# The Tactile Times Newspaper

Issue Number 8

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[tactiletimes.org](https://Tactiletimes.org)

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Welcome to the 8th edition of the Tactile Times!

We are Ellie, Lexy and Theo, three young braillists who thought it would be fun to put together a way for children and young people who are braillists, to share news, event information, tips, opinions and ideas. We hope you like it.

We are really excited about the Tactile Times being a way for more and more of us braillists to keep each other up to date, so if you know someone else who might like to get a copy too, let us know! To find out more about the Tactile Times and why we set it up, visit <https://tactiletimes.org/about>

Thankyou to everyone that sent in articles, ideas and other contributions for this issue. We would love to include even more articles from our readers in the next issue! If there is something you really enjoy doing, or a place you had a good time visiting, why not write a short article about it for the Tactile Times? Or submit your favourite joke or recipe. You can find more ideas for what to contribute and some accessibility tips at <https://tactiletimes.org/contribute>

This issue is filled with:

* Info about the [latest updates for JAWS](#_==_New_major) and [new features on the Touch+](#_==_New_BrailleNote)
* [A comparison of the replacements for the Microsoft Soundscape app](#_==_Microsoft_Soundscape)
* [Examples of accessible language vocabulary you can study online](#_==_An_accessible)
* Loads of [upcoming accessible events](#_10._Upcoming_Events), including [lots from VICTA](#_==_VICTA)

And much, much more.

Best wishes from all of us at the Tactile Times.

Some navigation tips: We have put a line of 10 +’s between sections and == before each article so you can search for == to find the beginning of articles and +’s to find sections. This method is most useful on devices that cannot navigate by headings (such as Braille displays). On the Touch +, you can navigate by heading by either pressing Enter+V to open the KeyWord preview or reading this issue via the online version. Each section heading is also numbered so you can search for the number of a section followed by a full-stop to find that section.

We have also put headings in for sections and articles:

Heading 1: Title at the top of the document

Heading 2: Sections and contents page

Heading 3: Article titles

Heading 4: Article sections (not used in every article)

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Tap on a section below to jump straight to it. On a computer with JAWS you may need to use the Open hyperlink option in the Context menu (Shift+F10).

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## 1. News

### == Major new version of JAWS is out!

Although it’s not quite 2024 yet, JAWS 2024 has been released! This includes several major updates, including the ability to split your braille display to be in two applications at the same time, and improved support for Mathematical equations (although sadly still Nemeth code only for now). Another big feature they are releasing is “Face in view”, which checks whether you are in view for a video call. This is useful, but there’s already a great free program called Can you see me (<https://canyouseeme.app>) which does this job very well.

You can read the full release notes at:

<https://support.freedomscientific.com/downloads/jaws/JAWSWhatsNew#:~:text=The%20new%20Split%20Braille%20feature,into%20two%20halves%2C%20or%20regions>.

And Sight and Sound have a [webinar](#_==_Sight_and) where they are demonstrating these features.

Sadly the costs of upgrading to this release are quite high, as Sight and Sound have not offered any discounts this year. But it is definitely worth updating if you can.

### == The Paralympics are coming to Paris in 2024

The Paralympics are coming to Paris next year, and this is probably the closest they’ll get to the UK for a long time. If you’d like to watch some professional-quality blind sport, whether it’s an international-standard goalball match or some top-notch athletics, this is your chance!

Tickets are currently available at: <https://tickets.paris2024.org/> (although they’re likely to sell out pretty quickly).

### == New BrailleNote Touch+ updates

HumanWare have released a set of updates for the BrailleNote Touch+. This includes an onboard dictionary (which is very exciting), Microsoft Exchange email support (so you can now check your school email at schools with Office 365 without several hours of setup) and a lot more.

If you have a Touch+, update through All applications > KeyUpdater > Application update, and view the full release notes on that screen if you’re interested. For more on how to update, see our [detailed guide in Issue 6](https://tactiletimes.org/issues/TTNIssue6/#calibre_link-16).

HumanWare are also showing off these new features in a [webinar in November](#_==_HumanWare).

