

Press Release No. 15/2011 on the 30th of September 2011

The World Congress Braille21 draws to an end today at Leipzig with a public motet at St Thomas Church where the blind vocal quartet „Pro Puncto“ will be performing together with the St Thomas Boy’s Choir. The three-day convention has shown the great variety of braille usage by its manifold events. Furthermore, the dialogue among institutions for the blind has been intensified, especially with developing countries. Moreover on Thursday the World Blind Union has bestowed the Braille21 Award on the Swedish Library of Braille and Talking Books for the PEF (Portable Embosser Format).

World Congress Braille21 – »Innovations in Braille in the 21st century«

More than 400 experts from 49 countries have discussed the future of braille in Leipzig from Wednesday to Friday. Not only participants from industrialised countries had the possibility to take part. The World Congress Braille21 that has been organised by the German Central Library for the Blind in Leipzig (DZB) could also enable participants from developing countries to travel to this three-day convention, thanks to the generous support of the German Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted (DBSV), Christoffel-Blindenmission (CBM) and Herbert-Funke-Stiftung. Thus, the travel expenses from participants coming from countries such as Ethiopia, Peru or Kenya could be refunded.

This global exchange is to be underlined in the eyes of Elke Dittmer (Norddeutsche Blindenhörbücherei e. V. and chairperson of MEDIBUS e. V.) because in the course of Braille21 it has become clear how important the teaching of braille is in those countries and how big the differences to developed countries are: »Here in rich Europe we currently discuss if it is still appropriate for the blind to print braille on paper. The importance of this is demonstrated by the participants from Asia or Africa who talk very emotionally about braille on paper. By this they have the opportunity to learn a profession or to study and thereby successfully meet their lives. The enthusiasm of those people who are acting with these small and simple means is really contagious.«

Also the US-American Dr. Judith Dixon (Consumer Relations Officer at the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.), who was the opening speaker at Braille21 with

a keynote about the global library on Wednesday, can take a lot of new incitements along for her further work: »I would never have thought that there were so many ways of teaching braille – especially for adults. Many people still assume that one can only learn braille as a blind child. At Braille21 there were so many presentations that showed how many strategies there are to teach braille successfully, particularly to the elderly people. Braille is relevant for people of all ages.«

Other important topics at Braille21 were the global use of music braille and the importance of braille for deaf-blind people.

WBU Braille21 Award

The World Blind Union (www.worldblindunion.org) – the globally acting organisation for blind and visually impaired people – has bestowed the WBU Braille21 Award in the course of the World Congress Braille21 at Leipzig. On this occasion the Swedish Library of Braille and Talking Books has been awarded for their PEF (Portable Embosser Format). This digital format is an excellent example that shows how the accessibility and affordability of braille can be guaranteed all over the world.

Dr. Thomas Kahlisch (Director of the DZB Leipzig) appreciates this decision as groundbreaking: »By this award, the World Blind Union points clearly the way to the digital world. PEF means that a text in braille can be printed by every braille printer all over the world. This format is very well adapted for the exchange of information, and this fosters again the cross-border exchange.«

For the WBU Braille21 Award there have been 17 nominations in total. The award selection committee has prepared a shortlist of five finalists that had the opportunity to showcase their products or services at the Braille21 World Congress. These were: BraillePen 12 (by Harpo Sp. z o. o, Poland), DaCapo – Braille Music (DZB Leipzig, Germany), Embroidered Braille for textiles (Kampmann GmbH – international, Germany), PEF – Portable Embosser Format (Swedish Library of Braille and Talking Books, Sweden) and RoboBraille (RoboBraille, Sensus, Denmark).

Some printable photos of Braille21 are available at the press area of DZB

Leipzig: www.dzb.de/presseportal/fotoarchiv.html

More information about Braille21 is available at www.braille21.net

German Central Library for the Blind in Leipzig - Deutsche Zentralbücherei für Blinde zu Leipzig (DZB)

The World Congress »Braille21« has been organised by DZB Leipzig. Our main task is to make printed information accessible to blind and partially sighted people. DZB Leipzig is all in one, a library, a publishing house and a production centre for braille and talking books. It was founded in 1894 as a society for supplying the blind with braille literature and working opportunities, and has now become the oldest public library for the blind in Germany. DZB belongs to the most important media institutions of the German speaking countries. Over 8,000 members use the library's different services. The library comprises about 40,000 volumes: braille books, braille music, talking books and tactile graphics such as geographical maps and calendars. DZB edits and publishes seventeen magazines in braille and audio formats. Additionally, our scientific library collects published information about blindness related topics.

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