

## A Day at the Humane Society

By Terri Lynn Higashi Akamine

November 17th 2024 was the month of giving. HAB and PAY were excited to celebrate with a special event at the Humane Society! We experienced a guided

tour discovering the incredible work being done to care for animals in need. Using our creativity, we had the opportunity to craft a variety of cat toys

to donate to the furry friends at the shelter. The cat toys keep our furry friends entertained and in good spirits. Finally, we got to wrap up our day

with some heartwarming playtime and sensory walk through to utilize our 5 senses navigating through the Humane Society. It was a wonderful opportunity



to give back and make a difference in the lives of these animals! Many students and their families are considering volunteering later. Thanks to all those who made this event possible and all those who attended. Special thanks to the Humane Society for providing us this interactive and hands on experience.



# Santa Cane To Town & Deaf Santa Events

On December 12, 2024, students with visual impairments and students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing from schools across the state participated in the annual “Santa Cane To Town & Deaf Santa” events held at Pearlridge Center. The events brought meaningful learning experiences to students while fostering inclusivity and spreading holiday cheer.

The events are made possible each year through a collaborative effort with the Hawai‘i Department of Education, Office of Student Support Services, the ASL program at Kapi‘olani Community College, Pearlridge Center, and numerous community partners and dedicated individuals. A special mahalo goes to the Hawai‘i Association of the Blind (HAB) for their generous contributions to make this event successful.

Students with visual impairments had a festive day filled with activities, including a ride on the holiday train, meeting and taking photos with Santa, and a screening of Moana 2 with the use of audio description headsets. The event provided valuable learning experiences where students practiced essential skills, such as:

- \* Mall navigation using Orientation and Mobility skills
- \* Movie theater navigation, which included:
  - ◇ Purchasing movie snacks at the concession stand
  - ◇ Using technologies to access the print menu
  - ◇ Interacting with theater workers
  - ◇ Understanding numbering systems
  - ◇ Familiarizing themselves with the layout of the theater, both inside and outside
  - ◇ Practicing auditorium/theater seating

The day also served as a wonderful opportunity for social interaction with peers and families. Students developed and strengthened their social skills and self-advocacy while enjoying time with peers, families, teachers, and school staff. This event not only brought the joy of the season to our students but also helped them build essential life skills in a fun and supportive environment. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all the partners, community members, and especially the HAB for their ongoing support. We look forward to continuing this tradition of empowerment, connection, and joy for years to come, enriching the lives of our students.

# December Book Club filled with Thriller, Mystery, and HO HO Surprises

By Terri-lynn Higashi Akamine and Lorenzo Barry

The December Book Club adventures at the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled theme was thriller and mystery. The event started with laughter, good cheer, and friends. The PAY committee and our youngest book club member Lorenzo and his family must have written a letter to Santa because he came to visit the book club at the Library for the Blind. Lorenzo said, “everyone was surprised, and I thought it was cool that Santa came.” Santa Claus came sharing good cheer and thanking folks for coming out. Checking his list to see if folks were naughty or nice. Santa even had a few helpers like Crata and Alex help pass out candy canes and introduce him.

Laughter filled the air with talks of their different book adventures. Lance Kamaka especially enjoyed sharing the book he had read. Thank you to all who came out to the book club and to the wonderful staff at the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled. It continues to be an engaging time filled with lively discussions, encourages the love of book reading for all

generations, and widens our imagination as we share our love of reading. Next month January 4th theme for the book club is cookbooks and things revolving around food. Let your imagination and taste buds captivate your mind. Come one come all. Make it your New Year’s resolution to spark the joy of reading by joining us at the next

## January 4 2024 Book Club

theme of cooking. It will be a mouth watering and flavorful time of sharing. This is just a friendly reminder that the next LBPD Book Club meeting is scheduled for Saturday, January 4th, at 2:00 pm till 3:30p.m. The book club will be meeting at the library, which is located at 402 Kapahulu Ave.