### == Replacements for Microsoft Soundscape have launched!

In Issue 6, we published an article all about Soundscape’s removal from the App Store. This was an app developed by Microsoft that let blind users listen to where shops were and navigate to them all in 3D sound. We’re very lucky in that since then, 3 replacements for this vital app have been launched. We’ve compared them all in [the tech section](#_==_Microsoft_Soundscape), but in summary you’ll be able to keep virtually the same functionality you’re used to from the old app, while bringing your old markers and routes over if you’re lucky.

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## 2. Fun Things we did

### == RNC Sport Event

Recently, there was a sports open event at RNC Hereford for visually impaired people. This event was run by the Guide Dogs charity on the 30th September. We were put in small groups based on age. The first event was judo. The students there had the opportunity to do judo as an after school activity. They had outfits to borrow or you could take your own. This was followed by a tour of the campus. Each boarding house had multiple floors and the students have key cards to their floor and room. They were all single rooms with ensuite bathrooms. They also had a small kitchen and common room on each floor.

At lunch time, we did acoustic shooting which was different to what I had done before. The pitch of the sound was different and it was connected to a laptop. After that, we played blind football. There was a proper astroturf pitch with boards like they have in the Paralympics around the walls. They were metal and about shoulder hight and slightly slanted. Then we did goalball. They have one of the only courts that stayed down permanently in the country. At the end they gave out free blind footballs. Overall, I was really impressed with their facilities.

**By Ellie**

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## 3. Languages

### == An accessible way to learn vocabulary on your iPhone or computer

Have you ever wanted a fully-accessible way to electronically learn Vocab for languages? Quizlet works well for sighted people, but blind users (including me) have faced lots of problems with it.

If you’d like to have a go learning some Vocab accessibly online (with your screen reader speaking in the correct language), check out the below example Quizlet sets we’ve made accessible:

Tricolore 4 Unité 1 Sommaire: <https://quizlet.tactiletimes.org/flashcards/61/>

Year 7 French Module 5 School subjects: <https://quizlet.tactiletimes.org/flashcards/28/>

Year 8 Spanish - module 6 - El fin de semana pasado - Last weekend: <https://quizlet.tactiletimes.org/flashcards/30/>

It’s even possible to make your braille display dynamically change braille code between the two languages, or to slow down the rate of one of the language voices while keeping the other one full-speed.

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## 4. Technology

### == Microsoft Soundscape is dead, but three new apps have launched to fill the gap.

As you may have already heard, Microsoft’s Soundscape app (used for navigating with 3D spatial audio), has been removed from the App Store and the servers were shut down on 31st August. Microsoft did, though, open source most of the code behind the app.

This is bad news for anyone looking to try and use the app but luckily, some new apps based off the code Microsoft open-sourced have launched. We list them below in alphabetical order.

#### Soundscape Community

A consortium of organisations from around the world (including NCBI in Ireland and Once in Spain), have come together to re-launch the Microsoft Soundscape app.

* Layout: Almost identical to original Microsoft Soundscape
* Features: Everything major works right now (including beacons and search) except marker sharing using links and categorising nearby places which don’t work yet but are on the roadmap.
* Marker import: Possible, but a bit fiddley if you get an error. In original Soundscape create a massive route containing all your markers, and then try to use the share menu to share the route to the new app. Markers created using business locations won’t work and will cause errors, however any markers you created by marking your current location will transfer across.
* Map data loading: Very fast and reliable

To download search for “Soundscape Community” on the App Store.

This is the app that I’m currently using, as I could take all my markers with me to it.

#### Soundscape from the Scottish Tech army

This is very similar to Soundscape Community, and was launched on the same day, but there are a few differences. It’s worth noting that this app is supposedly age restricted as it, according to Apple, gives you unrestricted web access. But we don’t see the reason for this as it doesn’t give you access to any more data than the others, and the only thing you’ll see through this app is the name of businesses around you. Therefore we think that it is as safe as the others for children, but Apple seem to disagree.

