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SPEAKERS

Speaker 1, Riane LaPaire, Shawn Marsolais, Jen Jesso, Rob Mineault, Steve Barclay



Rob Mineault 00:15

Hey and welcome to another episode of AT banter.



Steve Barclay 00:21

Banter.



Rob Mineault 00:24

Hey, Banter, 2026. This is, of course, the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is, once again, Rob Mineault, for the first time in 2026 and joining me today, we're a skeleton crew. It's just me and Mr. Steve Barclay.



Steve Barclay 00:51

I appreciate being called a skeleton crew after putting several pounds on over Christmas.

R

Rob Mineault 00:57

Was that type of Christmas?

S

Steve Barclay 01:00

It was, it was, indeed, yeah, everything.

R

Rob Mineault 01:06

But did you have a nice break? How long were you off for?

S

Steve Barclay 01:09

I was off from the we took off the 24th through the 28th I went into the office on the 29th and discovered that they had locked the building so there was no point being there because nobody could get in. And then, yeah, I've been off ever since nice so, so back to the office on Monday.

R

Rob Mineault 01:28

Wait, so technically, you're not even back.

S

Steve Barclay 01:31

No, well, technically we are working today. Greg, Greg's in the office building still locked, but he put a sign on the door for the couriers. Yeah, he's holding down the fort there. I'm working down in The Man Cave. And, yeah, we'll be back on Monday.

R

Rob Mineault 01:50

Excellent. Well, but you had a nice rest?

S

Steve Barclay 01:52

Oh, it was fabulous, absolutely fabulous, except for the run up to Christmas, because that's always everybody comes to us. So we had like, 16 Christmas Eve, and then I think, nine Christmas Day, and we did games on Boxing Day, which was kind of nice and relaxing. And of course, through all of this, from the 26 onward, there has been World Junior Hockey, so I'm like, super happy camper.

R

Rob Mineault 02:20

Oh yeah, that's right, you know, it's funny. I talked to, I talked to Mr. Ryan Fleury, over the over the break, very briefly, just to ask him a question podcast related. And of course, he's on vacation, which is, I should tell the audience, that's why he's not here. But he sends his regards to everybody. And he mentioned that this World Hockey thing. So that's, I'm sure that's where he is right now, sitting in front of TV watching hockey. In any case, I have something else to say to you. Steve,

R

Rob Mineault 02:51

Oh?

R

Rob Mineault 02:51

Happy World Braille day.

S

Steve Barclay 02:55

Well indeed, Happy World Braille day, back to you.

R**Rob Mineault 02:59**

Because this is, of course, being released on World Braille day. We've get we're gathering here together, actually, in a little bit of an impromptu podcast that we threw together over the break in order to celebrate World Braille Day. So without any further ado, I wants to get right to the meat of the podcast, because I'm really excited this year. Of course, you know, we've kind of done something like this in past years. We've called it BraillePalooza, very tongue in cheek, and we've, we've sort of talked a lot about a Braille. This year, we wanted to do something a little bit different. So we've gathered together some some real Braille advocate superstars, in my opinion, to have a bit of a conversation and talk a little bit more high level about Braille and Braille literacy and where it kind of sits right now, both systemically, in our in our organizations, and our schools and our public spaces, and to just get some opinions and some conversation about about where people feel we are. It's really important to to remember that Braille is literacy and it's access and it's independence for a lot of people. So that's why we wanted to come together and and to record this. So with that, I want to introduce our panel for today. We'll go around the room, and maybe each of you, if you could just say who you are, and give us a little bit of a of an idea of why this topic is important to you, and and how Braille sort of how you interact with Braille in your daily or work lives.

S**Shawn Marsolais 04:44**


I'm Sean Marsolais. I am the least of the Braille superheroes as you referred to us, or superstars I can't remember. So I'm from Blind Beginnings and the Limitless Podcast, and I grew up with retinitis pigmentosa, and I actually didn't learn braille until I was 18, and at that point, I pretty much could no longer read print. But because I learned it sort of late after graduating from high school, I'm still quite slow. And I use it for necessity when, you know, I use it for presentations and playing games and labeling things in my kitchen and stuff like that, because to actually read a braille book would be it would take me forever. So I wish, I guess, I'm a Braille advocate from the side of I wish I had learned it earlier. I wish that I was a natural at reading braille and that I could use it more in my life, but I also work with children and youth who are blind, many of whom are avid Braille readers. So I kind of have that I come with that perspective as well.


J**Jen Jesso 05:57**


Hello, everyone. I am Jen, Jesso and I have low vision, so I learned braille in elementary school, but didn't really use it University. And these days, I am a dual media user, so I use large print and Braille. I've got a Braille displacing in front of me right here at my computer. And in addition to being a Braille user myself, I am a teacher of students with visual impairments. I currently work at the provincial Resource Center for the visually impaired as the outreach coordinator, and I'm also a certified braille transcriber and a secretary on the board of Braille Literacy Canada. So I sort of come here with a variety of different hats.

