



DeafBlind
ONTARIO SERVICES

keeping [in touch]

DeafBlind Ontario Services | Fall 2020

**WHEN FACED WITH
CHALLENGES, WE ADAPT
AND GROW - BECOMING
STRONGER TOGETHER.**



DeafBlind
ONTARIO FOUNDATION



Indirect light



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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:

Ayr Branch Library, Ayr Public School, Carroll Farm, Country Style (Peterborough), Dog Parks of London, East Side Mario's (Aurora), Grandview Baptist Church, Innovation Works, K9 to 5 Doggie Daycare, Kitchener Foodbank, London Foodbank, Meals on Wheels (Oshawa), Ontario Sports Entertainment Group, Peterborough Humane Society, Salvation Army Christmas Kettle, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Elementary School, Tim Hortons (Kitchener), Walmart (London), Westhill Retirement Home, YMCA of London, Zubick's

Are you interested in making a difference as a Community Partner? Visit our website deafblindontario.com or call 1-855-340-3267 ext. 262 to learn more!

COVID-19 Update

At DeafBlind Ontario Services, we believe it is always our role and responsibility to prioritize the health and well-being of the people we support and our employees. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, we have continued to monitor the progression of the virus, making decisions that are in line with both our mission and the recommendations of health officials and government leaders.

We are continuing to take a number of steps to do our part in containing the COVID-19 virus. We are following health officials directives for Long Term Care facilities; employees must work for only one employer in congregate care settings. Employees are also encouraged to stay home if they feel unwell or exhibit any symptoms of the virus. We hold weekly meetings with respect to COVID-19, and consistently communicate updates with our employees and the families/guardians of the people we support.

Below are other measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our locations across the province:



Face coverings and PPE for employees



Staying home (and making the most of it)



Limiting interactions and sanitizing between them



Universal precautions approach to infection control

Due to the vulnerability and complex health needs of the people we support, we are not participating in community outings at this time. However, our team is constantly thinking outside the box to bring recreational and leisure activities in-house to the people we support. We are proud of our essential intervenors for creating limitless opportunities in these extraordinary circumstances!

Together We Are Better

The word “community” is defined as a group of people with certain commonalities, residing within a particular area. With programs and support services in remote locations and urban centres across the province, DeafBlind Ontario Services is grateful to have an extended community during these unprecedented times.

Our communities have really been a pillar. We have received an outpouring of support through donations of face shields, procedure masks, homemade masks, gowns, gloves, disinfectant products, along with donations for PPE. These items help to protect a vulnerable population of Ontarians, along with our essential employees, and the greater community too.

With projections for the number of COVID-19 cases to rise throughout the fall and winter months, DeafBlind Ontario Services continues to rely on the greater community to secure PPE, along with financial donations during this challenging time. Learn more at deafblindontario.com.



We are excited to announce that DeafBlind Ontario Services has been successful in its bid to be re-accredited by FOCUS Accreditation for four years from July 2020 - July 2024, and has received an elite level award, named the Seal of Sustainability. This level of award is given to organizations, who achieve three levels of accreditation status.

FOCUS Accreditation, a non-profit accreditation agency for community service organizations, looks at all aspects of how an organization provides services - from how people are supported to the effectiveness of the operations. The FOCUS team observed how services were provided, reviewed data, and collected input from various people who have a stake in the services being provided.

Feedback gathered during the validation described DeafBlind Ontario Services as a phenomenal agency that is forward-thinking, values the people supported, and provides great opportunities for their employees. Stakeholders noted that employees are caring, passionate and consistently go above and beyond in providing exceptional service.

With all this, we're happy to report that we accomplished a variety of firsts:

- 1st deafblind organization to achieve our 3rd 4-year accreditation;
- 1st deafblind organization to receive a 100% rating;
- 1st deafblind organization to receive the Seal of Sustainability;
- 1st organization to undergo virtual onsite validation.

Re-accreditation is a team effort, thank you to everyone involved.