The December book club was filled with excitement and surprises talking about our mystery books and a surprise visit from Santa. People were excited to tell their stories about the many books they had read. While the book club was meeting Santa came by with a smile and a treat.

Remember, the reading theme for January meeting is cook books and anything food related. It could be fiction or nonfiction, in verse or prose, written for a child, teen, or adult. If you need help finding some appropriate reading materials or have any questions, give the library a call

at 808-733-8444.

Come prepared to have fun and hear about what's cooking. Family members and related agency staff friends are always welcome. RSVPs are always welcome too! Please call (808)733-8444 or email at [olbcirc@librarieshawaii.org](mailto:olbcirc@librarieshawaii.org). Remember it will be a yummy for the tummy fun time at the book club. Don't delay call the Library for the Blind today.



## Holo Holo Shoppers Event

Join Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialists Jeannie Camacho, Sherri Martinez, and Troy Kato for a supported shopping adventure within a local favorite gathering spot.

### Where

Pearl City Foodland Farms:  
1150 Kuala Street,  
Pearl City

### Dates

- \* Monday, January 20, 2025, 2:00-5:00 pm
- \* Friday, April 11, 2025, 4:00-7:00 pm
- \* Friday, May 2, 2025, 4:00-7:00pm

### Why

To provide a supported social gathering in a community setting to strengthen shopping, communication, and O&M skills

### RSVP

Sherri Martinez, COMS  
E: [sherrimartinez46@gmail.com](mailto:sherrimartinez46@gmail.com)  
P: (808) 561-5968

Liability Disclaimer: All participants are responsible for their own safety throughout the event. Hawaii Association of the Blind shall not assume any liability resulting in injury or death.

## Holo Holo Swap Meet Event

Take the HandiVan, The Bus, or The Rail. Join Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialists Jeannie Camacho, Sherri Martinez, and Troy Kato for a supported shopping adventure within a local favorite gathering spot.

### When:

Wednesday, March 26, 2025, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm (Prince Kuhio Day)

## Where:

Aloha Stadium Swap Meet  
99-500 Salt Lake Blvd.  
Aiea, HI 96701

## WHY:

To provide a supported social gathering in a community setting to strengthen shopping, communication, and O&M skills

## RSVP

Sherri Martinez, COMS  
E: sherrimartinez46@gmail.com  
P: (808) 561-5968

Liability Disclaimer: All participants are responsible for their own safety throughout the event. Hawaii Association of the Blind shall not assume any liability resulting in injury or death.

## Good e-Reader - Thursday, December 5, 2024 at 12:17 PM

A Digital Braille Device Invented by a Teenager may Change the Future of Reading

By Madeline Foster

In a previous post on GoodEreaders titled “Embracing Diversity in Literature: E-Readers and Audiobooks,” we discussed the Canute braille system. Currently, Canute is one of the best available technologies to assist blind individuals with reading. However,

as noted in the article, it comes with a hefty price tag that makes it unaffordable for most people. The system relies heavily on mechanical parts, which can malfunction and require costly repairs. For many, access to such technology is limited to libraries or schools.

During a recent trip to India, 14-year-old Yash Metha, a student from Durham Academy in North Carolina, observed that many students in the region did not have access to braille technology. With a keen interest in engineering and a creative mindset, Yash wondered if he could develop something better, prompting him to experiment with prototypes.

Working with teachers and students at the Blind Relief Association in New Delhi, he successfully built his first model and tested it with some students. His efforts paid off when he won first place in the Thermo Fisher Scientific Junior Innovators Challenge for the technology category and received a \$3,500 prize to encourage him to continue his research. He is currently focused on developing a low-cost model, with guidance from mentors in the field, and we eagerly await news on a potential release date.

Yash’s innovative braille device simulates braille dot patterns using a set of six rotating motors connected to an open-source electronics coding program called Arduino. The motors gently brush against the user’s fingers,

allowing them to read the braille output. While the concept may be more intricate than described, it is built on the widely accepted idea that if computers can read fingerprints, there must be a way to reverse the process.

