



**DeafBlind**  
ONTARIO SERVICES

# keeping [in touch]

DeafBlind Ontario Services | Fall 2019



# WORKING IN PARTNERSHIPS





# Combined Partnership to Improve Community-Based Support Services for Ontarians with Complex Needs

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**At DeafBlind Ontario Services, we set the standard and promote excellence in our field. We are excited to announce that we've come together with PHSS to form an integrative partnership.**

Established in 1988, PHSS is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting people with developmental disabilities and/or complex physical needs so they can live in their own homes, participate in the community, and enjoy life with family and friends.

Providing 24-hour care in residential homes, day and overnight respite, and recreational programs, PHSS supports more than 200 individuals in more than 50 locations throughout Ontario.

We are not amalgamating our services, but rather exploring the integration of our back end processes in IT, Finance, Marketing and Communications, as well as Recruitment to be more cost-effective and efficient.

The partnership comes at a time when significant changes are underway in Ontario's health and social support systems as a means to help ensure these populations' needs continue to be recognized and addressed, while reducing strain on the system.

"The combined services of DeafBlind Ontario Services and PHSS provides

long-term value through quality, specialized support for individuals with multiple, complex needs," said Roxanna Spruyt-Rocks, CEO of DeafBlind Ontario Services.

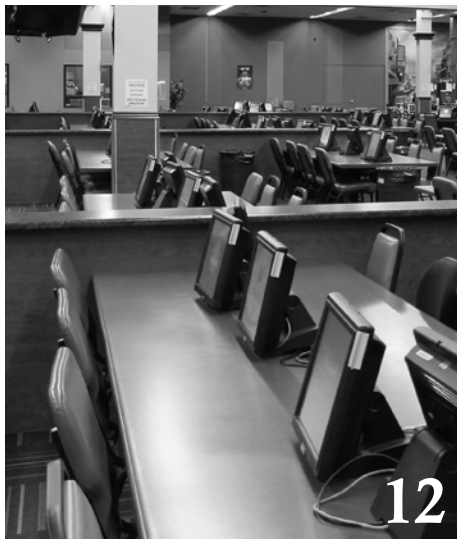
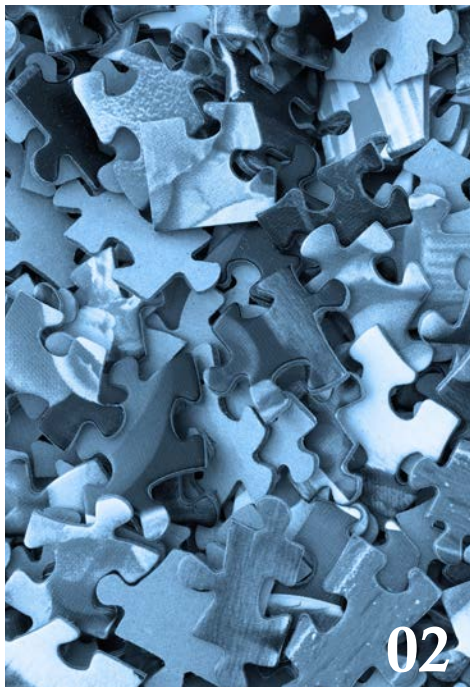
"Rather than being inappropriately admitted to a hospital or long term care facility, they can remain in the community with appropriate supports, which is less taxing on the system. Savings from this integration will allow us to further bolster the necessary services we provide Ontarians."

"We want to achieve an efficient, sustainable system that helps remove barriers for people who require a flexible mix of health care and supports, to improve health outcomes and increase their independence," said Brian Dunne, President and CEO of PHSS.

Our services are different, yet complementary. This partnership will enhance the ability of DeafBlind Ontario Services and PHSS to share specialized expertise and services that benefit the people we support, while working together to promote the unique needs of these populations who require access to integrated support services and health care in remote communities and urban centers across Ontario.

For more information, visit [deafblindontario.com](http://deafblindontario.com).

**Goal to improve outcomes while helping reduce strain on the system**



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# TOGETHER WE THRIVE

**Ready to make a difference? Join our team!** At DeafBlind Ontario Services, we want you to be your best. We provide a collaborative culture, supportive environment, open communication, and commitment to your personal and professional development. Start your career with DeafBlind Ontario Services today, apply online at [deafblindontario.com](http://deafblindontario.com).