 Shawn Marsolais 06:45
True superstar.


 Steve Barclay 06:46
We're all superstars. Don't be humble.

 Rob Mineault 06:52
We're all superstars today.

 Riane LaPaire 06:54
So my name is Riane LaPaire. I am the Braille Coordinator at the National Network for Equitable Library Service. I am a sighted Braille advocate, and I, like Jen, sit on the board of Braille literacy Canada as the current treasurer. And you can also, you know, purchase some great Braille devices from me and Steve - Canadian Assistive Technology plug there. You're welcome. I was planning that one all since yesterday, and in my hobby and spare time, I volunteer for other blindness organizations, including the Saskatoon blind skiers. Not quite a superstar, just here and excited to ensure everyone has equal access to literacy, whether that be through print, but in this case, Braille.

 Rob Mineault 07:54
Okay, well, thanks everybody for joining us. Let me just open up the open up the conversation and just ask -

 Steve Barclay 08:01
Can we actually step back one step?

 Rob Mineault 08:04
Sure.

S

Steve Barclay 08:04

Because I'd really like to have somebody take up the reasoning , why we say Braille is literacy? Because I think that's a very, very important message.

J

Jen Jesso 08:20

Yeah, yeah. So Braille is as essential to a Braille user as print is to somebody who's sighted. And there are a variety of different tools that we can access or use to access literacy. But for many people with visual impairments, whether it's children or adults, Braille is truly an essential part of their literacy toolkit. There are things that I do even though I can read large print, there are things that I do every day that I can't do with large print, and so Braille is often the quickest and sometimes really the only way that I can accomplish a task. And so, yeah, I sometimes get the question just in my personal life about, you know, oh, well, one of these days, is technology going to replace Braille? And my answer to that is always, you know, when the day comes that technology replaces print, then sure, but until that day comes. The answer is, I don't think so.

S

Shawn Marsolais 09:24

Jen, can you talk about when kids are learning Braille, they're also learning like, it's all like, wrapped up in learning to read and learning Braille for blind students.

J

Jen Jesso 09:36

Yeah, so students with visual impairments have services from a qualified teacher of students with visual impairments. So this is a professional who has a teaching certificate and also has a master's degree in education of students with visual impairments, and part of that of course is on literacy and Braille literacy. But for a student who like. Even including myself growing up, who is learning to read at the same time as we're learning Braille, we are learning basically literacy. So we're not learning the Braille writing system in the way that a braille transcriber might, where they're learning all of the rules, but we're just learning Braille as we learn to read and write the same way that a sighted student does with print.

R

Rob Mineault 10:23

So given all of that where is the system failing in terms of pushing Braille literacy forward?

R

Riane LaPaire 10:31

That's a big question, like, where do you even start?

S

Steve Barclay 10:36

There are multiple areas where kids are being failed by the system, and that can be anything from there not being enough qualified teachers of the visually impaired out there. You know, I know in certain provinces there's, there's teachers who have case loads over 100 kids. And now, granted, all of those aren't really using kids. But you know, how do you even see that many kids in a school year? Then there's a lack of access to technologies that help support Braille. Lack of transcribers to produce Braille. What am I missing? There's probably other oh, and then there's then there's resistance from some of the vision teachers themselves, some of whom take the attitude that, well, we don't really need Braille because technology is so good now, and that is super dangerous, and I really think they should be set for retraining when they say that.

R

Riane LaPaire 11:39

So a lack of funding, and also just the attitudinal barriers, sometimes even from families and students thinking that, you know, oh, well, audio is just so much easier, or I can type that's good enough kind of thing, right?

S

Shawn Marsolais 11:53

Well, and I think in the case of my parents and I, there are other parents that it's like a big hurdle emotionally, to accept Braille or a white cane for somebody who's low vision, that can sort of pass as sighted. So there's sort of that, like not ready to accept once Braille gets introduced. There's no denying that this person is blind.

S

Steve Barclay 12:19

I've seen that at the Children's Low Vision clinic. Over the years, a number, a number of parents have have been very resistance, resistant about their kid being taught Braille. And, you know, we try and sit them down and and lay it out for them as best we can, but at the end of the day, if they say no, it's a no.

J Jen Jesso 12:37

Yeah, there are assessments that teachers of students with visual impairments use to, you know, gather some objective data about students learning media and how they're using their various senses to gather information, and work very closely with families to make that decision. But it is, it is an individual decision. That's, you know, there is no one size fits all.

R Rob Mineault 13:05

So really, it's, it sounds like it's sort of a bit of a mixture of systemic problems as well as attitudinal and, I mean, I guess I would, I would throw something on the pile as well. And that would be, maybe we're not driving home the point quite hard enough. You know, I can't help but think back to the journey that sort of the say the Deaf community has gone through over the years, and the way that their advocates have been very, very, loud, yeah, they've really, really fought the fight, maybe, maybe the advocates for this community needs to take a page from that.

