THE BRAILLISTS FOUNDATION

BRAILLECAST PODCAST EXTRA 43

Formatting Your Braille

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Matthew Horspool: Welcome back to Braillecast Extra. Coming up this time, Formatting Your Braille, a session recorded on Tuesday, 17th May 2022, moderated by Ben Mustill-Rose and introduced by Dave Williams.

Dave Williams: Hello, good evening and a very warm welcome back to the Braillists Foundation and a very warm welcome to our Masterclass about formatting braille documents. How do you lay out a braille document to make it feel great? We'll be talking about how you centre your headings, how you style your paragraphs and what to do with footnotes, endnotes, page numbers and all that good stuff. So, everything and anything you ever wanted to know about how to format a braille document, that's what we're going to be covering this evening.

 Our guest this evening is Kawal. Kawal, hello, a very warm welcome in. I'm taking a bit of a run-up. I'm going to say, Kawal Gucukoglu. Have I got that right?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Near enough. It's Kawal Gucukoglu.

Dave Williams: There we go. Easy for you to say. Welcome in. We really appreciate you joining us.

 Now, Kawal, you were for a number of years a professional braille transcriber. So, why don't you just tell us a little bit about what that entails?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, for 23 years I worked for the RNIB. I started in 1997 and left in 2020, and I'm still transcribing to this very day, when I get the chance and I get some work in.

 When I first started transcribing, I worked at Great Portland Street and there, I didn't have any braille experience, let me be truthful with you, and so I relied on my team to show me what I needed to do. Because we were using Cipher, I had to learn how to put the letter signs in, how to put the colons in. I was transcribing trustees meetings and letters and anything else that came along then.

Dave Williams: So, let's just back up a little bit. So, you were already a lifelong braille reader and you learned transcription really on the job?

Kawal Gucukoglu: I did. I was born blind and I went to a special school called Linden Lodge School and first I went to Northwood and if you've listened to my podcast before, you would know that I started learning braille at three or four years old.

Dave Williams: What attracted you to transcription? Was that the job you originally applied for?

Kawal Gucukoglu: No. That came along by accident. I went for an interview as a secretary at a place at the RNIB which is called Employment and Education Division. The person who interviewed me was my school teacher and he wanted to know everything that I'd done, because I hadn't had a job and I'd been looking for ten years then. Once I'd told him what I'd done, he thought that I would be getting this braille transcription job, although he never told me that. So, it was very much out of the blue. I got a call from the braille unit in Great Portland Street and they were looking for a braille transcriber, somebody who could read braille. So, I told them that I could read braille but I'd never done transcription before and they asked me if I would like to try it and I said yes. So, I went in on a Monday morning, met everybody and unknown to me, there were a few people in that team who knew me from college. They all knew that I could read braille and, so, they said that they'd be happy to try me on.

 I thought I'd be there for six months and I ended up being there for about ten years.

Dave Williams: Fantastic. I know the technology has changed and we'll talk about some of the tools a little bit later, but what would you say are the skills that you need to become a successful braille transcriber? I imagine most of us on this session are braille readers, but I certainly wouldn't describe myself as a transcriber. It's a very specific skill set, right?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes. You need to have attention to detail and you need to be able to learn where you need to put colons, where you need to put paragraphs, where you might need to put the email address styles, otherwise you won't be able to master this because it does take a very long time.

 I used to get things wrong quite a lot, but because I wanted to get things right, I wanted to persevere, so I even committed a lot of things to memory, because I do have a very good memory. Sometimes I would get a picture in my head of where to put this and where to put that and I must say, when I was young, I used to read braille books and I used to think to myself, "I like these colons, I wonder if they're hard to make," because I used to think that braille was an art, and I still do. I thought to myself, if I was able to be a transcriber one day, I'd love to do that.

 This job came by accident and after a couple of years , I started to get the hang of it.

Dave Williams: Just before we talk about the specific tasks and what is involved in formatting a document, you mentioned there minutes for meetings, agendas, letters, that kind of thing. Was it all that sort of work? Was it all internal work? Or were you eventually transcribing for commercial clients?

