# New Zealand Country Report to the Eighth General Assembly of the International Council on English Braille, May 2024, from The Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust (BANZAT)

## Purpose of the Trust

The purpose of BANZAT is to:

• set standards and 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.

## BANZAT Trustees

The 11 trustees of BANZAT are drawn from a wide range of teachers, producers and users of Braille. There is representation from:

• Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ);

• Blind Citizens NZ;

• Blind Low Vision NZ (BLVNZ);

• Kāpō Māori Aotearoa (KMA); and

• Parents of Vision Impaired NZ (PVI).

## Setting Standards and Staying up to Date

BANZAT works with ICEB committees to contribute to and learn from Braille developments across Unified English Braille. We have implemented all ICEB UEB Rules and amendments.

## Accredit Practitioners Involved in Braille Production

BANZAT collaborates with the Australian Braille Authority (ABA) to set and administer the Trans-Tasman Certificate of Proficiency in Unified English Braille. The examination is held each year during the first two weeks of October. ABA and BANZAT take turns to set the examination paper according to specified criteria about what the examination is intending to test. ABA and BANZAT each test examination candidates against their own unique format guidelines.

## Production Shift of Student Braille

Over the last few months, BLVNZ and BLENNZ have worked closely to ensure the smooth transition of production of educational materials from BLVNZ transcribers to a new transcriber team at BLENNZ.

## BANZAT Braille Transcription Course

For a number of years BANZAT has had the idea, but not the funds, to run a Braille transcription course in order to increase the pool of Braille transcribers in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2023 we received funding from the Lottery Grants Board to part meet the funding for such a course. We also partnered with The Generator, a not-for-profit organisation that helps members of communities that are often marginalised in setting up businesses to bring their business ideas to fruition.

So, after much planning, in late February 2024, six blind would-be Braille transcribers got together for a weekend to undertake an intensive course in how to transcribe documents into Braille using the Duxbury Braille Translator. It was a tiring, but rewarding weekend.

We spent our time formatting unformatted documents to render them as properly formatted Braille documents.

As well as the taught component of the course, we will be having Zoom get togethers approximately monthly until the end of the year. The Zoom meetings will include: business support, master classes on various aspects of Braille production and facilitate an ongoing network of course participants.

BANZAT is pleased to have been able to put on the course and follow-up networking sessions, and we were particularly pleased to not only have six blind course participants, but to have a blind course tutor: Chantelle Griffiths.

We are excited to see how our new transcribers develop and contribute to more Braille being produced in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Massey University Course Overview

The Specialist Teaching programme at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand, offers a number of qualifications for professionals working in the area of supporting children and young people who are blind and low vision, specifically Resource Teachers Vision (RTV) and Developmental Orientation and Mobility Specialists (DOM). The qualifications include:

• Post Graduate Certificate in Specialist Teaching (1 year part time, 2 courses);

• Post Graduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching (2 years part time, 4 courses);

• Masters in Specialist Teaching (1 year part time, 2 courses).

This year, we have 25 students enrolled across the three programmes.

In the Post Graduate Certificate, we have five students who are qualified RTVs who have already completed the Post Graduate Diploma, now completing two DOM specific courses to become RTV DOM endorsed. This is the first year we have offered this pathway, which was developed in partnership with BLENNZ, as a way of increasing the workforce of people with DOM knowledge around the country. Students need to have completed a Post Graduate Diploma to be eligible to complete this qualification.

In the Post Graduate Diploma programme, we have 8 year one RTV students who received Ministry of Education study awards to complete the training. The study award allows them to work part time at the same time as they are studying, which gives them opportunities to apply their new learning to practice. We also have 2 year one DOM students who are being funded by BLENNZ. They also work part time and study part time over the two years. In year two, we have 9 RTV students.

A requirement of the Post Graduate Diploma is to complete a Braille Proficiency course and students have to provide evidence of this before they graduate. This is achieved by completing the UEB online English and Introduction to Mathematics courses.

This is the only qualification in Aotearoa New Zealand for teachers who want to gain a qualification as a teacher of students who are blind or low vision (referred to as TVI in the US and QTVI in the UK).

This year, we have one student completing a Masters in Specialist Teaching, which is self-funded. For this qualification, students complete a 45 credit professional inquiry into a topic relevant to their professional context, as well as a 15 credit course.

Massey University is the sole provider of these qualifications in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Promotion of Braille

### Capitalisation of Braille

At the 2020 BANZAT AGM, the matter was raised over whether we would consider giving the word "Braille" a capital B in all contexts. Aotearoa New Zealand had never had an official policy on this matter, but it had been normal practice to follow the American system of only capitalising for proper nouns. In 2022, we put this to the wider nationwide Braille community, by way of an online survey. We were thrilled with the number of responses, and a clear majority of respondents answered in favour of capitalising the word Braille in all contexts.

At the start of 2023 we shared this recommendation with disability organisations, media outlets, publishers, government departments and the general public.

We are proud to have adopted this practice, giving honour and respect to the young man who, 200 years ago, invented and gave his name to the code that has changed the course of literacy for blind people throughout the world.

### Children's Braille Challenge

In 2022 we changed from running an annual Braille Competition to having a Braille Challenge. Participation has grown exponentially, as our school aged (and younger) Braille learners, in consultation with their specialist teachers, set themselves goals, and gain individualised prizes for meeting these goals. A highlight of the Challenge, which is held in Term 3 each year, has been the opportunity to meet online with other challenge participants. In 2023, we expanded this even further to include twelve mentors from the adult Braille reading community. For many children, this was the first time they had heard anyone reading Braille fluently and expressively, and it was a great opportunity to speak with others who had walked the Braille path ahead of them, and now lead fulfilling, Braille-rich lives.

