leader throughout her entire life was ABA Secretary for more than two years.
* John Shute was a prolific volunteer music transcriber – he produced more than 30,000 titles over 20 years.
* Phil Gilbert was a highly skilled and respected tactile graphics producer with almost 50 years of volunteer work with RBS and RVIB.

We say "farewell and Thank You" to each of you. Your contributions will live on long in our hearts and minds. Rest in Peace!

## **Executive:**

Again this year I have led a dedicated, hardworking and enthusiastic Executive. Each member has worked diligently to achieve great results:

* Jordie Howell, a braille user thoughout her life brings to the ABA her experience of working at a high level, with both the Literary and Music codes as well as her teaching and transcription experience. Jordie is a competent user of the Duxbury Braille Translator (DBT) and is experienced in using various braille notetakers.
* Josie Howse has years of local and international experience in the world of braille. Her skills in conveying the braille code to others, (either through face-to-face teaching, or through the design of teaching materials) are in high demand.
* Leona Holloway never fails to surprise. She has the ability to turn her mind and her hands to an amazing number of complex tasks in parallel. With no prior experience Leona successfully designed webpages for both the ABA and Round Table. She has done an amazing job at leading the group who are producing our Braille Formatting Manual and has worked as our ABA Correspondence Secretary. She maintains our facebook page and has been my right hand, my "goto person". Leona's work is highly respected internationally.
* Kathy Riessen is a clear thinker with highly developed research skills. She can usually find the example we need to illustrate the point of discussion. She is concise when documenting processes and excellent at troubleshooting. Kathy is well known for her ability to quickly find the solution or the cause.
* Julee-anne Bell, who is also a braille user, left the Executive late last year due to increased work commitments. Upon joining Executive, Julee-anne volunteered as Minute Secretary. Her ability to quickly understand the jargon and the issues was amazing. Her enthusiasm for the Queensland Braille Forum and particularly the involvement of children was important to us all.

The Executive team has also benefitted greatly by having both Nicole Donaldson and Tricia d'Apice participating in our meetings. As leaders of the Queensland and Sydney Braille Forums, Nicole and Tricia have enabled us to keep across Forum activities. Their involvement encourages a timely exchange of information between ABA Executive and Forum members.

My thanks to you all for outstanding contributions.

## **Regional Braille Forums:**

### Sydney forum

The Sydney Braille Forum met four times throughout the year and was again convened by Tricia D'Apice with Annette Sutherland as Secretary. Together they worked hard to ensure that meetings had a guest speaker whose topic would appeal to audiences including braille readers, teachers, parents and transcribers alike. Their final meeting for the year attracted more than 80 people and it served as the Braille Writing Competition award night. The competition attracted entries from 49 braille-using students across the state.

### Queensland forum

The Queensland Braille Forum was again convened by Nicole Donaldson, with Julee-anne Bell as secretary. Their main focus continues to be Braille Club – now in its fourth year. Braille Club brings together young braille using students who, (one afternoon each school term) come together and have fun while discovering new and exciting ways with braille. These afternoons continue to be popular with several children regularly attending. Activities included braille games and competitions, cooking from a braille recipe, mapping exercises and braille technologies. As usual, adult forum members joined with Queensland Braille Writing Association members to organise the annual Braille Challenge for braille using students. This is another project which encourages our blind youth to develop and value their braille skills.

Reports from both the Sydney and Queensland forums are attached for your reading.

## **Publications:**

The *Unified English Braille: – Australian Training Manual* is in high demand. It can be downloaded from our ABA website and printed, embossed, read as a PDF file or as a braille file on an electronic braille notetaker. It is of immense assistance to anyone wishing to learn braille, or to revise their braille skills.

The *DBT Producer's Manual* remains a valued "how to" reference for DBT users. Its many explanations, screen dumps and step by step instructional guides are regularly called upon.

Our newest manual is the *ABA Rules and Guidelines for Formatting Braille*. It has been a long time in coming, but has finally arrived. It represents literally years of work by a small and dedicated team. In particular, we owe great thanks to Leona Holloway, for her persistence with and belief in the need for this title. Leona's work has been exemplary, but she could not have done it alone. Throughout the entire project, the working group members have been there to give input, encouragement, find examples, wordsmith the text, offer alternatives, proof and re-proof and much more. I believe that if any of us had realised the size and complexity of this project at its outset, we probably would have cautioned against going ahead. This manual in its various formats is also available for download from the ABA webpage.