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



MICHAEL'S

Intervenor Services: Residential

STORY

Deafblindness, a combined loss of hearing and vision, impacts access to information, communication, and mobility. Diagnosed with Congenital Rubella Syndrome (also known as the German measles) just three days after birth, Michael has vision and hearing loss, along with a heart condition.

When Michael was born, his family lived in Quebec. At that time, he was only the second person with deafblindness in the province. There were very limited resources available.

When he was three years old, his family moved to Ontario. “Everything seemed to happen at the right time for us, Michael’s Dad got a job offer in Ontario and we had a lot of hope that we could do much more for Michael. We had visited W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind and Deafblind when he was nine months old, and we received a lot of valuable information and support,” said his Mother, Margaret Hartley.

Over 1% of Canada’s population or approximately 466,420 people are deafblind, like Michael. In Ontario, an estimated 211,250 individuals are deafblind.

The hope to do more for Michael was answered. The Hartley’s learned about DeafBlind Ontario Services, a not-for-profit organization that provides accessible residential and customized support services from Michael’s physiotherapist. He moved into one of their locations almost 19 years ago.

DeafBlind Ontario Services’ professional intervenors foster independence through a holistic and person-centered approach of “do with, not for”. Individuals with deafblindness build life skills, gain independence and contribute to the greater community with their essential support. “Working as an intervenor gives you the opportunity to be the ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ for another person; bringing the world a little closer to them,” said Roxanna Spruyt-Rocks, Chief Executive Officer at DeafBlind Ontario Services.

“Thanks to DeafBlind Ontario Services’ intervenors, Michael has grown so much over the years. He has increased independence and makes his own daily choices. A little over a year after he first moved out, he was back home for a visit... A couple days in, Michael brought me his suitcase indicating he was ready to go back to his own home. Although it made me a little sad, I realized this is what we wanted for him; to make his own life,” said Margaret.

“It truly amazes me that DeafBlind Ontario Services finds the most caring and devoted people I have ever met in all levels of the organization”.

People with deafblindness across Canada, like Michael, have inconsistent access to support like Intervenor Services. Each province or territory has a varying degree of funding available to provide specialized services. “Michael is just one example of the difference that 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.

To learn more and explore career opportunities as an intervenor, visit deafblindontario.com.

Research Spotlight

Research spotlight with M. Kathleen Pichora-Fuller, PhD, Professor Emerita, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto; Adjunct Professor, Department of Gerontology, Simon Fraser University; Adjunct Scientist, Rotman Research Institute, Baycrest, Toronto; Research Affiliate, Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility, Vancouver.



Dr. Pichora-Fuller

Within the last few years, research has shown that sensory impairments increase the risk that older adults will develop physical health problems, such as falls, or psychological problems, including depression or dementia. This research has raised awareness about the importance of hearing and vision for healthy aging.

The population is aging as the baby boom cohort reaches retirement age. Statistics Canada 2019 data indicates that about 6.5 million people are 65 years and older in Canada and account for 17.5% of the population. The proportion of seniors in the population is expected to double by 2025. Dr. Pichora-Fuller worked with a team of researchers who looked at the rates of hearing and vision loss using data from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging. They found that about half of the 30,000 Canadians who were tested in the CLSA had hearing loss by 75 years of age and about half had both hearing and vision loss by 85 years of age (Mick et al., 2020).

"Having become Professor Emerita in 2020, I am looking forward to continuing my research on sensory aging as a researcher, but also as one of those being researched," says Dr. Pichora-Fuller, who has a background as an audiologist and a PhD in Psychology.

Dr. Pichora-Fuller's research bridges basic laboratory research in sensory and cognitive aging and translates it to applied research concerning rehabilitation and accessibility for older adults in clinical, community, and specialized settings such as long-term care. Her current work has extended to include new questions about how sensory-cognitive aging affects and is affected by social factors such as stigma and social support.

"In working with older adults and interdisciplinary experts, it became clear that I needed to learn more about how hearing loss combined with other age-related changes, like vision loss, to affect communication and many aspects of health and quality of life," says Dr. Pichora-Fuller.

