

# Parent to Parent

For Parents and Families of Students in  
Kentucky who are Blind and Visually  
Impaired

Spring 2010

Kentucky School for the Blind

Family Support Center, Member of Parent Resource Centers of KY



## Learning Braille is Easier than You Think

By: Kathryn Aqua, Parent

As the campers flocked to mail call, Holly heard her name and headed toward the sound of the voice. "Here you go, Holly! Put your hand out!" She stretched her hand forward and felt the soft, smooth paper envelope touch her skin.

With a big grin, Holly tore open the envelope and pulled out a letter. After a week of camp, she had been feeling a little homesick and looking forward to a letter from home. She could not wait to know what her mom had to say.

Sliding her fingertips across the paper, Holly's face fell. The letter was print. She had known it would be print. Her parents did not know Braille. Even so, she hoped sometimes that maybe her mom would surprise her by learning. Now she would have to wait until someone could read the letter to her. Holly sighed. How she hated having to wait! She hated having a reader too. Sometimes her mom wrote private things in her letters and Holly felt embarrassed for another person to read them.

She counted the pages. Three. It was a long one! She folded the paper and slipped it into her pocket, wondering how long it would be before she found a sighted person who had time to read the news from home to her.

"Did you get a letter?" Holly's friend, Ruthie, bumped her left arm.

"Yeah, but I have to find a reader."



*Kathryn Aqua and daughter Annemarie  
read a braille book together in the KSB  
Library.*

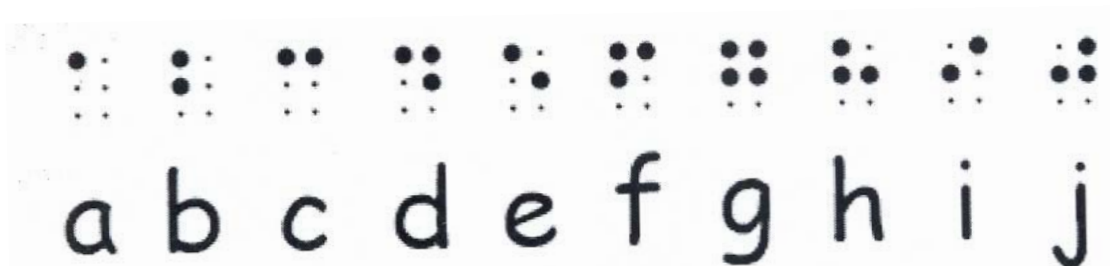
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"Oh, Too bad," Ruthie consoled her. "I got one too! My mom says my grandpa is going to come for a visit right after camp is over. I'm so excited! He's going to take us fishing!"

"You are so lucky that your mom knows Braille. I wish my mom would learn it. It's not hard; she just says she doesn't have time."

That night, Ruthie tucked her Braille letter from home under her pillow. As she lay in the dark, her fingers traced the words, "Grandpa is coming" over and over until she fell asleep. Holly put her letter in the pocket of the shorts



she would wear the next day. She still did not know what her letter said. Maybe tomorrow someone would have time to read to her.

Holly was right; learning Braille is not hard. Ruthie's mother learned Braille right alongside her daughter, with the help of a cheat sheet. Parents can learn Braille by sight. Since we already know the print alphabet, Braille is easy for us to learn.

Parents sometimes think learning Braille is hard, says Carrie Gilmer, the president of the Minnesota Parents of Blind Children, and a parent of a blind son who is now a university student. "Braille is not something you have to 'stop and learn,' you can take a few minutes out of each day to learn a little Braille. There are different levels of knowing Braille. You don't have to be an expert. It's okay to use the cheat sheet."

The important thing to a blind child is that mom and dad demonstrate that Braille is important, and that their blind child is important enough for them to learn Braille.

Carrie says she has never heard a blind person say that they did not care whether or not their parents learned Braille. "Either they say, 'I'm glad my parents learned it,' or 'I wish my parents knew it.'" She says children who grow up with parents who never learn Braille tend to feel a sense of isolation from their family. "They feel like Braille is such an important part of their lives, but their parents were not interested enough to learn."

When a parent learns Braille, it communicates to the child that their needs and interests are important and valued. It also shows that the parent values Braille, which can motivate the child to be more accepting of learning it as well.

