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>> *Turner:* All right, good afternoon, everyone, welcome to the Accessibility and Disability Policy webinar series. My name is Randi Turner, and I'm the accessibility and disability rights coordinator at the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. Today's focus is the importance of Braille literacy.

And we have with us several people from the National Federation of the Blind of Texas.

Before we get started, a couple of housekeeping items. Your microphones will be off during the session. Please take note of the webinar toolbar, where you can see the Q&A icon and submit questions there.

We will be taking questions during the session and not saving it until the end, so go ahead and submit whatever questions you have while the session is going on.

If there is information to share with the audience, we will send that through the chat box. But don't respond through the chat box, it makes it more difficult to monitor two different things, so keep your questions in the Q&A box. The webinar will be recorded and posted to the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities channel and the real-time transcript will be made available to all participants after the session. We will post them to our website and you will be able to find the link for the session, recording, as well as the materials right there on the same spot.

Before we begin the webinar, just a little bit about the committee. We're composed of 12 members, seven of whom must be people with disabilities. We have officials from the Texas Department of family and protective services, Texas Health and Human Services Commission, Texas Education Agency, the Texas Workforce Commission, the Department Of Licensing and Regulation and the Texas State Independent Living Council who all serve as non-voting advisory ex-officio members. There are

five staff here in the central -- central resource for people with disabilities.

Currently we do not have any vacant positions -- vacant positions but if you are interested you can submit an application to the appointments office. If you are interested in more information about that, our email is GCPD@gov.texas.gov. I'm going to press the record button and you will hear me repeat just a little bit of this information as we get started.

I'm going to ask the.

>> *Turner:* Good afternoon, welcome to the

Accessibility and Disability Policy webinar series.

My name is Randi Turner, and I'm the Accessibility and Disability Rights Coordinator for the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. Today's focus is the importance of Braille literacy and I'm going to turn it over to Norma Crosby of the National Federation of the Blind of Texas. Thank you, Norma, for being here with your team.

>> *Gibbs:* Norma, you need to unmute.

>> *Crosby:* Okay. Good way to start. Thanks, Randi, we appreciate being here and we're so happy to welcome who is attending the webinar today.

As Randi said, I'm Norma Crosby. I serve as president of the National Federation of the Blind of Texas. And I have two colleagues here with me today, Emily Gibbs, who is our director of youth and education services and Danny Martinez, who serves on our state affiliates board and who handles our translation and interpretation services.

I'm going to have Danny and Emily do the vast majority of this presentation. I feel like they are

really the experts, but I wanted to say a couple of things about the importance of Braille that I think sometimes get overlooked whenever we are considering what makes Braille important.

Emily and Danny are going to give you all kinds of facts and solid evidence of why -- why Braille is so important to blind and low-vision Texans.

But I want to touch on two areas that aren't often considered when determining if a blind student should have Braille.

One is emotional and the other is physical.

I am myself a blind person who has some usable vision. Growing up, I wasn't taught Braille. I was forced to utilize large print, even though it made me feel very uncomfortable in the classroom in the sense that when I had -- when I was asked to read or to make a public presentation, I always felt people are watching me, people are making jokes, people are -- are doing things that I'm -- I can't be aware that they are doing because my nose is stuck in my presentation. Or, I've tried to memorize my presentation and if I forget one little piece of the

presentation, I find that I've lost my place entirely.

And so contrary to what some people think, not all blind people have great memories.

So having that emotional context, the context it's less than dignified sometimes to have to speak and not be able to make contact with your audience the way a person who can stand up straight and read their Braille can do. And, also, to think of the physical aspects. For some blind people, even in Braille isn't their primary medium, as it wouldn't have been for me, print was still a viable option for me, but having the tool of Braille so that I could do public presentations and those kind of things would have been wonderful.

But the other thing is the physical thing that I think people don't think about often, and that is that some blind people can read just fine for 15 or 20 minutes. But then they have a terrible headache or the -- or the page seems blurry or things begin to happen to them physically that means that if they have to rely exclusively on print, there's not a very

good way for them to keep up with the work they have to do in class.

And so I hope there are some teachers in the audience today and some parents, too, who will think about -- those concepts when considering how important Braille might be, even to a student with some residual vision that's actually useful. Even if Braille is not the primary medium, making the student a dual media student could be advantageous to them as well.

So I want to stop talking now and turn this over to Emily and Danny. Emily, are you going to go first?

>> *Gibbs*: Yes. All right. So Randi, if you could go to the next slide. All right, so Norma already did our introductions, but this is our contact information.

Norma is the president of the National Federation of the Blind of Texas. And I will post this again at the end of the presentation, too, in case you want to contact any of us. But I wanted to make sure that you had our contact information early so you knew who we were.



So first of all, I wanted to go over just a little bit of history of Braille. I'm sure a lot of people know this, but some of you might not. So in the very beginning, Braille is based on a system of writing. You want to go to the next slide. Called night writing. Invented by Charles Barbier for the French Army. And night writing was based in 12 dots where Braille is based in six.

