# **Country Report For Canada**

**International Council on English Braille**

**8th General Assembly**

**Auckland, New Zealand**

**May 2024**

**Canadian Delegation**

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## **Introduction**

Many changes have taken place in the last four years, and the world of braille is no exception. In this report I will provide an overview of Braille Literacy Canada (BLC) activities, and I will also highlight other braille-related events and initiatives that have happened in Canada since the 7th General Assembly in 2020.

## **Braille Zoomers**

In my report to the mid-term meeting of the Executive Committee I noted that in April 2020 BLC launched the Braille Zoomers Program. This is a monthly virtual get-together for adult and older adult braille learners. Each session is an informal opportunity to share resources, support and strategies that could be helpful for adult braille learners. While there is a general theme each month, the intent is that participants determine the direction of the discussion so that BLC can best support their braille learning journey. After four years this program is still going strong and we’ve been able to come alongside dozens of braille learners!

As a result of this initiative, BLC has also launched our Braille Starter Kits. Adult braille learners in Canada can register for a free starter kit, which includes a slate and stylus, braille flash cards, a Dymo® labeller, a deck of playing cards, a UEB symbols list, and other resources to help learners practise their braille skills.

## **World Braille Day activities**

Each year, BLC partners with organizations across Canada to present a series of online events in celebration of World Braille Day. The sessions are open to people of all ages and are geared to anyone with an interest in access to braille, with a focus on braille readers, educators, and library staff. The events take place throughout the month of January, giving us an opportunity to turn World Braille Day into Braille Literacy Month. The following organizations collaborated on this year’s events:

* Accessible Libraries;
* the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC);
* Alternate Education Resources Ontario (AERO);
* Braille Literacy Canada (BLC);
* the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB);
* the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA);
* the CNIB Foundation;
* the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS); and
* the Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired (PRCVI).

The 2024 events included an online writers’ festival and a content creators panel discussion, as well as a presentation by Chancey Fleet, Assistive Technology Coordinator at the New York Public Library. In addition, the Braille Boost gave students an opportunity to practise their braille skills with a series of games and puzzles that TVI’s could download and emboss.

## **Access to Braille**

CELA continues to offer its Single Use Braille, and NNELS has also made this service available to its patrons. Current and future titles produced as BRF files are only embossed when requested, and patrons do not have to return these hard copies to the library. Canadians can also access Bookshare through CELA, and thousands of titles from the National Library Service in the United States are being added to CELA’s collection.

## **Braille Certification**

The following table shows the BLC/CNIB braille certification numbers for 2020-2023.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Certification | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
| UEB Update | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Transcriber | 26 | 26 | 25 | 13 |
| Technical | 7 | 11 | 19 | 14 |
| Music | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

In addition, Beta testing is underway for the CNIB UEB Proofreading Course. It will earn successful participants a BLC/CNIB Letter of Proficiency in UEB Proofreading. It uses as references the most recent editions of the UEB Rule Book, Guidelines for Technical Material and BANA’s Braille Formats. The small group of Beta testers are selected from those who had inquired about a proofreading course and includes one tactual braille reader.

## **Other items of Note**

* BLC has updated our Accessible Signage Guidelines to reflect current best practices and legislative changes that have taken place since the guidelines were originally published in 2016.
* The Graphing Calculator Guidelines have also been updated to bring them in line with UEB. We would like to thank Bonnie Read, Michele Hayes and PRCVI for all of their invaluable contributions to this document. At the time of writing we are coordinating with BANA so that these updated guidelines can be approved for use in both Canada and the United States.
* Brailler Bounce: BLC continues to provide refurbished Perkins Braillers free of charge to individuals across Canada, pending the availability of used braillers.
* The Edie Mourre Scholarship provides funding for those interested in pursuing training and/or certification in any of the braille codes approved for use in Canada.
* A program to make French print/braille books available to Francophones across Canada was launched in 2021.
* Thanks to generous donors, BLC has been able to establish an endowment that will help to ensure the organization is sustainable for many years to come.
* Braille Bites: PRCVI and BLC have teamed up to produce and distribute a series of short bite-sized videos that demonstrate simple activities to help develop literacy skills for young children who are blind or have low vision. These are available on PRCVI’s YouTube channel.
* In 2018 the BLC Board launched the BLC President’s Award, given annually to honour Canadians who have made a significant contribution to the field of braille. Darleen Bogart was the first recipient, followed by Myra Rodrigues, Phyllis Landon, Cay Holbrook, Bonnie Read and Debbie Gillespie.
* In 2021 BLC hosted our first annual Braille Symposium: From Braille Literacy to Empowerment. An afternoon of world-renowned speakers was followed by a few rounds of braille trivia. Each of these events was a resounding success, and this year will be our fourth annual Braille Symposium. It will take place on June 14th.
* Our Annual General Meeting for 2024 will be held on Saturday, June 8th.

For more information about BLC, please visit us at [www.brailleliteracycanada.ca](http://www.brailleliteracycanada.ca).

## **Conclusion**

It has been an honour to serve as Canada’s representative to the ICEB Executive Committee for the last eight years. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed being a part of this organization, and I look forward to seeing all that ICEB will accomplish in the coming years.

Respectfully submitted,

Jen Goulden,

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Ottawa, Ontario

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