J Jen Jesso 13:51

I definitely think there is a lack of awareness, just from everybody, like everybody in the general public, when it comes to Braille and technology and how technology can be used to access material in Braille. And I, you know, for example, am a little bit involved in computer programming, just as a hobby. And like, there are a ton of developers who don't know that braille displays are a thing, and don't realize that they could make a huge difference just by making their apps and their documents and resources accessible. And, you know, I use my braille display out in public quite often, and people will come up and, you know, just be interested in what it is, and they've never seen it before. So I do think that, yeah, when it comes to Braille and technology specifically, it's just not something that people see every day being used.

S Shawn Marsolais 14:51

I also think that we don't have, like, the argument is always made that it's a small percentage of people who read Braille, which just slams the door instantly. It seems so, if only 10% of the legally blind population is Braille reading - so we're a small population, and then even smaller piece of that is a Braille user, then the argument can always been, I don't know, it's like, well, it doesn't affect that many people, so I guess we don't need to provide it.

R**Riane LaPaire 15:29**

Think too that federal and provincial governments and municipal governments have a place to play here as well with even from the development of curriculum that we're not including, creating materials excessively. You know standards that we need to include for teaching, whether you know that every potential Braille reading student needs to learn braille, and this is the requirement that is needed for instruction, for this, for all of those things, because it feels like half of the TVI's job, our teacher of students with visual impairments, job is to just be advocating for a lot of that instruction Time and for those extended core curriculum, and that those Braille skills, rather than the time that they could be spending with the student, at least, that seems to be what I'm hearing in in Saskatchewan, but maybe other places as well. But not only that, you know, if we have a, you know, provincial and federal legislation for, you know, Braille signage and and having Braille availability, because we, we would never say this about print, right, right? So why, why do we need to continue to I mean, obviously we do need to continue to advocate, but we shouldn't have to continue to advocate for something that is a print equivalent, honestly, like I put a Braille label on everything I ship out from Nels if I know it's going to a braille reader, even sometimes if it's not just for an awareness piece, and the number of people who are shocked, or the number of emails I get saying thank you so much, I could tell that The package was addressed to me, just seems ridiculous. And I, I, people are thankful for braille, and that's great, but it should just be the expectation, right? What like there? There must be some other way to to just make this the norm.

S**Shawn Marsolais 17:36**

That's the same when you get a business card that has Braille on it. Shameless plug - Blind Beginnings, brailles business cards. But it's so impactful, like it just it so unexpected, especially if it's coming from somebody who isn't in the blindness world, right? Like they're not their business is not related to disability or blindness, which is super rare, but when that happens, it's it means so much, or a family member or a friend brailing Like a greeting card, a birthday card, a Christmas card, whatever, like, it means so much because it is so rare that it happens, you know?

R**Rob Mineault 18:19**

And that makes me actually think of something that came up just before the break, which I'd love to get here hear what everybody's opinion on as well, is that in some ways, we might be taking steps backwards, because the Free Matter for the Blind with Canada Post is potentially going away.

R**Riane LaPaire 18:37**

I personally don't think that we can rely on assurances or verbal agreements that the government is going to continue funding it and Canada Post is going to continue by providing it. I think it is such a step backwards to not have it in legislation to make it a guarantee.

S**Shawn Marsolais 18:57**

For the lay listener who isn't aware we've been able to mail braille materials for free, because Braille takes up so much space, it's, you know, to like, a book in Braille is often multiple volumes, or, sorry, a print book translated to Braille is often multiple volumes. And so the cost of mailing Braille would be really, really high, which isn't really fair that blind people should have to pay more to receive materials in a format that they can read something that comes to mind. I have friends. I kind of grew up in a generation where most, most of us who had low vision were not learning Braille, if, if they could read large print and their vision wasn't expected to decline that that was sort of what they were encouraged to do. And then as adults, they really struggle in an employment situation, or, you know, a situation where you're maybe. Giving a presentation, you have to be able to read your notes, but in order to read your notes, you have to hold them really close to your face, or have really huge font, so it's slower to read. It's just not what's the word efficient? So there's that too. It's like, I think a lot more of the low vision community would be better prepared or more employable or more efficient if they were using braille.

J**Jen Jesso 20:28**

Yeah, Sean, that's an example of one of the I mentioned earlier, that there's some things I do for work or even leisure that aren't, you know, really possible with large print. And yeah, presenting is one of them. We do a lot of videos at work for social media where I'm reading a script. You know, that's another one. I can't really have it in front of my face. Also, when I get nervous, I've got nystagmus, and that gets way worse if I'm nervous. So like, print actually becomes much more difficult to read if I'm presenting something than if I'm not.

S**Steve Barclay 21:02**

There's actually statistics out that show that people who are braille literate with the visual impairment, have a much higher employment rate than people who are not braille literate as well. So it has impacts, significant impacts, through throughout their lives.