"Aside from patients I have met in the clinic or participants I have met in research, I have learned a lot about acquired dual sensory loss from sharing experiences with my mother in the latter years of her life. She had Parkinson's and confronted a combination of hearing and vision problems, as well as mobility and cognitive problems. This combination made it impossible for her to live independently in her own home.

According to Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI) 2016-2017 data, 22% or 70,080 of Ontario seniors in home care and long-term care reported experiencing vision and hearing loss combined. Research conducted by Dr. Pichora-Fuller and an interdisciplinary team found that about 1/5 home-care clients and 1/3 long-term care residents had combined hearing, vision and cognitive loss. Those with dual sensory and cognitive loss had greater difficulties with communication and functioning in daily activities than those who had cognitive loss alone (Guthrie et al., 2018).

As we have seen from COVID-19, the residents of long-term care have very great needs for communication and social interaction; dual sensory loss

increases these needs. I know how important it is to find ways to overcome dual sensory loss, especially in this older sub-group," says Dr. Pichora-Fuller.

According to Dr. Pichora-Fuller, "one of the key findings in aging research is that there are both losses and gains as people get older. Too often, it seems that research on aging is only about losses. I've been pleasantly surprised that some of my research has drawn attention to the gains in abilities that older adults can deploy to their advantage.

Our ongoing research aims to find ways to strengthen compensation by counter-acting losses with gains in older adults with acquired dual sensory loss. In particular, we are developing interventions to promote positive views of aging. Those with more positive views of aging have better outcomes in many areas of health. However, little is known about how changing these attitudes may be an asset for those living with dual sensory loss. There are new opportunities to discover how people with sensory problems can age optimally."

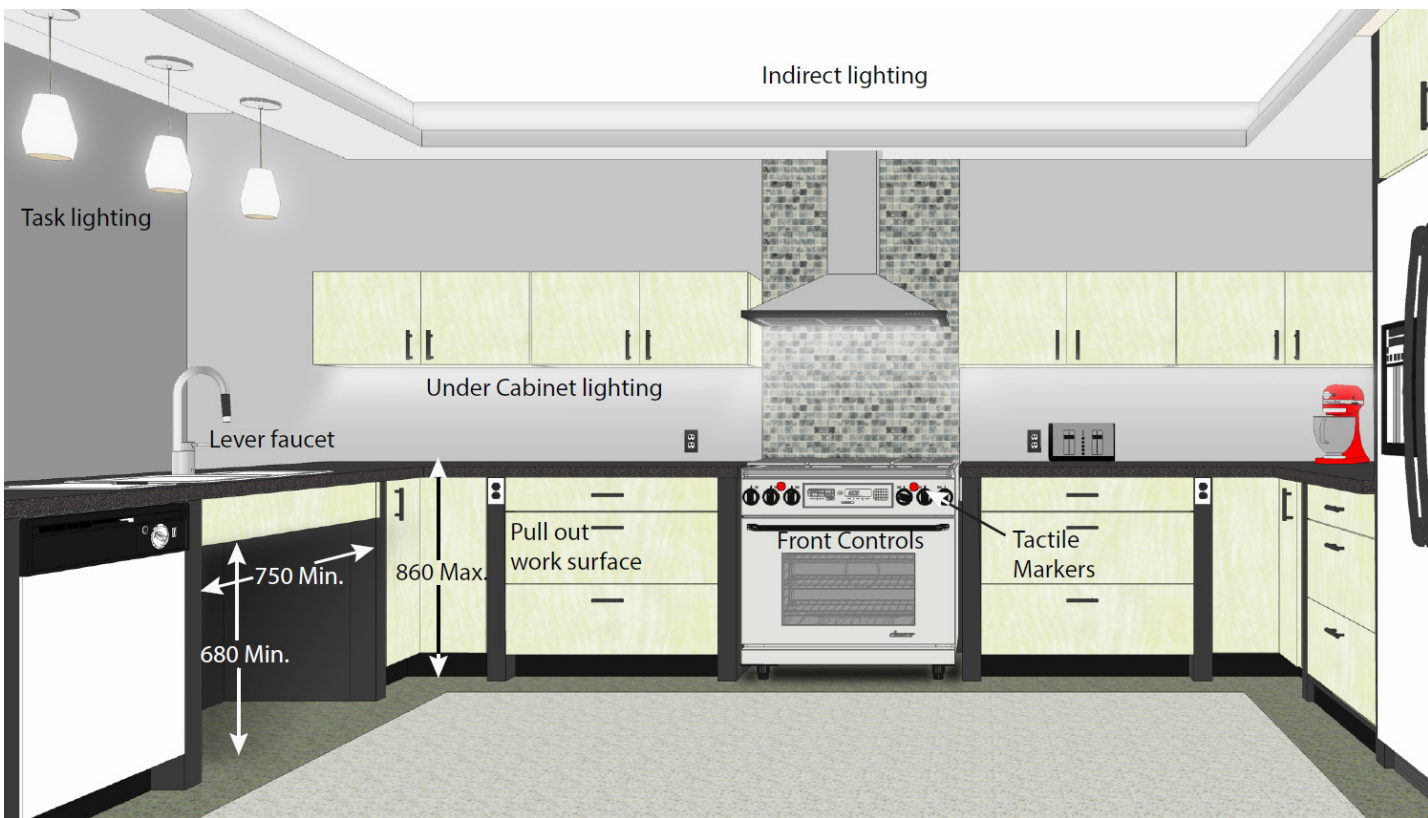
Dr. Pichora-Fuller has been instrumental in facilitating networking opportunities for DeafBlind Ontario Services. This has resulted in presentations on congenital and acquired deafblindness, along with communication challenges and approaches, to the graduate and undergraduate students of the Exceptionality in Human Learning class at the University of Toronto since January 2017.