**We are pleased to highlight the work and achievements of Dr. Walter Wittich, Ph.D., FAAO, CLVT, a pioneer Canadian researcher in support of people with deafblindness.**

"I am not visually and/or hearing impaired, nor am I part of the deafblind community. However, I want to inform people with deafblindness and be informed by them," said Dr. Walter Wittich.

Dr. Wittich is an Assistant Professor at the School of Optometry at the University of Montreal. Coming from a background in age-related vision loss, he now conducts research in dual sensory loss and deafblindness. His research domains include basic sensory science, as well as medical, psychosocial, and rehabilitation approaches to sensory loss.

After retiring from a 15-year career as a professional ballet dancer, Dr. Wittich went back to school to complete his undergrad degree in psychology. It was in a methodology course that he met Dr. Olga Overbury, a Professor studying age-related vision loss. Their shared sense of humour motivated Dr. Wittich and the two worked closely as she supervised his honours project.

"Following my Masters, I became curious about research as a second career... I decided to complete a PhD in Neuroscience at McGill. My thesis was on peripheral vision loss and brain response to peripheral vision loss. I interviewed several individuals with Usher's Syndrome, which is characterized by partial or total vision loss and hearing loss that worsens over time. At that point, I felt that I needed to explore hearing loss, so I pursued a Postdoctoral Fellowship in Audiology."

After working as a part-time research coordinator and researcher for two years, Dr. Wittich was hired at the University of Montreal, where he currently is an Assistant Professor at the School of Optometry.

"My research aims to improve functional ability, social participation, and quality of life for persons with vision and/or hearing loss.

In addition, I am interested in how these combined impairments influence the use of assistive devices, the stigma related to assistive technologies, and the interactions among the device user, the rehabilitation provider, and the device itself," said Dr. Wittich.

Dr. Wittich notes that communication is an important part of the experience in working with individuals with sensory loss. A couple of years ago, he started to learn American Sign Language (ASL), which he describes as similar to learning choreography in ballet.



"I gave a keynote presentation in Winnipeg a few years ago. I signed "nice to meet you" into the palm of a woman with late-onset dual sensory loss. Although I am not a fluent communicator in ASL, it was the first time I was able to introduce myself in this way. It was magical for her as an audience member, too."

Dr. Wittich's focus on the rehabilitation of older adults with combined vision and hearing loss has shed light on the contrast of perceptions of sensory loss and the realities.

In Ontario, an estimated 147,736 individuals are deafblind; 22% or 70,080 of Ontario seniors in home care and long-term care reported experiencing vision and hearing loss combined every year for the past three years.

A combined loss of hearing and vision, or the decline of these senses, affects communication and can lead to social isolation. Further, vision or hearing loss

increases the risk for dementia in older adults. "There is a lot we can do and learn with respect to dual sensory loss and dementia," said Dr. Wittich.

For those with sensory loss, aging can pose other challenges. For example, in the case of someone that communicates with sign language, the onset of arthritis can create a barrier. "We must better prepare professionals that work with these individuals... not just intervenors, but other health care providers like nurses and even dentists."

In early 2017, DeafBlind Ontario Services established a collaborative partnership with Dr. Wittich as a Research Affiliate to capitalize on the unique features of deafblind and age-related dual sensory loss communities, support the strategic aims of DeafBlind Ontario Services, and allow for creative opportunities to build our research capacity and sustainability.

"I am inspired by the resilience of the people I work with; those impacted by sensory loss and those working in the field... I've met so many kind people and I feel that we recognize each other in spirit. I am motivated to continue my research and express the needs of people who are unseen and unheard."

Dr. Wittich has published 87 peer-reviewed publications, primarily about visual impairment, low vision, and dual sensory impairment, bringing much needed visibility to this field nationally and internationally. He is a resident researcher at both the CRIR/ Centre de réadaptation Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay du CIUSSS du Centre-Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal and the CRIR/ Institut Nazareth et Louis-Braille du CISSS de la Montérégie-Centre.

We are proud that Dr. Wittich is the co-leader of Canadian Consortium for Neurodegeneration in Aging (CCNA) Team 17 - focusing on interventions at the Sensory and Cognitive Interface and implications for Communication and Quality of Life – along with a group of 8 professionals in the field of vision and hearing from universities across Canada.





## Announcement from the Honourable Christine Elliott

In October, the Honourable Christine Elliott, MPP for Newmarket-Aurora, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, visited our administration office to make an announcement.