S**Shawn Marsolais 21:21**

Can we talk about electronic Braille versus, like, hard copy Braille? I mean, first of all, the the cost of, like a Braille display is quite high, and, and then, or and, or you can have sort of a minimum, or, you know, only a couple of lines of Braille that refreshes. So that's different. But I'm also curious, maybe, Jen, you can speak to this whether I was talking to some of the youth who are Braille readers about refreshable braille, and there was a comment about how they didn't like the feel of it, the same as paper, whereas, for me, because I'm not that great at braille, and I didn't learn braille till I was 18, I'm like, oh, I love the crispness of refreshable braille over paper, where it can sort of get smushed down a little bit. But just yeah, just curious about, is there a difference? And how do people feel about electronic versus hard? Copy print, well, not print paper.

J**Jen Jesso 22:24**

Yeah, I think it's probably like you were saying personal preference, depending on sort of just what you kind of like to read. But there are advantages to paper Braille, like Braille display, as you said, is just one line of Braille, or maybe now with the new multi line displays you might get, you know, maybe nine or 10 lines of Braille, but they aren't in common use yet. And there are situations where you do want to be able to see the whole page like you I can skim down a page of Braille way faster than I can skim on a Braille display, hitting the little thumb key to refresh. And then there's also tactile graphics. I think these are often left out when we're talking about Braille. Like tactile graphics can also be essential. So in some of my courses, for example, we've been dealing with UML diagrams, for example, that are just very complex, detailed diagrams that I just cannot understand it. When I zoom in, I can only see, like, one word at a time, and they're, you know, you might have two dozen boxes and different shapes connected in various ways. And so I get these as tactile graphics, and they are absolutely essential for learning. But, you know, every I've been to several post secondary institutions, and every time I go to a new one, I need to do a whole kind of education and advocacy session all over again with the Accessibility Services Office, because they often haven't had a braille reader in a long time, or maybe the staff has changed, or they just, you know, aren't aware of how do we get tactile graphics, if we if we need them. And in BC, at least, there is no government funding for Braille. So, you know, each post secondary institution has to, sort of, you know, find their own funding or figure out their own process.

R**Riane LaPaire 24:17**

I'd like to add to that, even if you do have all the processes in place. There is, like, a serious shortage of new Braille Transcribers coming into the field. And even if they do take the CNIB course, it doesn't mean that they're ready to come out of the box and transcribe, you know, textbooks for post secondary. It's, it's complex work. You need to build up to that. You need to be mentored. You need to, you know, learn about, you know, production of braille, and to make sure you have all your Braille formats and things like that too. It's not just as like, Okay, I did my course, and away I go. Here's your computer science textbook.

S

Shawn Marsolais 25:00

Yeah, Jen, did you just say that there is no funding for universities for Braille?

J

Jen Jesso 25:05

So my understanding, and this is not my area of expertise, but I just come at this from the perspective of somebody who's taken a lot of post secondary courses, is that the agency in BC that produces textbooks in alternate formats. They can provide e text and they can provide other accessible formats, but they do not have funding to produce Braille, is my understanding.

S

Shawn Marsolais 25:31

Yeah. I mean, I know a lot of students that you know struggle when they get to university. So they're totally blind. They're Braille reading. They go through the K to 12 system, they have access to the braille materials they need, and then they move on to university, and all of a sudden it's not available. And that's really, really hard, but I didn't actually realize that there was, like, zero, like, it's just a definite no, it's not possible. That's awful.

S

Steve Barclay 26:00

Yeah, yeah, there's, I've run into many cases where kids hit University and the textbooks for their course courses aren't available until they're three months into that course.

R

Riane LaPaire 26:13

If at all.

J

Jen Jesso 26:14

I was just going to say, in regards to the textbook timing issue, I think part of that is, is this, this notion that, you know, everybody is responsible for accessibility, and so, like the instructor, for example, needs to get their textbook list and their course materials ready with enough lead time that the Braille can be produced. Because I've had that be an issue as well, where, you know, it's not that people aren't wanting to do it, but it's just that the course materials, for whatever reason, aren't created in time, with enough time to get the Braille done.

S

Shawn Marsolais 26:50

So is it possible to get a Braille display through like at Accessible Technology BC, to use, if you can only use electronic Braille at university, like, do they account for that in any way by providing the technology?

J

Jen Jesso 27:11

Yeah, so I should clarify there's my understanding is there's no funding for hard copy Braille. So right textbooks as an actual, you know, embossed book ATBC does provide loans of braille displays, and also there's quite a bit of funding for braille displays as well. Okay, sorry. I should have clarified that earlier.

S

Shawn Marsolais 27:32

But then, if you never needed one or had one in high school, you might not know how to use a Braille display. So you're starting university, where, arguably, there's a lot more reading, a lot more a lot more everything, and a lot less support, and now you also have to learn how to read on a Braille display as well.

J

Jen Jesso 27:53

Yeah, I think access to training is super important for adults, for technology and also for Braille. I mean, you know what, if somebody loses their vision in their 20s and wants to learn braille, I think there definitely is a need for more equitable resources in terms of accessing training.

