

# Wisconsin Council for the Visually Impaired: Jan. 4 is World Braille Day, an opportunity to highlight the value of everyday Braille

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Louis Braille was born on January 4, 1809. Four years ago, the United Nations honored him by proclaiming that date World Braille Day. World Braille Day celebrates the importance of Braille's revolutionary raised dot system, which allows people who are unable to interact with ordinary print to read through touch. World Braille Day also kicks off Braille Literacy Month, which we observe throughout January. It's impossible to overstate the lifechanging impact braille has had for millions of people with vision loss over the years.

Many sighted people don't realize most individuals who are proficient in braille learned it in school as children. It's uncommon for people who lose their vision as adults to become fluent enough in braille to read large amounts of text, like an entire book.

"Our World Braille Day message this year is that you don't need expert-level proficiency to benefit from learning braille," says Denise Jess, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired. "For many adults, very basic braille literacy can be extremely helpful in accomplishing everyday tasks."

For example, Jess notes, you can use braille to label food packages, medications and other household items. Elevator controls and room signs in office buildings often include braille. In addition, many government agencies, financial institutions and health care entities make their forms available in braille, though much more progress is needed in that area.

Braille can also come in handy for fun and games—you don't even have to know the entire alphabet to use a deck of braille cards.

“Here at the Council, we recently added braille instruction to our Vision Services menu,” Jess says. She encourages adults interested in learning braille to get in touch so Council staff can help them determine whether acquiring basic braille literacy is right for them.

Jess also encourages people to continually tell the institutions they interact with that equity for people with vision loss matters. That means offering all their materials in accessible formats like braille, large print and audio.

“Resolving to acquire new skills that enhance your independence— whether by learning braille, receiving orientation and mobility training, or consulting with a vision rehabilitation therapist to find new strategies for everyday tasks—is a great way to ring in 2023.”