She announced that WSIB rate increases have been frozen for all non-profits in the province. This freeze on WSIB premiums demonstrates the Government of Ontario's strong commitment to providing supports so that vulnerable populations, like people with deafblindness, have every opportunity to thrive.

## Not-for-Profit of the Year Award

On October 17th, nearly 300 members of the business community in Newmarket came together to celebrate the Business Excellence Awards, which pays tribute to businesses across 10 categories.

Recipients are commended for their business achievements or community involvement that have made significant contributions to the economic and social well-being of the Town of Newmarket.

**We are honoured to be the recipient of the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Award in the Not-for-Profit category!**



## 5 Senses Gala - 02.28.2020

Plans are underway for the 2nd annual **5 Senses Gala**. Join us at Galt Country Club and experience a journey of the senses through entertainment, gourmet dinner, live/ silent auctions, and more!

Watch for further details and ticket information at [deafblindontario.com](http://deafblindontario.com).

## Magna Hoedown



DeafBlind Ontario Services was proud to be one of the 20 recipient charities of the 2019 Magna Hoedown! This year's event raised an impressive \$517,800, of which we received \$38,051.95! Funds raised will go towards community programs and activities across all regions making a difference for the people we support.

We were thrilled to learn that we sold the third prize raffle ticket. Ashleigh, the winning ticket holder, generously donated back to DeafBlind Ontario Services. Thank you Ashleigh!

**A BIG thank you to Magna, as well as everyone who sold or purchased event and raffle tickets!**

## Wine and Whiskey

On Thursday, June 6th, we hosted our first **Wine and Whiskey** fundraising event at the beautiful Club at Bond Head.

This journey of the finer senses started with a delicious 3-course gourmet dinner prepared by chef Jacquie Peter of the Club at Bond Head. To further enhance the dining experience, dinner was expertly paired with wine tastings hosted by sommelier, Tim Reed Manessy of the Living Vine. Later, guests sipped and savoured whiskey tastings coupled with an enticing dessert, hosted by Leah-Anne Austin of Univins and Spirits.

In learning from experts in the field, guests discovered how their senses of sight, smell and taste play a role in isolating and amplifying each tasting. **Thank you to our guests, volunteers, and generous sponsors for making this first-time event such a success, helping us raise \$30,759.**



## Savour the Senses

On Saturday, September 28th, we hosted our first **Savour the Senses** fundraising event at Russell High School. This journey of the senses started with a 'blind' wine tasting, guided by Sommelier Noreen Hyatt-Gervais, owner of Stone Crop Acres Vineyard. To further satisfy the sense of taste, a delicious dessert paired with a whiskey tasting complemented a gourmet dinner. King's Lock Distillery owner, Laura Bradley, led guests through a tasting of their 3-time award winning Canada's Whiskeyjack Rye.

Later in the evening, guests took part in a deafblind simulation art exercise, using an eye mask and earplugs. With some upbeat celtic music and drumming in the background, guests unleashed their creativity and "drummed" in paint on their canvasses with small dowels. **A warm thank you to our guests, volunteers, and generous sponsors for making this a memorable evening, raising \$17,547.**

# GIVINGTUESDAY™

GivingTuesday, a movement for giving and volunteering following Black Friday and Cyber Monday each year, is on **December 3, 2019**. Join us in celebrating this global day of giving back. Watch for details on our website and social media for more information on how you can participate in this year's GivingTuesday.





Katherine and Amanda communicating using AISTL, a hand-over-hand sign language.

# INTERVENOR SERVICES: RESIDENTIAL

For many, it can be difficult to imagine what it must be like to live with a combined loss of vision and hearing. For Amanda, this is the reality.

Born premature, Amanda has Cerebral Palsy along with profound hearing loss and very little vision. Although she has some perception of light in one eye, Amanda is deafblind.

As a child, Amanda's Mother advocated for her to receive essential support through Intervenor Services. Canadians with deafblindness have inconsistent access to services like Intervenor Services or Support Service Providers, as there is no national standard for these vital resources.

Individuals with deafblindness have the capacity to build their life skills, gain independence and contribute to the greater community with the support of professional intervenors. After graduating, Amanda did not have access to an intervenor until she came to DeafBlind Ontario Services at age 22.

Amanda communicates expressively with the world around her through Signing Exact English (SEE), a system of manual communication that strives to be an exact representation of English vocabulary and grammar. She receives communication through Adapted Interactive Tactual Sign Language (AITSL).

