

Number 6, Friday 6 May, 2022

Inside this issue

Here's what you'll find:

- **From SVRC:** Message from the Manager, Q&A: Audio Books, Using Google Docs to make an epub, Support Skills in Term 2 – special focus on LEISURE
- **From the field:** PD for teaching screen readers, Free swish table, What Kinds of Jobs do People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired Do?, National Simultaneous Storytime book in BRAILLE!

PD events

The [2022 Professional Learning Calendar](#) is now available on the SVRC website. Most PL will continue to be held online, but some are planned to be onsite. Please encourage school staff to [register for PD through our website](#).

Wednesday May 11 [Inclusion of students who have vision impairments in art](#)

Practical strategies teachers can use in art classes to promote inclusion and achievement for students who are blind or partially sighted.

Tuesday June 7 [Inclusion of students who have vision impairments in PE](#)

Providing ideas and practical strategies to support the inclusion of students who are blind or partially sighted in physical education.

Message from the Manager

Source: Kim Foley, Manager, SVRC

Education Week takes place this term from Sunday 22 to Saturday 28 May 2022. The theme for this year is celebrating the 150th anniversary of public education and renewing our commitment to the great values of free, secular and compulsory education with equity and excellence at the core. Thank you to Marion for gathering all the historical information and photos and submitting [the following article to be published by DET](#).

Statewide Vision Resource Centre – supporting students with vision impairments

The Statewide Vision Resource Centre (SVRC) supports eligible Victorian children and young people who are blind or have low vision to access and engage with school-based learning. It does this by providing students with specialised teaching, support, materials and technologies. It also equips school staff, Visiting Teachers and families across Victoria by providing personalised advice, training and resources. In 2022, SVRC supports 530 students who are blind or have low vision in schools throughout Victoria.

SVRC was established in 1983 by the Victorian Department of Education and Training. It is a leading centre of expertise in blindness and low vision education services, supporting eligible students in Government, Catholic and Independent schools. The staff at SVRC are committed to providing specialised and professional assistance, information and resources for students, school staff, Visiting Teachers and family members.

SVRC's facilities are based at 370 Springvale Road in Donvale, on the grounds of the Heatherwood School (a Government secondary specialist school).

Prior to the establishment of the Visiting Teacher Service (Vision), and the Statewide Vision Resource Centre, the Department supported students with vision impairments through a unit and special school.

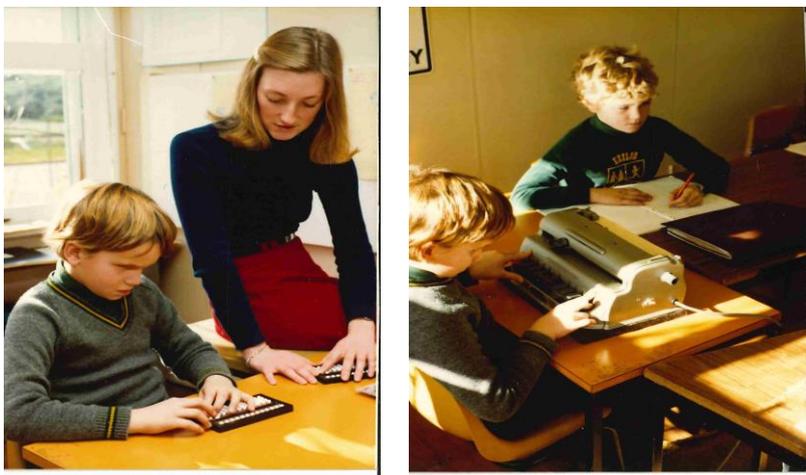
John Simpson and his brother attended Princes Hills Primary School from 1953 to 1960. Both brothers had low vision and so were in the 'Sight Saving Grade'. The belief at the time was that if you used your low vision, you might damage it, so their education minimised the use of their vision. They used typed large print, blackboards and chalk and had desks with tiltable lids to raise work up to their eyes. The unit comprised students from 5 to 15 years of age. John Simpson, AM, is now a director of Blind Citizens Australia.

In 1961, Carronbank School for the Partially Sighted was established in Kew. This then became a school for deaf-blind children downstairs and a base for the VTS (Vision) upstairs.

One of the first students who was blind and integrated in his local primary school with SVRC and Visiting Teacher (Vision) support, was Brett Scarr. He attended Keilor Primary School in the 1980s and his Visiting Teacher was Annette Godfrey-Magee. Brett featured in a 'Comet' magazine at the time. He was quoted saying, 'My teacher makes me do the same work as the rest of the class. Every day my Visiting Teacher comes. She helps me with my Braille. I use an abacus to count.' Brett used a Perkins Braille Writer to produce his own school work and an abacus for counting and maths. SVRC and his VT would need to translate the braille Brett produced, for his teachers to access and correct. Brett's school requested all the books being read by his classmates in embossed braille from SVRC so that Brett could read along-side his peers.

