

TAR HEEL TALK



Volunteer Spotlight

Wesley Brown 16

FEATURES

Writing Contest Winners 2

Staff Feature 7

Accessible Voting Information 19

WRITING CONTEST WINNERS

We are thrilled to announce the winners of the 2023 Writing Contest!

We enjoyed reviewing the short stories, poems, and even songs submitted by our patrons. Winning pieces are being published by the library and featured on BARD. Here are the winners of the 2023 Writing Contest!

Adults Division:



First Place:

Jennifer O'Bryan, *Walter's Project* – Short Story



Second Place:

Willie Holmes, *Losing Sight* – Poem



Third Place:

Evakay Favia, *Gilbert Gottfried* – Short Story

Adults Division Continued:



Honorable Mention:

Diana Soto, *That Summer* – Short Story



Honorable Mention:

Delilah Baker, *The Dream Vacation* – Short Story

Ages 13-17 Division:



First Place:

Amaya Vick, *The Complication* – Short Story

We'd like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated in the contest. We are already looking forward to the next contest, which will launch in September. It isn't too soon to start preparing a piece for this Fall.

Keep writing and stay inspired!

2024 WRITING CONTEST



That time of year is approaching again! We will be accepting entries for our annual writing contest from **September 1, 2024, through **December 31, 2024**.**

Contestant entries may include the following: short stories, novel excerpts, poems, songs, fiction/nonfiction, autobiographies/biographies, or something entirely different— be creative!

All submissions will be judged on the following criteria: Clarity, Spelling, Grammar, and Creativity. Each contestants' entry has the potential to be added to our collection. If your entry is selected, we will notify you before it is published. The entry will be subject to editing before it is added. The contest will be divided into four age groups: 8 and younger, 9-12, 13-17, and 18 and older. Your entry will automatically be entered into your age group at the time of submission.

Writing Contest Rules

- Contestants must be a patron of Accessible Books and Library Services
- Your entry must be your own original work.
- Entries must not use artificial intelligence as a part of their creation.
- Please do not use previously published materials.
- Only one entry per contestant will be allowed.
- There is a 5,000-word count limit for all submissions.
- All mail-in entries must be typewritten, at least 14-point font, double-spaced with numbered pages, and include a cover page with a title and the author's name.
- If your entry is in Braille, an additional translated Word file will be required.
- If your entry is in an audio format, please include a transcript as a Word file.
- If your entry contains images, please include alt text.
- If your submission is in a different language, an English translation will be required.

Acceptable Submission Formats:

All writing contest submissions must be in one of the following formats: Word File, Audio File, Braille File, Mail-In Type-written.

Prizes:

The following prizes will be available to each age group:

- 1st Place - Contestant will receive a certificate and the first-place prize. Submission will be added to the library's

collection and made available for download.

- **2nd Place** - Contestant will receive a certificate and the second-place prize. Submission will be added to the library's collection and made available for download.
- **3rd Place** - Contestant will receive a certificate and the third-place prize. Submission will be added to the library's collection and made available for download.
- **Honorable Mentions** - Contestant will receive a certificate. Submission will be added to the library's collection and made available for download.

Prizes are provided by the Friends of Accessible Books and Library Services. All other contestants will receive a certificate for their entry.

Visit the ABLS Writing Contest Page:

slnc.info/WC22

Submit your entry:

slnc.info/WC22submit

Access Resources for writing:

slnc.info/WC22-resources

STAFF FEATURE



ABLS Welcomes Leslie Yount, Jason Richmond, and Jabria Williams!

The library has had a few new staff additions this year and we would like to introduce them to our library's community. So Instead of featuring one new staff member, we'll feature three!

First is Leslie Yount. Leslie is new to our Pa-

tron Processing Department. In the Patron Processing Department, Leslie is responsible for keeping track of the status of our many patrons. When new patron applications come in, she is responsible for putting the new pa-

Pictured from top: Leslie Yount, Jason Richmond, Jabria Williams

tron in our system so we may provide that patron with library services. Whether a patron is coming or leaving for any reason, Leslie along with the other department staff will update their status in our records. Currently, her department is working on digitizing all of our patrons' records. Since we have thousands of patrons, this is an all hands on deck job for the department of four.