R

Rob Mineault 28:14

Yeah, I think 100% I think that, again, this is a big misconception. People don't realize that there is a big learning curve. Somebody can't just jump from reading braille on paper to jumping into using something like a Braille display. And not only that. I mean, they're they're infamously expensive. So you know, to for a family to be able to just go out and purchase a Braille display for primary school kiddo. For a lot of families, it's just not going to happen.

J Jen Jesso 28:45

Yeah, so in BC, I can't speak to other provinces, but in BC, children do have good access to Braille technology through a program called Set-BC. So they would work with their TVI to get any braille displays or other Braille technology and embossers or whatever else they need through Set BC. And then there's some other opportunities for families to get funding as well, but, and as I mentioned ATBC provides funding at the post secondary level in BC. But you are correct that adults who need a Braille display don't have any funding. So they do have to fund that, you know, \$4000, \$5,000 device themselves. And you know, now there's tactile displays coming out that my understanding is they cost 10s of 1000s of dollars. So that's even more prohibitive.

S Steve Barclay 29:36

You're talking about a Monarch. It's like \$23,000.

S Shawn Marsolais 29:40

So does it give you a tactile like diagram as well as Braille?

S Steve Barclay 29:47

Yeah, it's a multi line Braille display, so you can do some interesting things with it. When it's got it's got dots in a square array. So yes, you can do tactile graphics with it very effectively. It also allows you to zoom in and out on those graphics, so you can get more and less detail, so you can get an overview, as well as zoom in and get the detail of a graphic. And it also lets, lets you dynamically adjust the spacing between the Braille. So if you're, you know, a beginning user, you can have it spaced out a little more for, you know, a little more clarity. It's an interesting technology, but because it's so expensive, there's been very little adoption of it in Canada so far, even though it's, you know, manufactured here in Canada,

R Riane LaPaire 30:29

And it's also heavy and big. Yeah, I wouldn't want to carry one of those around University.

J Jen Jesso 30:35

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's the kind of device that I think hopefully this is sort of the first device in, you know, what will be kind of a new era of multi line braille displays and tactile graphic displays.

S Steve Barclay 30:50

A lot of potential, but the price needs to come down a long ways. And you know, where, when you look at new technologies coming out and the cost of technologies. If you go back, you know, back to the beginning of my, my career in assistive technology. Back then, a VersaBraille was somewhere around \$9,000. It was a, you know, a single 20 line braille display with with a built in computer. We won't get into the details of how crappy that computer was, but, but if you index that against what that would cost today, it's, it's about what a Monarch is worth, and people were buying them back then. So, you know, it's a matter of of the funding, coming to terms with, you know, the advantages of new technologies too, to a certain extent.

R Rob Mineault 31:42

Let me throw this out then, because, you know, we talked about part of the problem. I think when it, when we it comes to funding specifically for assistive technology - and I know Steve, you know, you can talk for hours about this, but you know, every province has their own programs, and all of those programs seem to be tied to, I mean, part of its geography. I mean, if you you've got somebody that's that's in a remote area, they might not have the same access to any any given program, somebody who's who's in more of an urban area. But also, it can depend on budget cycles, or who's in power, provincially or federally, there's all of these variables that your mileage for a family, and what they what they might have access to in terms of a Braille device or any sort of funding to help them get one. It can really vary.

S

Steve Barclay 32:38

Well, for sure, I've got lots of opinions there. I mean, oftentimes it comes down to the priorities of government. And, you know, as we've just seen happen in Alberta, for example, you know, a conservative government has come in, and they have defunded a lot of, well, I wouldn't say defunded, but they've, they've cut back funding to education. Now, every time I've seen this happen, and it's not just the Alberta experience, here it is, every single time you get a government that comes in and they start cutting down money to education, the very first people being impacted by that are the students with disabilities, because that's the very first thing they cut back, even though they have structured funding in place specifically to address the needs of their disability. That money goes into a general pool, and it doesn't get spent on that student. It gets spent to cover other costs that have been created because of the shortfall in funding. It's really frustrating. And there have been, you know, back 20 years ago, there was a lawsuit in Alberta. A parent took the government to court and said, hey, you're not educating my child equitably. And the court agreed, and the government had to throw a lot of money into special ed. But you know that that court opinion is, you know, 20 years back, and it's all, it almost seems as though it's going to take another round of people suing governments to get equitable access to education.

R

Riane LaPaire 34:07

I hope everyone hears that. Steve says, sue the government.

R

Rob Mineault 34:09

Yeah, that's right, but it's true. But you know, honestly, like, I feel the same way. I think that some of these are real, systemic problems that I don't know how else they get addressed, because just sort of relying on whoever is in power at the time to do the right thing just isn't working.

S

Shawn Marsolais 34:30

So what, how does, how does Braille Literacy Canada - like is there an advocacy arm of that group and like, is there an approach or a strategy or suggestions or thoughts on how to kind of solve some of these problems?

