

# Visual Aid Volunteers Inc. plays important role in brailleing textbooks for Texas Education agency

The world of books opens at a touch of the fingertips to the child without sight, a world that grows broader each day because two different groups of Braille book technicians put their time to work for Texas school children.

**VISUAL AID VOLUNTEERS**  
A local group of volunteers—mostly women—long active in Braille textbook production includes the Visual Air Volunteers of Garland which does approximately one-third of the work each year.

Another group transcribes, binds and reproduces Braille textbooks behind bars of the Texas Department of Corrections at Huntsville.

Both are vital to the Texas Education Agency's special textbook program.

"We depend heavily on both groups because the demand for Braille textbooks always exceeds the supply we have on hand," says J. B. Golden, director of the Agency's Textbook Division. "If we could not call upon the first-rate services of these devoted people to do the tedious work of making master copies and copy pages of our textbooks, it would be almost impossible to meet the particular needs of the 400 blind school children in our state."

The director estimates the need to be around 1,200 Braille textbooks a year. In addition, there are the many tests and workbooks which are transcribed for local school use here in Garland in the traditional Braille dot pattern so the teacher can evaluate the blind student's work.

**VAV BRAILLES TEXT BOOKS**  
Texas is one of the leading states in the nation in providing free special textbooks in Braille so that its youthful blind population can keep up with their sighted classroom contemporaries. Many of these books are obtained from the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, Ky. But for the many titles not produced there, the Agency depends on volunteers in the two transcribing groups.

Meeting the Braille textbook needs of the state is not a page-for-page project for the volunteer workers. Three pages of Braille are needed to duplicate a single page of printed text.

Textbook officials suggest using a 224-page second-grade reader as a "rule of thumb" to illustrate the work required to produce a Braille book. A volunteer worker spends about 15 minutes at the Perkins Braillewriter to turn out one page of the master copy. (The Perkins machine is comparable to the typewriter, with two major exceptions. It has only six keys with dot "letters" which can be combined into various cells to form the alphabet and other symbols of written communication).

**READER TAKES 168 HOURS**  
It would take a volunteer

about 168 hours to duplicate the reader which, in its Braille form, would be in not one but seven 90-page volumes. The book would be even bulkier if it didn't have at least one illustration on every page.

The work of converting a printed textbook into Braille is almost evenly divided between both groups. The master is brailled by volunteers at the Dallas Services for Blind Children, El Paso Braille Guild, Garland Visual Aid Volunteers, and the Houston Lighthouse for the Blind. (Some of this master brailleing is also done at the Texas Department of Corrections.)

Master copies are shipped to Huntsville, where the prisoners reproduce the pages, bind the book and send it to fill a school district's order.

Even in this age of automation, the speed with which the prisoners fill an order is impressive. Officials of the Agency's Textbook Division say the inmates can turn out a 1,000-page textbook and ship it in two days.

How much does this 1,000-page textbook cost? The Department of Corrections would bill the Agency about \$50 or five cents for each page copied.

**TRANSCRIBER TRAINEE**  
While this kind of Braille work has been a traditional task for women volunteers working in the blind facilities, it is relatively new to the men at Huntsville.

The Oak Cliff Lions Club in Dallas put the prisoners into this specialized book business with a \$1,500 contribution to the Texas Department of Corrections in 1965. The money was used to hire a teacher to train ten inmates in all phases of the art of Braille book production. This nucleus of transcribers trains new transcribers as men are released and increases the staff as needed.

Together, these two groups are helping to place the world of books literally at the fingertips of the young people of Texas.

**NEED FOR BRAILLISTS**  
The volunteer braillists who are members of Visual Air Volunteers met in a workshop 10 a.m. Monday Nov. 25 in the old First National Bank Building. The meeting, under the direction of Mrs. Ed King, executive manager, was called for two purposes. One to discuss Texas Textbook Format and second to give out braille assignments for the 1969-70 school year.

There are 13 volunteers who will do the Textbook assignments. "We hope this is a lucky number, since, according to our estimates, this will be one of the largest assignments we have ever done," states Mrs. King who estimates the 14 textbooks will amount to 15,000 braille pages in 155 volumes of braille.

Braillists were enthusiastic about being able to complete this tremendous "workload". Unless all our textbook braille

masters are completed considerably before Sept. 1, 1969 and in the hands of the inmates at Huntsville Department of Corrections for thermoforming (duplicating), children somewhere in Texas will have to begin school without a braille textbook.

