The Braille Authority of New Zealand

Aotearoa Trust (BANZAT)

Country Report from New Zealand

to the Sixth General Assembly

International Council on English Braille

May 2016

# BANZAT and its Trustees

The Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust (BANZAT) is pleased to share with you developments across the braille sector in New Zealand in the four years since the 2012 ICEB Fifth General Assembly.

First, we will describe the makeup of the Trust itself. Then we will discuss the five strands within the purpose of the Trust, highlighting activities within each strand.

## The BANZAT Trustees

The Trust which was established in 2010 has 11 trustees including one vacancy. Five organisations set up BANZAT. They appoint seven trustees.

The five organisations are

Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand (Blind Citizens NZ), the largest blindness consumer advocacy group in New Zealand;

Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ), the school for blind and low vision children which employs the Resource Teachers Vision working in mainstream schools;

Kāpō Māori Aotearoa/New Zealand, the blindness consumer group representing indigenous Māori;

Parents of Vision Impaired, the parents advocacy group in New Zealand; and

the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind (the Blind Foundation), the primary blindness service delivery agency.

Their seven trustees may appoint up to four additional trustees.

### Retiring Trustee Janet Reynolds

In September 2014 we sadly farewelled from BANZAT Janet Reynolds. Janet retired from the Blind Foundation in her role as head of braille production in June 2014. Her contribution to braille in New Zealand over more than two decades has been invaluable.

Before she came to us, Janet was a secondary school teacher of mathematics.

You will recall Janet attended several ICEB general assemblies and the Mid-Term Executive Committee Meeting held in South Africa in 2006. She was the architect of the UEB Guidelines for Technical Materials, now being considered for revision by the ICEB Code Maintenance Committee. Janet was a founding trustee of BANZAT and its first treasurer.

Though Janet is a great loss she has passed on her learning to her production team and many braille users around the world.

## Purpose of the Trust

The purpose of BANZAT is to:

• set standards and to make rulings on braille code usage within New Zealand;

• maintain awareness and consistency with current international developments in all braille codes;

• accredit practitioners involved in braille production;

• promote braille as the prime literacy medium for blind people; and

• promote best practice in teaching, acquisition and distribution of braille.

## Purpose Strand 1: Standards-setting for Braille Codes and Formats

New Zealand adopted UEB in 2005. BANZAT has its own Code Maintenance Committee which monitors changes to UEB agreed by the ICEB Code Maintenance Committee.

BANZAT's Code Maintenance Committee has become aware that it is some fifty years since New Zealand decided how to braille the Māori language. Our Code Maintenance Committee is about to formally recognise and publish those rules.

UEB deals very well with the code but there is also the issue of format, how braille is laid out on the page to show headings and so on.

In September 2014 BANZAT launched a booklet called “Essentials of Braille Formatting”. The rules for properly formatted braille are accompanied by examples in print (simulated braille) and braille, as well as helpful hints for users of the Duxbury Braille Translator program. It includes advice for transcribing menus, agendas, lists, Māori and much more. “Essentials of Braille Formatting” is on the BANZAT website at [www.banzat.org.nz](file:///C:\Users\Judy%20Dixon\Dropbox\icebweb\www.banzat.org.nz).

## Purpose Strand 2: Maintain Consistency with all International Braille Codes

Several BANZAT trustees serve on ICEB committees. In particular we contribute to and learn from the Code Maintenance Committee and the Music Committee.

New Zealand was the first ICEB member country to transition from the Nemeth Code for Mathematics and Science to UEB, some eight years ago.

We were delighted to host in Auckland the Mid-Term Executive Committee Meeting of ICEB in May 2014. For us it was a great privilege to learn from our guests. And it was a real pleasure to show our guests what we are up to.

## Purpose Strand 3: Accredit Practitioners Involved in Braille Production

### The Trans-Tasman Unified English Braille Proficiency Certificate

New Zealand can be proud of its history in the quality of braille teaching. Not only do we teach braille to our teachers of learners, young and old, but also the teachers have themselves been sitting formal braille examinations since the mid 1980s. The teachers who work for the Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) and the Blind Foundation are expected to sit and pass the Trans-Tasman Unified English Braille Proficiency Certificate. Of interest is that several blind people have chosen to sit the exam. It is a serious test of accuracy and attention to detail. This certificate is administered jointly by BANZAT and the Australian Braille Authority.

Since its establishment in 2008, 101 New Zealand candidates have passed the Trans-Tasman Unified English Braille Proficiency Certificate and 15 were unsuccessful.