Brett now works for the NDIA as a digital accessibility consultant. He helps ensure that the NDIS portal and app are fully accessible to all.

- Photos (from Comet magazine)
 - Brett and Visiting Teacher, Annette, using abacus
 - Brett using Perkins Braille Writer while classmate uses pencil and paper



SVRC continues to support the inclusion of students who are blind or have low vision. Zoe Smith is currently in year 4 at Solway Primary School. Her current Visiting Teacher is Sofia Michael. Zoe is blind and uses technology and equipment borrowed from the SVRC Technology Library. Zoe still jots some braille notes and does her maths on a Perkins Braille, but also uses a variety of technology to access the curriculum. This technology can also help her teachers to access what Zoe produces in braille. SVRC supports Zoe by lending this equipment and also helping her VT, teachers and Education Support to know how it all works.

Because Zoe can produce her braille on a piece of technology, such as a BrailleSense Polaris, her teachers can see a translation of this braille on a screen or it can be emailed or sent to a printer or braille embosser.

Zoe uses an iPad borrowed from SVRC with built-in accessibility of VoiceOver, and specialised apps such as an audio dictionary, and Voice Dream Reader to read eText.

SVRC also supplies her braille either in embossed books or as eText that Zoe can read using a refreshable braille display. Zoe is a keen reader and the school request many books that are available to her sighted peers and in her school library. Recently, SVRC produced 'Women in Sport' by Rachel Ignotofsky as an MSWord file for Zoe to read on her refreshable braille technology.

When Zoe began at Solway, staff were invited to professional learning days to help them prepare for inclusion of a student who is blind, and to know what supports and resources are available. Each year new staff involved with Zoe participate in professional learning offered by SVRC, which is now all online.

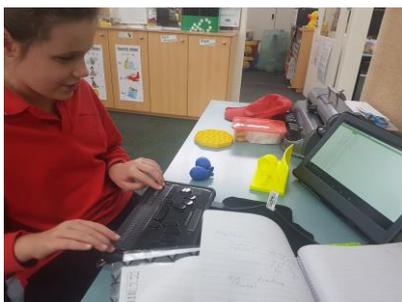
When Zoe was in Foundation to year 3, she participated in Dot Power Days at SVRC. Dot Power is a fun day of braille immersion with other young readers of braille. Most students who are blind are the only one in their school, so it is fun and powerful for young readers to be together with other

students reading braille. Dot Power is also a learning opportunity for school-based personnel and VTs who are invited to attend with Zoe.

Now that Zoe is in year 4, she attends the Support Skills Program at SVRC, twice a term. This is a day of learning all aspects of the Expanded Core Curriculum - the extra skills needed by a student because of their vision impairment. Most of the teachers at Support Skills are themselves blind or have low vision.

Both Dot Power and Support Skills continued during lockdowns with sessions being offered online.

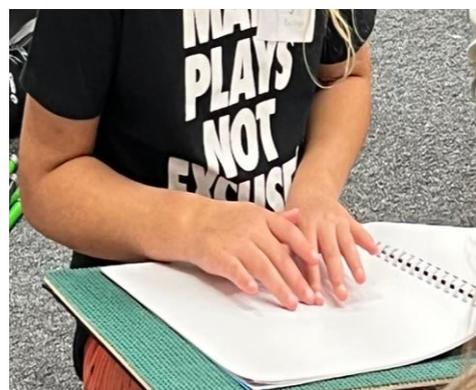
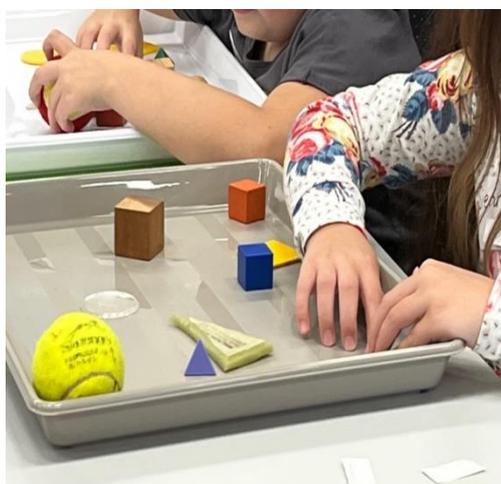
Photo – Zoe using her refreshable braille device and visual display for teachers



DOT Power Day

On Tuesday May 3 the first DOT Power Day for 2022 was held onsite and we welcomed Omer, Elijah, Ethan, Olivia, Patrick, Henry, Kaitlyn, Brooklyn, Sienna and Sarah. It was wonderful to observe the children's engagement with the learning tasks and with each other. It was a great opportunity for parents, teachers and educational staff to join in with the activities and to learn more about SVRC programs and resources we can offer braille users. The theme for the day was Shapes with learning tasks such as reading and writing for shapes, reading the 'Shapes at Play' story, shapes and volume exploration, Making Shapes in 2D and 3D. Thank you to Marion for organising the exceptional learning tasks and SVRC staff who supported the program before and on the day. A great day was had by all!

