



ANNUAL REPORT

Collaborative • Leaders • Resilient • Passionate • Limitless

2022 - 2023

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Our Philosophy

Mission

DeafBlind Ontario Services is focused on individuals who are Deaf, hard of hearing, non-verbal and deafblind. We offer an array of services that support people to live their best lives.

Vision

Enriching lives one touch and sign at a time.

Values

We are **Passionate**

We are driven to empower the people we support and to celebrate their uniqueness.

We demonstrate being passionate by:

- Embracing challenges and opportunities with energy and enthusiasm;
- Extending the reach of the people we support into the community, where they can achieve their goals, dreams and aspirations;
- Creating and providing unique opportunities to learn and grow; and
- Motivating and encouraging our co-workers, as well as the people we support, to challenge themselves every day.

We are **Collaborative**

Engaging others makes us better. Each of us has something to learn and something to teach.

We demonstrate being collaborative by:

- Fostering partnerships with the people we support, their families, other community resources, government, funders and organizations with similar goals—locally, nationally and around the world;
- Committing to open communication and transparency when working with each other and our partners; and
- Supporting each other and seeking input from others for solutions that benefit all.

Our Strategic Plan

Over the past year, the DeafBlind Ontario Services Board worked together and with stakeholders to develop a strategic plan that builds on past successes to guide us through the next few years and beyond.

The Strategic Plan 2023-2026 features three core principles and objectives:

- Services: Be the provider of choice
- Our Employees: Support to thrive
- Collaboration: Enhance, enrich and create

Services: Be the provider of choice

The continued evolution and growth of our services is the cornerstone of our strategic plan. We are dedicated to providing exceptional support that is unique to each individual through our Living My Best Life service model.

A key aspect of sector-leading service delivery is managing our risks through monitoring and reporting on progress and risks, and taking action when warranted. For more on our risk management approach, please see page 6.

Our Employees: Support to thrive

Our people are integral to delivering on our Living My Best Life service model, so it's imperative that we support our employees to thrive. About 80% of our employees interact directly with people we support, and intervenors form close bonds and trusted relationships that have an impact on skill growth and enjoyment of life. The trust built over years has to be rebuilt with staff turnover—and trust is crucial in so many everyday situations, such as crossing a road. It also takes time for intervenors to know when to give that nudge to challenge someone.

By enhancing our employee engagement and creating and implementing a succession planning strategy, we will retain more staff for longer, providing lasting relationships for the people we support.

Collaboration: Enhance, enrich and create

Sharing best practices and working with local, provincial, national and international partners will help us enrich and enhance our services and create new opportunities that benefit both our employees and the people we support. We're also keen to explore development of a Northern Ontario Strategy to meet the unique needs of the region, particularly rural and remote communities. Through working, learning and growing together, we'll drive enhancements in service—supported by evidence and data—to continually improve on our Living My Best Life service model.

As we move further into 2023, we welcome opportunities to grow, strengthen our team, and work closely with governments, sector counterparts and others.

We are Leaders

We set the standard and promote excellence in our field.

We demonstrate being leaders by:

- Constantly evolving and striving for excellence in everything we do;
- Mentoring, educating and encouraging ourselves and others;
- Generating and being receptive to new ideas;
- Advocating for people's rights, beliefs and dreams; and
- Holding ourselves accountable to the people we support, families, employees, funders and other stakeholders.

We are Resilient

When faced with challenges, we adapt and grow—becoming stronger together.

We demonstrate being resilient by:

- Providing holistic services that are responsive to the ever-changing needs of individuals supported;
- Being proactive in identifying and addressing circumstances that may present challenges; and
- Learning from setbacks and being persistent and flexible in our efforts to find creative, workable solutions.

We are Limitless

We believe in endless possibilities.

We demonstrate being limitless by:

- Being courageous, open-minded and creative; and
- Empowering each other to go outside the box and achieve goals and dreams.