AISTL is hand-over-hand sign language, where the person 'listening' is feeling and reading the signs with their hands.

When Amanda started receiving Intervenor Services from DeafBlind Ontario Services, her expressive sign vocabulary was limited to two signs, "more" and "finish". Today, Amanda is able to communicate her choices and be a more active participant in her own life. She currently has an expressive sign vocabulary of 16 signs that is continuing to grow.

"A highlight of my career has been being part of Amanda's journey. A lot of time, trial and error was dedicated to enhancing her range of communication; seeing it all come together was a huge moment", said Katherine, an intervenor at DeafBlind Ontario Services.

"Amanda is just one example of the difference that professional intervenors make for people with deafblindness. Access to Intervenor Services or Support Service Providers is a basic human right, regardless of where the individual lives", said Roxanna Spruyt-Rocks, Chief Executive Officer at DeafBlind Ontario Services.

**With the right supports in place, the potential of a person with deafblindness is limitless.**

# National Deafblind Awareness Month

In June, DeafBlind Ontario Services collaborated with our partners in the field across the country to promote and celebrate the contributions of individuals with deafblindness.

Together, we shed light on inconsistent access to services like Intervenor Services or Support Service Providers across

Canada. Each province or territory has a varying degree of funding available, or no funding at all, to provide specialized services for people with deafblindness. We look forward to continuing to advocate for a level playing field for Intervenor Services across Canada during National Deafblind Awareness Month in June 2020.

## 17th Deafblind International World Conference 2019



The 17th Deafblind International World Conference 2019 was held in Queensland, Australia from August 12-16. The theme of the Conference was, *"Sharing the Knowledge to ACT: Accessibility. Communication. Technology. Now is your time to ACT!"*

Abstracts from 26 countries were selected for the Conference's program, five of which were submitted by DeafBlind Ontario Services' employees. The following employees presented their papers at the Conference: Angela Brown and Lorraine Simpson - *"Bringing Accessibility Solutions to our Homes and Communities"*, Annette Piggott and Katherine Logan - *"Communicating with Amanda: One Sign at a Time"*, Alyssa Young - *"LEAD: Learn, Empower, Achieve, Develop"*, Renu Minhas - *"Open your Eyes and Ears to Age-Related Dual Sensory Loss (ADSL) in Ontario"*, Tracey Veldhuis and Melanie Gauthier (CHKC) - *"Nicaragua: Attainable and Meaningful Accessibility"*. Further, our CEO, Roxanna Spruyt-Rocks, Chaired the Scientific Committee and sits on the Dbl Board.

This Conference created valuable awareness about work in progress across the globe, and provided the opportunity to connect and form partnerships with others in the field.

## INTERVENOR SERVICES: COMMUNITY

**Community Services - Partnerships** offers specialized training and mentorship to agencies that support individual(s) with deafblindness. Partnering agencies engage in interactive training that is customized to the communication needs of the individual(s) they support. After the training is complete, our Community Services team continues to provide guidance, advice, knowledge, and experience, to ensure on-going and continued success.

We asked intervenors from our **Community Services - Partnerships** programs to share what Intervenor Services means for the people they support:

### Joan from Community Living, Iroquois Falls:

"I am the 'eyes' and 'ears' for one of the people we support. My job is to help this individual to understand, enjoy, experience, and communicate at a pace and in a manner that is appropriate for his unique needs."

### Jennifer from Partners in Parenting, Ottawa:

"Access to Intervenor Services means the individual we support is immersed and fully participates in day-to-day activities, achieving independence in a way that is meaningful to him."

### Julie from Valoris for Children and Adults of Prescott-Russell, Ottawa:

"Intervenor Services has brought stability to the woman we support. Knowing that an intervenor will be there to help her with her daily routines is, I think, one of the most valuable ways we have improved her confidence."

### Keshia from New Leaf Living and Learning Together Inc., Newmarket:

"Intervenor Services has impacted the individual's life in a BIG way! By 'doing with' and 'not for', we help him maintain social skills, plan his day, learn new life skills, and ultimately build his independence."





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## Community Services - *Bridge*

**Community Services - *Bridge***, offered by DeafBlind Ontario Services, provides customized training opportunities for organizations that support individuals with a sensory loss and/ or communication challenges.

**Our expertise has led to the development of our interactive workshops:**

### **Communication 101: Bridging the Gap**

This unique workshop provides learning opportunities for organizations or individuals who are looking to expand their knowledge and understanding of individuals with a sensory loss and/or communication need.