Photo/s of students at DOT Power Day sorting and naming a variety of 3D shapes in a tray, matching 2D to 3D shapes, and reading the story of 'Shapes at Play' in braille.



Q&A: Audio Books

Question: I have a student who would benefit from listening to talking books. How do I go about getting these?

Answer: At the SVRC we have a limited number of titles on our catalogue as audio files (MP3 mostly, but some audio CD) available to eligible students.

These can be located via the [catalogue page on the SVRC website](#). Take a look in the audio column of the spreadsheet for Primary and Secondary Library Resources and [make your requests using the Transcription Request Form](#).

There are many other sources of books in audio format, including:

- the school library
- the local library
- the Vision Australia library (for clients of Vision Australia)
- podcasts can be a great source of audio materials also

There is also [BorrowBox](#) – a great source of FREE audio books (and ebooks) that you can access through your local library. All you need is a library ID number and login and you can borrow from an extensive collection. Every local library in Australia offers this service.



Along with the above sources, there is also technology that will convert docx files (for example) into digital audio via technology. Many of the students have a Victor Reader Stream through the SVRC Technology Library or through NDIS funding. So you can request a docx file from the SVRC (see also the catalogue described above), load to the Victor Reader and listen to the book!

The iPad also offers text-to-speech for ePub files which can also be sourced from the SVRC.

We hope you enjoy the range of audio resources offered by the SVRC and the wider community!

Using Google Docs to make an epub

Source: SVRC

There are some circumstances when you have a document in the .docx format but you'd like it to be an .epub format instead. We recently discovered you can use Google Docs to do this.

1. Save the file to Google Docs
2. Open the file
3. Choose "File", then "Download" and choose "EPUB Publication (.epub)" from the dropdown list.

The file will appear in the Downloads folder.

Epubs are ideal for reading using the Books App on an iPad.

Support Skills in Term 2 – special focus on LEISURE

This term, the focus of our Support Skills program is on LEISURE.

‘Enjoyable leisure activities are associated with:

- Lower levels of depression and negative affect
- Improved positive, physical and psychosocial states.’

Source: [Mental Health Benefits of Leisure Activities](#)

At Support Skills on Fridays, we will be sharing ideas for meaningful and fun leisure activities. Our staff will be sharing what they do in their spare time that is fulfilling and accessible. We are hoping to steer away from technology-based leisure activities.

If members of Support Skills families, Visiting Teachers or support staff have leisure activities that they do and love, we would love to hear from you. We can have you on Zoom to describe to the students what your favoured activity is and why you find it such fun or you can come in if that suits you and demonstrate or show equipment for your activity. The best time for us to share with all the students is at assemblies which take place 8.45 to 9.20 when we are on-site and 9.45 to 10.10 when we are online.

Please contact us if you would like to share your favourite leisure activity with our students.

marion.blaze@education.vic.gov.au

PD for teaching screen readers

Source: Chris Hawkins, Visiting Teacher

Here are some resources on how to teach screen readers to students. There are four videos on Youtube from American Printing House for the Blind with Cody M. Laplante who is a Teacher of Students with a Visual Impairment in the USA. The four videos are linked below.

[Teaching Screen Readers the Fun Way: Part 1 - YouTube](#), [Teaching Screen Readers the Fun Way: Part 2 - YouTube](#), [Teaching Screen Readers the Fun Way: Part 3 - YouTube](#), [Teaching Screen Readers the Fun Way: Part 4 - YouTube](#)

You can find the handouts through the [APH Access Academy website](#) – the handouts for the first video are in May section. There's also a self paced online course through Cody's website, eye.t. [An Introduction to Screen Reader.](#)

Free swish table

Would you or your school like a swish table? There's one available that was made a few years ago by Men in Sheds and was used at school. It comes with blindfolds, paddles and balls, and folds up for easy transport!

Contact Ange Richards 0438469967 if you're interested.

What Kinds of Jobs do People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired Do?

