



*Empowering visually impaired
people to live fulfilling lives*

Program Review Committee
Meeting Report from July 30, 2009
11:30 am – 1:30 pm

The Braille Institute Program Review Committee met on July 30, 2009 at Braille Institute. In attendance were John Nuanes, committee chairman; Caryl Crahan, Ron Smith, M.D., Delores Louie and Joy Efron. Staff included Sally Jameson, Vice President of Programs and Services and Adama Dyoniziak, Director of Strategic Programs.

The agenda (see attached) covered three topics: enrollment challenges, new strategies for public education and the status of the strategic plan.

Enrollment Challenges

Sally Jameson briefly reviewed the year-end report on enrollment that showed flat enrollment at the regional centers compared to the prior year and an increase in enrollment in Community Outreach programs. She explained that the challenges to enrollment for both regional centers as well as Community Outreach include how to effectively get the word out about the programs, transportation and denial. While we provide transportation to regional centers, none of the centers provide transportation for outreach programs except Santa Barbara. Denial refers to the fact that many adults experiencing sight loss are in denial about their situation and feel they don't need services because they are not like "those blind people."

Joy Efron told the committee about her neighbor who has low vision but, despite Joy's encouragement, is not interested in going to Braille Institute, even when Joy offered to take her. Sally stated that this is a very common situation. To confront this problem, Braille's Rancho Mirage Center has developed a course catalog, which was shown to the committee. The catalog has organized classes and programs in an easy to read format and has used interesting titles for them, thereby mitigating the issues of denial and stereotypes of services for blind people. The result has been a significant increase in enrollment. Discussion followed about why all the other centers don't produce a catalog, as there was much enthusiasm among the committee for the catalog as an excellent way to market the program. Sally stated she felt the others centers would eventually adopt a catalog.

Sally also reported to the committee that Braille is now tracking its Community Training Programs. These are programs that provide a minimum of 1 hour of skills training to clinicians, caregivers and other professionals. This also includes a general category of "Public Education" to individuals not enrolled in Braille classes. This past year, 15,000

received this type of training. The principle behind this is to train those who provide care and assistance for others, as a way of extending the reach of Braille Institute.

The Committee asked if there is a list of all the locations and Dr. Smith felt that the Board would be quite interested to see the breadth and leverage of such training programs.

Strategies for Public Education

The discussion about enrollment led into a review and discussion about how Braille Institute informs and educates the public about its programs and services. As a group, Committee members felt it is important to target doctors' offices. Dr. Smith offered to sign a letter to physicians with accompanying materials. It was also suggested that a letter from our consulting optometrist, Dr. Bill Takeshita, should be sent to area optometrists.

Other suggestions from the Committee included using Auxiliary members to spread the word and materials in their areas as well as working with pharmacies. The Committee continued to refer back to the catalog as an effective information and marketing tool.

Sally Jameson explained the public education campaign that is currently being developed for a fall kick-off. The firm Braille Institute hired for rebranding has designed a campaign to include 4 elements: campaign volunteers/community ambassadors, online marketing, cause-related marketing partners and PR and limited advertising. The campaign is called ***Solutions in Sight*** and will utilize a large number of (new) volunteers who will be trained and given materials to distribute throughout their communities. Some of these volunteers will serve as Ambassadors and will do presentations and represent Braille Institute at health fairs and other community events.

The materials being produced will present lifestyle themes in order to garner interest from people who might not otherwise be attracted to information about low vision. All materials will offer very practical tips and suggestions for adapting to sight loss. This information will be linked to a Solutions in Sight website where community participation will be encouraged through blogs and other postings. Braille already has a page on Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In and YouTube.

The lifestyle themes are as follows:

Travel—***Discover the world***

Cooking/shopping—***Kitchen Confidence***

Personal Care—***Looking Good***

Sports/recreation—***Fun and Fitness***

Literacy—***Staying Connected***

Managing your life—***The Business of Living***

Mobility—***Getting Around Town***

Arts—***Express Yourself***

It is hoped that we will be able to find a corporate partner for some or all of these lifestyle themes to extend our reach through advertising or other promotional opportunities. Such cause-related marketing is common but something Braille Institute has never done.

Status of the Strategic Plan

A list of Braille Institute's strategic plan initiatives was distributed (see attached). Adama Dyoniziak, Director of Strategic Programs, presented a status report of these initiatives.

- **Services to the underserved, Latino segment of the population**: Progress is being made in each of our regional centers with hiring of bilingual staff as we are able to do so and targeted outreach to the Latino community. A part of this effort involves new community partners who are anchored in the Latino community. Inroads have been made to build a relationship with the Latino community at all centers; Latino enrollment has increased at all centers. San Diego still lags in this area but is making progress slowly.
- **El Poder Sin Ver** is the specially funded Latino outreach program in Los Angeles. Braille Institute is working with *promotoras* or health promoters to build relationships and educate older Latino people with vision loss and their families about what they can do to live with sight loss. To date, 408 people have been enrolled in Braille Institute programs. A 4-part instructional Spanish language DVD has been produced that will be available on our website and to the community-at-large. This effort will continue with the recruitment of bilingual volunteers as well hiring a community resource coordinator for the program.
- **Distance Services**: With the formation of Braille Institute's Digital Media Production department, we have the capability to develop web content (instructional DVDs) along with print materials that people can access on our website as well as on the social networking sites. We have also added bilingual volunteers to our 800 information line. The website has been redesigned and offers more resources and downloadable information than before.
- **Low Vision Rehabilitation Services**: Continued and expanded training of our low vision staff has broadened the level of service to our clients with better screening procedures. Also, the low vision staff has been trained in assistive technology so they are able to offer a full array of options to our clients. Every regional center is dedicating space to show and demonstrate assistive technology as a part of low vision services. We have also introduced a line of low cost, high quality private label magnifiers.
- **Expansion of public education efforts**: As was presented earlier, Braille Institute is implementing a new public education campaign throughout Southern California. Also we have restructured our department with the focus in three key areas: PR and marketing, Website and publications and digital media production. Results of the public education campaign will be tracked through website hits, phone calls to the 800-line as well as enrollment.
- **Braille literacy**: Braille Institute is successfully continuing two primary programs to promote Braille literacy: the Braille Special Collection and The Braille Challenge®. In particular, The Braille Challenge® continues to grow. The 2009 Challenge had 30 regional Challenge events throughout 39 states and 3 Canadian provinces. Nearly 1,400 preliminary tests were requested, with 664 returned, meaning that 664 kids actually took the preliminary test. However, we know that many teachers use the preliminary test as a teaching tool for braille

readers who may not yet be reading a grade level. This year, as in the previous year, we held a Teachers Roundtable lunch at The Braille Challenge®. Feedback from all the teachers in attendance (approximately 11 teachers) was that The Braille Challenge® has fundamentally changed the way they are teaching braille to students in today's classrooms. Specifically, kids were doing their homework using computer software to produce their Braille work. But The Braille Challenge® requires the students to read and write braille (using braille writers) and this process identifies where their skills may not be as solid as they should be. In other words, preparing students for The Braille Challenge® enables teachers to evaluate all reading and writing skills of their students. While we have not developed any research on this, there are a number of researchers who have expressed interest in working with us.

Dr. Smith remarked that he believes most organizations develop a strategic plan and then, in effect, put it "on the shelf." But, he said, Braille Institute is actually working its plan; the committee agreed that significant progress has been made on the strategic plan.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:45 p.m.