Letter From Our Board Chair & CEO

There's much to celebrate and build on as we look back on the past year at DeafBlind Ontario Services.

Our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, approved last October, was developed to help us navigate the path forward as we focus on seizing exciting opportunities and tackling challenges both old and new. We will continue to be guided by our strategic principles and objectives: **to be the service provider of choice, to support our employees to thrive, and to enhance, enrich and create through collaboration.** The effects of uncertainty on strategic objectives are monitored through our strategy and risk report that is reviewed by the Finance and Risk committee and board of directors.

To support our new strategic plan, we launched our new *Living My Best Life* service model, which focuses on providing consistent services for the people we support who are deafblind, as well as those who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or non-verbal with a developmental disability. Nearly a year in the making, the model's four pillars, My Wellbeing, My Experiences, My Independence, and My Relationships, are designed to assist a person to create their own plan with short- and long-term life goals. In alignment with the new service model, employees in direct services roles (almost 80% of our team) will receive enhanced or additional opportunities for professional development and training.

Our people are key to the success of the services we provide, and in recognition of the additional pressures the pandemic has placed on them,

we have made further commitments to support a culture of health and wellness. In 2022-23, we increased the employee Wellness Benefit funding reimbursement and made it more flexible to cover costs for exercise or wellness classes, exercise equipment, fitness clothing and other resources.

We are also grateful that the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services included DeafBlind Ontario Services' direct service employees in their permanent \$3/hour wage enhancement. The Ministry created the Guidelines for the Administration of the Personal Support Workers and Direct Support Workers Permanent Compensation Enhancement Program in response to recruitment and retention issues facing the sector, and we appreciate this measure to help reduce turnover challenges.

We also continued our journey of creating an intervenor specialist certification in collaboration with our sector partner, CNIB Deafblind

Community Services. We remain committed to raising the professionalism of intervenor services and are pleased to now recognize professional certification through our pay structures for the 31 employees who passed the Certified Deafblind Intervenor Specialist Beta exam, administered through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals.

With a new intervenor certification, a new strategic plan, and the new *Living My Best Life* service model to guide our next steps, DeafBlind Ontario Services has built a strong foundation for continued success.



Lise Gagnon
Board Chair



Roxanna Spruyt
Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors

Lise Gagnon
Tiffany Barker
Rick Boychuk
Raymond Coutu

Emma LeBlanc
Linda Littell
Kelly O'Neill
Greg Paget

Kathy Peters
Donald Spink

Our New *Living My Best Life* Service Model

Every person deserves to live their best life, and at DeafBlind Ontario Services, we are committed to helping people do just that with the support of a specialized team that communicates, encourages, informs, inspires, and advocates.

Our *Living My Best Life* service model is an approach that empowers individuals to achieve their goals and aspirations and gain greater independence. With a personalized plan determined by the person supported, this model ensures we are focusing on what's meaningful in life to them and fulfilling their wishes and desires. The goal is to enable people to live their life on their terms, supported by the DeafBlind Ontario Services philosophy of "do with, not for."

This individualized approach is fundamentally important because every person we support has unique needs, methods of communication, and goals. There's no one-size-fits-all approach.

This service model is based on four pillars—My Well-being, My Experiences, My Independence, and My Relationships—each carrying equal weight to offer a holistic approach to support planning. That means an interest in learning to

rock climb is just as important as expanding sign language skills.

We use a wide range of tools and processes to best understand what is important to and important for each person. Each *Living My Best Life* Plan is created through information collected from a variety of sources, including directly from the person supported, the person's past experiences, their family or others close to them, and the specialized support team providing services for that person.

Once information has been collected, a *Living My Best Life* planning meeting gathers everyone involved to discuss and make decisions before the plan is formally created. This plan will look at all aspects needed to work toward each goal, including any barriers, costs, and the level of support needed to engage in a particular activity. Once implemented, the *Living My Best Life* Plan is regularly reviewed in *My Progress* meetings, and we celebrate successes along the way in a manner determined by the individual.