Kawal Gucukoglu: In the first few years, we were transcribing all the trustee documents and they used to be typed up by ourselves sometimes. We used to get audio cassettes, if you remember those, and I'm actually also a trained audio typist. I worked in a secretarial unit so anything could be coming in from all over the place. We used to get all the trustees meetings and agenda. We got all the text. We weren't at the meetings or anything, we just got the text from the committee office. That's what it was called. Then we used to do all the papers. There was a certain layout that we were told to use and we had to stick to that layout and I had to learn what that layout was, which took a little bit of time, but I got the hang of it eventually.

 About five or six years into this role, they wanted to get a transcription centred just like Ivybridge, so we had to start selling our services to external organisation and I used to go round to the organisations and explain why they needed braille for their customers. I loved that job. Most of the time then I was on the telephone as well taking orders for what they wanted and then putting the invoices into the RTN database that they had and then transcribing it up and doing the invoices for the clients that RNIB had and I loved that job.

Dave Williams: What kind of documents were those external documents?

Kawal Gucukoglu: They could be anything. They could be letters, government organisation documents from external agencies, minutes or reports. You name it, it was anything and everything, even letters from GPs and things, because some people wanted their information about appointments.

Dave Williams: What would you say was your most challenging assignment?

Kawal Gucukoglu: I did the Quran for a mosque and two people came along and myself and another member of that team, we sat for two years with these two people from the mosque and we had to translate the text into English so those two people were both reading the Arabic text to us and we had to decide what layout we were going to use and where we were going to put the things, because there was no fast rule about the headings, and things. So, we relied on them telling us what was on the page, like centring, headings, and so on.

Dave Williams: Wow. You transcribed the entire Quran. Give people a sense of the size of that.

Kawal Gucukoglu: It was two volumes and then I remember, when it was all finished, after two years, they invited me to the mosque and I sat down on the floor with quite a lot of other people and they had the printed material open, but they wanted me to read from the passage, so they could see that a blind person was reading the same as they were seeing. I really enjoyed doing that.

Dave Williams: Incredible. That, in a way, is sort of a nod to the first public demonstration of braille. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the story, where there was a child who was asked to read some braille in front of an audience to demonstrate to the public that braille really did work.

 Incredibly powerful stuff.

 Let's talk about how you would go about formatting a document then, how we tackle that. I wanted to cover some of that, just to illustrate the vast amount of experience that you've had.

 These days, the chances are, if you want to put a document into braille, you've got two options. One is that you could just fire up your screen reader or run it through a quick and dirty braille translator and you might just get a very rough translation of the file and that might be okay if you're only going to use that for personal use or you're just going to stick it on a single line braille display where the formatting perhaps is less evident. However, if you want to prepare a braille document for, say, a group of braille readers, maybe a handout or a letter, what are some of the things that people should bear in mind to make that document feel presentable?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Well, if you want to format a document, you must be consistent with what you're going to do. It's no good putting a heading in one place on one page and a heading in another place when it's meant to be a paragraph or something. So, you really must know what you are doing.

 When I came to the Peterborough office, I had to start doing books and that's a challenge in itself, certainly because I can't read print.

 So, I had to learn where to put the headings, to recognise when there's going to be a separated line with dot 2s, where to put a dedication, because I couldn't read what the book was, so I did rely on my colleagues to put some instructions in the email that I had to tell me where that heading would be.

 Now, at the RNIB, there's in-house software called XML and I think you know, Dave, that they get a lot of books in XML format and then you're meant to run it through a program and output it to braille using Duxbury. But before Duxbury came along, we were using Cipher and I remember going from Great Portland Street to Peterborough and I had to learn how to use MegaDots and that's a totally different program.

Dave Williams: Just to clarify, because the names won't necessarily be familiar to everyone. Cipher, MegaDots, Duxbury, they're all commercial braille packages.

Kawal Gucukoglu: They were commercial packages. I believe they might still be around, but I'm not sure, because people don't develop them anymore.

Dave Williams: Duxbury certainly is.