At DeafBlind Ontario Services, we are coordinating research into this unique disability, ensuring the evidence is used to enhance services for the people we support and develop partnerships with other community services organizations. Learn more at deafblindontario.com.

Mick, P. T., Hämäläinen, A., Kollisang, L., Pichora-Fuller, M. K., Phillips, N., Guthrie, D. M., & Wittich, W. (in press 2020). The prevalence of hearing, vision, and dual sensory loss in older Canadians: An analysis of data from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging. *Canadian Journal on Aging*. PAP June 17, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0714980820000070>

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Guthrie, D., Davidson, J.G.S., Williams, N., Campos, J., Hunter, K., Mick, P. T., Orange, J. B., Pichora-Fuller, M. K., Phillips, N., Savundranayagam, M., & Wittich, W. (2018). Combined impairments in vision, hearing and cognition are associated with greater levels of functional and communication difficulties than cognitive impairment alone: An analysis of interRAI data for home care and long-term care recipients in Ontario. *PLoS ONE*, 13(2): e0192971. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0192971>



What does it mean to have an Accessible Home?

Accessibility Guidelines for Sensory Loss, Third Edition

From walk-in closets to stainless steel appliances, fireplaces and custom cabinets, the list of coveted features in a house are endless. But, what about the elements that make a space ‘age-friendly’ and ‘inclusive’?

Statistics Canada 2019 data indicates that about 6.5 million people are 65 years and older in Canada and account for 17.5% of the population. The proportion of seniors in the population is expected to double by 2025.

The newly released third edition of **Accessibility Guidelines for Sensory Loss**, was developed by DeafBlind Ontario Services with the accessibility needs of individuals with deafblindness, a combined loss of hearing and vision, in mind. However, this free for download resource can benefit anyone with sensory loss, including Canada’s aging population.

According to the Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI), 22% or 70,080 of Ontario seniors in home care and long-term care reported experiencing vision and hearing loss combined.