Next, there is Jason Richmond. Jason is our new Systems and Digital Services Librarian, meaning his main responsibility is managing and maintaining our integrated library system, KLAS. This involves maintaining our database that not only holds our patrons' records, but also records involving our collection and circulation

of our books and materials. One of his recent projects involved improving the process in which we distribute talking magazines to our patrons receiving cartridges.

Finally, there is Jabria Williams. Jabria is interning with us this summer in our Volunteer and Outreach Services Unit (VOSU). As the name of the department implies, she'll be responsible for working with volunteers and significantly contributing to our outreach endeavors. Working with the volunteers may include helping out with the studio volunteers, setting up the volunteer area for the volunteers coming in that day, and providing volunteers with support if they have questions about their volunteer duties. In outreach, her duties include reaching out to

potential community organizations that could benefit from our services, engaging with the community during outreach events, and contributing to this newsletter.

We are excited to welcome our newest staff to our library team! Here's your chance to get to know a little about them!

Q: What led you to join this library team?

Leslie: I'd been a graphic designer for over 18 years and was looking for a change.

Jason: I visited ABLIS several times starting in library school and later while working at a public library on an assistive technology grant. It heartened me knowing this place existed to provide resources for people that we could not serve well at my previous library.

When I saw the posting for the Systems and Digital Services position, I was excited to get a chance to work here in a capacity that is a good fit for my skills and experience.

Jabria: Since I was a little girl, I have loved reading. It was always an escape from the world. I was raised by a single mother, and she would always say that an "education is the one thing no one can ever take away from you." I held this advice close to my heart throughout my academic career. I read, learned and grew. I say this because it explains why I decided to join this team. I want to work with groups of people who work every day to provide accessible books and tools for reading to people in underrepresented communities, working every day to give them a way to es-

cape from reality.

Q: What are you looking forward to most in your job?

Leslie: Learning new things and growing as an individual.

Jason: I'm excited to dig into the technology at ABLS that I haven't used before.

Jabria: I am looking forward to establishing more community connections and expanding the reach of our services to more individuals.

Q: What goal or goals would you like to accomplish here?

Leslie: Finding ways to improve the accessibility of our patron materials while also helping to make processes more streamlined and efficient.

Jason: I think tech people are doing their best work when

they aren't noticed. If everything just works without issue, you don't need to call someone to fix it. My goal is for the technology at ABLS to work so smoothly patrons can get their materials and staff can provide stellar service without having to struggle with or even really think about the underlying system.

Jabria: My main goal is to build the connection between the community and the library, make a significant contribution to the quarterly newsletter and present themed catalogs of books.

Q: What is most important to you in a library?

Leslie: Options! I believe in the availability of all books – in an accessible format, of course.

Jason: I am a big believer in a

public library's mission to provide free and equitable access to the world's information.

Jabria: Representation and inclusivity. Making sure that everyone can come into a library and feel seen and heard.

Q: Who is your favorite author and why?

Leslie: Albert Camus speaks to me, as I can relate to the constant threat of an existential crisis.

Jason: I really don't have a favorite author. I tend to read broadly across fiction and nonfiction. However, there is one author that literally changed the course of my life, and that was Robert Putnam. Best known for *Bowling Alone*, I read his work in college and it led me to working in libraries.

Jabria: My current favorite au-

thor is Frieda McFadden. McFadden is a thriller writer and is not a cookie cutter author. The plot twist and storylines are not only intriguing but enticing and makes the reader want to continue to read.

Q: What is one book and one movie you would bring to a deserted island?

Leslie: Albert Camus's *A Happy Death*. As a child of the early '80s, I'd be bereft without *The Goonies* – although it's a toss-up between that and *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*.

Jason: My choice for book is *The Count of Monte Cristo*. It's a long and dense book so would chew up many hours and hold up for several re-reads. For a movie, I would bring *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. If there

are any birds on the island, it would be my mission to find out how many coconuts they can carry.

Jabria: My book of choice would have to be Fahrenheit 451. My movie of choice is The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Q: What's an interesting fact you would like to share about yourself?

Leslie: Define interesting. I feel like the more I talk to people, the weirder they think I am.