* Layout: Almost identical to original Microsoft Soundscape
* Features: Everything except marker importing, exporting and sharing. Also no support for categorising nearby places. Search may mal-function (for me if I searched Costa I only got Costa coffee’s in London and not near me).
* Marker import: Not currently possible
* Map data loading: Took a few seconds, but seemed to be reliable enough

To download go to <https://sta.ngo/soundscapeapp>

#### Voice Vista

This app is based on the Soundscape audio technology but has a totally different layout. So you need to anticipate the change. It does have some features that Soundscape doesn’t have, such as turn-by-turn navigation built in.

* Layout: Very different, more like a typical iOS app with tabs at the bottom.
* Features: Everything except marker import works. You can share your markers with other Voice Vista users. The places nearby feature is still not perfect as they need to build their database but it is categorised.
* Marker import: Not really possible. By editing links you could slowly and painfully copy over 1 marker at a time.
* Map data loading: Seems to be quick for call-outs, but places nearby can take a while and you have to wait for the list to build itself.

To download search for “VoiceVista” on the App Store.

All 3 of these apps are free, and they all have their strengths. Its great to have so many options. We’ll compare all of these in even more detail in Issue 9 next summer.

### == Sight Village Central 2023, How was it?

I visited Sight Village Central in Birmingham in July, a trade show where you can get your hands on all the latest tech for blind users. It was very exciting to see the latest innovations.

#### Monarch from HumanWare

APH (the American Printing House for the Blind) and HumanWare are working together to produce a multi-line display which can be used for both braille and tactile graphics. They plan to launch at the end of 2024.

The display uses the same braille technology as the Dot watch, and there is a protective film over all the cells. This film, as well as protecting them, is required to make them work properly.

Although this is super exciting, it’s going to come with a super high price tag of likely over £10,000, so is more for education. It also is an Android tablet underneath, so will be subject to some of the same pitfalls of the Touch+ such as likely never being updated.

#### Sight and Sound

Sight and Sound sadly didn’t have a discount on a JAWS SMA this year. They normally have huge discounts available at Sight Village, which make JAWS upgrades and first-time purchases a lot more affordable.

They were showcasing the BrailleSense 6, a competitor to the BrailleNote Touch +. It’s now on Android 12, and unlike the Touch + seems to be receiving updates. However the web browser isn’t very good and is waiting for an update, and it doesn’t have support for Method 2 language braille tables.

#### Braillists Foundation

The Braillists were at Sight Village this year, and they even had SD cards you could take away with every single podcast and masterclass they’ve ever done on them.

#### Biped

Biped is a new type of mobility aid. It is a harness that you wear, which uses AI technology to tell you where obstacles are. Although I found the experience of trying it quite fun, I felt I didn’t need it as I can echolocate to get this information more efficiently.

#### WeWalk cane

The WeWalk smart cane is supposed to let you find head height obstacles and let you navigate to places using GPS.

Although smart canes have come a long way since I tried them a few years ago, the experience is quite similar for me. I found that the demo smart cane was too heavy to use comfortably, and that the obstacle sensor was not very helpful for me as I can already find out that information easily. It also doesn’t really tell you where the obstacle is, just that there is one. GPS navigation is via an app, and controlling this from the cane is fiddly.

#### Optima braille laptop computer

Although not an official stand, I got a chance to try out this new prototype of a braille computer. It has a braille display and a QWERTY keyboard, and runs Windows. In the final product you will be able to swap parts out (e.g. if you need more storage or you would like a different kind of braille display). The concept is very exciting, and I hope that this device makes it to the market.

It’s always nice to go to Sight Village and demo the latest tech, and this year I had a great time. Hopefully I’ll be back next year after my GCSE’s are over.

Written by Theo

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## 5. Sports

### == Goalball camp

Hello, I'm Elidh Johnstone and I am 16 years old. I have recently completed my GCSEs, and on the 22nd August I went to Rugby School in Rugby near Coventry on a GB Goalball Academy camp until the 23rd. On the Tuesday, the 22nd, we played goalball and tried out new skills, on this particular occasion we were practicing different shot types, however on the Wednesday we went to Coventry to see GB play in the IBSA World Games Goalball competition. The Games were being held in Birmingham and Coventry so the Academy went to watch both Great Britain's men and women play in the group stages. Beforehand, all of us had received British flags that we could show our support, and the atmosphere in the hall was really exciting when the ball was out of play, for in Goalball there must be complete silence from the spectators while the ball is in play. Unfortunately, GB lost both matches despite having good first halves. However, despite this, I had a really brilliant time watching GB and it has inspired me to train harder.