### **Experience Tools: Expand your Communication Toolbox**

*Recommended Prerequisite - Communication 101: Bridging the Gap*

Experience Tools are used to initiate conversation, enhance concepts, promote expressive and receptive language, encourage anticipation, reinforce choices or reflect on memories.

### **Introduction to Sensory Loss**

Understand the differing needs of individuals with sensory loss and how you can improve your work practices to support and empower them. Learn about the eye and ear and maximizing residual vision and residual hearing.

### **Sensory Integration: Making Sensory Engagement Meaningful**

Deepen your understanding of sensory integration, sensory integration disorder, and the impact on someone with sensory loss.

### **Personality Dimensions®**

This interactive workshop of self-discovery will help you to develop a better understanding and appreciation for yourself and others. Build stronger teams and optimize team performance.

**Look for workshops  
in the following areas:**

Chatham  
Kingston  
London  
Milton  
Newmarket  
Oshawa  
Ottawa

... and other locations  
based on interest!



For more information, visit  
[deafblindontario.com](http://deafblindontario.com),  
or contact our Manager  
of Community Services at  
[mcs@deafblindontario.com](mailto:mcs@deafblindontario.com)  
or call 1-855-340-3267 x 273.



**[deafblindontario.com](http://deafblindontario.com)**



**“Volunteering at Knox United Church allows Michael to give back to his community and it gives him a sense of purpose”.**

## Supported Volunteer Placements

“Knox United Church are more than our neighbours on Northumberland Street, they are a community partner that has warmly welcomed the people we support with deafblindness,” said Amanda Albrecht, Client Services Advocate at DeafBlind Ontario Services.

For over a year, Michael, a young man with deafblindness, has volunteered at Knox United Church.

With the support of an intervenor, he helps fold the bulletins and deliver them to the sanctuary. The intervenor is a communication partner, connecting Michael with members of the church and providing guidance when necessary to encourage independence in his role.

“Volunteering at Knox United Church allows Michael to give back to his community and it gives him a sense of purpose. The administrative tasks have expanded his skillset and he

has a strong relationship with many members of the church,” said Jennifer Leung, an intervenor at DeafBlind Ontario Services.

“Michael plays a vital role in our church administration. The work that he does each Friday has freed up our office administrator to take time for other tasks,” said Gail Fricker, Minister at Knox United Church.

“We are called to live together in community. Working with Michael has been a practical way of living out our faith. Their involvement wouldn’t be possible without the dedication of DeafBlind Ontario Services’ team of professional intervenors,” said Gail.

**Social inclusion through volunteer or paid employment opens new doors of opportunity for individuals with disabilities and positively impacts the participating business or organization too.**

## Community Partners

DeafBlind Ontario Services is grateful to the following organizations who have accepted people we support as volunteers or employees, giving them meaningful work experience and building confidence in their abilities:

- Agilec
- Alcona Esso
- Ayr Branch Library
- Country Style, Peterborough
- East Side Mario’s, Aurora
- Food Bank of Waterloo Region
- Furry Friends, Barrie
- Goodfellow Public School, Innisfil
- Grandview Baptist Church, Kitchener
- Holy Rosary Catholic Elementary School, Waterloo
- Innisfil Fire Department
- Innovation Works, London
- K9 to 5 Doggie Daycare, Newmarket
- Knox United Church, Ayr
- London Food Bank
- Meals on Wheels, Oshawa
- Pasta Plus, Innisfil
- Pepperlaw Library
- Peterborough Fire Services
- Salvation Army, Georgina
- St. Peter’s Catholic School, Barrie
- St. Thomas Aquinas School, Keswick
- The Peggy Hill Team – Keller Williams Experience Realty, Brokerage, Barrie
- Tim Hortons, Kitchener
- Wal-Mart, London
- Westhill Retirement Residence, Waterloo
- Windreach Farm, Ashburn
- YMCA Of London – Centre Branch
- Zubick’s, London

***Are you interested in making a difference as a Community Partner?***

**Visit [deafblindontario.com](https://deafblindontario.com) or call 1-855-340-3267 ext. 262 to learn more!**



Thank you for making a difference.