“The purpose of this tool is to share guidelines and provide helpful tips that focus on establishing inclusive environments for individuals with varying sensory loss. Inclusion of

accessible features and design emphasizes efficient environments, space maneuverability, the importance of illumination, and the use of colour, texture, as well as specialized materials to name a few,” says Kelly Patterson, DeafBlind Ontario Services’ Manager of Client Services and Specialized Training.

Contrary to popular belief, accessible design does not need to be expensive and may esthetically enhance a space.

When looking at a kitchen, for example, there are a number of factors that can improve accessibility, ensuring that the space is functional and safe. Some of these factors include: efficient design, maneuvering space for mobility devices, minimal effort of use, ease of cleaning, illumination, and safety.

Accessibility Guidelines for Sensory Loss, free for download on DeafBlind Ontario Services’ website, features comprehensive Accessible Design Guidelines, Quick Design Tips, and a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Accessibility Enhancements section to provide readers with all of the information necessary to improve the accessibility of a specific space.

Download your copy at deafblindontario.com/our-services/accessibility-guidelines/

Fundraising Events



A warm thank you to our guests, volunteers, and generous sponsors for making this a memorable evening, raising \$18,500.

The Finer Senses - A Virtual Wine Tasting Experience

On Friday, June 12th, DeafBlind Ontario Foundation hosted our first virtual wine tasting experience, ***The Finer Senses***.

Throughout the evening, guests experienced world-class wines from the comfort of home in a unique online blind tasting. Prior to the event, three bottles of wine, handpicked by the evening's sommelier, Tim Reed Manessy of The Living Vine, were delivered to guests' doors for contactless delivery.

First, guests tasted Ant Moore Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, NZ 2019, which was paired with goat cheese. Next, attendees learned about an ancient style of wine making that has reemerged; orange wine. Guests sipped 20,000 Leguas Orange Wine,

La Mancha, Spain 2019, which was paired with Manchego, a Spanish cheese. Lastly, guests enjoyed Domaine du Séminaire, Côtes du Rhône, France 2018, alongside Saint Agur, a mild and creamy blue cheese.

Throughout the evening, Tim answered guests' questions about various wines, varietals, wine making, tannins, sugar content, and more. His approach was informative and fun, creating an entertaining and educational event.

With social distancing in effect, DeafBlind Ontario Foundation made the most of challenging circumstances and brought people together during National Deafblind Awareness Month.

Savour the Senses - A Virtual Journey of the Senses

On Saturday, September 26th, DeafBlind Ontario Foundation hosted a unique virtual wine tasting experience, ***Savour the Senses***. Throughout the evening, guests from 146 households experienced Eastern Ontario's finest wines from the comfort of home.

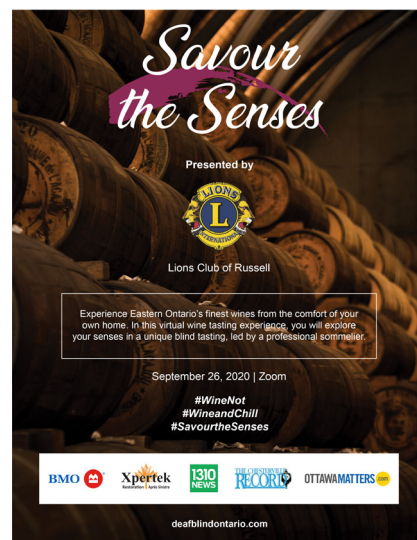
At ***Savour the Senses***, guests explored their senses in a one-of-a-kind blind wine tasting, led by winemakers from three different wineries; Noreen Hyatt-Gervais from Stone Crop Acres, Richard Deslandes from Green Gables Vines, and Tom Moul from Jabulani Vineyard and Winery Ltd.

The evening's sommelier, Paul Gault from Somm4all, lent his expertise and answered questions about pairings,

varietals, regions and more.

First, guests tasted Stone Crop Acres' 2019 Frontenac Gris + Pinot Grigio paired with Emmentaler, a savoury and mild swiss cheese. Next, guests sipped Green Gables Vines' 2019 Strawberry Swirl which was paired with Muenster, a semi-soft cheese with a mellow flavour. Lastly, guests enjoyed Jabulani Vineyard and Winery's 2017 Marquette Cab Merlot (MCM) alongside Cambozola, often called 'blue brie'.