Could a \$50 electronic braille device truly become the latest and greatest technology for reading? Suppose a high school student with creativity and a desire to help others can build a working prototype with little or no coding experience. In that case, the reality of a functional model seems plausible. This is especially true given the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence.

“The journey from concept to creation, fueled by innovation and creativity, is what entices me the most,” said Yash Metha.

A breakthrough in reading technology like this could help bring the world closer to achieving its sustainable goal of creating a more inclusive and diverse society. Well done, young man.

<https://goodereader.com/blog/technology/a-digital-braille-device-invented-by-a-teenager-is-changing-the-future-of-reading>

David Goldfield,  
Blindness Assistive Technology  
Specialist

If you need help using your assistive technology learn about my training services by visiting [WWW.ScreenReaderTraining.com](http://WWW.ScreenReaderTraining.com)

# Honolulu Star Advertiser

November 27, 2024

At least \$100K in transit fare revenue lost from cyberattack

By: Ian Bauer

A crippling cyberattack that targeted TheBus and TheHandi-Van earlier this year wound up costing the city \$100,000 or more in lost fare revenues, Honolulu officials indicate.

Nearly a half-year later, Oahu Transit Services Inc., the private company that manages the city’s bus and paratransit system, said its still working on implementing cybersecurity measures to protect its fleet as well as its ridership.

Over several days in mid-June, OTS said, thebus.org website, HEA (also known as Honolulu Estimated Arrival) and related GPS services were inoperable due to the cyberattack.

The city Department of Transportation Services said on June 18 that there was a cyber breach and that OTS was working with the proper authorities to investigate and handle the situation.

HOLO card readers on TheBus and TheHandi-Van were also affected.

However, Skyline rail operations were not affected by the breach, and, at the time, train riders were required to tap their HOLO cards at the fare gates, DTS said.

Initial and unconfirmed reports said the breach was the result of Dragon Force ransomware which extorts money from victims by first locking companies or agencies out of their own computer systems.

But during a June 18 news conference, Roger Morton, DTS director, told reporters OTS had not paid any ransom and that officials were unclear exactly what kind of cyberattack crippled the city systems.

Still, there was an indication from an outside entity that it was a result of an outside actor that had entered the system, he said at the time.

OTS cybersecurity experts jumped in to try to remedy the situation, and very quickly the phone system, which had been down Saturday morning was restored so that regular operations from the users continued with some minor Saturday interruptions. By Saturday afternoon everything was running normally as far as regular operations, said Morton, who added that the Honolulu Police Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation and other law enforcement agencies were informed of the cyberattack. What still does not operate normally is connections which require an external connection to other systems.

All in all, the impact of the cyberattack on the city's transit system was apparent.

OTS President and General Manager Robert Yu told the City

Councils Public Infrastructure and Technology Committee last week that the cyberattack caused disruptions to the bus system and HOLO card services for about two weeks.

Since that time, Yu said, OTS has looked at adding new firewalls to prevent cyberattacks and implemented additional cyber monitoring security features.

The breach also resulted in training our employees on the importance of looking at emails and making sure it's the proper email that you recognize the sender, he said Thursday at the meeting.

OTS is considering the use of a product that will recognize a first-time email sender to our network, he said. And the software will send a message to the first-time sender asking for verification before the email could come through our system, Yu told the committee. And we think that's one of the better security features that we want to look at.

OTS is looking at multifactor authentication, too, he said.

That's one of the things that we've been rolling out, he added. It's going to the office staff; any employees working remotely need to have (an) MFA. . Yu said that type of authentication system would be needed for OTS to potentially buy cyber insurance.

At the meeting, Andria Tupola, committee chair, asked how much revenue the city lost

during the two-week period in June.

About \$100,000, Yu replied.

And with this possible insurance you're going to get, in the event that happens again, would they cover the loss? she asked.

It all depends on what the exceptions are, Yu said.

Tupola then asked whether OTS had purchased insurance.

As soon as we get our MFA up, then we will look into it, Yu replied.