### Strategic Framework for the Provision of Braille Services

In 2018, Blind Citizens NZ, Aotearoa New Zealand's oldest blindness consumer organisation, launched its Strategic Framework for the Provision of Braille Services. Prepared in collaboration with BLENNZ and BLVNZ, the document covers production, teaching and library services for Braille users in Aotearoa New Zealand.

An annual discussion allows Blind Citizens NZ to keep up with developments, in particular at BLENNZ and BLVNZ, the primary teachers and producers of Braille in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### Braille Special Interest Group

In late 2023 a Braille special interest network was established by Blind Citizens NZ. This was in response to blind people calling for a way for them to discuss and advocate for Braille in Aotearoa New Zealand. The network primarily consists of touch readers of Braille. Adults who are learning Braille or wish to learn can interact with life-long users of Braille. An email list has been set up to allow members to communicate with each other about all things Braille. Virtual meetings are planned throughout the year and a face-to-face meeting is likely in October 2024 to coincide with the next National Conference of Blind Citizens NZ.

We are looking forward to seeing this network grow in the future.

### All of Government Documents in Braille

The COVID-19 pandemic and advocacy from Blind Citizens NZ and other disability organisations drew attention to the need for information to be in the hands of disabled people in their preferred formats. Government paid Braille producers to provide health information in Braille. Since COVID, the work has continued and documents in Braille have been funded by several Government ministries. Documents include information about the launch and development of Whaikaha -- Ministry of Disabled People, the National Cervical Screening Programme, guidance for trustees serving on Aotearoa New Zealand's school boards, and much more.

We are now seeing local government funding some items in Braille. For example, in the 2022 elections the Wellington City Council paid for candidate booklets in Braille, a first for Aotearoa New Zealand.

### Adult Braille Library

Aotearoa New Zealand has joined the Marrakesh Treaty which allows us to exchange Braille with co-operating libraries all around the world. Aotearoa New Zealand produced materials should be reported to the Accessible Books Consortium Catalogue. BLVNZ has moved its library to emboss on demand.

BANZAT is monitoring these developments.

### Braille Music in Aotearoa New Zealand

Braille music in Aotearoa New Zealand is going from strength to strength for both children and adult learners with exciting initiatives being developed. Our popular Music School programme run by BLENNZ supports learners who are studying music at school and accessing music through Braille. This programme incorporates musicianship, group singing, band, and movement and dance within a musical context. The past two years have seen an increased emphasis on leadership skills, with two recent school leavers becoming volunteer tutors and mentors for younger learners.

The Wesseling Awards is an initiative developed by a small group of Braille musicians to recognise the unique skills of Braille music readers. The awards are in memory of Lisette Wesseling, a professional singer, teacher, pedagog and Braille music advocate who firmly believed in the value of Braille music and the access it affords for a wide range of musical opportunities. There are five levels of achievement, each building on the skills learned in the previous levels. The physical award is an interactive "trophy" that is added to with each level achieved. It incorporates many tactile elements including shape, weight, texture and tactile interest and has been designed primarily by blind people.

### Tactile and Technology Literacy Centre

In 2022, a new Braille teaching and production social enterprise was founded by three members of the blind community. For its first project, the Tactile and Technology Literacy Centre (TTLC) received a generous grant from the Ministry of Culture and Heritage COVID Regeneration Fund to develop a Braille music curriculum for adults in collaboration with Dr Wendy Richards. There is no formal pathway for adults in Aotearoa New Zealand to learn Braille music. The Braille Music for Us curriculum aims to increase access to music literacy through Braille while providing much-needed training and skill development opportunities for blind adults in all aspects of the Braille music creation and production process, including Braille transcription training, MuseScore skill development, embossing, binding and administration. The curriculum has already had considerable international interest, with plans for international collaboration and testing to begin in 2025.

### BANZAT Tenth Anniversary

BANZAT celebrated its tenth anniversary on 17 November 2020. The event was hosted by BLENNZ. A moving highlight of the celebration was a performance by blind adult musicians who, as part of their learning Braille, had asked to be taught Braille music. Violin, viola and flute players performed and sang, all their parts having been learned from scores written in Braille music. Their teacher was Chantelle Griffiths who was then a Braille instructor at BLVNZ, the service provider for adults.

### BANZAT Website and Social Media

The BANZAT website <https://www.banzat.org.nz/> is well established, with links to Braille manuals and information about BANZAT activities. Our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/banzatnz/> is reaching out to followers in several countries.

## Looking Ahead

We have adopted a three-year strategic plan to be renewed in June 2024. One goal is to work with the organisation of indigenous blind Aotearoa New Zealanders, Kāpō Māori Aotearoa, to look into whether a Grade 2 Braille Code should be developed for te reo Māori, which is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's three official languages.

## In Memoriam

We would like to remember Julian Lee. He was born in Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand, on 11 November 1923. Julian attended the Blind Institute school in Parnell, Auckland.

His musical gifts, supported by Braille music, were prodigious. He worked primarily as a jazz arranger and pianist in Aotearoa New Zealand, the United States and Australia. In his later years, he was able to inspire young blind musicians in Australia.

Julian worked with several people who transcribed his arrangements into print. One of these transcribers was Bette Gilmore, the New Zealand music teacher and Braille transcriber at BLENNZ whose passing we recorded in our 2020 In Memoriam.

Julian died on 3 December 2020 in Moss Vale, New South Wales.

## In Conclusion

I wish to acknowledge BANZAT Trustees and the organisations they represent for their ongoing dedication and support for all things Braille, and for assisting me in writing this country report.

Maria Stevens

Chair, BANZAT

23 April 2024