### == Strava club

The Tactile Times now runs a Strava club for anyone who is interested in joining.

The club provides a way to share activities, encourage each other, receive important updates directly via Strava and more.

To join or find out more visit <https://strava.com/clubs/tactiletimes>

### == Fantasy Football league

If you like football you might be interested in joining an online Fantasy Football league which we have set up for Tactile Times readers, three people have already joined! You will need to set up your own team for this year’s Premier league if you would like to join.

You can do this using a free, accessible app and website. To join the Tactile Times league you will need to visit the link below:

<https://tactiletimes.org/ttnfpl>

For more details about this league visit the link above or get in touch.

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## 6. Jokes

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## 7. Games

### == Hangman

We have an accessible Hangman game that can be played in any web browser. We are still improving it so please do get in touch with suggestions or ideas. The game is available on our new games website at: <https://games.tactiletimes.org> or via the link on our homepage.

### == Escape Room

We now have an accessible online escape room on our Games website for you to have a go at. It is made for people using a screen reader on a phone, iPad, computer, tablet or other device.

The escape room contains several puzzles which you will need to complete before you can escape. The system will remember your progress so you can leave and come back later at any time. Once you have escaped you will get access to a special success page which can only be viewed after escaping.

You can get started by tackling the first puzzle here:

<https://games.tactiletimes.org/escape-room/>

### == Progressing towards a text-based multi-player game our readers can join

A few issues ago, Ellie and I both wrote about what Moo is. It’s essentially an accessible, text-based game world, which is perfect for blind users. Players type out commands, for example “north”, and things happen in response (in this case being transported to another room in the world). But Moo’s a lot more than just moving around virtual rooms. You can talk to other people who are logged in using text, and even interact with various virtual objects. For example, I’ve built a large train station where people can board trains which take them quickly and efficiently to other areas of the world. If you know how to code, the possibilities really are endless.

I’ve been working on a Moo world where people will be able to:

* Connect in two clicks from any iPhone, and get a fully-accessible experience
* Play virtual games of Uno with other players, as well as a multitude of other games (including unscrambling words set by friends)
* Pay a virtual visit to a ski resort, and ski down a ski slope at high speed
* Just walk around the world, explore, and have fun
* Visit the virtual office building of the Tactile Times, and print your very own copy of a Tactile Times issue

And much, much more…

We’re not quite ready to open up yet, but if you’re a young braillist and you’d like to help test this out do contact us for more details.

By Theo, 16

### == C-race

This is a game using a Perkins brailler where the aim is to see how quickly you can do a line of c’s across a portrait page of A4 (32 braille cells). You do three attempts and take an average of your time. The current record is 6.4 seconds. If you beat the record, send your time in and you will become the champion… Until someone beats you!

The current record has stood unbeaten for five whole years since we launched in 2018. Do you think you have what it takes to become the new champion? Then get playing!

You can find an up-to-date leaderboard and more details here: <https://games.tactiletimes.org/crace.html>

### == Try out our Chatbot!

We are experimenting with how useful a chatbot could be in providing help and advice.

Our chatbot currently only understands a limited amount of questions about different areas of our website, and we need some people to help try it out!

Please note that our chatbot is nowhere near being as advanced as AI bots such as [ChatGPT](https://chat.openai.com), it is just a bit of fun. You can go to <https://games.tactiletimes.org/chatbot.html> to try it out.

Try asking questions such as How can I subscribe?, How can I view issues?, Where can I find your blog?, etc…

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## 8. Upcoming events

There are lots of fun events coming up in the next few months, both in person events and on-line events. VICTA have masses of things going on, especially in the Christmas holidays. We hope you find some you think you might enjoy!

### == VICTA

VICTA are interested in anyone aged 12 – 29 that would like to try VI Rowing.