Jason: I disliked libraries growing up and rarely visited them. I read a lot but got most of my books from used book stores. It wasn't until after college that I volunteered at my local public library, then went to library school, that I learned of my family's librarian roots. My grandfather and my

great-grandmother were librarians.

Jabria: I am a first-generation college student attending North Carolina A&T on a full ride scholarship! I am active on campus as I currently serve as the Miss 1929 for the Beta Epsilon Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and am also the current Junior Class Secretary for the class of 2026 through my school's Student Government Association.

FRIENDS CORNER

“I would rather walk with a friend in the dark than walk alone in the light”

-Linda Grayson



Hello to all of our Friends of the NC Accessible Books and Library Services. Happy Summer to everyone! Recently, I read an article entitled “Read for Your Health” in the May 2024 Mayo Clinic Health Letter magazine. This article is about a doctor who is an avid reader, and she recommends books to her patients to educate them and to have them learn more about specific health conditions they may be experiencing. She uses non-fiction books, but she also recommends narrative books



such as fiction and memoir books that are easier to read and more accessible to patients. As patrons of the Library, we all have thousands of books available to us with hundreds of genres for us to explore. Yes, we can read books to help us learn more about health issues, but I started thinking about reading in general, and how reading benefits our lives. So, I googled “benefits of reading” and here is some of what I found:

Reading reduces stress. It helps you sleep better, and keeps your mind sharp. Reading can improve rela-

tionships. It strengthens your brain, expands your knowledge, and enhances creativity and imagination. Reading improves memory, language and communication skills. It improves mental health, and provides enrichment and entertainment.

This is an amazing list, and as you think about this, you can probably add your own personal benefits of reading to this list. As patrons, we are very fortunate to have such a terrific library service available to us, and the staff at the SLNC Accessible Books and Library Services are the greatest! This is a perfect time to also remind you that the Library has a Summer Reading Program that both youth and adults can sign up for. Give

the Library a call to find out more and to sign up for this event.

Within the next few months, there will be statewide events where the Friends of the Library will have an informational table about our services and programs. Please take the opportunity to stop by and say hello. This is also a golden opportunity to sign up as a new member of the Friends or renew your existing membership. Your membership and donations continue to allow us to support the services and programs of the Library. There are various levels of Friends membership, and you may join us for as little as \$10 annually. We look forward to seeing many of you at these events and sharing a “Hello.”

Until next time, wishing you all the best, and once again, have a safe and happy summer! As always, remember- be a friend, hug a friend, and join the Friends of the Accessible Books and Library Services!

Happy reading!

Eddie Weaver, President, FNCABLS

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VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



**Wesley Brown, ABLS
Volunteer**



Meet **Wesley Brown**, also known as **Wes**, a resident of Raleigh with low vision who volunteers at the State Library of North Carolina Accessible Books and Library Services (ABLS) on a weekly basis. **Wes's** love for volunteering greatly benefits the library by allowing us to better

serve our patrons. **Wes** started volunteering with ABLS in 2022 and says that one of his favorite parts of volunteering at the library is the chance to meet new people and “show off” his work ethic.

Wes recounts one of his favorite memories with SLNC Accessible Books and Library Services. He was invited to our library’s annual volunteer recognition luncheon where he played the piano during the

reception. “I had never been to a luncheon and when they asked me to play the piano, I thought it was really cool.” Wes has been playing the piano since he was 5. Having a mix of self-taught lessons and standard studio lessons, Wes found a love for music. This super-star volunteer talks about how music is his escape “Whenever I am having a bad day or something is going wrong, I listen to music, and it brings me so much joy and happiness...always being there to lift me up.”

Wes is known for playing the piano as it also has a deep connection with his grandmother, who taught him lessons from a young age and inspired him to keep playing. However, in total, he knows how to play

4 instruments. Wes is also a songwriter and posts music on his YouTube channel that he started back in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Wes’s YouTube channel was launched in 2020, after he completed the NC Achieving a Better Life Experience (NC ABLE) program. The NC ABLE Program is administered by the North Carolina Department of State Treasurer and is dedicated to preparing people with disabilities to increase their independence, learn about jobs and colleges, and any endeavors that they may want to pursue.