The rules that guide the setting of the papers and the running of the annual examination were set in 2008 when the Trans-Tasman certificate was established. There was a review in 2013. Work has renewed between BANZAT and the Australian Braille Authority to refine the terms of the Trans-Tasman Proficiency Certificate. We need to be sure it remains relevant for the sector on both sides of the Tasman. The goal is to allow flexibility to reflect the different formats used on each side of the Tasman, the need to test the transcription of passages in Te Reo Māori in New Zealand, and timetable issues because of different school holiday dates, while retaining shared rules about what the examination should test and how each section of the paper should be structured and marked.

### Accreditation of Braille Producers

Rogue braille production has been causing some problems in New Zealand. The Trans-Tasman UEB Proficiency Certificate is an essential starting point for producers. However, it does not test knowledge of computer translation software and has limited testing of formats.

As described above, to improve the quality of braille BANZAT published “Essentials of Braille Formatting”. BANZAT has also established an accreditation framework for braille producers using computer translation software. To become accredited, candidates must first have passed the Trans-Tasman UEB Proficiency Certificate or an equivalent qualification recognised by BANZAT. We are now focussing on marketing the accreditation framework and gaining the necessary funding to offer training to potential and current braille producers who are not employed by the Blind Foundation or BLENNZ.

For more information read the paper “BANZAT Building Better Braille: an accreditation framework for producers using computer translation software” which is being presented at this Sixth General Assembly.

## Purpose Strand 4: Promote Braille as the Prime Literacy Medium for Blind People

We are often told, and we sometimes read this in the media, that braille is no longer needed in today's technology world. Braille readers know that is not the case. Our teachers in New Zealand continue to teach braille to our blind children and newly blinded adults, just as print is taught to sighted people.

Trustees working in both formal and volunteer settings promote literacy through braille in a number of ways.

### Immersion Courses for Braille Learners at BLENNZ

The Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) supports learners who are blind, deafblind or have low vision from birth to the end of compulsory education including those who attend early childhood centres, primary, secondary and special schools throughout New Zealand. Resource Teachers Vision may visit learners in their homes and schools. In addition, learners attend residential Immersion courses at the Homai Campus of BLENNZ.

Up to 20 Immersion courses have been run in each of the past four years. The key focus areas for these courses have been:

• Learning how to use their technology such as laptop with screen readers and developing typing skills. All students and their teachers have received tutorials to support ongoing learning when they return home.

• Study and exam skills, for example, working successfully with a reader writer.

• Independent travel using a long cane and developing map reading skills.

• Tactile graphic interpretation in maths.

• Performing Arts.

• Life skills such as independent personal care and eating.

• Social skills.

• Transition from school.

Literacy through braille for the blind learners and print for low vision learners is a key component of all aspects of the Immersion courses.

### Braille Music Activities

We are very pleased to share that the braille music events, reported in 2012, are continuing and growing. Music is another key ingredient of the Immersion courses discussed above.

This year the monthly Music School which has been running for over a decade has a roll of 24 students, 14 of whom are braille users. We are very fortunate to have a fabulous volunteer team to support these young learners, including three passionate music braille users.

Braille Music Editor (BME) is an Italian computer software program that allows the user to key in braille music and have the score printed out for sighted teachers. Seven students are using Braille Music Editor in 2016. This development has been a boon to those who want to take music theory and composition as a formal subject in their high schools, even leading on to university studies. To further encourage peer support and music braille writing using BME, a pilot BME online group has been established.

Wendy Richards, the music teacher at BLENNZ, completed a masters course last year. She interviewed several adults who use braille music to better understand their techniques for studying braille music. Wendy is now applying these learnings in her teaching this year.

### Teaching Braille Remotely to Sighted Adults

BLENNZ supports the opportunity to learn braille for parents, teachers and teacher aides undertaking a correspondence course. Some 59 are enrolled in 2016, including some mainstream classroom teachers.

Upon enrolment, the tutor mails a starter kit which includes all the information about the course. Initially all course members are required to produce braille using the manual Perkins brailler or the electronic Mountbatten brailler. When the required standard is met students may use Perky Duck which accepts six-key entry on a computer keyboard and produces simulated braille on the computer screen.

Braille lessons are posted back to the course tutor who marks the braille and provides supportive comments, further instruction and additional resources. Students may sit the Trans-Tasman UEB Proficiency Certificate which is run each year. 15 students have indicated they want to sit the certificate in 2016.

## Purpose Strand 5: Promote Best Practice in Teaching, Acquisition and Distribution of Braille

In this strand we would like to share the steady growth we see from braille organisations around the country as well as some BANZAT outreach efforts.

### Accessible Signage Guidelines Revision

The Blind Foundation published its Accessible Signage Guidelines in 2010. These were endorsed by several New Zealand organisations, including BANZAT.

In 2012 in reply to a query, BANZAT considered whether the Māori macron should be included in the braille on the signs. If the macron was used in the print of the sign, then we advised the braille macron should be shown.