Tupola also queried whether the cyberattack came through an email.

Without sharing many details, Yu asserted one email came through an OTS email server, while another server was affected in a similar way.

Although Yu pegged the loss of transit revenue at \$100,000, Kaneohe resident Donald Sakamoto told the committee it was much more.

Sakamoto cited DTS Director Morton recently informing the Honolulu Rate Commission that the city lost approximately \$300,000 in fare revenue due to the cyberattack.

I'm kind of worried that that much money was lost in that two-week time, Sakamoto added.

After the meeting, OTS told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser there was only one cyber breach at its facility. . We estimated revenue lost at around \$100,000 using data provided by the Department of Transportation Services HOLO

card contractor, Ulu HI-Tech, an OTS spokesperson said.

There have been no cyber breaches on OTS since the June incident, the spokesperson said. And they confirmed that no ransom was ever paid over the breach at OTS either.

Meantime, high-tech data systems operate most of Honolulu's transit operations, according to Morton .

Just from DTS perspective, we have a number of data systems that we operate or have operated for us, he told the committee. First and foremost, we have our OTS system, which they operate themselves .

OTS is not part of the city system, he added.

They have their own IT department; they have cyber professionals within that group, Morton said.

He stressed that much of the city's transit system is largely protected from cyberattacks.

He also said Skylines Hitachi Rail system is a very comprehensive data rail system that keeps our trains running without an operator.

We operate all of our parking meters with an outside vendor; those are all connected through data systems, he said. We have our very sophisticated traffic signal control system, which goes around the island and controls all the traffic signals.

Morton said the traffic signal system is not connected to any



other system; it's not part of the internet or anything like that.

Honolulu's online outage in June recalls a prior, suspected hack into TheBus online system about three years before.

On Dec. 9, 2021, an alleged cyberattack targeting OTS disabled the online servers to both administrative and operating access for TheBus and TheHandi-Van, according to DTS.

While most resources related to operations of TheBus and TheHandi-Van were restored in that incident, email servers were shut down.

In what was later investigated as a ransomware attack, Honolulu city officials collaborated with transit agencies in other U.S. cities targeted by hackers affiliated with Russia.

The FBI, HPD and U.S. Secret Service also looked into the prior incident.

## **New Partnership Creates Groundbreaking Product**

American Printing House -  
Monday, December 2, 2024 at  
3:07 PM

American Printing House has partnered with General Electric (GE) Appliances in the creation of stickers to ensure accessible home appliances and greater independence for those who are

blind or low vision.

Last year, GE reached out to APH with an idea for a product after attending an accessibility workshop put on by staff members of APH. GE appliances had not only learned the importance of workplace accessibility but saw an opportunity to fill a need within their own products.

Andrew Moulton, Director of Technology and Manufacturing Research at APH, explained that as products become 'smarter' they also become less accessible. "Everything is flat screen, you know, there's no physical buttons or tactile touch screen," said Moulton. Joe Hodge, Technical Quality Assurance Supervisor at APH, said that in his experience shopping for appliances as a blind person he often searches for the oldest model possible. This way, it's more likely to have buttons he can navigate independently.

After learning about APH's selection of tactile stickers and overlays, GE felt there was an opportunity to solve this problem. The process consisted of developing an idea, producing prototypes, and creating a lot of surveys for the redesign. APH agreed to produce the stickers in-house as efficiently as possible to keep the products at a low price. It was important to GE to ensure the product was not only available, but attainable.