So if you go to the next slide there's a -- so this is what it looked like. It was meant to be read at night. And -- when you couldn't see. So you can see, it's very long and you had to move your fingers up and down.

It was introduced to Louis Braille when he was at the academy for blind students in France, in paraeducator, if you want to go to the next slide and he -- so he saw it at the national institute for blind children in 1821. When he was 15 years old in 1824 he created what we know as Braille. Braille is a little bit smaller, only six dots so it fits better under the pad of your finger. Braille came to the United States in 1860 when it was adopted by the

Missouri School for the Blind.

So why Braille is what I wanted to talk about next.

Look at a little bit of data, but there's been a lot of studies on why kids, especially blind or -- when I say blind I mean all students who have a visual impairment or significant visual impairment. So blindness is really a spectrum. It's not exactly kids who have no vision at all.

And so this is a look at the data about why blind kids might need Braille.

I focused on three different studies. If you want to go to the next slide. The first study is reading Braille equals employment.

So there were -- reading Braille equals employment. Two studies done, but Dr. Bell and Dr. Mino and Ruby Ryles. Dr. Ryles interviewed 74 blind adults of working age and she found out of those blind adults who used Braille as their primary reading medium, so Braille users since childhood, 56% of them were employed, compared with only 23% of blind people who had grown up using print.

So there's really a significant difference for people who read Braille from an early age and employment.

Again, in a different study, sorry, she learned that using -- people who grew up using Braille are employed in higher numbers. So employment and Braille, reading Braille, is really linked in the blindness community.

It also equals a higher salary. People who read Braille on a daily or weekly basis are employed at a higher rate, which we already covered, and they are employed with a significantly higher salary than people who do not read Braille. Braille earners on average earn \$11,000 more a year than non-Braille readers.

Again, Norma touched on this a little bit, but reading Braille can equal higher well-being, higher self-esteem, this is a different study by Dr. Silverman and Dr. Bell from 2018. They found that Braille literacy was uniquely associated with well-being and self-esteem among legally blind adults, even if blindness had onset in adulthood.

People who learned Braille later in life reported higher well-being levels than those who never learned Braille .

In addition, employment again. People who read Braille and who were Braille literate were more likely to be employed than those who were not, regardless of what age they learned Braille.

So the data really shows that Braille is important and the data really shows that reading Braille makes people happier and makes people more -- more employable. And it makes people be employed at a higher salary.

I wanted to discuss what Braille is a little bit for people who didn't -- don't know what Braille is.

I explained that it was six dots already.

But if you want to go to the next slide, you can see that Braille it's a code. It's not a language. A lot of people think that Braille is a language like sign language or ASL is a language and it's really not.

It takes English and it turns it into a code.

So more like Morse Code than it is like sign language.

And so I said it was labeled because each dot in Braille has what I like to call an address when I'm teaching Braille. Every dot has its own number, which you can see in this graphic. So from starting from the top left, and going down, it goes, 1, 2, 3, and then the right side is 4, 5, 6. So every dot and every -- every character when you are reading Braille, you can identify it by its dot locations.

So I'm -- I might say a is a dot 1, b is a dot 1, 2. I will then go on from there through the whole alphabet. Braille is also predictable. You can see from this that you have dots a through j, then when you get down to k through t, you just add a dot 3.

So there is a pattern to it when you are learning as well.

Braille isn't just the Braille alphabet, though, it's also a series of contractions. So contractions make what you are reading shorter because Braille sometimes does tend to take up larger real estate on a page.

So by shrinking is down to contractions it also

makes it easier to read.

So in order to create Braille, there's several different ways. You can use a slate and stylus, which is like a -- like kind of like a paper and pencil. It is a -- a pointed tool that's used to press on to a slate and make annotations for Braille. It's easy to carry around and very light.

>> *Martinez:* I would like to talk about the other three.

>> *Gibbs:* Go ahead, Danny.

>> *Martinez:* Excellent. The slate and stylus, what it looks like, this is only one model. You can see it. It has the ability to -- to insert an index card and I take notes with it.

This is the stylus, which is -- easy to hold because of its saddle handle.

And this is part of my notes for this presentation.

So -- the first line in this note says slate and stylus. The second one says Perkins Braille machine.

Imagine an old style typing writing, where

you -- where you would insert a page, a white blank page, you type on to it, and ink would mark that page with letters. Or symbols.

well, there's exactly the same way the Perkins Braille machine. You insert a Braille sheet and you can emboss the Braille on to it manually.

This machine is pretty heavy. A lot of students and people complain about carrying it from class to class. But it's a useful tool. It's how we can use -- we use Nemeth code in school with math or science courses where technology at this moment is not advanced enough to give us the ability to -- to have access to that Nemeth code, which is what allowed us to do math and science notations.

Technology is getting there, but not quite yet.

The other one is a Braille display, which is very useful when we're working on the computer. And we can connect it to it. And with the use of a screen reader and the computer and the Braille display, we have the ability to have instant access to the Braille.

