# Country Report for Canada to the 6th General Assembly of the International Council on English Braille

## **Introduction**

It is certainly a challenge to sum up four years’ worth of events and activities in a few paragraphs. Much has happened in the field of braille in Canada since the 5th General Assembly in South Africa.

## **Changes Within The Braille Authority**

As a result of changes to the federal regulations governing not-for-profit corporations, Braille Literacy Canada (BLC) had to reapply in order to maintain our charitable status. This was somewhat complicated, particularly because we updated our bylaws and changed our name from the Canadian Braille authority to Braille Literacy Canada in conjunction with the reapplication process. It is gratifying to have moved beyond the administrative and legal tasks required for our name change and reapplication under the Canada Not-For-Profit Corporations Act. Now we are finally able to focus on issues directly related to braille.

## **Braille Formats Committee**

In 2015 BLC reaffirmed the decision made by the Canadian Braille Authority to follow the Braille Authority of North America with regard to braille formatting rules. We then established a committee that is responsible for reviewing guidelines and other publications to be adopted for use in Canada. The BLC Braille Formats Committee has had a productive year. Its first task was to review New Zealand’s Accessible Signage Guidelines and adapt them for use in Canada. We would like to thank the Blind Foundation of New Zealand for granting us permission to undertake this project. The Formats committee also reviewed the guidelines for transaction documents, which were developed by a BLC committee formed specifically for this purpose. (Transaction documents refer to personal and confidential information such as banking and credit card statements.)

## **The Big Brailler Bounce Initiative**

In January of 2015 BLC launched an exciting initiative that is putting braillers in the hands of those who need them. Although we had only intended to run this program for a year it has been so successful that we have decided to keep it going throughout 2016 as well. Thanks to the hard work of BLC board member Myra Rodrigues, braille users across the country can have their own Perkins Braillers free of charge. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who donated their unused braillers to the Brailler Bounce. I would also like to thank Laura Haydon of the Canadian Helen Keller Centre for the tremendous amount of work she has done in cleaning and repairing braillers for us. Many individuals and groups have contributed in some way to the Brailler Bounce, and we are very grateful for their assistance. Once again, I’d like to thank Myra for all the time and energy she has put into making this initiative a continued success.

## **World Braille Day 2016**

BLC collaborated with several organizations in order to celebrate World Braille Day on January 4th, 2016. We hosted the Blast-Off to UEB model-making competition, which gave students the opportunity to use their creativity to construct a rocket and highlight braille at the same time. The winner received a $25 gift certificate for The Braille Superstore, a treasure trove of braille books for all ages. Tactile Vision Graphics generously donated 1000 bookmarks containing the Braille Blast-Off logo that was designed for the World Braille Day celebrations. Finally, BLC hosted a teleconference with the theme of Braille in the 21st Century. Over 60 people from across Canada attended this panel discussion. It generated a lot of interest in new braille-related technology, so we are planning to organize more of these teleconferences in the future.

## **UEB Instructional Strategies workshop**

This workshop was developed by Dr. Cay Holbrook and Betty Nobel. It was presented in conjunction with our 2015 Annual General Meeting in Montreal, and in other cities across Canada. The workshop covers the following topics:

* Instructional strategies (including a guide to help educators determine how and when to make the transition with their students);
* Production options for textbooks and classroom handouts;
* The financial impact of the transition to UEB;
* Case studies and experiences with current students;
* Assessment issues, including timelines for the production of exams in UEB; and
* Acceptance of the new code.

The format for the workshop includes group discussion and case studies.

## **UEB Parties**

The UEB Party model was launched in 2013. It is a community-based approach to sharing information about UEB to those who use contracted

braille. The UEB Party Kit is available on the BLC web site and provides a fun and easy way to present some of the features of UEB. Myra Rodrigues has facilitated UEB Parties throughout Canada in collaboration with CNIB, and has taken this model to the US as well.

## **CNIB Braille Conference**

For the past several years CNIB has held its National Braille Conference that has drawn vendors and participants alike from across Canada and around the world. Although workshops cover a wide range of topics, the recent focus has centered around braille + technology. The Exhibitors’ Hall is an important component of the conference, giving participants a chance to try out the latest in braille displays and other assistive technology.

## **Translation of UEB Rule Book**

In 2015 we received a grant from Canadian Heritage for the translation of the UEB rule Book into French. With the support of CNIB and the Cajole Inn Foundation we were able to complete this project. The reason for the translation is that there are several braille producers (in Quebec, but also in other parts of the world) who transcribe French braille but do not necessarily know English well enough to work through some of the intricacies of the code. It should be noted that only the explanations were translated; the examples and word lists remain in English. L’Institut Nazareth et Louis Braille (one of our founding members) has graciously offered to transcribe and produce a braille version of this document. I’d like to thank ICEB for giving us permission to proceed with the translation of the Rule Book.

## **Conclusion**

This report would not be complete if I did not express my sincere gratitude for all the help that BLC and I have received throughout the past four years. CNIB has generously provided us with financial and administrative support, both of which are very much appreciated. Members and potential members alike have provided advice and feedback on various issues, contributed to our web site and assisted with grant application processes.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Darleen Bogart, who received BANA’s Braille Excellence Award in November of 2015. On behalf of BLC I congratulate Darleen on an award that is very well-deserved!

Finally, my thanks go to Betty Nobel, who is the Past President of BLC and has represented Canada on the ICEB executive since 2012. Betty’s enthusiasm and her commitment to braille are a real asset and I am certain that she will continue to promote the importance of braille literacy at every opportunity.

I look forward to the next four years as we find new ways to improve access to braille literacy.

Respectfully Submitted

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