Joe Hodge recalls that the desire to produce intricate designs and cover a wide scope occasionally

got in the way of the initial purpose. “When we sat down with them, they had over 100 stickers with different symbols on them, and the symbols would range from ‘start’ to something like a pizza setting on a microwave. They had some things I had never seen before, like crushed ice,” said Joe. “No one ever teaches you what crushed ice looks like in school.” After a few rounds of receptive editing to the product, GE was able to come away with a set design that not only looked nice but was extremely functional. What the team did not expect to follow was the widespread recognition of the product as something innovative and forward moving for the future of accessibility in appliances. The product was announced at the Kitchen and Bath show in Las Vegas. A huge gathering for what’s new in the world of home tech and appliances, the show attracts a lot of attention as it sets the stage for revolutionary tech coming in the following year. USA Today chooses 15 new products each year to award ‘best in show,’ and to the team’s surprise, APH’s new stickers were 2nd on the list. “I think that’s pretty major because the other appliances on the list were smart televisions and app based. You know, high tech stuff,” said Andrew. The fact that this super low tech set of accessible stickers was mentioned is a huge win for both GE and APH,” said Andrew. The stickers have gone on to win more awards within the

past year, but more importantly, they’ve provided individuals who are blind or low vision with a greater opportunity for independence in their home.

To learn more or purchase your own set, visit GE’s website.

<https://www.aph.org/new-partnership-creates-groundbreaking-product/>

## **Annual Rearview Mirror Awards for those who made, preserved or shared Hawaii’s history: Terrance Tom**

Margaret Hamada

In November, I interviewed Terrance Tom, who played piano at several Hawaii lounges. He was a state legislator and is still a lawyer, which is not easy for a blind person to do.

Tom was told that he was the first person in the U.S. to take and pass the bar exam in Braille in 1973. I asked him to explain it to me.

“It is my understanding that prior to that, blind persons took the bar exam orally and not in Braille,” Tom said. “No one has ever disputed that I was the first to take it in Braille.

“Each part of the exam was released on the day it took place.

Mrs. Helen Nawaa, who was also blind and employed at the Library for the Blind, was seated in a room next to mine. A sighted person would read the printed materials aloud to her, and she would Braille (that's a verb) the questions for me.

"All of this was done on each day of the exam so I would have the exam questions in Braille at the same time my sighted counterparts received the questions. I did not have any additional time to take the exam as the sighted students.

"When I completed each day of the exam, a stenographer would come into my exam room, and I would read my answers for her to take down. Fortunately, I passed the exam on my first try."

Nawaa was part of a team that helped translate Tom's college textbooks into Braille. For that, I give Tom and Nawaa the 2024 Pioneering Spirit Award.

## Uber vs. Lyft: What's the Difference and Which Should I Use?

How-To Geek

Monday, December 16, 2024 at 9:15 AM

Uber and Lyft are two very similar services. Both are "ride-sharing" apps you pull up on your phone to quickly get a

ride somewhere from a driver using their own car. These two services have diverged a bit over the years, but there are still major similarities between them.

## How Uber and Lyft Work

These ride-sharing services work in basically the same way. They allow drivers, who are independent contractors and not employees of Uber or Lyft, to pick you up when you book a ride in the app. You're charged a standard fee with a base rate and a per-minute and per-mile fee. The cost generally adds up to much less than you'd spend on a traditional taxi for the same distance.

That's not the only reason people prefer them to taxis. You can book them from your phone and see exactly where the driver is and when they're arriving, which beats calling a taxi service and wondering when the taxi might arrive. The same app works in every city, or at least the cities where these services are available. Both apps allow you to select a pickup and drop-off location, see nearby cars, and track the car's location as it arrives. At the end of the ride, both let you rate your driver and even tip them from the app if you like. Drivers rate riders on both services, too.

For the standard service—known as an "uberX" in Uber or just a "Lyft" in Lyft—the experience is about the same. Both allow you

to book a larger SUV if you have more people or larger items that need transportation, a higher-end luxury car if you want that experience or a cheaper shared service known as “Uber Pool”—where you’ll ride with other people going in the same general direction for a small discount.

## **Uber and Lyft Are More Similar Than They Used to Be**

Lyft has cultivated a more playful, driver-friendly image. Lyft drivers used to have a pink mustache affixed to the front of their car and fist-bumped their passengers (though they don’t do either of those things anymore). Uber acquired a take-no-prisoners, combative reputation for the way it expanded into cities that had regulations on the books that would prohibit it, fighting legal and political battles only after launching the service in a city.

