Audio & Braille Literacy Enhancement, Inc.
Providing alternative ways for people with print disabilities to read
Autumn 2025
Central Library Building 803 W. Wells St. Milwaukee, WI 53233
(414) 286-3039 www.ablenow.org

60th Anniversary Celebration
(And What a Celebration it Was!)

ABLE celebrated 60 years of service this year! To highlight our anniversary we hosted a fabulous ABLE luncheon acknowledging our volunteers who are the heart and hands of this organization. Volunteers started this organization sixty years ago, and their presence is embedded in the fabric of this organization today.

We were honored to hear from Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson, whose remarks were powerful and inspirational. He read a proclamation acknowledging ABLE, and declared October 23, 2025, ABLE Day.

Photo of Mayor Johnson holding proclamation and ABLE Executive Director Cheryl Orgas

A special award was presented to Lenore Tesch, the 2025 Excellence Award, acknowledging her 12,153 hours of service since 2004, and her more than 75,000 pages of braille transcription for children and adults. ABLE could always depend on Lenore to do her best, whether it be brailling a chapter book or making braille cookies. If she was not assigned a task Lenore would find something to do, be it watering the plants or making treats for the office. She embodies the best of what the ABLE team can be. We are forever grateful.

Photo of Cheryl at podium and Lenore Tesch with award

Jane Moran, Wisconsin Teacher of the Visually Impaired, speaking of the experience of her elementary grade school student said, "I would like to pass on our many thanks for all the books you [Lenore] brailled for my student. He is able to fully participate in all the activities in the class and loves to have his own little books. Thank you to you all for all your hard work."

Photo of Cheryl standing near Sam who's at the microphone

Sam, a middle-schooler who receives braille and tactile materials from ABLE, was our news anchor for the day. He gave a fabulous rundown of the history of ABLE since we opened our doors in October of 1965. You can find him telling our story on our Facebook page.

More on Our 60th Anniversary Celebration

Photo of Kai at podium

Milwaukee Public School students, with party hats on and balloons decorating their chairs, sang happy birthday to us. Kai, a 5th grader and JT, an 11th grader, shared their appreciation for the work they receive from ABLE. Kai said, "My superpower is reading braille. ABLE helps me develop my superpower by ensuring I have braille books and braille materials for school and at home. Without ABLE I may not be the successful fifth grade student I am. I want to say thank you ABLE employees and volunteers for supporting me, other students, and my teachers. ABLE, you make the world a better place."

Photo of JT at podium

At our anniversary celebration, we also highlighted our tactile services. To learn more about tactiles check out this video, produced by Tim Turton, our audio specialist, featuring our tactile manager, Matt Scholtes. This can also be found on our website under Services/Tactile Services.

We offer our deepest gratitude to all who made our celebration a great success. We couldn't have done it without all of you.

Many thanks to the following dedicated volunteers whose milestone service achievements we celebrated:

Celeste Baldassare 250 hours, Audio Reader
Jodi Goell 250 hours, Audio Reviewer
Kathy Herbst 250 hours, Audio Reader
Tiffany Tinsey 250 hours, Audio Reader
Mary Ann Hand 500 hours, Audio Reviewer
Megan Hindman 750 hours, Audio Reader
Vidya Girish 750 hours, Braille
Tom Littelmann 1,500 hours, Audio Reader
Dale Kuehn 2,000 hours, Tactile
Barbara Althoen 27,500 hours, Braille

Museum Audio Tours: A New Way to Experience MPM

Photo of ABLE volunteer Neil Jaehnert & Audio Manager Stephen Strupp in the ABLE Sound Center

ABLE's audio team has recorded a series of pilot audio tours that will enhance how visitors experience the Milwaukee Public Museum. In 2026, MPM will be testing a variety of narration styles in three beloved exhibit areas: **Third Planet**, **Rainforest**, and **Streets of Old Milwaukee**. These pilots will help determine which approaches best support visitors of all ages and abilities as they explore the galleries.

Dawn Koceja of MPM says, "As the Nature and Culture Museum of Wisconsin prepares to open in 2027, our team is already looking ahead. We will have the incredible opportunity to record full audio tour scripts for the new museum, ensuring that guests can engage with exhibits through clear, compelling, and accessible narration.

We are especially grateful for our dedicated volunteer ABLE readers. Their voices bring stories to life, and soon you'll hear them guiding you through both our current exhibits and the exciting new museum spaces still to come. Their commitment helps us create meaningful, inclusive experiences for every visitor."