And it comes in pretty handy when we're editing

documents. In college, when we don't have a dedicated individual embossing material for us, it's easy to have a Braille display around be able to read our textbooks or a quiz where the professor does not have the ability to give us a Braille document, well, they can send us an email and we can have access to that document when we plug in the electronic Braille display on to the computer or another devices that are compatible with it.

The last one is a Braille embosser. I had access to an embosser when I was in public school, 10, 12 years ago. I wasn't using it myself. I had a paraprofessional who would obtain documents from the teachers, go to her office, format them in such a way that the embosser would be able to -- to provide that Braille documentation that she would then hand to me and in order for me to have access to my assignments.

Right now, because I'm traveling and -- all the time, I have my slate and stylus, just like you would have access to pen and paper.

Thank you. Go ahead, Emily.



>> *Gibbs*: So we just talked a little bit about Braille and why Braille is so important and what Braille is. You want to go to the next slide.

Now I wanted to talk about how you can get Braille, where you can get Braille from and different resources on how to learn Braille. So a lot of parents ask me often, how can I learn Braille?

And there are several online sources that can help parents with this. Since I wanted to touch on this because I think it's important, I think it's really important that parents learn to read Braille with their kids so they can help them find page numbers, help them do their homework assignments.

And I have labeled these kind of in order of what I think are really accessible for parents. The first one is Hadley.edu. They have a set of classes that are taught by instructors, so you can actually register for them and they are free and they have -- instead of being self taught, it's more of a correspondence course. So you have an instructor that you are -- talking to that can give you help throughout the series.

Braille Bits is run by Iowa and they have a series of podcasts to listen to that correspond with each of the lessons. Braille through Remote Learning or Braille.org, is -- again, kind of a correspondence -- self-taught correspondence course as well as Braille for families. UEB Online is from Australia, they started learning it first. It's all online based. It's a great way to learn it, but if you don't have any knowledge of the Braille code ahead of time it can be daunting because there's no real lessons.

NLS Braille Transcriber course is the final one, but probably the most rigorous of all of these because it is to become a certified Braille transcriber.

But all of these are very good resources in order to learn Braille and to be -- from these you can become, you know, a little bit knowledgeable all the way to an expert in the Braille code.

So these are some resources for early childhood.

The first thing that is important is to get

early childhood intervention services through your local school district and that would be the service of a teacher of visual impairments that would come out to your home. Also two really fantastic through the National Federation of the Blind. The first is Braille Reading Pals Club, you will get free Braille book, free Braille activities and a pal, a little stuffed animal that encourages Braille skills from the very beginning. The next is not really Braille related, but still very important, Early Explorers is for cane travel, again for early childhood. You get a free cane and free activities involved with that.

The next is school age. These are resources to learn Braille and to learn skills for school age blind kids. The first is the National Federation of the Blind BELL Academy. The BELL Academy is Braille enrichment for literacy and learning. It is a summer program in which kids are taught for two weeks really intensive Braille skills. Last year and this year they were online, so it's state-wide, it's actually nation-wide, this program, it's available, they send

out a box of materials for -- again, and all of the lessons and all of the materials are included in this box for the two-week program.

For science and for promoting science and math skills in Braille, the National Center for Blind Youth in Science is good. Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired here in Texas has fantastic short term programs that are focused on Braille and other educational skills.

They also have really great summer programs. And the summer programs are being registered for right now. The summer programs are typically more recreational based, so there's maybe one on -- I know in the past they've had a gym class or one on forming a band, but they are also very -- very Braille-based and very fun for kids.

There's also Training Center Programs for summer training. There's the Buddy Program in Louisiana. The Buddy Program at Blind, Inc. and the Colorado Center has a summer program. So these programs are again intensive programs all summer long where the kids -- they are residential, so kids go

there and they learn Braille and other non-visual skills for the whole summer.

And so if they need more intensive help, these are really fantastic options.

Danny, do you want to say anything about the summer programs -- or Norma, I know you guys know a lot about them, too.

>> *Martinez*: Sorry, can you repeat that?

>> *Gibbs*: Do you want to say anything about the summer programs at Louisiana Center for school age like Buddy Program?

>> *Crosby*: I will jump in right quick and say the one really great thing about the summer programs at these centers is that -- they are guided primarily by blind adults. So the kids not only have a great opportunity to learn skills, but they also have an opportunity to meet competent blind people who can be role models for them.

I'm sure Danny has more to say, but that is definitely something that I would consider if I were --

>> *Martinez*: Definitely. Using the skills and

demonstrating those skills to the youth and youth programs is important.

The -- the students are learning from their mentors and instructors. Because the skills are being demonstrated. Whenever they are traveling and they are looking for a room or a class number, that's exactly how they are doing it. They are using their canes and they learn to use an elevator, they are able to use their independence and find the buttons, which are labeled in Braille by law. And they are looking for a conference room, for instance, and there's a public place, that -- that door must be in Braille as well.