Source: by Sandy Murillo from [The Chicago Lighthouse](#)

A common question the Lighthouse's [Employment Services Department](#) gets is what types of jobs can people who are blind or visually impaired do? I too get this question from curious individuals, who are in awe when I tell them about my work at The Chicago Lighthouse as a radio producer and development assistant. Today's technology, as well as using different adaptations, allows people with vision loss to do just about any job you can think of. The following list, although not exhaustive, is meant to give a general idea of the different careers and jobs done by people who are blind or visually impaired

- Teachers, college professors and guidance counselors
- Social workers and psychologists
- Doctors, nurses and occupational and physical therapists
- Masseuses and chiropractors
- Rehabilitation teachers and counselors
- Customer service representatives
- Restaurant and store workers
- Factory workers
- Freelance writers, journalists and TV and radio broadcasters
- DJs and musicians
- Attorneys, judges and politicians
- Executive directors and managers
- Coaches and athletes
- Authors and motivational speakers
- Chefs
- Architects
- Researchers, engineers and scientists
- Artists and photographers

Just like people with sight, individuals who are blind or visually impaired have different interests and skillsets. For a long time, the unemployment rate among people with vision loss has been over 70 percent, and it is due in large part to the numerous misconceptions that still exist. Thanks to equipment like screen-reading and magnifying software, Braille displays and various other tools, people with vision loss can hold different jobs. When employers have doubts about how we will accomplish a certain aspect of the job, chances are we have already given careful thought to it and come up with solutions.

If you would like to learn more about the different jobs done by people who are blind or visually impaired, visit the American Foundation for the Blind's [CareerConnect website](#). The site provides different resources and other information for job seekers with vision loss. It also includes blog posts from successful professionals who are blind or visually impaired. You can also read our popular post about the [top 5 benefits of hiring](#) employees who are blind or visually impaired.

National Simultaneous Storytime book in BRAILLE!

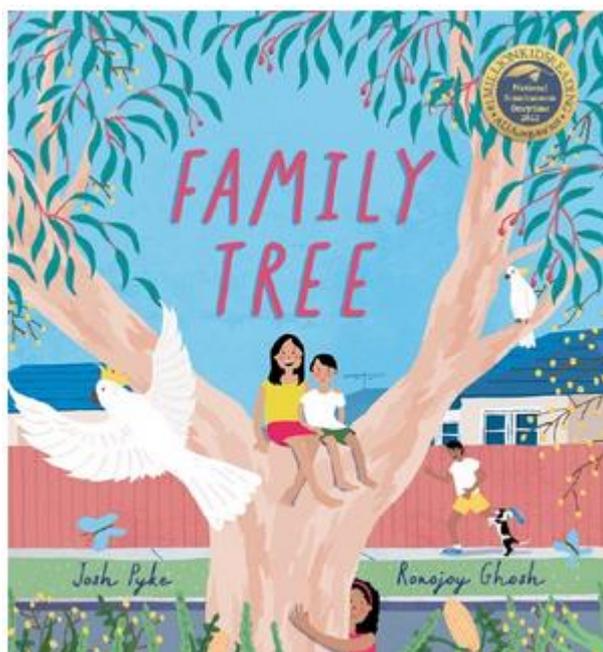
Source: [Australian Library and Information Association](http://www.alia.org.au) and SVRC

The National Simultaneous Storytime (NSS) is held annually by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). Every year a picture book, written and illustrated by an Australian author and illustrator, is read simultaneously in libraries, schools, pre-schools, childcare centres, family homes, bookshops and many other places around the country. Now in its 22nd successful year, it is a colourful, vibrant, fun event that aims to promote the value of reading and literacy, using an Australian children's book that explores age-appropriate themes, and addresses key learning areas of the National Curriculum for Foundation to Year 6.

The book chosen for NSS this year is **FAMILY TREE** by **Josh Pyke** and **SVRC has produced this book in braille** so that our braille readers can participate. Simply request the braille book from us and register to participate in the NSS.

This year NSS takes place on **Wednesday 25 May 2022 at 11:00am**. Everyone can join NSS, it doesn't matter whether you are at home, a school, a public library or even a university library!

[Register to participate](#) - (it's free)



Swish/vision impaired table tennis at Kooyong

Source: Robyn Bousie, Vision Impaired Table Tennis

Vision impaired table tennis will be running a junior program once a month on a Saturday at Kooyong, 454 Glenferrie Road. We would like to encourage any child from 7-16 to participate.

Time: 12pm to 1.30

Dates:

- 4th June
- 2nd July
- 6th August
- 3rd September
- 1st October
- 5th November

Please email either Marco or myself if you are interested in being involved. For further information and access to Kooyong please contact the following.

Marco Curralejo (Kooyong club)

Email: marco.curralejo@vitta.org.au

Mobile: 0412 128 429

Robyn Bousie

Email: president@vitta.org.au

Mobile: 0717 159 106

And finally ...

A fact from the 2022 Guinness World Records Book, currently being put into etext at SVRC.

First blind person to lead a climb of the Old Man of Hoy

On 4 June 2019, blind climber Jesse Dufton (UK) led an ascent of the 137-m-tall (449-ft) Old Man of Hoy sea stack in the Orkney Islands, UK. His sighted partner, Molly Thompson, followed him up the east face. Dufton was born with just 20% of his central vision, with large blind spots; his limited sight continues to decline. On the ascent, he had only light perception to guide him.