Kawal Gucukoglu: Certainly is, but MegaDots might not be. I'm not sure who wrote that. Maybe James can tell us. Cipher was definitely a program which was used by RNIB to start with.

Dave Williams: If somebody wants to emboss something in braille and they want it to look good and they want to understand about headings and paragraphs and so on, do they have to use one of these commercial packages or is there any free software that would do as good a job?

Kawal Gucukoglu: There are free software packages but I'm not very familiar with what there is around today. I believe there's something called BrailleBlaster but I'm not sure. Everybody is using Duxbury to my knowledge, although I haven't met anybody not using Duxbury and transcribing. I know Duxbury is very expensive, but there must be some braille programs out there, but you will need to learn to use them, or there are some other sources where you can send some files by email, and it will be returned to you in a braille format.

Dave Williams: I think you mean RoboBraille and that kind of thing.

 Let's cover the basics then. What's the difference between a paragraph and a heading, when styling a document?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Well, the heading is going to be on the left-hand side and a paragraph is a block of text going on for quite a long time.

Dave Williams: So, the paragraph, you indent that by two, whereas the heading you're saying would be left-justified and start in the first cell of the line?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Or cell three, or cell five, depending on what heading you want to choose.

Dave Williams: Right. But choose one and stick with it, is what you're saying?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, I would say, choose one and stick with it. I don't know if people read the RNIB documents. They've always got colons at the end. You don't need to put colons at the end. You can put whatever you like at the end or nothing at all at the end even. As long as you're happy with what you do, it really doesn't matter how you do it, but you do need to know how to put headings in, how to use styles and things like this.

Dave Williams: How would you do that? What are the steps? To make Duxbury put the headings in the right place, what do we need to do with our source document?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Say you've got a Word document, you can either import it to Duxbury from Word, which is quite easy to do. If we open Word and you have Duxbury already open, it will ask you if you want to import the document into Duxbury. You either say yes or no. If you've actually put all your headings in the right places in your Word document, hopefully Duxbury will import the headings, although you might want to tidy them up, if you know what you're doing.

 If you know advanced Duxbury, you can make the headings up manually yourself, but you need to know again what codes to put in. Headings always on the left-hand side, either cell three to five, or cell five to seven, because if you want to have recipes in cookery books, you always have to indent the ingredients by three or four or five cells.

 If you have a book called the Braillists Manual, which you can get from the RNIB, it will explain to you how you do these things. There is quite a lot of theory in that book and it's quite comprehensive.

 So, there are some sources out there if you're learning to transcribe things for the first time.

Dave Williams: So what about putting a title or a centred heading at the top of the document? One of the things I'm never quite sure about is at what point do you put that over multiple lines. Would you fill up a line before you would start using another line?

Kawal Gucukoglu: No. When you have a centred heading, for instance, automatically the line is going to format itself. So, if you transcribe this document into braille and it's got a centred heading, it'll go onto multiple lines, so once you go back to your DXP file, which Matthew has spoken about, DXP files and BRF files, because you can't just translate into braille. You have to do a print DXP file first if you're using Duxbury and that's quite intense. You need to know what you're doing.

 You would need to then balance out the text of the headings so that they look good, so when you transcribe the document into braille, your headings are tidy and they're not all over the place. So, you will need to make sure that the text of that centred heading it tidied, otherwise you'll get short lines and long lines and things won't be tidy. It's quite involved, really.

Dave Williams: What about use of white space? When should we leaving blank lines and making use of white space?

Kawal Gucukoglu: When you've got a paragraph, for example, it will automatically format it on its own, because you have to open a style and close a style, open another style and close it. When you open and close all the styles, it will happen automatically.

 So, for instance, if you have a Duxbury file and you've got your Word document in that Duxbury program open, you need to press, for example, F8, Function 8, on your keyboard, using JAWS, because that's all I use, and you can choose lots and lots of styles.

 Automatically, once you've chose a style, you'll have a beginning of a style and a closing or end of style at the end. So you know when your paragraph starts and ends, but you will need to reveal your codes. You have to press Alt+F3, so that you can feel when the paragraph starts and the paragraph ends. You can feel that your style is opening and closing.