And they are out in the restaurant for a travel lesson or for socialization purposes. The instructors are going to take them to a restaurant that has Braille menus. Why? Because that allows the youth or the students to practice their decision making.

It's not fair when we don't have access to a Braille menu and we're forced to order a burger, or chicken nuggets, because that's something that we

know that we like to eat and they most likely have it. When you have a Braille menu, you have more options at your fingertips.

So we're -- we're demonstrating how Braille is a functional tool when we're out and about.

>> *Gibbs:* Right. Sara asked about [indiscernible] Spanish resources, Danny is going to cover those in a few minutes. I wanted to mention that the BELL academy is available in Spanish and we do offer -- they do offer Spanish application and Spanish lessons, Spanish translation lessons during that.

So if we move on, we're going to move on to high school age. And one thick thing I wanted to mention was the NFBTX mentoring program. Norma was talking about how important it is for blind students to know successful blind adults and to learn from them. As this is one thing that the mentoring program does. Is we pair blind students of high school and college age with a successful blind adult and they -- they go out and do activities together and really form a relationship.

>> *Crosby*: Can I jump in right quick on the mentoring program. Just to say that starting in March we're going to lower the age of the students we will accept. We will be accepting students from 14 to 22.

And, also, to point out that having that blind mentor with you, you know, if a person has a goal of Braille literacy, for example, as one of their primary goals before they get to college and to employment, virtually all of our mentors are Braille users. And they -- they can be a real encouragement in that area.

>> *Gibbs*: And --

>> *Martinez*: As a mentor myself, I would like to note that we see that virtually both in our mentor pool and the mentees and we take that into consideration because culturally, when we're mentoring, in my case, a Hispanic student, the connection is in our culture it is a big part of it. Our language, being both bilingual, being able to communicate with a Spanish speaking parent, that was an important factor in our relationship as a



mentoring team.

>> *Gibbs:* So as you get into high school, all of those same residential programs exist, but they are a step more intensive. For instance, in Louisiana, blind Inc. in Minnesota, Colorado and [indiscernible] in Maryland, they all offer summer work programs for high school students. BISM is Blind Industries and Services in Maryland.

>> *Turner:* We have a question Emily, I'm not sure if this is a good time or not. Does the American Action Fund still provide books? They are also Dolly Parton's Imagination Library also the Texas Talking Book program for audio and Braille books.

>> *Gibbs:* Yes, I actually have a slide coming up that lists a whole bunch of resources for Braille books, but yes. The American Action Fund is on there. The last time I looked at the Dolly Parton Imagination Library they were not serving Texas. I might be wrong about that, they might have expanded the program. I also mention the Talking Book program for audio books and Braille books as well. That is coming up I think in two slides .

So -- so anyways, this is for beyond when you get to high school and after high school, all of those places I mentioned before, including Criss Cole here in Texas, offer adult programs, adult training for Braille and other non-visual skills.

And this is important in order to, you know, get those Braille skills and to get -- get your other independent living skills in order to be successful blind adults.

And if your student happens to be 18, TSBVI offers an 18 plus program called the EXIT program. Which also covers these things.

So here's the Braille book slide.

All of these places are -- where Braille books are available.

Some of them are not free. I know that American Action Fund is free. You can get a free slate from the NFB's free slate program. Bookshare is free for all, K-12 students here in the United States. Bookshare is for downloading books. Learning Ally is also free for students. NLS is the National Library Service. The BARD is their Braille

program. Braille institute has a special collection. Seedlings, National Braille Press, American Printing House. Seedlings does have a Braille book angel program where you can get one free book a year -- [Multiple voices]

>> I'm sorry. Let me say that BARD is a great service for people who don't want to wait for books to read, because signing up with BARD it's an online service. So if you or your child wants a book that's available through the National Library, you can get them signed up with BARD and they can download and read with their Braille displays so they don't have to --

>> Gibbs: Bookshare and learning are download sites as well. Bookshare offers [indiscernible] files as well as Braille files. Danny, did you have something that you wanted to say about these Braille resources?

>> *Martinez*: Yes, on this note, it's important for -- for people who are interested in Spanish literacy, literature, to request books in Spanish.

Most of these resources do provide Spanish

books. However, their collections are very, very small. In comparison to the English material.

And there's not enough interest, they are not -- if there's not enough interest, they are not going to invest in Spanish literature. So -- so if individuals are interested in Spanish books, please do make a request.

Because that way they will increase that library.

In regards to the Texas Talking Book library, I recently found out that prior to the pandemic, if they don't backtrack their timeline by the end of this year, 2021, they are going to be releasing Braille displays. Right now, they released like digital book players where the audio books can be downloaded to on cartridges and then listened to that way.

But I can't wait for Braille displays to be released so that -- so that we no longer have to receive nine volumes for -- for a single book or more.

We will be able to download books from BARD, the application that Norma mentioned, and read them in Braille.

In minutes.