"With social distancing in effect, we decided to get creative and host an event that brings people together for a good cause," said Susan Manahan, Director of Development and Communications.



Thank you to our guests, volunteers, and generous sponsors for helping us raise \$13,824 at *Savour the Senses*!

GIVING TUESDAY™

Giving Tuesday, a movement for giving and volunteering following Black Friday and Cyber Monday each year, is on **December 1, 2020**. Join us in celebrating this global day of giving back. Watch for details on our social media for more information on how you can participate in this year's Giving Tuesday. Now more than ever, we are called upon to make a difference.

Integrative Partnership Stakeholder Communication

What we've Accomplished:

Over the past year, we have examined ways to integrate administration, systems and approaches to allow for more efficient, person-focused services while operating in a more cost-effective manner. We have found this to be a valuable experience, and are exploring ideas from the active and creative working groups. Our organizations' relationships have evolved, forming an innovative and collaborative group who shares learnings and resources, especially during the challenges faced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future Plans:

Given significant changes underway in Ontario's health and social support systems, the partners have signed a two-year memorandum of understanding, committing to work together to ensure that the complex needs of those with significant disabilities, deafblindness and sensory loss continue to be recognized and addressed.

The collaborative ideas coming from the working groups will help to determine and identify future milestones and opportunities. With continued discussions and streamlined supports, any monetary efficiencies will be directed toward people who require services.

In 2019, three organizations (DeafBlind Ontario Services, PHSS and Community Living Chatham-Kent) came together to form a formal partnership. The focus of the integrative partnership is on strengthening the collective abilities of the 3 organizations. Our goal is to share knowledge and find efficiencies, recognizing that the people and families who place their trust in us are the number one priority.

DAVID'S

Intervenor Services: Community

STORY

"Since the outbreak of COVID-19, I've had to be much more independent. I can do a lot; I am proud of this," says David.

David lives in the small town of Pic River, more than 3 hours east of Thunder Bay. He is creative, active, and a hard worker. David is also deafblind.

"I come from a big family, but I am the only one with deafblindness. However, I am not completely blind; I see best out of my left eye and I have some hearing too," says David.

He is supported by Superior Greenstone Association for Community Living in partnership with DeafBlind Ontario Services, through their **Community Services - Partnerships**. This program offers specialized expertise and services to the individual with deafblindness through their supporting agency. Every partnership is uniquely designed to ensure the needs of each individual are met in collaboration with the supporting organization.

Community Services - Partnerships provides David with access to Intervenor Services so he is more independent in his community and able to achieve his goals.

With the support of his intervenor, David has a part-time job, rides his bike, and has even overcome his fear of water, swimming 50 laps of the pool on each visit.

Until mid-July, David did not have access to an intervenor for months due to COVID-19. "Because I didn't have an intervenor, I had to be more independent at work, as well as doing errands and going to doctors appointments on my own. It was rough, but I got through it," says David.

David also continued to work his part-time job at Circle K, where he has worked for the last 4 and

a half years, without the support of an intervenor. He often works in the back of the store, making it easier for him to social distance.

David wears a mask to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, noting that it does interfere with his eyesight. With one eye stronger than the other, wearing a mask makes it more difficult for David to focus his vision. He also finds it hard to walk with it on, but, it's "how we have to live right now."