At this point, though, Uber and Lyft are more similar than they are different. In our experience, you’ll often call an Uber or Lyft and get in a car only to see that the same driver is driving for both companies. One driver who only drove for Lyft told us that this is typical of drivers who are driving full time, while others (perhaps retirees looking for a bit of extra work) often stick with one service.

Both Uber and Lyft screen their drivers in basically the same way. Anyone can apply to be a driver,

and Uber and Lyft both perform background checks with the driver’s social security number before approving them. Uber and Lyft use different background check companies, but the criteria for approval can vary based on the state.

## **They Cost About the Same**

There isn’t much of a price difference between the two services, in our experience. Competition has driven Lyft and Uber prices down to be largely the same in many areas. There may be a price difference in certain cities, but you can check it yourself using some online tools. Use the Uber Fare Estimate and Lyft Fare Estimate tools for your city (or a city you’re visiting) and plug the same pickup and drop-off addresses into both to compare prices.

Both services charge more during peak, high-demand times. Uber calls this “surge pricing,” and Lyft calls it “Prime Time.” This is designed to encourage drivers to get on the road to perform more pickups at times when there are a lot of people who need rides.

## **Uber Is More Widespread Than Lyft**

While these services are largely similar, there’s one big difference. Uber is available in 63 countries around the globe, while Lyft is mostly only available in the USA and Canada.

While Uber and Lyft are available in many (but not all) cities throughout the US, there may be gaps in drive availability. While a large city like San Francisco has a lot of drivers for both Uber and Lyft, smaller cities frequently have more Uber drivers than Lyft drivers, at least in our experience. Uber is still the bigger name here, and it can show.

If you like Lyft, don't let this sway you from giving it a try. But you may want to have both the Uber and Lyft apps installed, so you can call an Uber if you find yourself somewhere where there aren't many Lyfts available.

Both Uber and Lyft offer a more expensive service with high-end black cars and professional drivers. Uber has UberBLACK, while Lyft has Lyft Premier, Lyft Lux, and Lyft SUV. But, again, Uber was the first to launch this level of service. You may encounter cities where UberBLACK is available, but the Lyft luxury car services aren't.

## **The Elephant in the Room: Uber's Bad Behavior**

It's impossible to compare Uber and Lyft without talking about Uber's bad reputation. This isn't just about Uber's internal culture or its violation of laws that seem designed to protect the taxi industry, either. In October 2016, hackers stole the personal information of some 57 million people from Uber's servers. 50 million riders had their names,

email addresses, and phone numbers stolen. That's not too much information if you're just a rider. However, 7 million drivers also had their information accessed, and the attackers acquired 600,000 driver's license numbers.

Rather than responsibly disclose the hack, Uber paid the hackers \$100,000 to delete the data and hid this attack for more than a year, in apparent violation of the law. Uber's new CEO Dara Khosrowshahi, who took over in September 2017, told Bloomberg that "None of this should have happened, and I will not make excuses for it." He also said that Uber is "changing the way we do business."

While Uber has been attempting to improve its image and culture recently, it's no surprise that many people have shunned Uber for Lyft given consumer-hostile behavior like that. For a time, Lyft was growing faster than Uber, but Uber is still overwhelmingly more popular in the US.

However, it's worth noting that many of the things Uber is criticized for are things Lyft also does. Both services use independent contractors instead of employees, pay their drivers about the same, and have a version of "surge pricing" that charges more during busy times. Both services are working on self-driving cars to one day replace those drivers, too.

### **It's Not Just About Car Rides**

While Uber and Lyft both made a name for their ride-sharing

services, they've branched out to other areas. The big one is Uber Eats, which has become nearly as popular as Doordash and Grubhub. It works essentially the same as those other services. Uber drivers act as the delivery drivers for restaurants. Lyft doesn't have its own food delivery service, but the company's "Lyft Pink" premium subscription includes free access to Grubhub+.