Thank you.

>> *Gibbs:* Dina was nice enough to share that Texas Talking Book Program at [TexasTalkingBooks.org](http://TexasTalkingBooks.org) is the regional library for the National Library Service. She said they don't give a firm timeline yet for Braille displays but the option is coming, thank you so much, Dina.

Danny, now it's time for you to talk about Spanish resources.

>> *Martinez:* Excellent. So I would like to talk about three programs that the National Federation of the Blind of Texas offers. The first one is *Cambiando Vidas*, which is close to my heart because I was coordinating that program. We have a committee of individuals who participate in this program, individuals who are independent and blind.

Thank you.

And individuals who are instructors and mentors in *Cambiando Vidas*.

We provide instruction in Spanish and skills in Braille literacy being one of the most important

ones, non-visual skills where we teach independent living skills, organization skills and cooking skills in this center.

Braille is a big part of this center because it helps with organizations and -- and [indiscernible] at home for individuals that are learning Braille or learning their independence at home.

We have travel lessons where Braille [indiscernible] as well. We host these events in hotels there where we -- where we help the students navigate in the elevator through how to get to their rooms, on the first day.

Individuals who -- who don't have -- don't have access to a [indiscernible] before the event, quickly learn how to navigate in their -- in our space and in our environment, using the skills that we're teaching them in this event.

Training skills and Braille skills. We also teach technology. And -- and a lot of people believe that Braille is outdated, that it's not a functional tool because we have screen readers and computers.

However, we like to implement Braille because  
[indiscernible] of the technology and vice versa.

We have -- [Dog barking] two other programs,  
one of them is the Silver Bells. This one is  
for -- we provide Spanish interpretation. This used  
to be an in-person event. However this year we were  
successful in running a Silver Bells academy for a  
week. Monday through Friday. And the instructors  
were providing instruction in Spanish; however, I  
was -- we interpreted the instructors into Spanish.  
And we have the BELL Academy, a program for children  
where we teach also the core skills in Braille  
literacy, cane travel, technology, and  
Braille -- BELL stands for Braille Enrichment for  
Literacy and Learning.

All of these programs have access to  
interpreters and translators.

I would like to clarify that we interpret  
language and we translate text into Spanish. Thank  
you.

The next slide, I believe, is talking about  
Spanish Braille. There is two -- there are two

resources that I'm sharing here. One of them is the -- sorry. My -- can you read me the title of the first resource Emily, please.

>> *Turner:* The first resource that you have is -- is Paths to Literacy. And the second is Braille Bug.

>> *Martínez:* Thank you, excellent. So Paths to Literacy explains how we can teach Braille to -- to a Spanish reader or someone who is learning Braille perhaps in high school. Fortunately, Braille has been translated into the major languages in the world. Whether it's French -- any language that you might want to learn is in Braille. There shouldn't be an excuse like the one that I received when I was trying to take Spanish in high school, they didn't have the resources to teach me Braille in Spanish, I was already learning Braille in English.

However, after I graduated high school, my interest in wanting to learn Braille in Spanish in my native language, I realized that, hey, I just needed to learn six new symbols for the letters that had accents and I needed to understand that



punctuation looked different but really the Braille code is built in the same platform. Six dots, 1, 2, 3 on the left side, 4, 5, 6 on the right side. And the teachers, the Braille instructors, can use the same exercises that they use when they are teaching students English or Unified English Braille code at this time to teach me the Spanish code.

I added the resource of the Braille Bug because that -- what -- that gives us access to the letters and punctuation that we need to learn in Spanish Braille or any other language. It has an extensive list.

It's accessible enough that I was able to do my own self-learning on that page.

Like I mentioned before, don't let individuals tell you that there's not enough resources in Spanish. There might be, however they need to build that list of resources rather than denying the service in Spanish.

Here in my community, in the Rio Grande Valley, I work with youth and the majority are Hispanics whose first language in their household is Spanish, they

are learning English in school; however, they have the right to learn Spanish as well.

Thank you.

Emily?

>> *Gibbs*: This is our contact information again. We are available for -- for all sorts of services, if you need help. We do all sorts of consulting and Braille. And pretty much anything that you might need.

We are happy to help with.

We run the BELL program here in the State of Texas and we also run a program for -- we also run a weekend program for Expanded Core Curriculum skills that we call BEST. Which stands for Braille -- blindness Education and Skills Training, we do that one weekend a month. And so if you need anything at all, please don't -- please feel free to contact us, even if you're not sure if we can help with it, we would absolutely try to find someone who can.

The next slide is those resources for the studies that I said before, citations, I thought all

three of these are really interesting studies. If you are interested in the impact of Braille on education, employment, and well-being, you might want to check out these studies.

Are there any -- [Multiple voices]

>> *Turner:* Thank you, Emily, thank you, thank you. I want to see if we have more questions. We've only had one or two pop up that were more general questions about the materials, they will be posted at our website next to the recording, I put that in the chat box how to access that information.