Just as the NC ABLE program helped Wes succeed in his music endeavors, he has shared that SLNC Accessible

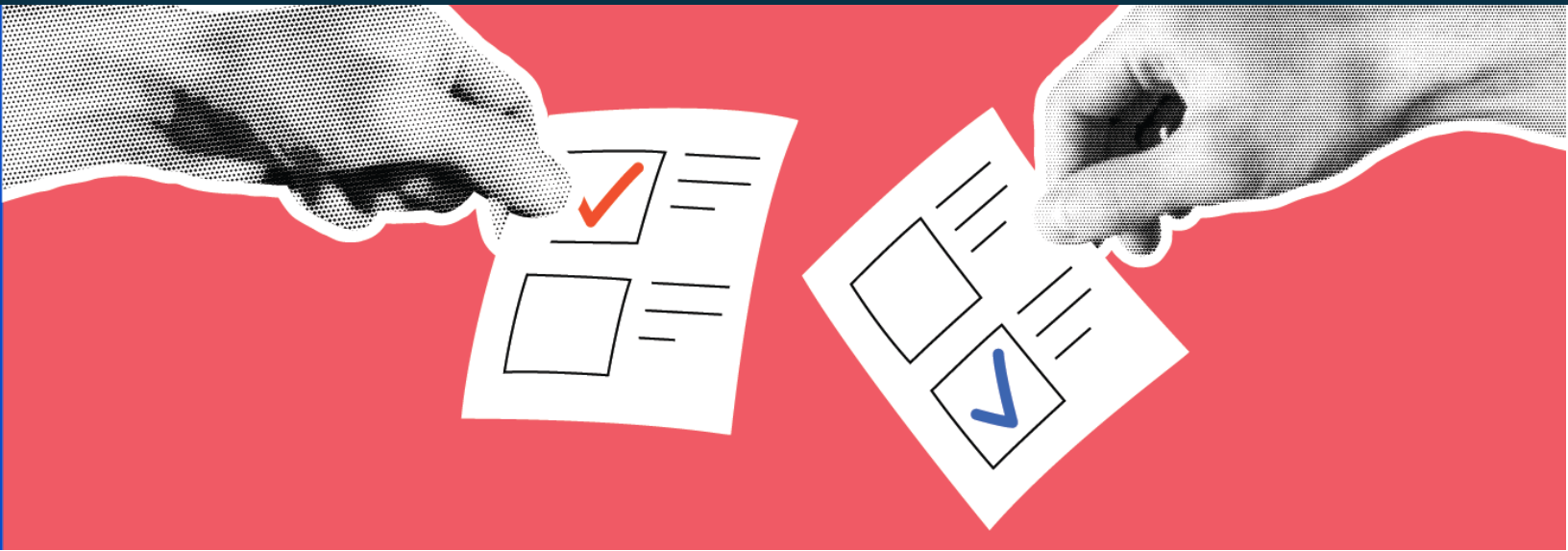
Books and Library Services have also had a positive impact on his life. The library has allowed him to explore new books and expand his knowledge on many topics.

By volunteering, Wes helps to ensure that SLNC Accessible Books and Library Services can best serve our patrons and that we continue to provide a community of resources for all people with print disabilities.

DOWNLOAD SOMETHING NOBLE

One of the many services we offer our patrons is access to our version of BARD we call NOBLE (North Carolina BARD Local). NOBLE features digital braille books and digital talking books and magazines which are published in North Carolina and produced by our library. While there is no patron application necessary to use NOBLE, all media downloaded from NOBLE can only be played on a digital book player approved by the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled. You may visit NOBLE to see if there is anything you would like to download by going to slnc.info/ABLS-NOBLE.

ACCESSIBLE VOTING



North Carolina visually impaired voters can request and vote using an absentee ballot online. This article aims to publicize the online accessible absentee ballot and share information on how to take advantage of this option.

A thorough overview of the process for voting using the accessible ballot can be found on the NC State Board of Elections website at sinc.info/ABLS-VOTE. The “How It Works” section will walk you through the process

of requesting, accessing, marking, and returning the accessible absentee ballot.

The NC State Board of Elections webpages and forms are all compatible with screen readers and allow for entering signatures digitally. As with

anyone voting absentee, you must have two witnesses that sign (or type) attesting that they have witnessed you marking your ballot and verify your identity. The witnesses are not to observe how you vote.

