Spring 2024

A Transformed Library With a New Recording Studio

Assistive Technology In the Time of AI

Isaac’s Journey of Learning
In this issue, Scene proudly shines a light on people who are making their lives bigger and better. The classes and experiences they have had at Braille Institute have helped, but it’s their own resilience and desire to grow that have brought them the greatest sense of achievement. May these stories demonstrate the impact and importance of the work we do with your generous support.

Jim (Dimitri) Kales
Braille Institute CEO

When we open our hearts to those in need, we reveal a world of possibility and opportunity. Thanks to you, we continue to expand our reach and create impact in the visually impaired community.

Thank you
Your generosity at work.
We’re maximizing independence with audio-accessible resources.

Thanks to our supporters, Braille Institute’s award-winning library was transformed last year to include a state-of-the-art recording studio, as well as a new teaching hub with iPads, laptops, Braille e-readers, and other devices. The recording studio offers new opportunities to produce audiobooks and other materials. The latest project is in collaboration with the Glaucoma Research Foundation to record “Understanding and Living with Glaucoma,” their flagship publication and educational resource. Actress and advocate Bianca Beach, who was diagnosed with glaucoma as a young adult, is the voice of the recording.

Collaborations like this allow Braille Institute to expand its reach in the low vision community and ensure access to additional resources that help maximize the independence and quality of life for those living with vision loss.

To listen to the audio recording of “Understanding and Living with Glaucoma” scan the QR code or learn more at glaucoma.org

“It’s so important to have this type of resource available to patients with glaucoma because if you’re not able to read it, you need to be able to hear it.”

– Bianca Beach, Actress and advocate

Expanding our reach
Trends and resources that support low vision.
Glaucoma Facts & Trends

A progressive low vision disease that causes the loss of peripheral vision and can happen at any age.

3,000,000
Three million Americans have glaucoma and it's projected to increase to six million by 2050.

15%
About 15% of the people Braille Institute serves have glaucoma.

age 40
A baseline screening is suggested at 40, when early signs may start to occur.

Ways to Give

Would you like to speak to someone about making a gift or do you have further questions?

Phone
1-800-BRAILLE
(272-4553) Ext. 1238

Email
givetobia@brailleinstitute.org

Donate by mail
ATTN: Development
741 N. Vermont Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90029

Donate online
brailleinstitute.org/scene

Free Upcoming Events & Workshops!

Join us for National Library Week: April 8-12
The art of storytelling in various forms will be a recurring theme during the week.

Author Reading and Talk: April 9 with author Gary Phillips. The master storytelling and crime-fiction legend will do a reading from his book, One-shot Harry, and host a discussion.

Poetry Workshop: April 10, 11 am-12 pm PT featuring author and poet Joy Walker

For more information on upcoming events and to register, visit bit.ly/3UCRCJW
Creating impact
Programs and services that make a difference.
We’re revolutionizing the world of assistive technology with AI.

After retiring from a career in the U.S. Navy as a scientist and engineer, Dr. Ron Peterson’s vision started to deteriorate quickly to the point of blindness. Shocked and depressed, he discovered Braille Institute, and it opened a whole new world of assistive technology and new ways to navigate independently. Realizing how artificial intelligence (AI) could help the blind, Ron now dedicates his time to AI research and instruction.

“Braille Institute has done so much for me, as a scientist and engineer who needed to stay independent when I lost my vision.”

– Dr. Ron Peterson
Volunteer instructor and student

Daily Applications for AI
AI is enhancing and supercharging the ability of different assistive technology devices that can help the blind. There are smartphone apps and wearable devices that can read and describe what’s around you with your camera—including a crosswalk or signal to help you navigate safely. AI is also making some phone apps more accessible and easier to use without using screen readers.