Getting Braille Books Into the Hands of Children

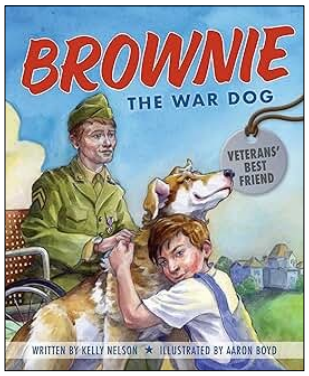

Image of Brownie the War Dog *book cover*

Two braille books, along with a print version, are to be given out this autumn just in time for the holiday season. The first is *Brownie the War Dog: Veterans' Best Friend* by Kelly Nelson, illustrated by Aaron Boyd. *Brownie the War Dog* is the true story of a family pet who served overseas in World War II and went on to become a friend to wounded veterans back home. Brownie serves faithfully on the front lines until an injury sends him home. Brownie is not content sitting at home; he needs a job. He goes to the Veterans Home in King, Wisconsin, where his owner works. Brownie finds a way to serve the veterans just as he found a way to help soldiers in the war. This heartwarming story will be a favorite for children and their grownups.

Thank you to Herb Kohl Philanthropies for funding this book.

The second book is *National Geographic Kids: Rocks and Minerals* by Kathleen Weidner Zoehfeld. From dazzling gemstones to sparkling crystals to molten lava, this brilliantly illustrated book introduces children to the exciting world of rocks and minerals, including both the building blocks and the bling. This level-two reader, written in easy-to-grasp text, will help cultivate the geologists of tomorrow! This book has very cool tactile graphics including the interior of a volcano.

Thank you to the PwC Foundation Reimagine Grant Program for funding this book.

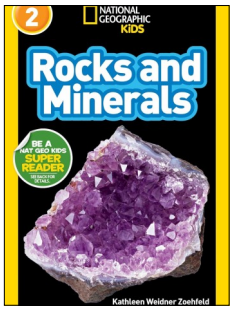

Image of National Geographics Kids: Rocks and Minerals *issue*

Outstanding Local Leader

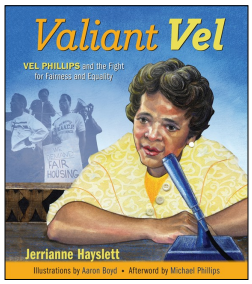

Image of Valiant Vel *book cover*

We are excited to introduce you to Vel Phillips through an audio book recorded for the Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library that will be available soon. This very inspirational book is *Valiant Vel: The Fight for Fairness and Equality*, written by Jerianne Hayslett.

This book for young readers, age 11 and up, explores Phillips's challenging journey from her childhood experiences of facing racial discrimination, to achieving her dream of becoming a lawyer, to her long career in politics and civil rights. It was recorded by Dave Raasch, an audio narrator for ABLE for over twenty years.

An Overview of the Children's Audio Books for 2025

So far this year we have completed twenty-one books for children or young readers. Six more are underway and should be done by the end of the year. Of the books we've completed so far, eight are children's picture books such as *Janna and the Kings* and *Olive Takes to the Sea*. The remaining thirteen are middle-grade chapter books, including *Marvelous Jackson* and *The Zodiac Dozen* series. Among these middle-grade books, we also completed a historical fiction book called *Faye and the Dangerous Journey: An Ojibwe Removal Survival Story*, and the non-fiction book *Valiant Vel: Vel Phillips and the Fight for Fairness and Equality*, mentioned above.

We Couldn't Do All This Without YOU!

As we come to the close of a very busy year at ABLE, we need your help. As donors, you are helping ABLE make a difference in the lives of blind and print-disabled individuals, one braille page at a time, one tactile at a time, one audio page at a time. Volunteers are at the heart of what ABLE does, and has been doing for 60 years. As donors, you are the backbone of what we do by giving us the financial resources to thrive. As ABLE's executive director and one of those first students getting help from this organization, I would be so grateful for your generosity.

While *all* donations are greatly appreciated, some people may be eligible to make a Qualified Charitable Distribution. If you are age 70½ or older, you may direct up to $108,000 in 2025—or $216,000 for married couples filing jointly with individual retirement accounts—from a traditional IRA directly to qualified charities without paying income tax on the distribution. For donors taking required minimum distributions, qualified charitable distributions can be a particularly effective way to reduce taxable income.

Check out our new, short video about ABLE, now featured on the home page of our website, www.ablenow.org.

Braille Games, Another Year of Tremendous Collaboration

ABLE's collaboration with the Milwaukee Public Museum, Vision Forward, the Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library, and Beyond Vision for Braille Games was another great success in 2025. This year's event was held on May 15th at the Milwaukee Public Museum with a focus on Native American games, which were adapted for children who are blind or have low vision. Students participated in games such as lacrosse and the Ojibwe snake game, both of which teach patience, sportsmanship, endurance and problem solving. Children from seven Wisconsin counties attended Braille Games.

Photo of child playing lacrosse

Photo of student being taught to use braille writer

Photo of student learning to play the Ojibwe snake game