

Folsom Prison brailist is first in the world to receive top award

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Posted by [Michele Kane, CALPIA](#) | Dec 29, 2023 12:16 pm | [Community News](#)



For more than 21 years, Lyale Shellman has mastered the world of Braille. A soft-spoken man who works at his desk, not from home, but inside Folsom State Prison, Lyale provides leadership and guidance to the California Prison Industry Authority's (CALPIA) Braille program.

"When people go inside our Braille program, Lyale is that shining light offering them insight as to what it takes to be a top-notch Brailist," said CALPIA's General Manager Bill Davidson. "Lyale is a great example of what it takes to be a success story in our programs."

The Braille program has been around since 1989 through a partnership with the Folsom Lions Club. Twenty incarcerated individuals transcribe books into Braille for blind and visually impaired students as part of CALPIA's Digital Services.

"The guys who go through this program are successful by becoming Braille transcribers," added Davidson. "CALPIA changes their lives for the better by providing meaningful work while incarcerated along with the ultimate goal they never return to prison."

Shellman is quick to point out that it takes an amazing team to make the Braille program excel. Wearing his iron-pleated prison blues, Lyale leads tour groups through the program and makes sure to give credit to all the students and staff in Digital Services.

“For a man serving life in prison, this program gives life meaning,” said Lyale.

Incarcerated individuals who participate in CALPIA’s program complete certifications through the Library of Congress and the National Braille Association.

“Each certification takes time – between 250-700 hours of learning and studying,” added Shellman who has received all his certifications in Braille, even in Math and Music.

Past District President of the Lions Club, Don Ring, said this program works and is quick to add that only 20 individuals are certified throughout North America who hold all certifications including Lyale.

Ring is thrilled to share its success with others. He, along with other representatives from the Lion’s Club, awarded Lyale in late December for his years of hard work serving others with the Melvin Jones Fellowship Award.

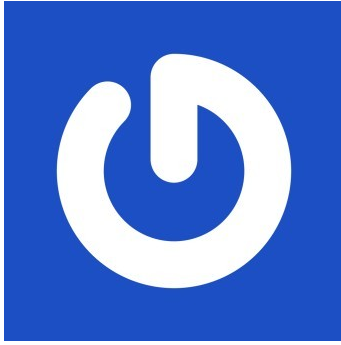
“Lyale is the first in the world to receive this award as an incarcerated individual,” said Ring. “It means a lot to the Lions Club. We are very proud of Lyale.”

Lions Clubs International recognizes outstanding individuals by bestowing on them an award that is named after its founder, Melvin Jones. The Fellowship Award is the highest form of recognition and embodies humanitarian ideas with the recipient becoming a model of exemplary service to the club and the community for which it serves.

“I am so grateful,” said Lyale after receiving the award and choking back tears. “To give back to the most vulnerable is humbling.”



About The Author



[Michele Kane, CALPIA](#)