 I know this is a bit technical.

Dave Williams: So, just to try and simplify it a little bit, are you saying that there are basically two approaches? One is if your Word document has been properly styled and made good use of headings and so on, that will be respected in Duxbury and then the commands that you were just describing, that's if you need to manually make changes. Is that fair?

Kawal Gucukoglu: That is absolutely right, but again if you wanted to tidy up all your headings and so on, and I'm going to talk about the RNIB things again, you will notice that they have colons in it and they have dot 2 lines in it and you need to know how and where you're going to put those yourself.

Dave Williams: So, these are separators for separating between sections, that you might get at the end of a chapter?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, they are. So, yes, you might have some colons at the end of a chapter, and then you have another style for the beginning of the next chapter and so on.

 Sometimes you might have Contents. Now, these Contents in books are very involved. You need to know how you're going to do your Contents. You get Table of Contents in Duxbury. You're going to have to tidy up all of those and they take time. You can't automate Contents and so, you need to do these things manually.

Dave Williams: I just want to belabour that point slightly, because in Microsoft Word, you can insert a Table of Contents at the beginning of your document and providing you've got appropriate heading levels, then actually you can generate that pretty automatically with the right page numbers and everything. You're saying that with a braille file in Duxbury, you've got to build that manually?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, you do.

Dave Williams: That's a lot of work.

Kawal Gucukoglu: You have a Table of Contents in Duxbury. I don't know whether it's in the UKAAF template, but certainly in the in-house template that I used to use at the RNIB, there used to be a Table of Contents and we used to use those.

 In the UKAAF template, which I'm not very familiar with unfortunately, there must be Table of Contents, because people will want to put Contents in their books, if they're going to do books, but, again, you need to know what you're doing with books and that can be quite time-consuming.

 I don't think everybody would want to do a book at the minute. If you're going to transcribe anything, it will be a letter. So, as long as you've got a heading at the top, saying what it is, like a letter, and you can get an information heading, so that you can have "letter" at the top of every single page. It has to be a short line, otherwise if you keep putting, "This is a letter," at the top of every page, that will take up a huge amount of space, so you need to have another little heading there, in order for you put something like "letter".

Dave Williams: Okay. Have you got any tips for lists and tables?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Tables are very challenging. You can get tables from your Word document into Duxbury. It will import but you do need to do a lot of work on it, in order for the table to be tidied up, because Duxbury doesn't always do the columns for you. You need to know how many columns you're going to put, because you've only got a certain amount of characters across the page. You might have 38 cells across or 27 cells across or 28, it doesn't matter, because with Duxbury you need to tell the program how many cells you want and that's another thing you need to know.

Dave Williams: Presumably that's job one,

Kawal Gucukoglu: It is.

Dave Williams: We should have covered that at the beginning, really, to set your page size.

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, sorry. You do. You need to set that at the beginning and you can only do that in the DXP file because you want to do all your editing of a DXP file and you want to check all your stuff in a DXB file, which is a braille file, before you save it as a BRF file. Again, if you don't know what a BRF file is and how to do it, you will have to get some instructions from somewhere on what to do.

Dave Williams: Do you have any advice on footnotes and endnotes?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Footnotes, you can have a thing called footnotes in your Word document. I'm going to give you an example referring to a book. Footnotes always come at the end of a volume, especially in a braille volume. That's how RNIB used to do it. I've never done a book outside of RNIB. I've never seen another book, other than what RNIB give you for you to read. So, I know that other agencies, they choose how they want to do their books. They don't have to put footnotes in. You don't need to put any colons in even. You can just have things running on from each other, headings, paragraph headings, paragraph, and that's it. There's no fast rule on how you do a book. It's just that RNIB have rules on how to do books. I'm not sure who devised these rules, but that's what they use.

Dave Williams: When it comes to pagination, a lot of braille books, in the UK, at least, put the print page number in there, sometimes with a dot 5 following by dots 2 5 and then a number sign and the print page number and that can appear obviously anywhere within the braille page, where the end of the print page was.