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## Resources for Parents to Learn Braille

1. Talk to your child's teacher of the visually impaired (TVI). Some vision departments have resources available for teaching parents Braille. Many TVI's are willing to spend a little time introducing you to the braille and the alphabet to get you started.
2. The Hadley School for the Blind offers a free Braille correspondence course for parents of blind children. Visit their website at [www.hadley.org](http://www.hadley.org) for more information and a list of available courses.
3. *Just Enough to Know Better* from National Braille Press is a great book resource for learning Braille. This guide will give you the Braille basics, along with some flash cards you can put on the refrigerator and a cheat sheet with all of the Braille contractions. To order, just call NBP at 1-800-548-7323 or visit their website at [www.nbp.org](http://www.nbp.org).
4. The Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind offer a website called Dots for Families: Ongoing Literacy for Families of Children with Visual Impairments at <http://uacoe.arizona.edu/viliteracy/default.htm>. This website has a series of free lessons to teach parents basic Braille, along with a free cheat sheet you can print out. There are a lot of additional tips for using Braille, including instructions for making designs using Braille, and methods for adapting print books for your blind child.
5. [dotlessbraille.org](http://dotlessbraille.org) has free Braille lessons. Another website with free Braille lessons is Braille through Remote Learning at <http://www.brl.org>.
6. If you are very ambitious, you might be interested in the free Braille transcriber's course available through the National Library of Congress at <http://www.loc.gov/nls/bds.html>.
7. *Because Books Matter: Reading Braille Books with Young Blind Children* is a free book for parents available through the KSB Library and Family Support Center. To request your copy, contact Heather Davis, KSB Librarian at [heather.davis@ksb.kyschools.us](mailto:heather.davis@ksb.kyschools.us) or 502-897-1583 ext. 254 or Mitch Dahmke, Family Support Specialist at [mitch.dahmke@ksb.kyschools.us](mailto:mitch.dahmke@ksb.kyschools.us) or 502-897-1583 ext.221.

*Learning Braille is Easier than You Think, continued from page 3:*

Where can a parent go to learn Braille?

A list of additional resources is listed on page 3, but all you really need is the cheat sheet and you are in business. With the cheat sheet in hand, all you have to do is sit down at the braille and start. If you make a mistake, flatten the dots with your fingernail, hit the backspace bar and try again.

## What is stopping you from learning Braille?

The best way to learn Braille is simply to use it. When my daughter does her homework, I sit down with her and pull out my Braille cheat sheet. This is my time to review my Braille. I am available if she needs help with her homework. "Mom, I can't remember how to spell *should*." I remind her. She says, "What is the contraction for that? I remember there is a contraction for should, but I can't remember it. Is it sh and d?" I check to be sure. Yes, Annmarie, that is correct! She is able to finish her homework with confidence.

The benefits of learning Braille have been many. Not only can I write little love notes to my daughter and help her with her homework, I can also review her school work. When Annmarie was in public school, her classroom teacher did not know Braille. Sometimes Annmarie's answer would be marked wrong when it was actually correct. The person who transcribed her work from Braille to print had made a mistake. By checking her work I was able to be sure that Annmarie got the credit she deserved.

What is stopping you from learning Braille? It's easy! Go ahead and give it a try! Surprise your child with a Braille love note when he or she gets home from school.

*Parent to Parent* is a quarterly publication containing information relevant to Kentucky parents and families of children who are blind and visually impaired.

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# Benefits Gained from Hadley Online Courses

*By: Sue Yocum, Administrative Specialist, Kentucky Instructional Materials Resource Center*

In the spring of 2003, I began to take courses from the Hadley School for the Blind. As a paraprofessional, I was eager to expand my knowledge in the field of working with individuals who are blind and visually impaired. Hadley offers courses free of charge to students who are blind and visually impaired and their families and affordable tuition for blindness professionals.

The distance education courses are offered in four program areas: adult continuing education, high school, family education and professional studies. I took the family education courses because they best suited my needs at that time. I was an Administrative Assistant working with Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) Regional Consultant Patty Dilg. Our primary clients were families of blind and visually impaired preschoolers and their teachers. The courses I took were: Coping with Low Vision; Access Technology; Beginnings, Introduction to Braille; and Contracted Braille.

My course work was very beneficial in many ways. On a limited basis, it enabled me to transcribe written materials into Braille for my co-worker Patty Dilg. She is visually impaired and a Braille reader. This new skill came in handy as I was able to label file folders, tapes and many other items around the office. While there haven't been a lot of opportunities to use this skill directly with students, I have used it to help prepare a workbook for transcription. In my present position as an Administrative Specialist in the Kentucky Instructional Materials Resource Center, I use this skill to decode Braille.

I am very grateful that I took advantage of Hadley's courses. The courses provided me access to a qualified instructor, allowed me to work at my own pace and afforded me the opportunity to gain valuable career skills. I would encourage anyone that has a child, student or family member who is blind or visually impaired to take the time to learn Braille. It may make life a little easier for both of you.