**TEXT BOOKS FOR TEA**  
This will be the first year since VAV began brailleing assignments for the Texas Education Agency four years ago that the thermoforming of braille masters will not be done in Garland. The masters we have brailled in the past have been thermoformed here in Garland by volunteers from PTA's, civic clubs, and many individuals coming to the VAV Room almost daily. All orders on hand were completed about Oct. 15 and now only volumes for Garland Students will be thermoformed from time to time.

**VOLUNTEER BRAILLISTS**  
The volunteer braillists who will be brailleing textbooks include: Gini Cook, Mary Kelsoe, Jo Ann Clopton, Betty Patrick, Elnita Johnson, Joan Bronstad, Dorothy McAllister, Jane Storey, Sally Weaver, Dinah Goodwin, Ayleen Burden, Barbara Middleton, and Henry Kirchner. Other braillists who will be working on special assignments for Garland Students are Dorothy Jeffcoat, Pat Wilkins, Jane Allen, Sue Coker, and Eleanor Henson.

A braille class is in progress and expected to be completed about March 1, 1969. Mrs. Ed King is teaching the class which takes about four months to complete.

The lessons are one-day a week with students spending about two hours a day on homework.

Those attending classes are Doryce Livingston, Sally Williams, Frances Holmes, Kizzie Mitchell, Kathryn Sales, and Pauline Smith. There will be assignments waiting the moment these volunteers "graduate".

**REQUIRES TWO HOURS PER DAY**

There are very few volunteers in any field who give as much of themselves as does a volunteer braillist. More than 150-200 hours are spent in the 20 lessons, given in 20 weeks. When one has then completed the class they are just really ready to learn . . . Giving two hours a day one can produce only about one volume of braille (approximately 100 braille pages) a month.

**BRAILLE CHAIRMAN**  
Gini Cook, the braille chairman and vice president of the Board of Directors for visual aid volunteers completed her braille course in May 1967. Since that time she has produced 87 volumes of braille amounting to 6,743 braille pages. Forty-two of these volumes were textbooks for Texas students and 45 were library books, workbooks and special assignments for Garland Students. Gini spends one morning

of each week taking braille volumes to the blind proofreader, delivering them to the VAV room, and back home again which is about 35 miles round trip.

Mary Kelsoe is the immediate past braille chairman who has been brailleing for about three years. Since Jan. 1967, she has brailled 32 volumes of 2,947 braille pages. Twenty-eight of these volumes were textbooks and four were special assignments for Garland Students.

Jo Anne Clopton was the braille chairman two years ago. She has been brailleing about three years. Since Jan. 1967, Jo Anne has done 58 braille volumes of 5,045 braille pages. Thirty-seven volumes were textbooks and 19 were for Garland Students.

These "chairmen" will confirm the fact that it also takes a strong back to be a braille chairman. Their arms are always full of heavy braille volumes whether they are coming to the VAV Room or leaving it.

Henry Kirchner is the only man who is brailleing for VAV. Several others have begun classes but dropped out almost immediately when they realized how time consuming brailleing is. Henry is a printer and takes great pride in "setting up" his braille so that it looks its very best. He has been brailleing about one and one-half years and has produced 10 volumes of 791 braille pages. Henry has prepared numerous "gadgets" and lists of braille materials which have made the work of all the braillists easier.

**COMMON INTEREST**

All three of these braillists have one thing in common, other than brailleing. They are all three certified by the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. This is a treasured award gained by submitting a 35-page braille manuscript to the Library of Congress for rigid grading. If you receive a passing grade of 80 or above you receive a certificate which means you are recognized anywhere in the U.S. as a Certified Braillist and your work would be acceptable anywhere.

Mrs. Ovetta Lewis is serving her third years as president of the Board of Directors. After working hours, Mrs. Lewis does a great deal of typing for the partially sighted in Garland and does tape recording when it is needed by any student here in Garland.

Mrs. Ed King, executive manager of VAV, serves as the coordinator of all the services rendered by VAV for blind or partially sighted children.

There are many volunteers in VAV who do a remarkable job of producing whatever braille, large type, or tape recording is needed, whether it is braille textbooks to be used all over the state of Texas (and anywhere in the U.S. it is needed) or any supplementary material needed right here in Garland.