Kawal Gucukoglu: You have codes.

Dave Williams: Yes. Then the braille page number, that usually sits in the top right hand corner.

Kawal Gucukoglu: It does, yes. You were talking about the print page numbers just then. You have special codes in Duxbury and you need to put those codes in, in order for that dot 5 and what you've just said, number sign, with the page number, it will just come into it, but you have to have print pages in the Word document itself, in order for the print page numbers to come into Duxbury.

 Sometimes you can get Word documents with print page numbers and they'll show up in Duxbury. Then you have to tidy those up with the codes, because the codes will come in automatically with some templates, but, I know with the RNIB, you had different codes to put in for the print page numbers, so you know where they were.

Dave Williams: I'm going to bring Ben in, for questions.

 I know we focused a lot on Duxbury and obviously you're coming at this, Kawal, from the perspective of somebody who was a transcriber primarily for RNIB. It's worth mentioning that a lot of these conventions that we're talking about are for the UK and other countries will have different braille formatting conventions.

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, they do.

Dave Williams: So, while the code has been unified, actually the standards for formatting braille documents, they remain different, depending on the country or even the publishing house that is putting out the content, but for small organisations and individuals, you're saying, actually, in some ways, it doesn't really matter too much what you do, as long as you're consistent with yourself.

Kawal Gucukoglu: The thing is, you've got UEB braille, but how about a unified layout? Why should everybody have different layouts? If we all had the same layout, at least everyone would know what they were doing.

Dave Williams: Oh, it took 30 years to agree the braille code. Can you imagine? Do you really want to do that?

 So, Ben, let's bring you in.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to come to Jane in a moment, but a nice question to get us started from the chat.

 What is a style?

Kawal Gucukoglu: I find this rather difficult to explain.

Dave Williams: It's a set of rules that defines the purpose of a certain part of the text. So, if we apply a heading level one style, then it's wrapped round that bit of text, and it says, every time we use heading level one, then use these rules for displaying this text. So, it might be that your heading level one is Arial Bold 16, for example. So, every time you use heading level one style, it tells the word processor to show that text using those rules.

 It means that you don't have to set the font and the emphasis and the point size and all of that each time you want to use a particular style within your document.

 That would be my understanding.

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, it's things like bold and underline. They're kind of styles.

Dave Williams: They are, but if you use them on their own, they're not really, because if you use a style, it also gives the document structure, so if you use heading levels, that means then that your screen reader will report those headings and that can also aid with navigation. So, on the web, for example, where heading styles have been used, it means then you can use the H key in your screen reader to jump to different headings on the page.

 Also in Microsoft Word, you can enable the navigation pane, so not even a screen reading function, if you enable the navigation page, particularly for large documents, if you've used styles then it can make it a lot easier to get around the document.

 I hope that answers the question, but if somebody's got a better answer, then we'd be very glad to hear it.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to come to Jane now.

Jane Sellers: I'm using Duxbury to transcribe into braille and when I go to transcribe, it's starting to ask me for codes. I'm in the latest version of Duxbury, using NVDA. I wondered how I could find out about what codes I use for layout.

Kawal Gucukoglu: You have some menus in your DXP file.

Jane Sellers: There are some menus, yes.

Kawal Gucukoglu: You can go into the layout menu or a code menu and it will tell you. If you don't know what codes to put, your code menu will tell you what the codes are and you can choose which ones you want. There's loads and loads of codes there.

Jane Sellers: Yes, I know there are lots.

Kawal Gucukoglu: If you or anybody needs any help, you can always contact me.

Jane Sellers: I might well ask for your help. The manual that you mentioned, what is it called?

Kawal Gucukoglu: The Braillists' Manual from the RNIB.

Jane Sellers: Somebody also asked that question in the chat and I needed to make a note. That's very helpful.

Kawal Gucukoglu: That's fine, yes. It tells you how to do hymns and things for churches, and things like this. That's how technical it really is.