*Administrative Specialist Sue Yocum brailles a note using a Perkins Braillewriter, utilizing the skills gained through her Hadley coursework.*

# KIMRC Not Your Ordinary Acronym

*By: Alexander Redden, KIMRC Program Coordinator*

Have you ever heard the acronym KIMRC and wondered what it meant? KIMRC stands for the Kentucky Instructional Materials Resource Center and it is part of outreach services provided by the Kentucky School for the Blind.



*KIMRC Program Coordinator Alexander Redden uses a scanner with the Braille book inventory.*

KIMRC is responsible for providing textbooks in Braille or large print and educational materials needed by Kentucky students who are blind or visually impaired for use in public or private, nonprofit educational programs of less than college level.

KIMRC conducts an annual statewide registration of students who are blind or visually impaired. Blind infants are also eligible from birth for inclusion in the registration, if enrolled in an early

intervention program (i.e., First Steps, Visually Impaired Preschool Services). This registration determines the amount of money that Kentucky will receive from the federal government through the Federal Quota (FQ) Program. For every child that is registered, the KIMRC receives \$334.27. These funds are then used to acquire supplies, textbooks and other materials for students who are blind and visually impaired. Depending on available funding, the Kentucky Department of Education also allocates textbook funds to the KIMRC under the State Textbook Program.

School districts are ultimately responsible for providing students with visual impairments with textbooks and material. KIMRC serves as a valuable resource to those districts as books and materials can be purchased and loaned on a yearly basis. If a district purchases an item or textbook, it may be used only once, depending on the number of visually impaired students they have and their grade level(s). The average large print



*With a \$2 million inventory, the KIMRC is a valuable resource to Kentucky's 176 school districts. KIMRC Administrative Specialist Sue Yocum shelves a large type book.*

book costs \$400-\$1,200 and the average Braille book cost ranges from \$1,000-\$3,000. With an inventory of over \$2 million books and materials, the KIMRC was able to ship items valued at \$570,000 from its shelves to be used again.

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**In the past three years, KIMRC has upgraded their warehouse, database and installed an online ordering and receiving website.**  
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The KIMRC works with the Kentucky School for the Blind Charitable Foundation (KSBCF) and a volunteer group to repair and supply Braille writers, at no cost, to Kentucky residents. Braille writers can be shipped "Free Matter for the Blind" or brought to the KIMRC for repair. Adults wishing to obtain a braillewriter should contact KSBCF at 502-897-3990 or [www.ksbcf.org](http://www.ksbcf.org).

In the past three years, KIMRC has upgraded their warehouse, database and installed an online ordering and receiving website. All items are bar coded which allows for wireless scanning of stock. This step has greatly enhanced the speed in which the KIMRC is able to process materials. The database keeps track of students, patrons (teachers of the visually impaired and special education directors), eye reports, requests, locations, purchases and so much more. Online ordering allows school districts to place orders and to track their progress through the ordering cycle.

## **Appalachian Visionaries Inc. is Up and Running**

*By: Bess Douthitt, Retired Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Breathitt County*  
Bess K. Douthitt, a retired teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) with the Breathitt County Schools and who is presently employed part-time as a vision consultant with the Owsley County Schools, has joined others in Breathitt and Letcher Counties to form an organization – Appalachian Visionaries, Inc. (AV). This organization was formed to assist visually impaired and blind residents of southeastern Kentucky to become more knowledgeable about resources that can help them achieve a greater degree of independence in their communities and workplace.

According to Douthitt, retinitis pigmentosa (RP), which is a degenerative retinal disorder resulting in night blindness and tunnel vision, is so heavily concentrated in Breathitt County that she frequently encountered relatives of

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*Appalachian Visionaries, continued from page 7:*

her students who realized that services were out there for them, but were not sure exactly how to access these services. Families especially wanted some of the assistive technology devices for home use that students were using at school such as talking calculators, computers with speech, screen enhancement systems, large print study materials for obtaining a GED, or just a new cane tip for a worn out cane. Others wished to learn when they might expect to lose remaining vision so that appropriate job training could be arranged with help from the Kentucky Office for the Blind.



