

## HumanWare Announces Braille Literacy Scholarship Winner



Camille O'Neill, age 3, explores using the Mountbatten Learning System. Her mother, Jennifer, submitted the winning entry in our braille literacy contest.

"The benefits of the Mountbatten will grow with her as she becomes an elementary-age student."

HumanWare US sponsored a braille literacy contest in which the winning families with a child who is blind would be provided a complete Mountbatten Learning System or a Jot a Dot note taking device.

Every parent wants the best for their child, and braille literacy is fundamental to a blind child's success. Starting blind children on the road to literacy as early as they are able and choosing the right tools to aid them are the keys to their success.

Entries were submitted by parents on behalf of their children between the ages of 3 and 8 years old in the United States, who are learning braille or are assessed as future braille learners. Parents expressed why braille literacy is key to their child's success and what role the Mountbatten Learning System will play in their future.

In addition, five US students will each receive a Jot a Dot Pocket Braille. Students described in braille why note taking is an important skill in their lives and submitted entries using poetry, verse or humor. Vital to self organization and as a general aid to memory, blind students need good note taking skills.

Many of the children whose families submitted entries would benefit greatly from the features that the MountBatten offers. Our winner, Jennifer O'Neill, the mother of Camille, expressed this so well:

"I have learned that literacy is literally at Camille's fingertips. As she learns to read and write braille, doors will open for her.

She will be able to experience the thrill of holding a book and slipping into a different world as stories of wonder unfold. She will have access to newspapers, magazines, and textbooks. She will be able to learn how to think critically, use technology in various forms, and become a well-rounded, independent person. She will be able to seek knowledge about whatever topic interests her, be it faith, math, science, or literature. With braille, she will be able to have a life driven by purpose that only she will limit.

"To teach these skills to preschool and kindergarten children, a sense of independence and fun is essential as motivation; this motivation in turn is essential to instilling the confidence and skills that children need in order to have a lifelong passion for literacy and education. I began to wonder how it could be fun and motivating for Camille to learn braille at a tender age with tiny hands using an outdated and cumbersome manual braille writer. It began to seem that while her peers get to have many exciting tools such as interactive computer programs, dazzling illustrations, and multiple choices in writing tools, Camille would be settling for a single tool that allows for little independent learning and little access to technology, a very important component of literacy in our world today.

"There are so many attributes of the Mountbatten that make it the best technology available for Camille, one being the speech feedback. Camille has very

good listening skills and loves to use them, so the Mountbatten would allow her to engage in independent and incidental learning opportunities that she would enjoy immensely. Early practice with speech output will also sharpen those auditory skills that will be necessary to compensate for vision loss, access books and media on tape, and use technology with audible speech feedback later in life. Quite obviously, the Mountbatten will be so much easier for her little fingers to use, making it more fun and less work. The benefits of the Mountbatten will grow with her as she becomes an elementary-age student. Through the Mimic and PC compatibility, her general education classroom teacher will be able to encourage her braille skills even though he or she won't be a braille reader; this is undeniably essential since her Teacher of the Visually Impaired is itinerant. These same features will also allow her to write letters and even emails that can be sent to our PC and on to her friends, family members, and pen pals. Instead of being isolated from her sighted peers because of braille, she will be able to use it to connect to others because of the Mountbatten."

Jot a Dot Notetakers will be awarded to:

- Nicole Lyssy, Austin, TX
- Kendall Lyssy, Austin, TX
- Milagro Sato, Hayward, CA
- Caiden Hooks, Jenison, MI
- Page Strickland, Raleigh, NC

Congratulations to everyone and a sincere thank you to everyone who participated in the contest.