Dave Williams: So, Jane, if you get in contact with the Braillists Foundation help address and we can pass on your message.

Kawal Gucukoglu: help@braillists.org.

Jane Sellers: Thank you.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We will be including all of this information on the handout that will accompany the recording. Keep an eye on our media page, braillists.org/media, where you'll find recordings and handouts for all of our previous Masterclasses and for this one, after a few days.

 We have a question from the chat, from a new transcriber. Is it more efficient to do all of the formatting of the book in the DXP file, before translating it?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, it is. You can do it in the DXB file, but it is best to do it in a DXP file, because if you make a mistake in the DXP file, it's easier to correct it, because it's all based on print rather than braille. When you translate into the braille, into the DXB file, you've got all the braille signs. You can look at how the page is going to look in braille and you can look at how your headers are going to be and how your Contents are going to look. When you write braille Contents, for instance, you need to keep translating it, because you need to know where the colons are going to end, or where your guidelines are going to end. Again, you need to know how to do these guidelines, or you don't need to have any guidelines. You can just put, say, this is chapter one, colon, space and a page number, but you need to translate your book or whatever it is into braille so you know where the page numbers are going to be, so you can put it in your Contents in the DXP file.

Dave Williams: Just to clarify there, Kawal, so the DXP, that's the project file, and then DXB, that's the Duxbury braille file?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, that's right.

Dave Williams: By guideline, do you mean the dots 3 6 that you get running along the line from the section title to the page number?

Kawal Gucukoglu: You get two kinds of Contents. You can either have a general Contents. You certainly have that at the RNIB in their braille books. You can get dot 3s and everything. They're called guidelines. They always have them in their books at RNIB. When you come to the braille Contents, this is where you're going to get the dots 3 6, as you're used to, Dave. So, for example, you get Chapter One and then you got all these dot 3 6 things and then you get to the end of the line and then you get a page number. They're called braille Contents.

Dave Williams: Okay. Thank you.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to come to Daniel next.

Daniel Gillen: This is a great workshop. I'm actually in the US. I'm a transcriber of mainly music braille, as part of the music school, but I occasionally have to do a concert programme or two throughout the semester and I think for that, because I'm dealing with the manual formatting and proofreading aspects of music, I seem to be mostly doing braille side formatting manually from a BRF document, but I think it seems useful to be able to do some of it from Duxbury. Would you agree with that?

Kawal Gucukoglu: I don't quite understand your question?

Daniel Gillen: Even though I mostly do music transcription, there are a few purely text documents that I do as well and I seem to be formatting using the manual methods. I have a braille display and I can go and correct errors on my own and adjust heading placements.

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, but you need to do it in a DXP file. You can't really do it in a BRF file. You want to use that braille file to see what it feels like under your fingers, if you know what I mean. The DXP is a print file, a Duxbury print file, and that's where you want to do all your layout and paragraphs.

Daniel Gillen: I think that makes sense. I think from now on I should think more about the functions within Duxbury for automating the formatting. That would be very useful.

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes. Then you can check it all in the braille file.

Dave Williams: Music is quite a specific use case, isn't it? I imagine you probably do have to do a bit more manual work when transcribing music, don't you, Kawal?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, you do. I'm a musician myself and I have flute lessons and I'm reading braille music and, again, at the RNIB, there is a music department and they're always transcribing music for musicians. That's quite involved work, because they need to read how the print is and decipher how it's going to be looking in braille.

Ben Mustill-Rose: On that note, we have James Bowden with his hand raised.

James Bowden: When I transcribe stuff using Duxbury, if it's an ordinary document, I like to start doing as much as I can in Word before I even touch Duxbury. As has been said, styles have so many advantages. Not only does it tell your screen header what it means, it also gives you assistance in print layout and braille layout and it also gives you the opportunity to do fancy things like Tables of Contents or if you really want, in Word, you can do fancy things with page headers and footers, but let's not go into that.

 Then I import the file into Duxbury and do as much as I can on the print side, like Kawal was saying, and then translate to braille and anything that really just niggles and needs to be tidied up, I do that in braille.