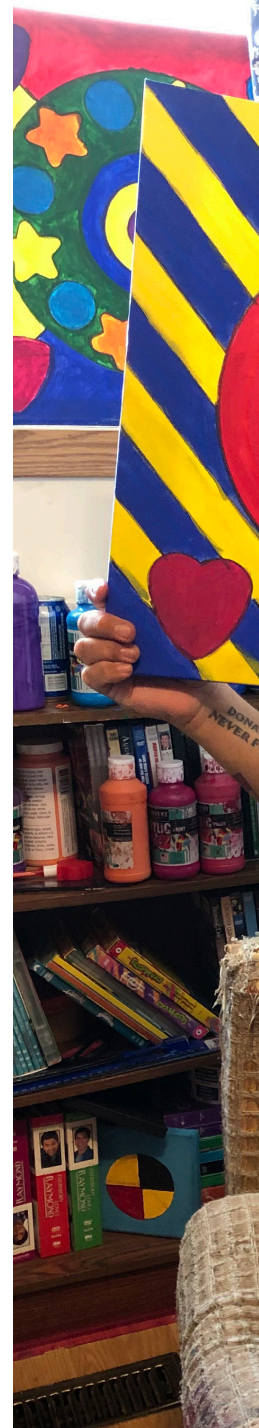
Face masks and coverings can create a communication barrier, especially for people with sensory loss. "When speaking to me, people have to remember that I am deafblind. Telling me who they are as well as speaking loudly and clearly help me in communicating and interacting," says David.

In mid-July, David started receiving support again through an intervenor, Sam. "I am happy to have Sam's support. She helps guide me on where I am going if I am not using my white cane. She also helps facilitate communication if I can't hear someone clearly. Things are easier with her support."

"We are going with the flow and taking things day-by-day. We are doing activities of daily living completely different than before COVID-19... It's a learning process," says Sam Atkins, David's intervenor from Superior Greenstone Association for Community Living.

"David demonstrates his increased independence that he built during his time without an intervenor. He continues to learn new skills and it's rewarding watching him take new things in," says Sam.

Learn more about **Community Services - Partnerships** at deafblindontario.com.



David (above) displays one of his paintings, a favourite hobby of his.



Come to Your Senses

Engage your senses in a fun and creative way during our ***Come to Your Senses*** challenge from March 8-12, 2021.

Choose up to 5 inspiring challenges over 5 days and fundraise for DeafBlind Ontario Foundation. It's all based on the 5 senses, so join us as an individual or team for this exciting event. Details coming soon at deafblindontario.com.

National Deafblind Awareness Month

June 2020 marked the 5th anniversary since a motion was passed in the Senate of Canada declaring June as National Deafblind Awareness Month.

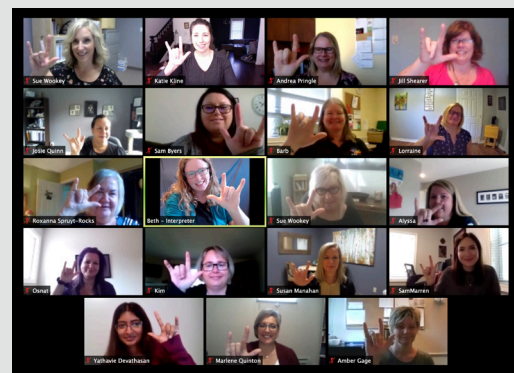
Each June, DeafBlind Ontario Services 'Makes a Wave from Coast to Coast' in collaboration with people with deafblindness, service providers, and supporters in celebration of National Deafblind Awareness Month.

With the passion to make a difference and raise awareness, a video that highlights individuals with deafblindness across Canada was created. Watch and share: youtube.com/watch?v=olTYdO_cxyl.

Exciting plans are already in the works for June 2021. Stay tuned!

Array-DeafBlind Ontario Services Partnership

In 2019, Array Services and DeafBlind Ontario Services came together to investigate the possibility of integrating our administration, systems, and approaches to enhance specialized services for persons with sensory loss (Deaf, hard-of-hearing, non-verbal and deafblind). The focus of the integrative partnership will be on strengthening the collective abilities of the two organizations. Our goal is to share knowledge and explore efficiencies, ensuring that the people we serve and their need for specialized services are the top priority.



In the fall, members of each team came together as the partnership develops in its beginning stages. Pictured above is the group signing the 'love-you' gesture in ASL.



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MAKING A
DIFFERENCE.**

The Finer Senses Sponsors



Savour the Senses Sponsors



Our Donors: April - October 2020

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