Give us a day to two to get that posted. Do we have any other questions from our audience?

Yes, Laura, the transcript will be available as well, it will be posted at the same place on our website.

Lets see if I have -- I'll put that link in the chat box where we have all of our webinars posted.

And just keep an eye on that under previous webinars and you'll find that in the next couple of days.

Any concluding comments that you want to make,

Norma, Emily or Daniel? We don't have any further questions?

>> *Crosby*: Sure. I would love to echo what Emily just said. Our office is generally open weekdays from 9:00 to 5:00. We welcome questions, not only about Braille, but anything related to blindness. I just had a question today from a parent who has no clue about what services are available to her five-year-old child.

And we put, you know, we can help put them in touch with their school district, with the Blind Children's Program, we talk to them about places like TSBVI. So we try to get to be a resource for parents, children, blind adults, blind seniors, it really doesn't matter your age. And particularly when it comes to Braille, we encourage that no matter your age.

And we -- almost always have a program of some sort going on. Whether it be through our affiliate or through one of our chapters.

And -- and we -- we look forward, hopefully, in 2021, to getting back to our normal schedule where

we actually get to meet people in person and say hello.

But in the meantime, we will keep doing online -- making online resources available. Our silver -- our next Silver Bells that Danny mentioned, which is our program for our blind seniors, is coming up in February. February the 22nd through the 26th. Unfortunately we're full right now. But we will -- we expect -- we hope to follow the -- the virtual one up with an in-person later this year, if COVID permits.

And so I urge people, if you know blind seniors, we take people 50 and over. If you know blind seniors who particularly newly blind seniors who are just getting their toe in the water or trying to figure out if blind people really can do the things we talk about, having that connection to a blind mentor during the program, that they can talk to both during the program and after is really key, I think, to making sure that they understand that there is hope for blind folks that are out there, even if they have gone blind as a senior.

And so -- so Braille is -- is key to success.

And we really thank everyone for being here today.

>> Norma, Danny, we have one question. Do you feel -- is it rude to ask someone if we know how to read Braille?

>> *Crosby*: Not at all.

I think it can start a good conversation.

>> *Martinez*: Not at all. Is there -- if they are offering me a Braille menu, I appreciate that question.

I've been in restaurants

where -- where -- [Laughter], sometimes I'm -- I ask if they have a Braille menu, if I know that, 90% of the time they're going to tell me, no, they don't have a Braille menu or the Braille menu is outdated. Why? Because they created a new menu with new choices and those choices or prices are not in the Braille menu.

So I welcome that question. Do you know Braille. And hopefully they're asking because they have Braille resources on hand to offer.

[Multiple voices]

>> Yes, Hadley is still around. I actually

recommended their Braille classes for parents early in the presentation. We have Brenda, she's a blind adult, 57, learning to read Braille. Are there any support groups in San Antonio, Texas for her?

>> *Crosby*: We have a local chapter in San Antonio. We just elected a new president there, because our old president is -- is getting a great new job. I think with the NSA. He says that he can't tell me anything about it or he would have to kill me. But we -- so we have a new chapter president there. Who would welcome people to come and join.

And her name is Wendy Walker. If that individual who asked a question would like to touch base with us, I can get her contact information.

For -- [Multiple voices].

>> *Gibbs*: Go ahead, Danny.

>> *Martinez*: I am going to be answering the same question. Someone asked about jumbo Braille. I have seen a slate and stylus that produced some jumbo Braille. Some -- when I was doing research for this event, I ran into a jumbo Braille machine, similar to a Perkins Brailier, I guess. It was a resource

that [indiscernible] provided. I have not seen Braille books that use jumbo Braille, though.

Personally.

>> Jumbo Braille is typically used for -- for people who have sudden neuropathy in their fingers, perhaps people who had diabetes went blind through that. The thought process is that the dots are bigger so they are easier to feel.

Because -- because Braille is designed to fit underneath the pad of your finger. Jumbo Braille doesn't. So it can be -- it can be slower to read because you would have to use more fingers.

Brenda you shared your email address, I will go ahead and copy that and we'll get in touch with you.

Anyone else have any questions?

>> *Martinez*: I read the -- the message that neuropathy is a situation in this case. At your age, you might use Braille in a functional way to label items at home. I have met people that rather than using paper, use dymo tape, which is a strip of some kind of plastic that's thin enough to being used in



the slate and stylus.

So the Braille is embossed in that plastic strip, which has adhesive. So, for example, at home, I use dymo tape and Braille to label my microwave, my stove, and the laundry machines. And these stay on those devices and I can -- I can use them in an accessible way, it's plastic and might be a little bit crisper, I guess would be the word. The Braille would be easier to identify.

Also I have met adults who rather than using the -- the tips of their fingers, which have lost sensitivity, have used -- other parts of their fingers. Which they might have better sensitivity rather than the fingertips. That might be calloused or less sensitive because of a loss of the sensation.