*Joey Couch, shown with his guide dog Iroquois, has conducted several presentations for AV. During one event, he answered questions about his guide dog.*

Through a Kentucky Appalachian Regional (ARC) Flex-E Grant made available through the Brushy Fork Institute of Berea College and supplemented by the Breathitt County Action Team, AV was able to receive funding this past July. This funding could be used for the development of a website, a quarterly newsletter, adaptive card and board games, various assistive technology devices, and monthly presentations throughout the fall of 2009 on various topics to help blind and visually impaired individuals to become more aware of resources. On October 24, Pamela Roark-Glisson, director of Independence Place in Lexington and her staff gave an outstanding presentation of Kentucky National Federation of the Blind (NFB)-Newsline. Newsline makes it possible for someone who is unable to read conventional print to access information from newspapers, magazines, TV listings, and other publications not otherwise available in an alternative format by use of the touch-tone telephone at no cost for those who are eligible. By listening to the Jackson Times-Voice, and other southeastern Kentucky newspapers that are a part of this service, an individual can learn about employment opportunities.

Many other presenters helped out with special events sponsored by AV. Joey Couch, who lives in Perry County and is president of the East Kentucky Christian Chapter of the Kentucky Council of the Blind (KCB), was on hand on three occasions to answer questions about his guide dog, Iroquois, and to demonstrate his laptop computer with JAWS for Windows. Jaws is a screen reading program that is most compatible with a lot of workplace and classroom applications. Bobby Begley, a resident of Perry County, who works

part-time in recreation at the Veterans Center in Hazard, demonstrated adapted card and board games and was also available to demonstrate JAWS. On a cold December Sunday afternoon at the Isom Presbyterian Church in Letcher County, Mitch Dahmke, KSB family support specialist, gave a most informative presentation of the INSIGHT Post Secondary Preparation Program that has been scheduled to take place on the Morehead State University campus on June 5-12. This is a unique program designed to provide students who are blind and visually impaired with opportunities and experiences that they are likely to encounter when entering a post-secondary situation. He also brought many other wonderful educational and vocational resources to share with families. Three AV board members, who are also fulltime TVIs and O&M Specialists – Louise Murtaugh, Jewel Eldridge, and Teresa Osborne, were also available to answer questions about the INSIGHT program.

If anyone residing in southeastern Kentucky would like to see a demonstration of JAWS or other assistive technology devices or any of the adapted card and board games, they can contact Bess Douthitt at 606-666-2289 or [bessinky@att.net](mailto:bessinky@att.net). The AV website is [www.aveky.org](http://www.aveky.org).

## Check Out these VI Resources

**SEEDLINGS BRAILLE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN** is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to increasing the opportunity for literacy by providing high quality, low cost Braille books for children. At this time, less than 20% of the 50,000 blind children in the United States are proficient in Braille because the written word is often inaccessible to them. This is what Seedlings hopes to change. **P.O. Box 51924, Livonia, MI 48151-5924, 1-800-777-8552, [www.seedlings.org](http://www.seedlings.org)**

Reading and writing Braille has been a priority for the **HADLEY SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND** since 1920. To this day, Braille courses are their most popular courses. Hadley currently provides 10 Braille courses for those who are blind, teaching reading and writing in both uncontracted and contracted formats. The school also offers three Braille courses for sighted individuals. **700 Elm Street, Winnetka, IL 60093-2554, 1-800-323-4238 [www.Hadley.edu](http://www.Hadley.edu)**

Through **NATIONAL BRAILLE PRESS**, one would be able to sign their child up for the only Children's Braille Book Club featuring a new print/Braille book every month. You would receive free monthly notices that describe the book of the month. There is no obligation to buy; you order the titles you want. You can buy an annual subscription for \$100 and automatically receive twelve monthly print/Braille books. This figures to be approximately \$8.33 per book. **88 St. Stephen St., Boston, MA 02115-4302 [www.nbp.org](http://www.nbp.org)**

# Summer Programs Available for Students

**KSB is excited to offer summer enrichment programs for students who are blind and visually impaired on June 21-July 2, 2010.** Elementary, Middle/High and Career/Work Summer Programs information and application registration forms are available at <http://www.ksb.k12.ky.us/Academics/Summer.htm>. Just like last year, the sessions will run concurrently.

A final decision on the Career/Work Program will be made once a worksite has been secured. Students wishing to participate in this program should submit a registration form. If a worksite is not obtained, students will be notified and encouraged to participate in the MS/HS program.

If you have questions, contact Director of Special Education Nancy Nusz, 502-897-1583, ext. 244 or [nancy.nusz@ksb.kyschools.us](mailto:nancy.nusz@ksb.kyschools.us). **The deadline to register is April 30.**

**The Kentucky Lions Youth Camp Crescendo, located near Lebanon Junction, KY will be held July 5-9 2010.** Boys and girls who are blind or have a visual impairment and are 6-15 years-old may attend. The camp schedule has yet to be announced, but your child can count on terrific camp activities. For information, contact Billie Flannery at 1-888-879-8884 or [bjflannery@lions-campcrescendo.org](mailto:bjflannery@lions-campcrescendo.org).

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