You can practice locating, marking, and returning a demo ballot at any time through the N.C. Absentee Demo Ballot Portal at slnc.info/BDEMO.

Additional information about the voting options for voters with disabilities, including help for those in care facilities, curbside voting, requesting ballots in alternative formats like large print, etc. can be found on the NC State Board of Elections website at slnc.info/NCBSE.

If you are blind or visually impaired and need assistance with any aspect of voting, please first contact your county board of elections. If you are not familiar with your county's board of election, you may find them using vt.ncsbe.gov/BOEInfo.

You may also contact the ADA Coordinator, at:

Email:

ADACoordinator@ncsbe.gov

Phone:

(919) 805-1302

Address:

6400 Mail Service Center,
Raleigh, NC 27699-6400



SPOTLIGHT ON ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY

The State Library of North Carolina Accessible Books and Library Services (SLNC ABLIS) focuses on providing reading resources and programs for the community of print disabled and visually impaired citizens all around NC. We also provide information on new accessible technologies. The following is an example of how far such technology is advancing.

U.S. Representative Jennifer

Wexton has used several new technological developments to develop speeches or share video messages. On May 6th, 2024, Rep. Wexton delivered a speech using an app that acts as an assistive program that converts written text into a form of speech, which is known as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). In July, she also released a video that uses artificial intelligence (AI) in com-

combination with AAC to deliver a message in a voice model based on her own, prior to the changes she experienced after being diagnosed with progressive supranuclear palsy (PSP). Wexton, 55, was diagnosed with PSP in September 2023. This disease affects walking, swallowing, maintaining balance, and eye movement. Wexton served as a trial attorney, state legislator and a candidate for the House before her diagnoses. After the life changing prognosis, the seasoned politician now uses a voice that is generated from a computer, with the same power and intensity as before.

Current accessible technology devices that are available

through our services include the NLS digital talking book players and accessories, the ZooMax braille eReaders, the accessible BARD Mobile app, and more.



DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THESE NLS SERVICES?

Did you know that our library is part of the **National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) network?**

The NLS Network has at least one library in every state of the United States and in some territories. While each of the network library offers the same core service of providing accessible books, the individual network libraries may provide something in addition the core services. A couple of examples being how our library provides Descriptive DVDs and Washington Talking Books has a Multisensory Storytime.

NLS has unique services they provide that any NLS Network patron may benefit from. These services can supplement the services you receive from our library. In case you didn't know what additional services you may benefit from, we have them listed them for starting on the next page.

Braille Education

Discover the future of braille certification with the National Federation of the Blind! Join our NLS-approved programs led by experts like Jennifer Dunnam for a transformative journey into braille literacy and accessible reading solutions. Contact us now to unlock a world of braille opportunities. Learn more:

slinc.info/NLS-BE

Braille on Demand

Love revisiting your favorite books? As an NLS patron and braille reader, explore our Braille-on-Demand program to have up to five books a month in hardcopy braille at your fingertips, indefinitely. Choose from tens of thousands of titles available on BARD and make your requests hassle-free through our easy request form or by reaching out to our dedicated support team.

Learn more: slinc.info/NLS-BOD

Patron Announce

Stay in the loop with NLS! Sign up for Patron Announce, our email listserv service, to receive regular updates on upcoming events, projects, and the latest NLS news straight to your inbox. Simply send your name and email address to NLSPE@loc.gov to join, and unsubscribe anytime hassle-free.

The Many Faces of BARD

The Patron Engagement Section offers The Many Faces of BARD online event the second Thursday of every month, at 7:00 p.m. eastern time. Each monthly event covers one aspect of BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download service) and is open to all. From this page, you can also listen to previous Many Faces of BARD recordings! Learn more: <https://slnc.info/NLS-TMFB>

Quarterly Patron Corner -

Quarterly Patron Corner, presented the second Monday of the third month of the quarter, shares specific information of interest to patrons regarding an announced topic. From this page you can listen to the previous recordings of the Quarterly Patron Corner! Learn more: slnc.info/NLS-PC

International Language Materials

Discover a world of literary treasures with NLS! From audio to braille, they offer a diverse array of titles in languages beyond English, facilitated by the Marrakesh Treaty. Explore their expanding international collections, including Spanish, French, German, and many more, all available through our accessible platforms like BARD. Join us in embracing the richness of global literature today! Learn more: slnc.info/NLS-ILM