R

Riane LaPaire 34:48

The Advocacy Committee. It has been recently formed. I mean, advocacy has always been a part of Braille Literacy Canada, but now it's a little bit more formal, and I do know. That they are working toward doing more.

S

Shawn Marsolais 35:05

I imagine raising awareness is a starting point, right? Yeah, if more people understand the importance of Braille, how hard it is to act to get Braille, I don't know, some of the sort of bigger global problems, then maybe that's a good start.

R

Riane LaPaire 35:22

Certainly Braille Literacy Canada has advocated for things like Braille bank statements and and, you know, updated Braille information cards on airplanes and things like that, especially with the switch to UEB. So, I mean, there has been work done in the past, and I just, I'm not on the committee, so I don't know what is currently in progress. I guess would be the best way to put that.

J

Jen Jesso 35:49

They've also done, like the Braille signage guidelines, for example, that provide guidelines for high quality Braille signage. But a lot of people aren't aware of that. So, you know, awareness building is a huge piece of getting this information out there.

S

Shawn Marsolais 36:07

Okay, so what are the requirements for Braille signage? I didn't even or standards, or like, it seems very as a as a blind person, there's Braille on elevators, maybe and sometimes brail on washrooms, like so I'm not even aware of what the standards are. And because it's so inconsistent, I don't even look for it most of the time, because I'm expecting that it won't be there.

R

Rob Mineault 36:35

As far as I know. I mean, I think that there, there are, you know, on paper, there certainly are standards, you know, the placement, height, you know, UEB, all of that type of thing that those are all there. But you know, you go back to enforcement. And if there's no enforcement mechanism, or there's, if there's not even a way for people to report issues, it's the wild west out there.

R

Riane LaPaire 37:01

I think the other thing is, a lot of people don't know how to advocate, advocate what their rights are. So they don't know what their rights are. They don't know how to advocate, or who to advocate to like, who do we contact? And at the end of the day, like a lot of families are, exhausted from advocating for so many things that they just have nothing left. So that, you know, that's certain point it's like, Oh, good, my kid's going to school. But, you know, like I and I'm I, they have Braille support, you know, one day a week or something, and, well, it's better than nothing. And I don't know what I should be asking for, and I don't know who to really ask for. But, you know, I have this, so I've put all my energy into this. So now I don't have enough energy to, you know, advocate for money to buy a Braille display for the home or a Perkins Brailler even, right? You know, I think there's just, I think there's also a missing link of, like, knowing what those basic rights should be like. Maybe there needs to be, like, some sort of wide known standard of what those rights should be and and who to go to if you're not, if they're not being met, and also knowing, like especially in the education system, that education knows what those standards should be, what those minimum standards should be, not because I would guess that a lot of those minimum standards aren't being met across Canada.

S

Shawn Marsolais 38:38

I'm just thinking about a Braille embosser or Braille Printer, when it's always been this thing in my mind that, wow, like you have one of those, you that's you're so lucky. And if we put that in terms of like a household printer, like most families probably have a printer, or most people probably have, a lot of people have a printer in their home, or you can go get it printed at Staples or whatever. Like, you can access print materials super easily, whereas to actually print a document out in Braille, I'm thinking of like maybe you want to proofread your your paper that you've written for your university course, or whatever it's it's like, it's a luxury to have an embosser. It's very expensive as well, and not something most people have at their homes,

R


Riane LaPaire 39:30


Not to mention the paper costs more too.


R


Rob Mineault 39:32


Yeah. I think, you know, a really useful mental exercise is just, you know, always switching, switching sides and thinking about, how would this fly if it was print? How would this fly if it was if it affected the sighted community, you know? What would people do if all of a sudden, yeah, oh yeah, there's no, there's no sign at all on any of the bathrooms, so you don't know.


 Shawn Marsolais 39:59
Guess, and you hope you're right.

 Rob Mineault 40:03
Not gonna fly, right?

 Steve Barclay 40:05
Or said to you as a parent, we're cutting back on teachers who teach reading how that's exactly what they do all the time, though.

 Shawn Marsolais 40:18
We're not going to have books anymore.

 Rob Mineault 40:21
Sorry. Books are too expensive everybody.

 Shawn Marsolais 40:23
We're just gonna teach everything auditory. Hope that works for y'all.

 Steve Barclay 40:26
We're gonna do it all with TV. We can do it all with TV now.

 Rob Mineault 40:30
We got audio books on Spotify, no problem.

S

Shawn Marsolais 40:33

Just ask Google.

J

Jen Jesso 40:38

I do want to speak to somebody I don't know who it was mentioned that the shortage of professionals, and I think this is a very it is a very multifaceted issue. I also think I being a TVI or a Braille transcriber is an amazing career. So if anybody is interested in that, that is something that, you know, it's I've been in the field now for about 18 years, and I'm still learning new things every week. So yeah, if anybody's interested, that's a great field to get into.

R

Rob Mineault 41:11

Why do we think that that they're they're becoming harder and harder to find and less and less people that seem to be engaging with that career? Why do you think that is?