 Now, coming back to Daniel's point about music, it is a braille code, so I have to do everything in the DXB file, because there is no print, it's braille.

Kawal Gucukoglu: That is true.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thanks for that. No more hands at the moment. Any more questions from you, Dave?

Dave Williams: So, Kawal, you mentioned that you're not working with RNIB directly anymore, but you're doing some freelance transcription. Can you share a little bit about that? I know you do some bits and bobs for the Braillists actually.

Kawal Gucukoglu: I do things for the Braillists and that's what I'm doing at the moment. I also will be doing a full-time job and I'm going to be using braille in that full-time job in a call centre. I don't know what it's going to be like but it's going to be a challenge for me, when I do come to do that.

 Yes, I do the work for the Braillists Foundation and whenever work comes my way, I'll always transcribe it and send it back and people can get it either by the website or via SD card.

Dave Williams: Yes. So, Duxbury clearly is the industry standard that most production houses seem to be using, not all, there are other games in town, of course, and if people want to share those, you're very welcome to do so.

 I stuck my head in Duxbury for, I think, an afternoon and I needed to go for a lie-down afterwards. There's so much to learn there, isn't there? It's a very sophisticated and complex piece of kit. I'm sure James Bowden has memorised many of the shortcuts and I'm sure you have, Kawal.

 What would you say to somebody who's looking to cut their teeth on Duxbury? How would you get started? What's the best way to learn with a package like that?

Kawal Gucukoglu: It's so much like a word processor, because you're using Ctrl+O to open a Word document or you're doing Ctrl+N to create either a print document or a braille document. So, it's so much like Windows. Before we had DOS programs like Cipher and they used to work on 5.1, if I remember correctly.

Dave Williams: I understand what you're saying, but if I bring in a table, for example, where do I start with that?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Again, you need to have a little bit of knowledge and you need to get some help on that. There must be sources out there. I don't know whether you can go onto the Duxbury website to find manuals. The only thing I've ever had to use the website for is for support with my Duxbury or download the latest version. I don't really look on the website for that sort of thing.

Dave Williams: Okay. Maybe they offer training.

Kawal Gucukoglu: You can get training. I don't know where. There are people like Steve Nutt, I believe, and he trains people. So, there are people out there. Or you can get training through Access To Work, if you're working.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We've actually got a few hands now. So, we're going to come to Charmaine first and then Jane, once again.

Charmaine Co: I'm a transcriber and I'm actually certified to transcribe UEB material and UEB technical material. I'm having a problem with transcribing maths and science text books using the UEB technical code. I'm really familiar with the code and how to braille things, but I'm having a problem of finding a program or some kind of screen reader that can accurately tell me what the print shows with all the maths equations and things like this, so that I don't have to rely on a copy holder to tell me that information.

Kawal Gucukoglu: When I was transcribing for the RNIB, I was relying on my colleagues, not for everything, but for some things, to tell me where I had to put a dedication or where I had to put a footnote or something like this. You have codes where you can put the footnotes. I don't know if there's anything to tell you where you might do it yourself.

Dave Williams: James Bowden, I know you're interested in technical material. I wonder if you have any suggestions for Charmaine. It's a great question, isn't it? If you have got a source document where you need to be able to identify some technical notation and you need to understand exactly what it does say in the print, then obviously you want to do a good job as a transcriber and if you're relying on somebody or Be My Eyes, or whatever, they're going to say what they see which isn't necessarily what the author intended. That can be an issue sometimes. Typographically, sometimes people use an X to represent a multiplication sign or whatever it is.

James Bowden: The problem here is the print, not the braille, and there are lots of ways to represent print maths in an accessible form and I would suggest LaTeX, pronounced Latek, is a good shout. The reason I say that is because it's purely linear, like our braille maths code, and it's purely textual, which means we can read it with a screen reader.

 Better still, with a plug-in for Word called MathType, you can convert between pretty-print and LaTeX and, better still, Duxbury will automatically import the MathType equations and code it up for you just beautiful.

Charmaine Co: Okay, thanks.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to come to Jane once again and then Michael.