Uber also has an off-shoot service called "Carrier," which allows you to request a driver through the Uber app to transport packages on your behalf. Lyft does not offer a similar service. Another service that both companies do offer is scooter rentals. In many cities throughout the USA, you'll find Uber and Lyft-branded scooters lying around. They can be rented and paid for with the regular Uber or Lyft app on your phone.

Ultimately, the best choice between Lyft and Uber depends on your individual needs and priorities. If you're looking for the widest range of services and availability, Uber might be the way to go. No matter which you choose, both companies offer a level of convenience and flexibility that's hard to beat in today's on-demand world. So next time you need to get somewhere, grab your phone and take your pick – the open road (and a whole lot more) awaits.

<https://www.howtogeek.com/219126/uber-vs-lyft-whats-the-difference-and-which-should-i-use/>

## You Can Touch the Elf on the Shelf: A Letter from Santa Claus

ConnectCenter - Tuesday, December 3, 2024 at 9:08 AM

Editor's note: Santa gives permission to children who are blind or low vision to touch their "Elf on the Shelf." We hope you utilize this updated post from parent Holly Bonner of of Blind Motherhood to make the holidays meaningful and accessible for your child!

### About Elf on the Shelf

"Elf on the Shelf" has quickly become a popular holiday tradition in families and schools around the globe! This combination book with a plush elf tells the story of how Santa Claus relies on scout elves to help him determine who's been naughty and who's been nice.

Once children go to bed, each elf flies back to the North Pole, offering Santa a full report on that day's events. Before the children awaken, the elf returns to his assigned home. He chooses a different place to hide but not before causing a bit of mischief, engaging in various holiday antics like dangling from the Christmas tree or making snow

angels from the family sugar bowl. Children who participate in this activity gleefully anticipate finding their elf each morning and seeing just what he's been up to while they are fast asleep.

There is only one rule according to the story: if the child touches the elf, it will lose its magic. Herein lies the problem for so many parents of children who are blind or low vision. Many kids have been experiencing stress, anxiety, and in severe cases, bullying, as a result of their instinctively wanting to touch these elves so that they, too, may fully experience this tradition with some tactile connection.

In an attempt to remedy these issues, Santa has issued a letter to all children who are blind or low vision. He asks that you read this note to your child and print a copy to keep in your "Elf on the Shelf" storybook for years to come.

A Letter from Santa Claus

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am so glad you have welcomed my magical Scout Elf into your family! I know you will love visiting with him as we count down the days to Christmas Eve. In the book that came with your elf, you probably heard my rule, "If you touch your elf, his magic 'might go' and then I won't hear all your elf has seen or knows."

My dear child, part of my job as Santa Claus is to know everything I can about each little boy and girl on my list. I understand how you use your other senses, like

hearing, taste, smell, and touch, to help you experience the world around you. You may even read braille. Did you know that I can read braille too?

Christmas is a magical time of year, and everyone deserves to "feel it." The elf that I sent to be your scout was selected just for you! His magic is extremely unique because he can only be touched by a child who is blind or low vision! Every morning when you discover where your elf has been hiding, you have my permission to feel what he's been up to. Grab his hands and see what he's holding. Run your finger along his body to feel if he's cold from his journey back from the North Pole. Hold his tiny body close to your nose and take a whiff. Does he smell like gingerbread? If he does, I bet it's because he's been sneaking cookies from Mrs. Claus' kitchen. Ho! Ho! Ho!

If anyone may have worried you about ruining the magic of Christmas because you have touched my elf, please don't listen to them. There are many people in this world who are convinced we "must see in order to believe," but I know each of us feels the spirit of Christmas differently. Your blindness or low vision will never stop you from knowing the joy and magic of this wondrous season! Remember, you have my permission to always touch your Elf on the Shelf.

I look forward to visiting your house on Christmas Eve. I wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays! Take good care of my elf!

Love,  
Santa

<https://aphconnectcenter.org/holiday/you-can-touch-the-elf-on-the-shelf-a-letter-from-santa-claus/>