Music Service and Materials

Discover the world's largest music collection for the blind and print disabled at NLS! With over 25,000 titles including braille and large-print scores, instructional materials, and music-related magazines available via postage-free mail or digital download, accessing enriching musical experiences has never been easier. Eligible individuals can request this exceptional service directly from NLS headquarters in Washington, DC, ensuring seamless access to a diverse array of musical resources. Learn more: slinc.info/NLS-MSM

Overseas Services

Experience the world of literature without boundaries! NLS's overseas program, designed for American citizens living abroad or eligible non-US citizens dependent on active-duty military or diplomatic personnel, offers free access to a vast collection of books and magazines in audio or braille formats. Whether through mail delivery, electronic access via BARD, or loaned digital talking-book machines, this service ensures that reading knows no borders. Learn more: slinc.info/NLS-OSS



NC Department of Health and Human Services Division of Services for the Blind Youth and Student Services Pre-Employment Transition Services (PRE-ETS)

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) partners with students, families, schools and other service providers to give students an early start at career exploration and preparation for life after high school.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (PRE-ETS)

- Are available for students with a disability, ages 14-21
- Can be requested by a student, school, parent, guardian or another service provider

PRE-ETS Topics

- Workplace Readiness Training is designed to help students develop independent living and social skills necessary for success in employment.

- **Job Exploration Counseling** helps students assess their unique skills and interests, learn about in-demand jobs and industries, and make informed decisions about their career pathways.
- **Self-Advocacy Instruction** equips students with information about accommodations, disability rights, peer mentoring and other resources, and helps students develop self-awareness and self-determination skills.
- **Counseling on Post-secondary Options** will teach students about opportunities for education and training after high school and explore post-secondary resources in their community and beyond.
- **Work-Based Learning Experiences** can include information interviews, jobs shadowing, opportunities for paid employment and other activities that connect classroom learning with the realities of work, help students make informed decisions about their options and prepare for a successful future.
- **DSB offers PRE-ETS at no cost to students. Call 866-222-1546 for a referral to your local office or visit our website ncdhhs.gov/dsb.**

NEW USPS POLICIES FOR PACKAGE PICKUP

The United States Postal Service (USPS) has instituted new optional policies for pickup of packages such as braille and digital books due to staff shortages, turnover, and seasonal workers.

USPS requests that patrons who may need this service use the on-line form at slnc.info/USPS-ABLS to schedule pickup of library materials. Patrons who do not have computer or internet access may call USPS at 800-275-8777 or reach out to us for assistance.

We would like to emphasize this action is optional, and not all patrons will be required to schedule their library materials to be picked up. If your library materials have always been picked up by the USPS no action may be required on your part. However, if you have had carriers who have not picked up your library materials, this policy can be a remedy.

CATALOG WEBSITE UPDATE

SLNC Accessible Books and Library Services catalog has a new address! It is now available online at ncabls.klas.com.

Please remember to update your bookmarks. If you need assistance doing so, do not hesitate to contact the library.



medicare

MEDICARE INFORMATION IN ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

Medicare provides free auxiliary aids and services, including information in accessible formats like braille, large print, data or audio files, relay services and TTY communications. If you request information in an accessible format, you won't be disadvantaged by any additional time necessary to provide it. This means you'll get extra time to take any action if there's a delay in fulfilling your request.

To request Medicare or Marketplace information in an accessible format you can:

1. Call us

- For Medicare: **1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)**
- TTY: **1-877-486-2048**

2. Send us a fax: 1-844-530-3676

3. Send us a letter:

**Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Offices of Hearings and Inquiries (OHI)**

**7500 Security Boulevard, Mail Stop S1-13-25
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850
Attn: Customer Accessibility Resource Staff**

- Your request should include your name, phone number, type of information you need (if known), and the mailing address where we should send the materials. We may contact you for additional information.
- Note: If you're enrolled in a Medicare Advantage Plan or Medicare drug plan, contact your plan to request its information in an accessible format.
- For Medicaid, contact your State Medicaid office.

“Tar Heel Talk” is a quarterly publication of the State Library of North Carolina Accessible Books & Library Services section (SLNC-ABLS) and the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

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