## Communication:

* Our *Braille Australia Website* continues to receive a regular stream of queries, relating mainly to braille signage and standards, and also the availability of braille products and services. We have seen a steady increase in page views throughout the year. After the welcome page, the most popular pages are those on Unified English Braille, the UEB Australian Training Manual and the Directory of braille services and products in Australia. The events page is constantly updated. Changes have also been made to the information for sign-makers, based on their feedback which we welcome.
* Our *facebook page* has more than 375 followers, of whom three quarters are female. Around 250 followers are from Australia, 25 from the US and 25 from New Zealand. The number from other countries is growing steadily. We now send monthly digests of our posts to Ozbrl. We know these are helpful, but we encourage facebook users to continue following our page for more up-to-date information. We encourage you to share your interest in braille and to contribute to our online community. Our most popular facebook posts reach several hundred, or even thousands, of facebook users. These posts tend to be stories about the importance of braille and new braille technologies.
* The *Ozbrl listserv* continues to be our primary means of communicating with members. Readers are encouraged to use it to share news and submit queries. Over the past year there has been an increase in queries about the availability of braille transcriptions (particularly music titles). We encourage such enquiries. Thank you Bruce Maguire for his moderation of Ozbrl.

## Proficiency in Unified English Braille:

The annual *Trans-Tasman Proficiency Certificate in Unified English Braille* was conducted during the first week of October 2015. This is the eighth year this test has been conducted as a joint undertaking between Australia and New Zealand.

There were four candidates who sat the test from Australia, two of whom were touch readers. The two successful candidates, (one touch reader and one sighted reader) achieved a Pass and a Distinction respectively. This has resulted in Australia awarding a total of 55 certificates to successful candidates since 2008. Congratulations to all our Trans-Tasman Certificate holders, especially our two latest recipients. My thanks to all involved with the conduct of these Braille Proficiency tests in both Australia and New Zealand.

## Braille Music in Australia:

Jordie Howell chairs our Music Subcommittee. Her report for the last year is attached.

In order to more closely align the work of our various music transcribers around the country and to provide a one-stop reference for Australia, she lead a group of transcribers and musicians who together compiled the *Australian Braille Music Addendum*. This document contains sections on transcribing vocal music, piano music, instrumental music, and guidance on how to format a paper for a music theory exam.

After a long battle with cancer, John Shute OAM passed away in August 2015. John dedicated much of his retirement to transcribing music for the National Braille Music Camps, as well as for choristers, music teachers and instrumentalists, both in Australia and overseas. Earlier this year, he was honoured posthumously with an Order of Australia Medal for his services to people who are blind or have low vision. John's work lives on in the thousands of pages he transcribed; many of which are accessed by blind musicians on a daily basis.

The 2016 National Braille Music Camp will again be held in Mittagong NSW, in late June. Music students from upper primary through to senior secondary school who read Grade II braille are encouraged to attend. If you know young blind musicians interested in improving their braille music skills, Braille Music Camp is a fun place to be!

## International Council on English Braille (ICEB):

ICEB Member countries are Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. The President is Christo de Clerk, Maria Stephens is Vice President and Bill Jolley is Treasurer. The ICEB Executive Committee meets quarterly using teleconferences.

The UEB Code Maintenance Committee is responsible for official documentation of the rules of UEB, providing clarification where needed and making additions and changes as necessary. The Committee is chaired by Phyllis Landon from Canada and consists of one representative code expert from each ICEB member country—Leona Holloway being Australia's representative. In addition, there are two independent code experts—Christine Simpson (Rulebook Editor) and Jo Sullivan (Duxbury Systems).

UEB implementation in the USA, Canada Ireland and the UK has gathered pace over the last year; so more observers from these countries have joined the Committee’s email discussion list. All members of the ABA Executive and the convenors of the ABA’s Braille Forums are observers on this list.