<https://www.victa.org.uk/victa-calendar/get-involved-in-vi-rowing/>

National Marine Aquarium Family Day, 4th November.

<https://www.victa.org.uk/victa-calendar/national-marine-aquarium-family-day/>

Sherlock: The Official Live Game, for 14 to 17 year olds.  11 or 25 November

<https://www.victa.org.uk/victa-calendar/sherlock-live-game/?portfolioCats=131>

Indoor Skydiving for 14 to 17 year olds. Saturday 9 December

<https://www.victa.org.uk/victa-calendar/indoor-skydiving/>

Cheap tickets to Wishmas. 14 November 2023 to 7 January 2024

<https://www.victa.org.uk/victa-calendar/wishmas/>

Cinderella, 21 December.  Applications are now open.

<https://www.victa.org.uk/victa-calendar/ticket-offer-to-see-cindarella/>

Jack and the Beanstalk – North West Theatre Arts Company, 13 January

<https://www.victa.org.uk/victa-calendar/jack-and-the-beanstalk/?portfolioCats=131>

ECO-Science Residential for 10 to 13s, February half term 2024.

<https://www.victa.org.uk/victa-calendar/science-residential-for-10-to-13s/?portfolioCats=247%2C43%2C39>

### == Sight Village

South East: Kensington Town Hall, on Tuesday 7th November 2023.

<https://www.qac.ac.uk/exhibitions/sight-village-southeast/3.htm>

It looks like its going to be quite a big event, with lots of exhibitors. If you’re trying to make your mind up as to whether to go or not, check out our [write-up of a Sight Village event](#_==_Sight_Village) in the tech section.

### == New College Worcester (NCW)

Outreach Open Day, 14 November, 10:00 – 15:00

<https://www.ncw.co.uk/events/outreach-open-day-3/>

### == The Braillists

They have Braille Masterclasses, third Tuesday of the Month at 7:30 PM.  This is an informative sessions on a range of braille-related topics.

As of this month, you now have to register for each masterclass separately. The next one is next Tuesday (31st October) on free braille translators, and you can register for it here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMvduCvrz0pG9DBTvg7jOGouByjoBz13aZJ#/registration>

If you’d like to get future registration links, you can sign up for their weekly newsletter at <https://braillists.org/newsletter>

And they have a Braille Bar, on the second and fourth Tuesday of the Month at 7:30 PM, when Braille experts are available to answer questions.

You can register for the Braille Bar on this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwtdOyopjMiHdyORwRuXacnY9IrA4lVN2Bh>

The latest episode of the BrailleCast podcast, about a new device called the Braille Doodle, was published on 19th September, and is on this link: <https://www.braillecast.com/podcast/e049/>

### == LOOK

Countdown to Christmas, Santa’s Grotto, 6 December (but you have to register by Monday 30th October!)

<https://www.look-uk.org/countdowntochristmas2023/>

### == HumanWare

HumanWare have a couple of very exciting-sounding webinars coming up, one on November 15th at 7 p.m. UK time all about braille displays, and another one on 16th November, also at 7 p.m., about the announcement of the latest BrailleNote Touch+ updates.

You can find out more information and register here: <https://www.humanware.ca/web/en/newsletter/231020231032-Webinars-Braille.htm>

### == Sight and Sound

They have a webinar coming up this Wednesday 1st November at 2 pm (sadly during the school day) on the new features in JAWS, ZoomText and Fusion. If you’d like to attend, you can register at:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Vo9v-gcvSgGz4fomrn2XBQ#/registration>

Hopefully this webinar will be recorded and uploaded to their YouTube channel so it can be watched later, as it sounds very interesting.

You can check out their latest products and other upcoming webinars on this link: <https://www.sightandsound.co.uk/media/>

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## 9. Get in touch and website

If you would like to send in a short article, joke or game, or if you have not subscribed yet and would like to subscribe, please do get in touch using the details below.

Email: [info@tactiletimes.org](mailto:info@tactiletimes.org)

Website: [tactiletimes.org](https://tactiletimes.org)

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### This is the end of Tactile Times Issue 8

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