Jane Sellers: Dave, you were asking about training on Duxbury. I was fundraised by the Bank Workers Charity to obtain my embosser, my training, my software, and I went to George Bell of Techno-Vision and his colleague Kevin came and taught me all I know, in half a day. So, it can be done, but you need to shop around really, which is what I did.

 Also, BrailleMaker is another bit of kit, but I don't know if that's still around. I think that's open source, though I don't know if it's free.

Kawal Gucukoglu: I remember using it at the RNIB when I used to be a secretary, a PA, and I was using BrailleMaker.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thanks for those recommendations. We're going to come to Michael.

Michael: I just want to make a quick comment. Here in the States, what we have is a transcriber course through the National Federation of the Blind and the Library of Congress, the National Library Service, and there is a free braille transcription course you can take. It takes on average, I guess, maybe a year and a half to do. You can actually download all your materials off the site. It is nfb.org/transcribers. You can download the material in PDF and also in BRF file format.

Dave Williams: That's really helpful. Thank you so much, Michael, for sharing that. Each country has slightly different rules around formatting braille. We've got the same code but some of those formatting rules might be different, so bear that in mind if you're from the UK and you're checking out that fantastic resource from NFB.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thank you, Michael. I have a quick question for you, Kawal. There are probably going to be some people on this call thinking that they know braille, they're pretty good at reading and writing it, they might be thinking of going into the transcription business. What's the bare minimum that you would need in terms of equipment and software to get started, and then as you progressed, what would be desirable, would you say?

Kawal Gucukoglu: Well, you say transcription business and I've just started mine. All I did was I got somebody to help me with a website, because I can't built a website myself. I know of somebody else who used to work for the RNIB and he has his own braille music business called Golden Chord. I'm quite sure you know who I'm talking about. I asked his advice and he told me that if you want to do it, you should make a website. I asked him how he got his website and he told me about somebody and I contacted that person and I asked her whether she would help me build a website and she did. She knew a little bit about accessibility because she'd been working with Golden Chord, and so she made the website for me. She asked me to think about what I'd like to put on that website.

Dave Williams: That would be true for any business, but for starting a transcription business specifically, is a laptop and Duxbury enough? Or would you definitely need a braille display, for example?

Kawal Gucukoglu: You need a braille display, because you need to check your braille and you really can't do it with a screen reader.

 Also you can get Access To Work to help you. You would need to make a business plan. If you go to the Job Centre and tell them you want to start your own business, they're happy to help you with that.

Dave Williams: So, there's the business side of it, which is interesting and maybe we could do that as a separate thing, but I think what Ben was driving at, is actually the process of being a transcriber. So, as a bare minimum, you need the software, the laptop and the braille display.

Kawal Gucukoglu: Yes, that's all you need in my opinion.

Dave Williams: You don't need an embosser?

Kawal Gucukoglu: No, I haven't got an embosser. I can get one if I need to, but the demand isn't there at the moment.

 As you know, so many people nowadays are downloading BRF files to their braille displays and they are reading their stuff on their braille displays. Look at the Orbit Reader for instance. BRF files have never been so popular as they are now.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thank you, Kawal, really interesting stuff, and thank you to everyone else. We don't have any more hands and I think we are just on time. So, I'll pass over to Dave to wrap things up.

Dave Williams: Well, thanks very much, Ben, for your help with the moderation and thank you, everybody, for your questions. A little bit of insight into the business of transcription and some of the tools and techniques that you might use to format a braille document.

 We did promise you James Bowden's email address. If you would like to contact James regarding transcribing technical material, then you can write to james.bowden@rnib.org.uk.

 Kawal, thank you so much for giving up your time and sharing with us. We really appreciate that and we wish you well as you start to grow your new braille transcription business and thank you for all the work you do behind the scenes for the Braillists Foundation. We really appreciate that very much indeed.

 From myself, Dave Williams, and the rest of the Braillists team, until next time, bye for now.

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 In the meantime, on behalf of everyone at the Braillists, thanks for listening and bye for now.

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