>> *Crosby*: Let me jump in right quick, too, say Danny makes a good point in another way. That is not everyone who learns Braille will use it to read a book. Maybe they are never that fast because they learned when they were a senior, for example, but there are so many ways that I call functional communication that you can do with Braille, whether

it's something as simple as writing down a person's telephone number or as Danny said labeling things.

There are functional ways to use Braille. So I hope members of the audience don't think, well, if I can never be a good enough Braille reader to read a book, I shouldn't bother learning, because there are all kinds of functional ways that you can use Braille and it can be an important and part of your life and help to make you a more productive person in your life. Whether you ever sit down and read a novel or not.

>> Uh-huh.

>> *Gibbs*: Will there be other Braille webinars offered in the future? I think that, Randi, that might be one for you to answer.

>> *Turner*: We don't have anything scheduled at this time. I don't know if there are other organizations like yours that offer webinars.

>> *Crosby*: We always offer things. I would say for us there would be a definite yes in there. I can't give you a schedule right offhand, but, you know, Braille is a critical part of blind people's

lives. And so I think you can definitely expect to watch out for things that we might sponsor for sure.

>> *Turner:* Norma, what is your website? And let me type that into the chat box, although it's probably NFBTX.org, is that it?

>> *Crosby:* That would be it.

>> *Turner:* So people can check your website and keep an eye out.

>> *Crosby:* We definitely periodically -- like this webinar was listed on our website and when we do major events, they are listed either in our news or in our events section.

>> *Martinez:* Talking about news, can you tell us about the NEWSLINE and how we can use the Braille machine also.

>> *Crosby:* Most people think of NFB NEWSLINE as an audio newspaper program, but that isn't true. That is how many people use NEWSLINE is to -- to call into the service and use their telephone, which is great for people that don't know Braille yet.

And so -- so I'll tell you just -- give you a moment on that. That is it's a free service for

anyone who is blind or print disabled. It provides people with access to over 500 -- I think it's close to 600 now publications between the -- between newspapers and magazines. And our Texas affiliate is working hard to try to include information that might be relevant to blind people around the state and our local information channel as well.

But aside from calling in on the phone, blind people can also access NFB NEWSLINE online and utilize Braille displays. You can email yourself articles that might be of particular interest to you or job listings. We have a job listings feature through NEWSLINE. So you could email yourself those things so you don't have to try to listen and write down everything and then you can use your Braille display if you check that out.

So it isn't just about audio. So ... and anyone who is interested in NFB NEWSLINE can touch base with our office. Emily gave the number for me earlier and that's our office number. And so just feel free to give us a call if you want more information, we will let you talk to Liz wisecarver,

our NFB NEWSLINE coordinator.

Danny, Michael asked are there

Braille options -- above and beyond what is required by the ADA and Texas' Accessibility Standards that can be designed into buildings?

>> Martinez: I'm missing part of the program, can you repeat it.

>> Are there Braille options, hardware components he can read up on that go above and beyond what is required by ADA and Texas Accessibility Standards and can be designed into buildings.

>> *Martinez*: Buildings. I know of -- the only thing that comes to mind is the member of congress who -- or government agency who implements the Braille display for his accommodation needs.

And -- of --I guess places that offer access to deafblind individuals that provide the communication devices with Braille, I can connect a resource to provide access in Braille for deafblind users.

But hardware, other than Braille signs, I'm not sure.

>> *Lucey*: This is Ron Lucey with the Governor's

Committee. It sounds like the person asking the question is asking about Braille signage, we can refer them to the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation. We have an ex-officio member of our committee who actually just joined our committee for the first time two days ago and she works for TDLR and a registered accessibility specialist. Randi, if you can capture the person who asked that question, capture their contact information, we will follow up with that.

>> *Turner:* Sure, Michael is asking about above and beyond David and TAS.

>> *Lucey:* Above and beyond, beyond signage and things like that, I'm not sure where else Braille would play a role in architecture. But yeah.

>> *Turner:* Okay.

>> *Turner:* Any other questions before we log off here. We still have about 10 minutes.

>> *Crosby:* Randi, if I might, I would say that the other thing that I would encourage people on the line or on the webinar here today to do is definitely to get involved with -- with consumer organizations.

We -- the person who was just asking that question might be interested in things like our research and development committee, nationally, not -- not necessarily to serve on it, but to learn more about what they do and to learn more about, you know, they find innovative things that we're interested in and I kind of got the impression that that might be what the questioner was asking about. What's new, what's innovative, what's above and beyond what's already here?

And our organization, for sure, is constantly looking for new and innovative approaches to utilizing Braille and utilizing the other tools of blindness.

And so I -- I think one thing to tell any blind or low-vision person is to -- to affiliate yourself with a consumer organization that -- that takes an interest in these kind of things is the best way probably to keep up with what's actually happening.

>> *Martinez:* There are programs that -- that focus on the STEM field. So those might be good programs to look at. They always implement

accessibility and a big part of it as you have realized in this webinar is the Braille. I would like to note something that I always talk about is environmental text. That's a term that I learned when I was studying for my education.