J

Jen Jesso 41:19

I don't know. I mean, I don't have any statistics, but I don't know that I would say that there are less people necessarily engaging. I think the shortage in sort of disability professionals has been a long standing problem for probably decades. And again, I think a lot of it is awareness. There's lots of people who just don't even know that this is a field, and who just, even a lot of teachers are visually impaired, just sort of stumble into it and say that, you know, when I was a classroom teacher, whenever I didn't even know that this was a field, and now I love it.

S

Shawn Marsolais 41:59

And also the shortage, it might be that there isn't anybody who can teach Braille, or, you know, produce Braille in like Kimberly, British Columbia. You know, the nearest person is an hour's drive away, or longer, or further, or whatever. So sometimes it's like, where you live and where there isn't anybody that has that expertise in that area. So if you know, if the pool was bigger to choose from, if there was more people across all regions that had this these skills, then we could, because when a child's learning Braille, they really should be seeing their vision teacher, like, like, every day. You know, if you think about kids learning to read, it's not just like once a week we're going to work on reading right? It's kind of, it's not all day every day, but you want to spend some time every day working towards these skills of literacy.

J Jen Jesso 42:58

So yeah, and we work in my job at PRCVI, we work very hard with school districts and independent schools to if they don't have a teacher of students with visual impairments, maybe they've never had a visually impaired student before. You know, we work with them to connect them to teachers who might be available for contracting, for example, and also just giving an overview of sort of the services that a student who's blind or low vision requires. So, yeah, that is something we do.

R Rob Mineault 43:32

Anybody else have any closing thoughts before I start to wrap things up?

J Jen Jesso 43:38

In BC, families should know that public schools and independent schools need to provide a teacher of students with visual impairments and a braille transcriber for for Braille using students.

R Riane LaPaire 43:50

So how much like, how often is there like a minimum? I'm just curious.

J Jen Jesso 43:59

That would depend on sort of the caseload, I think, and the assessment of the TVIs in terms of the students needs,

S Shawn Marsolais 44:10

But that is something that parents could do to advocate, like, if you're if you have a, well, I would, I guess if you have a Braille reading student, There must be a TVI that's teaching them Braille. But if there isn't a Braille transcriptionist or something, that's something they could be pushing for. Because I hear a lot of a lot of families say to me that their child's EA does not know braille when it is a Braille reading student. That does happen.

R

Riane LaPaire 44:40

Also, like the advocacy around teaching contracted Braille too is really important, and making sure we do have professionals that are able to teach contracted Braille, because, like, I know parts of the country, they either leave it up to the student, or they just think it's more efficient to teach uncontracted Braille, which is letter for letter. And I know that there are a lot of Braille readers who feel very strongly against that.

S

Shawn Marsolais 45:14

And well, it's not efficient.

R

Riane LaPaire 45:16

It's not efficient, yeah.

S

Steve Barclay 45:20

Well, then we're not teaching apostrophes in print anymore, either, right?

J

Jen Jesso 45:26

There is research that shows, at least for children learning Braille, that learning Contracted Braille is more efficient than uncontracted. So yeah...

R

Riane LaPaire 45:36

And in some of those those provinces are also saying, oh, well, it's just easier for the EA student, and that should never be the consideration.

S

Steve Barclay 45:46

Yeah, our our physics teacher, doesn't really know physics, so they're just gonna fall back on what they know that they're gonna teach gym in physics class.

R

Rob Mineault 45:56

That's right, they've watched a lot of Star Trek, though, so it's all good.

S

Shawn Marsolais 46:06

So is there anything that people listening could do on World Braille Day to help raise awareness, or is there anything I mean, maybe share this podcast or something?

R

Rob Mineault 46:18

I love that!,

J

Jen Jesso 46:19

Yeah. So Braille Literacy Canada has a couple of World Braille day events in partnership with about eight different organizations. I won't name all of them because I will forget some. But the world Braille Day Website is on the NELLS website. Does that have a short URL?

R

Riane LaPaire 46:37

It does. It is www.NELLS.ca/wbd.

J

Jen Jesso 46:41

Perfect. And the activities that we have are we have a set of games and fun activities for students in braille and tactile graphics that can be downloaded for free when you sign up for that for this year, you also get access to the previous three to four years of Braille boost materials so that will be available for download. There will also be a workshop, I believe, on Braille and technology in English and French, presented by users devices. Yes, and Riane, I believe there's some Braille resources for libraries as well.

R

Riane LaPaire 47:29

Yes, there is. There's some great programming ideas for libraries available on accessiblelibraries.ca. And these are programming ideas that you can use as is and then implement into your own programming ideas to make all of your library programming more accessible. And certainly they will be built upon. And we take feedback on those and and they're great ways to to celebrate Braille in the month of January and all year round, and incorporate Braille into your story times, your book clubs, your pen and paper activities, your scavenger hunts, your your gaming, anything that you can possibly think of you can include Braille in.