Ron uses three types of AI daily:
• Pi, a hands-free, two-way voice interactive AI chatbot that accesses the internet
• Recognition apps that can look at photos and help him read signs, menus, labels, and television or computer screens
• Navigation apps

Paying it Forward
As for what’s next for Ron—he’s bringing the latest trends, research, and experts in AI to the Braille Institute community with workshops and his new seven-week online course, “Get Smart about AI.” He’ll never forget the impact Braille Institute had on his own life, noting, “They’ve done so much for me.”

From Student to “AI Investigator”
“There is a lot to gain from AI in the visually impaired community,” states Ron. His research has led him to work with several universities and companies developing AI assistive technology. At the University of San Diego, Ron worked with engineering students to develop a smartphone app to help the blind avoid obstacles while walking.

Want to learn more about AI?
• Listen to Artificial Intelligence Technology for the Blind at bit.ly/AIVIwrkshp
• Check out podcasts, books and YouTube, or explore AI tools like ChatGPT or Pi.
We’re empowering families to improve their lives.

Isaac, 6, was born with optic nerve hypoplasia in both eyes as well as nystagmus, a vision condition that can reduce vision and depth perception as well as affect balance and coordination. His mother, Xiomara, discovered his vision loss at six months of age and was devastated.

In 2021, Isaac’s ophthalmologist at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles referred him to Braille Institute. Xiomara jumped at the opportunity to get started with our Child Development program.

Isaac’s Journey of Learning
When Isaac started at Braille Institute, he faced challenges with attention and ability to focus. Now, he is excited to explore, participate in activities, and interact with Elizabeth, his Child Development consultant. Isaac also participated in Cane Quest, a fun introduction to travel and navigation skills for students.

Xiomara’s Journey of Learning
Xiomara has discovered life-changing tools such as various white cane tips, magnifying glasses, and a brailler machine. She reveals, “I’m learning all these things that can help him now and later on—like labeling things in the house that he can read and identify.”

One of the most exciting opportunities has been for Xiomara to attend Braille Bootcamp, a one-day workshop for parents, educators, and siblings of those impacted by visual impairment. She also feels empowered to advocate for Isaac, sharing resources with his school to secure braille books that support his education.

“I’m not going to let my son miss out on the opportunity to learn braille and interact with other kids, and for me to learn different ways that I can help him.” - Xiomara, Isaac’s mother
Our Child Development Service includes early intervention programs for families, such as Cane Quest and Braille Bootcamp.

Through child development programming and events, Xiomara has met other parents who have children with low or no vision. As a single mother with a child who has a visual impairment, it’s been an important part of her journey to build these relationships.

**Hope for the Future**

As Isaac has become more verbal, he has been able to express what he can see, including certain colors. His ophthalmologist is thrilled with his progress and hopes that he can introduce glasses in the future to enhance Isaac’s sight. Xiomara is optimistic that he’ll eventually be able to read large text. Braille Institute is proud to be a part of Isaac’s continued growth and development.

SEE WHAT’S POSSIBLE:

**Tax-saving ways to create a legacy gift that transforms lives.**

- **Give from your IRA.**
  If you’re 70-1/2 or older, you can make a tax advantaged charitable gift of up to $100,000 per year (or $200,000 for married couples) directly from your IRA to Braille Institute.

- **Give a stock gift.**
  Make a gift with no cash out-of-pocket. You won’t pay any taxes, and you’ll receive an income tax deduction for the full market value of your stocks.

- **Give a gift that keeps on giving.**
  A charitable gift annuity (CGA) is a gift of cash or appreciated securities. In exchange for your generous gift, we commit to providing you (or a loved one) with a fixed income for life. Beyond the annuity payments, the remaining funds support Braille Institute.

- **Get started or learn more:**
  - Email plangift@brailleinstitute.org
  - Call (714) 503-2120 to speak with Cindy T. Rorman, Senior Director of Development

This information is not intended as tax, legal or financial advice. Please consult your personal financial advisor for information specific to your situation.

Find more stories about children we’ve helped at bit.ly/berkleytst