Discussion has concluded regarding confusion between the print apostrophe and single quote. Incorrect automated translation was occurring because the similar-looking print symbols are sometimes used interchangeably in source documents. As a result the final sentence in UEB Rule 7.6.5 has been amended to read:

7.6.5 Use one-cell (nonspecific) quotation marks when apostrophes are used as the predominant quotation marks in print. Use specific single quotation marks when apostrophes are used as the secondary or inner quotation marks in print. However, when in doubt as to whether a mark is an apostrophe or a single quotation mark, treat it as an apostrophe when between letters, and as a single quotation mark in other circumstances.

A query was received regarding the use of numeric passage indicators for long strings of numbers, such as: ISBNs; the printing history of a book; page numbers in an index; or a series of measurements. A clear preference was shown for restricting the use of the numeric passage indicator primarily to technical material; as readability is considered more important than the small space-saving that could be achieved in most instances. However, the numeric passage indicator may be used in literary material when there is a clear advantage to its use, such as for arrays of numbers which would not otherwise fit on the page in a logical manner.

Revision of the Technical Guidelines has been discussed but not yet commenced.

The sixth ICEB General Assembly will be held in the United States in late May 2016, at the headquarters of the National Federation of the Blind in Baltimore. Australia’s delegation will be headed by Jordie Howell, with the other members being Bill Jolley, Josie Howse and Leona Holloway. A highlight of the Assembly will be the consideration of reports and papers on the implementation of UEB around the world.

## Conclusion:

My thanks to all who have contributed to this report. It has been a busy year for the Executive, and we still have much to do. We welcome your ideas and your feedback.

This meeting brings to an end, my time as Chair of the Australian Braille Authority. The last six years have passed quickly and I am heartened and proud of our achievements over this time.

* Most significantly we have fully implemented UEB in Australia. It is now our official braille code. It is well regarded and integrated into our lives – at home, in education, in employment and in our leisure activities. UEB is now part of our daily lives - there is no going back!
* Our braille related publications are widely used. They set high standards for the production of braille throughout the country so, we now truly do oversee the development and maintenance of braille codes and specifications as used in Australia.
* Collaboration with our New Zealand colleagues to conduct the annual *Trans-Tasman Certificate of Proficiency in Unified English Braille* ensures an expectation of a high standard of braille production from transcribers as well as an understanding that the level we set is appropriate and acceptable outside our own shores.
* With the introduction of Regional Braille Forums our structure has changed and we are now far more inclusive of our young braille users – our leaders of tomorrow.
* We continue to raise our profile in the "world of braille" internationally the expertise of Australia's braille leaders is often sought by colleagues overseas.
* Through the efforts of ABA leaders, we have ensured that the words "braille", "progress" and "Australia" are often used together by our international colleagues. We have lead the way in our adoption of UEB. We will continue to meet the leadership challenges which come our way.

I thank each of you here today as well as your colleagues who have participated in ABA meetings and projects in the past, for the support and encouragement you have all given me. Without you the Australian Braille Authority could not exist and prosper.

Thank You.

## Sydney Braille Forum Summary – 2015

As 2015 was not an election year the Executive have remained unchanged with Tricia d’Apice as Convener and Annette Sutherland as Secretary.

Sydney Braille Forum met four times in 2015, below is a summary of the year’s activities.

* March 25th: There was a presentation on 3D printing, by Owen Doyle from RIDBC Teleschool, multimedia team. He bought along a variety of models that had been made from files available on the internet, including The Eiffel Tower, a 20 facet braille dice for the game ‘Dungeons and Dragons’, and small braille puzzles. The question asked about the model of a penguin was ‘how do you know it is a penguin, is there a picture on it?’ Answer given was that it is the only animal shaped like that. Owen later demonstrated the printer itself, allowing people to feel the filament, and to how differently it is shaped from a regular printer. Eleven people attended on the night.
* June 10th: Sixteen people attended the Sydney Braille Forum meeting on Wednesday, where Nigel Herring gave a practical demonstration on cleaning braille embossers. Consumers were given the chance to have hands-on practice. Following Nigel, was an informative demonstration of RealSAM (simple Accessible Media) given by Sondra Wibberley.
* August 26th: Shane Dopel (Assistant Principal-Support Teacher Vision) presented on her recent study ‘Accessing the Australian National Curriculum—what skills and technology do blind students need?’ Shane’s presentation promoted much discussion on how we could provide the best for our students in areas of socialisation, braille, technology and daily living skills. She cited the year-long BLENNZ program in Auckland as being exemplary. Eighteen people attended.
* November 18th: The Braille Writing Competition Award night was held at Burwood RSL club where over eighty people attended. The audience was treated to a marvelous presentation by the author Jacqueline Harvey, who wrote the Clementine Rose and Alice-Miranda Series for children. A record of forty nine students entered the competition; many of them including their families, friends and teachers attended on the night. The support from our members, Sponsors and Annette Sutherland’s planning and professionalism has led to another successful Award Night.