S

Shawn Marsolais 48:21

It's really unfortunate that Louis Braille was born on January 4, because nobody's at school, right. Like, it's, it's too hard. Like, I could this, I don't know. I'm just like, sitting here thinking if there was a day where kids across the country, world, whatever celebrated Braille. Learned about Braille, did activities like at school, and it was part of the curriculum that would be really, really cool, really good start.

S

Speaker 1 48:50

What day did he die? Maybe it was more convenient,

S

Shawn Marsolais 48:56

Yeah, maybe it's a better day, you know?

S

Steve Barclay 48:58

Why does it have to be on his birthday?

R

Rob Mineault 49:00

Yeah? Or what? Yeah, exactly.



Jen Jesso 49:02

That's partly why we call it World Braille Days sometimes, and then just celebrate the whole month of January.



Riane LaPaire 49:09

Oh, his death date wasn't any better. It's January 6.



Rob Mineault 49:15

Dude. Help us out.



Shawn Marsolais 49:17

Well. So the first step is moving world Braille day to, like November or something where there's nothing to do.



Rob Mineault 49:27

Totally, you know, you're totally right.



Steve Barclay 49:28

Actually, November 19th, do it on my birthday.



Rob Mineault 49:36

There you go. Well, listen, I guess, in general, with the big takeaway that I'm taking away from this episode, and that I hope that the audience takes away, is just how important Braille and Braille literacy is, and how important that the work that Braille advocates like you folks, how important it is and what good work you're doing. So. Please keep up the good work. Thank you for everything that you do, and thanks for coming on and having having a great convo.

 Riane LaPaire 50:09

Thank you to all of you for giving us this platform to talk about Braille and always being so supportive.

 Rob Mineault 50:16

Jen and Riane, where can people find you guys in case throughout the rest of the year, if they want to reach out and find your organizations?

 Riane LaPaire 50:24

So you can find me@NNels.ca or emailing braille@nnels.ca or Braille Literacy Canada, that's BLC-lbc.ca or Canadian Assistive Technology.

 Jen Jesso 50:44

Here you go. So people can find me at Braille literacy Canada. And probably the easiest way to get in touch with BLC is by emailing [info at BLC-lbc.ca](mailto:info@BLC-lbc.ca), excellent.

 Rob Mineault 50:57

All right. Well, thanks again, guys, and we will see you next year for World Braille Week.

 Jen Jesso 51:03

Thank you.

 Riane LaPaire 51:05

Thank you.

 Steve Barclay 51:07

Have fun

R

Rob Mineault 51:08

And Shawn, how about you? Where can people find you?

S

Shawn Marsolais 51:13

You can find me at shawn@blindbeginnings.ca, or limitless@blindbeginnings.ca.

R

Rob Mineault 51:25

Well, there you go, another World Braille Day under our belt.

S

Steve Barclay 51:30

Indeed, indeed, it's been a bumpy ride.

R

Rob Mineault 51:34

Yeah, that was a good conversation, though, and I think an important one to have. I think that you know, getting, getting everybody's different perspectives on this, the landscape of Braille and Braille literacy is, is kind of important. And I don't know there's some epiphanies in there for me. I don't know about you.

S

Steve Barclay 51:56

It struck me, while we were talking about it, that we always seem to be on the defense when it comes to Braille. You know, we're always trying to defend access to it and expand access to it. Maybe we need to start sicking some of these Braille users on politicians, you know, have them storm their offices and throw bumpy paper at them.

R

Rob Mineault 52:16

You know, I was thinking the same thing. Maybe we're just too nice, you know what I mean, like, because some of this is really frustrating and really is not equitable, even though, you know we're supposed to be, you know, we're supposed to have the ACA and provincial legislation in different provinces, but really it's just, is it just lip service, we really have some people out there really pushing to make some real systemic change. Because, and you think about it, you think about the history of disability rights in, you know, in the States, or even in Canada. A lot of it there are some, some rabble rousers that got the ball rolling in a lot of that stuff.

S

Steve Barclay 53:02

Yeah, indeed. And they managed to get federal standards put in place in the States, which is really, I think, something that we need in Canada, we, you know, leaving everything to individual provincial governments to figure out, and not having an overarching standard, I think, is a mistake.

R

Rob Mineault 53:17

Totally, yep. Again, that's why I really think that conversations like this is important and to get the message out there that it's key. It's key if we want to build an accessible and equitable society, things like Braille literacy, it just they we have to get better. But we're not going to fix that today.

S

Steve Barclay 53:39

Sir, No, probably not.

R

Rob Mineault 53:42

Well. In the meantime, where the heck can people find us?

S

Steve Barclay 53:47

Well, people can email the podcast at cowbell@atbanter.com

R

Rob Mineault 54:00

They can also find us online www.atbanter.com

S

Steve Barclay 54:06

Yes, they can, and we're on the social medias like Facebook and Mastodon, Instagram.

R

Rob Mineault 54:28

That is gonna go do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course, to everybody for joining us, and we will see everybody next week.

S

Steve Barclay 54:44

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