[indiscernible]. And my special education degree. My master's. Well, we can do environmental Braille for youth who are going to be Braille readers. Or individuals who are going to be Braille readers.

Make sure that there's Braille all over the house. And if a child, make sure that there is Braille -- there's Braille in -- you know, in their hands because a sighted child is going to be looking at text. Whether you are reading it or not, that's going to be their choice. Blind children have that choice as well. They should have.

>> *Lucey*: I do have one question related to environmental Braille. This is Ron Lucey again.

Are you finding that manufacturers of appliances, microwave ovens, washing machines, dish washers, are making any Braille overlays? A lot of the appliances these days have a flat panel for



controlling the functions of that machine.

There are no tactilely discernible buttons or controls. And with the machines like the dishwashers that require galvanic skin responses, I'm not sure that putting Braille displays over them would allow them to function properly. What is your experience with making them accessible with Braille?

>> *Martinez:* Right now I'm in the process of looking for an apartment and looking for these devices. I was disappointed how I can be standing in front of a refrigerator and the thing is not accessible. Why? Because it has a television, touch screen, that I cannot control anything on that refrigerator.

So I -- I need to consider an older style refrigerator where the only function that I can use is opening and closing the door on that refrigerator.

And the microwave, there are talking microwaves. However, they are two, three times more expensive than a regular microwave that I can purchase, the convenience and label it with Braille or dots in such a way that I can use it.

>> *Lucey*: Never been much interested in having a conversation with a microwave. [Laughter].

>> *Martinez*: Yep. Right now, we're preparing for watches and seminar. Last year we had a legislative priority and included these devices that includes fitness devices. However, this year, in hopes of passing legislation through our congress, well, we are talking about the access to medical devices which focuses on the accessibility of medical devices at home. Whether it's a pressure cuff, a thermometer, nowadays they are very -- well, those devices are very limited in the amount of -- that -- in our selections. We want to buy a thermometer, we only have a couple of options.

>> *Lucey*: I guess -- I guess the good news is there are more devices that will connect via Bluetooth to a smart phone, which is accessible, but there are fewer devices that have a tactilely discernible button that you can feel or that you can label the membranes. You could put Braille on them, but the touch screens not so much. So sometimes accessibility is -- [indiscernible] step forward and

[Multiple voices] steps back -- [Multiple voices]

>> *Martínez:* Our legislative

priority -- [Multiple voices]

>> *Crosby:* Go ahead and finish, Danny, I

will --

>> *Martínez:* Our legislative priorities seek

to create a guideline to [indiscernible]

manufacturer, go about promoting accessibility in

the devices that they are releasing. Most of the

time accessibility was an afterthought. When it

should be considered when they are on the development

phase.

Go ahead, Norma.

>> *Crosby:* Yes. I was just going to say, too,

for people who are left in the audience and for Ron

as well, that we do maintain sort of information about

appliances that might be more accessible in our

national -- in our national headquarters. The

Crosby household usually makes our appliances

accessible ourselves with -- with some dymo tape and

a slate and stylus.

But that -- you know, that -- if you don't have

a sighted person there to read everything to you, that can be an issue. But we just make time and do that.

But aside from blood pressure cuffs and that kind of thing, one of the reasons that we're focusing on medical devices is now a lot of people do home dialysis and home chemotherapy. And some of those, we would like those devices to be accessible to us so that we don't have to necessarily go into a clinic if we happen to need chemotherapy or dialysis, those kind of things. So that's -- that's why -- and why we want -- why we will keep working on accessible like -- layovers or templates, as you said Ron, for appliances and that kind of thing in the future.

We took on medical devices first in this case because we think that might be, you know, they might say well, you know, if you can't use your oven, that's kind of tough. But if you can't do your chemotherapy, we thought it might be something they might have a little more of a vision for.

So to speak.

So -- but we definitely do keep track of appliances that are accessible and we definitely

encourage that. Some -- some -- I think whirlpool has been fairly decent about making templates available. You usually have to ask for them and getting the phone number isn't always -- it can be a trial sometimes to find who you actually got to call to get it.

But I know a few years ago, we bought a whirlpool appliance that we were able to get Braille overlays for.

So, you know, accessibility is constantly evolving and whether it's a Braille access or access with Bluetooth and VoiceOver or whatever, that innovation is something that we keep working toward every day.

>> *Lucey*: Thank you, Norma. I agree that the priority on medical devices is a wise one. Some day we'll be able to have more things in our home accessible probably through interactive voice response. But the ability to touch and control medical devices is very important and as you said a life safety issue.

>> *Turner*: Well, this is Randi. It looks like

we have come to the end of our time slot. So I want to thank everyone for joining us today. Emily, Daniel and Norma. I would like to thank Texas Closed Captioning as well as communication by hand for the captioning and the sign language interpreters.

And I hope you all have a great rest of the day.

Thank you.

>> Thank you.

[End of webinar].