Tricia d’Apice

May 2016

## Queensland Braille Forum Report 2015

The annual report of the ABA Queensland Regional Forum covers the period from March 2015 until the present. During this time the forum has met four times. An AGM was held on the 25th February 2016. At this AGM Nicole Donaldson stepped down from the role of Convenor after many years and Julee-anne Bell stepped down as Secretary. Wayne Wiseman was elected Convenor and also Correspondent Secretary. It was decided by the forum that the taking of minutes would be shared by members on a rotational basis. Sue Wagner was re-elected as Treasurer.

The year has seen the 3rd year of Braille Club – a fun afternoon for students who use braille. This continues to be a very successful program. Most sessions have up to 10 children attending. Braille Club is run each term and sessions have included mapping, reading recipes, and braille based technology. This session was extremely popular as most young people are using braille displays or electronic braille devices in their classrooms and found the session valuable as they shared knowledge and tips. This year Braille House are opening their library to braille club so the young people are able to borrow braille books at each session.

The Braille Literacy Challenge was once again run by QBWA in conjunction with Education Queensland. Whilst ABA was not directly involved in any organisation of the day, ABA members attended the challenge and participated in judging roles as well as interacting with many of the students. The day was a great success and it is great that some students have such a familiarity with Braille House and know the ABA members due to braille club.

The Queensland Forum would particularly wish to recognise the passing of Linda Triasmono and the amazing contributions that Linda has made to ABA and the field of Braille over many years. She was untiring in her work in raising awareness about Braille and in all aspects of ABA and RoundTable. Linda was also passionate about Braille Club and passing on her love of braille to the next generation. She shall be missed.

Nicole Donaldson

Queensland Regional Braille Forum

## Braille Music in Australia

### Music Addendum

Although Vision Australia transcribes much of the braille music that is requested for braille reading musicians in Australia, there are many other transcribers brailling music; particularly in the education sector. This is done either manually, or with the aid of transcription software such as Toccata or Goodfeel. There is an international manual of braille music transcription as well as the UK Transcription Layout Manual which transcribers use as reference texts, however formatting practices differ between countries. To provide a one-stop reference for Australia, a group of transcribers and musicians came together and completed work on the Australian Braille Music Addendum. This document contains sections on transcribing vocal music, piano music, instrumental music, and how to format a paper for a music theory exam. We welcome comments, additions, clarifications and other feedback.

The addendum can be downloaded from: <http://brailleaustralia.org/about-braille/music-braille/>

### John Shute OAM

Our beloved transcriber, John Shute, passed away in August last year. John dedicated much of his retirement to transcribing music for the national Braille Music Camps as well as for choristers, music teachers and instrumentalists both in Australia and overseas. John was honoured posthumously with an Order of Australia Medal for his services to people who are blind or have low vision. On 6 March, we will hold a concert to thank John for his work. Blind musicians from across Australia will perform choral and solo works from John’s vast catalogue of music titles. choral and solo works from his catalogue. Proceeds from the concert will be donated to Cancer Research Australia. John’s work will live on in the thousands of pages he has transcribed which many of us still access on a daily basis.

### National Braille Music Camp

This year’s National Braille Music Camp will once again be held in Mittagong, New South Wales from Saturday 25 June to the morning of Saturday 2 July. We encourage students from upper primary school through to senior secondary who read Grade II braille to consider attending, even if you are a beginning braille music reader.

Jordie Howell

May 2016