## Wine and Whiskey Sponsors



## Savour the Senses Sponsors



## Our Donors: April - October 2019

100 Men Who Give A Damn, 1832 Asset Management L.P., 417 Bus Line Ltd., Adesa Ottawa, Andrew Van Pelt Electric Ltd., BlueSky Communications Inc., BMO Employee Giving, BNI Business Elite - Bradford, Bruce Elevator Service Ltd., Cambridge & North Dumfries Community Foundation, Century Group Financial Solutions Inc., Corporation of the Town of Georgina, Crate Designs Furniture, Curate Wealth, Electrical Elite, H.S.P. Consultants Inc., Home Hardware - Russell, Jenn B. Photography, J.P. Bickell Foundation, JSM Designs, Julien Savage Electric Inc., KB Media, Lean; Dr. Marvin & Marilyn, Libro Credit Union, Lomonte and Collings Insurance Services, London Central Lions Club, MacEwen Petroleum Inc., Magna for Community, Minnow Lake Lions Club, MKW Services, Morrison CPA Professional Corporation, National Mah Jongg League Inc., Open Plan Architects, PayPal Giving Fund Canada, Penmore, Pepsico Foods Canada, Pilkington-Henniger Charitable Trust, Raymond James Ltd., RBC Dominion Securities Inc., RBC Global Asset Management, Royal LePage RCR Realty, RPC Canadian Fine Art, Snyder Construction, Summerlyn Dental Care, The Audette Foundation, TD, The Printing House Charitable Office, The Robert Campeau Family Foundation, Webster; Albert & Joan, World Class Photo & Video, Xpertek Construction Ltd.



# Funds Raised at Bingo World Richmond Hill Make a Difference

**The goal of Charitable Gaming, known as 'cGaming', is to increase awareness and revenues for essential local programs and services.**

Surviving the decline of bingo, Bingo World Richmond Hill is one of only 60 halls in Ontario.

In 2018 alone, the gaming centre raised an impressive \$1.7 million, funding 39 not-for-profit organizations in the community at that time.

"Our operators Chris and Perry are the reason we currently fund 42 local organizations through charitable gaming. Our membership of organizations has grown by 20% since 2015, and will only continue to grow as we search for new members to join in early 2020," said Christine Arnold, Managing Director of Charitable Gaming.

Bingo World Richmond Hill is one of 30+ gaming centres that have opted to partner with Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLG). In 2015, when Charitable Gaming launched, Bingo World Richmond Hill worked closely with OLG and Ontario Charitable Gaming Association to successfully implement this new model, which introduced electronic games.

The goal of Charitable Gaming, known as 'cGaming', is to increase awareness and revenues for essential local programs and services. Charitable groups that benefit from cGaming receive a portion of the proceeds based on their volunteer participation and role at the gaming centre.

Two loyal and dedicated volunteers, Stella and Constantine, have volunteered at Bingo World Richmond Hill for over two decades, raising funds for DeafBlind Ontario Services.

"My wife and I were introduced to DeafBlind Ontario Services many years ago. We quickly realized the value of their mission and vision for those with deafblindness and wanted to make a difference by volunteering together," said Constantine.

During Bingo World Richmond Hill's 2017-2018 and 2018-



*Guests playing TapTix, an easy and fun game to play for the chance to win instant cash prizes and progressive jackpots.*

2019 fiscal years, Stella and Constantine have helped to raise approximately \$80,000 for DeafBlind Ontario Services.

Funds raised through cGaming go directly back into the community and make a difference. At DeafBlind Ontario Services, they benefit the organization's locations in York Region. This funding helps with life skills training, transportation for community activities and programs, Intervenor Services, house maintenance and upgrades, along with assistive devices.

"We have 430 active volunteers, like Stella and Constantine, that participate at Bingo World Richmond Hill each year. These volunteers are provided from our membership of not-for-profit organizations... as you can see, their impact is incredible", said Arnold.

"We are very proud to volunteer at Bingo World Richmond Hill and raise money for DeafBlind Ontario Services. At the end of the day, it's not about us... it's about the people they support. Helping them to become more independent and connect with their community", said Constantine.

When you visit Bingo World Richmond Hill, you are making a positive impact on local not-for-profit organizations while enjoying hours of entertainment. This gaming centre offers more than traditional paper bingo; there is electronic bingo, games of chance, as well as TapTix machines.

"It's an exciting time at Bingo World Richmond Hill! We have plans to continue to expand our product base and grow this community gaming centre. With revenues on the rise, we look forward to supporting more local not-for-profits and encouraging volunteerism," said Arnold.



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