



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

Spring 2024

## Volunteers: The Heart of ABLE!

We are given a special opportunity every April to recognize and celebrate the ways in which volunteers make this world a better place for all of us. In 2023, volunteers donated 6,768 hours of specialized labor to transcribe print materials into braille, tactile and audio formats. Based on Independent Sector's valuation of donated time for services which require specialized training or carry professional value in the U.S., this represents an in-kind dollar value of \$215,222.40!

To honor and celebrate our amazing volunteer team, please join us at the Italian Conference Center for the Annual Luncheon on **Thursday, October 24, 2024. Save the date!**

## A Timely IDEA

The ABLE Board of Directors completed a five-year strategic plan in April of 2023, and we have begun to implement some of the short-term priorities in this plan. One of them is IDEA, which stands for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access. Examples of creating equal access for full participation in society include brailled election ballots, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra programs and programs from the Marcus Center, as well as books that are being read in ABLE's Sound Center. Here are just a few:



Photo of Margaret Casey, recording in the ABLE Sound Center

*Girl's Guide to Leaving* by Laura Villareal, a collection of poetry in which Villareal takes on identity, trauma, and personal origins while referencing Mexican folklore. Read by Margaret Casey.

*The Story of Civil War Hero Robert Smalls* by Janet Halfmann, a Civil War history book for young readers that tells the remarkable story of Robert Smalls, who escaped slavery along with 16 others on a boat that he captained. Read by Margaret Casey.

*Somos Latinas: Voices of Wisconsin Latina Activists* by Eloisa Gómez and Andrea-Teresa Arenas, in which twenty-five Latina women share stories from their lives as community activists in their own words. Read by Celeste Baldassare.

*The Clothesline Code: The Story of Civil War Spies Lucy Ann and Dabney Walker* by Janet Halfmann, a Civil War book for young readers that tells the true story of Lucy Ann and Dabney Walker, who escaped slavery and went on to create a secret code to help the Union army. Read by Janet Zoltan.

*In Defense of Sovereignty: Protecting the Oneida Nation's Inherent Right to Self-Determination* by Rebecca M. Webster, a collection of essays detailing the Oneida Nation's ongoing legal defense of its sovereignty and reservation lands. Read by Mike Browne.

*Calling the Water Drum* by Latisha Redding, a book for young readers that tells the story of Henri, a boy who must overcome grief after losing his parents at sea on the journey from their home of Haiti to the United States. Read by Margaret Casey.



Photo of Mike Browne, recording in the ABLE Sound Center

## Meet Our New Board Members!

Stephanie Holt came to ABLE in September of 2023. Meet Stephanie in her own words from her compelling board introduction:



*Photo of  
Stephanie Holt*

“The reasons I am interested in being on the board are threefold. The first is that I despise ignorance, and when I learned of ABLE, I was shocked at my own. I have gone through multiple organizations in the belief that I was campaigning and highlighting some of the most forgotten segments in both my time on The University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse campus, and currently in my occupation with the Department of Revenue. However, I soon realized there was a population I had never considered. The second is that ABLE has a simple and noble mission I can completely stand by: ‘to provide alternative ways for people with print disabilities to read.’ The third is that I love being able to give back to my community in a useful and purposeful manner.”

Jennifer Wenzel joined the ABLE board of directors in April of this year. She has been a Braille Games blind mentor for years, and is a braille enthusiast. She said, “I would be proud and honored to accept a position on the ABLE board. I welcome the opportunity to serve this organization which aligns so well with my belief in high quality braille and audio for all blind and low vision students in Wisconsin.”



*Photo of  
Jennifer Wenzel*

Please join me in extending a warm welcome to Stephanie and Jennifer!

## Milwaukee Bucks Making a Difference



*Cover image of  
Braille Boy*

Thanks to the Milwaukee Bucks’ generosity, 75 children across Wisconsin will receive *Braille Boy*, a print braille book written by a nine-year-old blind author, ZuZu Sampson. Inspired by his love for superhero stories, ZuZu decided to publish *Braille Boy* when he couldn’t find superhero books in Braille format. The book encourages empathy, courage, and positivity.

Not only is this book available in braille, but it will also be available in audio through the Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library.

## In Memoriam

Many readers of this newsletter will remember Cheri McGrath, who died on November 20, 2023. Cheri has a lasting legacy with ABLE. Volunteering for over twenty years as a braille production volunteer and board member, and ABLE board president for eight years, she gave over 8,000 hours of her time. Her legacy lives on in her commitment to braille materials for blind students and her efforts to secure funding for the ABLE Sound Center, which opened on September 29, 2015.



*Photo of Cheri McGrath reading  
list of cupboard contents in braille  
produced by ABLE*

Cheri was a resident of Saint John’s On the Lake. Their Chapel Committee’s Lenten project this year was to raise donations for ABLE in Cheri’s memory. Nearly \$2,500, representing gifts made by Saint John’s residents, will be given to ABLE. We are so grateful for this generosity.