In 2016 the guidelines are being revised. Improvements in the draft revision are mostly about specifying more clearly the details about the raised print on the signs. The updated guidelines should be on the Blind Foundation website by the end of June 2016.

### Letters from Santa

Many families across New Zealand celebrate Christmas and the tradition of gift giving. For years sighted children have been able to write to our postal service telling Santa what they would like to find under the Christmas tree.

Since 2011 New Zealand Post has funded Letters From Santa in braille and large print. We are delighted that this tradition is continuing. These are available for families and friends to request on behalf of blind and vision impaired children.

They've been a great success. In 2015 more than 160 letters requested via the official website were sent out prior to Christmas.

### Super Animals Sound Cards Project

In May 2015 a nationwide supermarket chain launched a promotion of animal sound cards. Families could pick up from their supermarket the small receivers that would play the sounds when the cards were swiped through the receiver. Children began collecting and swapping the cards to complete their sets.

The Blind Foundation also gathered up sets of the cards and Accessible Format Production labelled the cards in braille. These were given to the Library at the Homai Campus of the Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ. Blind and low vision children began to enjoy the sounds, independently making their selections of favourites from the brailled cards.

For more information read the paper “Super Animals Sound Cards Project” which is being presented at this Sixth General Assembly.

### Tactile map of Hamilton Central Business District

The local government in one of our cities, Hamilton City Council, received New Zealand Government funding to have the Accessible Formats team at the Blind Foundation create a tactile map of Hamilton. The team used symbols from the Moon Alphabet as point symbols in the tactile map. This has been very well received by blind residents.

For more information read the paper “Using the Moon Alphabet Point Symbols in Tactile Diagrams” which is being presented at this Sixth General Assembly.

### Strategic framework for the provision of braille services

At its National Conference in October 2015, Blind Citizens NZ, the blind consumer advocacy group, passed the following resolution:

That Blind Citizens NZ work with the Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust, the Blind Foundation, Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ and other interested parties to develop a strategic framework for the provision of braille services, with scoping to include

the provision of electronic braille resources,

growth and development of braille library collections, and

the promotion and teaching of braille as a primary literacy tool.

We look forward to reporting progress about this initiative.

### Braille on Business Cards

The number of companies asking the Blind Foundation and the BANZAT Secretary for advice on how to include braille on their business cards or other promotional material is on the increase. As braille users we are seeing these cards turn up at all sorts of meetings, handed to us by proud sighted people.

### Marrakesh Treaty

The Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons who are Blind, Visually Impaired, or otherwise Print Disabled was drawn up in 2013. Countries around the world are considering whether or not to ratify it.

Last October the New Zealand Government published a very comprehensive discussion document. BANZAT was pleased to put in a submission supporting the treaty's ratification. We hope this may occur before the end of 2016.

### Braille Signs in Taxis

The year 2008 was significant for blind taxi users as legislation came into effect requiring all taxis to display important passenger information in braille. The Land Transport Operator Licensing Rule specified that all taxis must have a braille sign with the name of the taxi company, the taxi's unique fleet number and the taxi company's contact phone number for complaints. For the first time, braille had achieved legal standing in New Zealand which could be enforced. Braille reading passengers were able to confirm details about the taxi they were riding in, adding greatly to a sense of safety and confidence.

We were deeply dismayed last December to see a discussion document from our Government proposing, among other things, that the braille signs should be removed. BANZAT has made a submission strongly opposing this. For the proposal to be implemented there will need to be a change in legislation which will give New Zealanders another chance to advocate for the continuation of braille signs in taxis.

### Transforming Braille Device

BANZAT trustees were among those who had “hands on” experience back in February and March this year with the prototype of the low cost electronic braille device. We eagerly await its release to the market later this year.

### Hall of Honour

In 2013 BANZAT created a Hall of Honour to recognise outstanding contributions by individuals in the braille sector. This can be found on our website at [www.banzat.org.nz](file:///C:\Users\Judy%20Dixon\Dropbox\icebweb\www.banzat.org.nz).

### BANZAT Website and Social Media

The BANZAT website [www.banzat.org.nz](file:///C:\Users\Judy%20Dixon\Dropbox\icebweb\www.banzat.org.nz) is now well established, with links to braille manuals and information about BANZAT activities.

BANZAT recognises the need to encourage younger braille users to get more involved. Two members of BANZAT have been working on a social media presence via Twitter and Facebook.

# Conclusion

BANZAT continues its role of standards setting and promotion of literacy through braille in New Zealand. We have made good progress over the past four years.

However we cannot take for granted literacy through braille in New Zealand. We must maintain vigilance and continue our advocacy on behalf of our braille users.