As we continue to implement this model, we are eager to see the impact it has made on the individuals we serve. We expect to have results to share in next year's annual report.



A Plan Made With **Steve, For Steve**

An intervenor fluent in sign language who picked up on Steve's interests—a hallmark of our *Living My Best Life* service model—has been a game-changer for the 34-year-old.

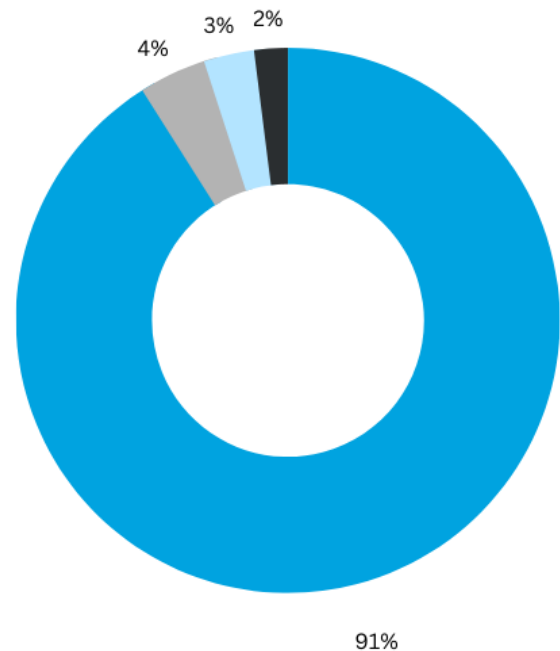
Born premature at 28 weeks, Steve is deafblind with less than 20% vision in his left eye. When he moved to a DeafBlind Ontario Services supportive living home and began working with Deaf intervenors, his mom, Anne-Marie, noticed a "tremendous" change.

"They're challenging him all the time, so he's always learning," she says. "That makes a huge difference for Steve. Before he would never initiate a conversation, but now he does—and he signs fast compared to what he used to!"

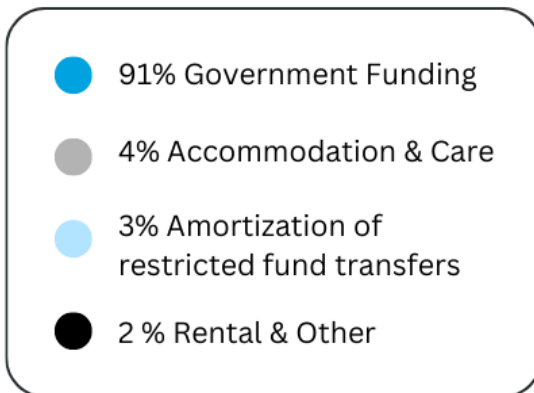
An easygoing person, Steve's love for stuffed animals and pictures have really moved the needle on building his communication skills. He'll often use two stuffies to illustrate similarity or difference. Meanwhile, showing his intervenor pictures on his iPad prompts discussions he wouldn't otherwise initiate.

Recently, Steve worked with his family and specialized support team to create an engaging *Living My Best Life* Plan. Prioritizing his interests and wishes, he'll continue gardening at the supported living home and taking pottery classes with his intervenor's assistance, but since he isn't particularly keen on learning signs for numbers, they'll scale back on that. "We're not going to give up, but we're not going to push it as much," notes Anne-Marie. "[His plan] is adapted to what he wants."

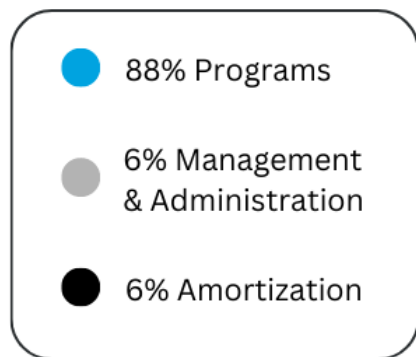
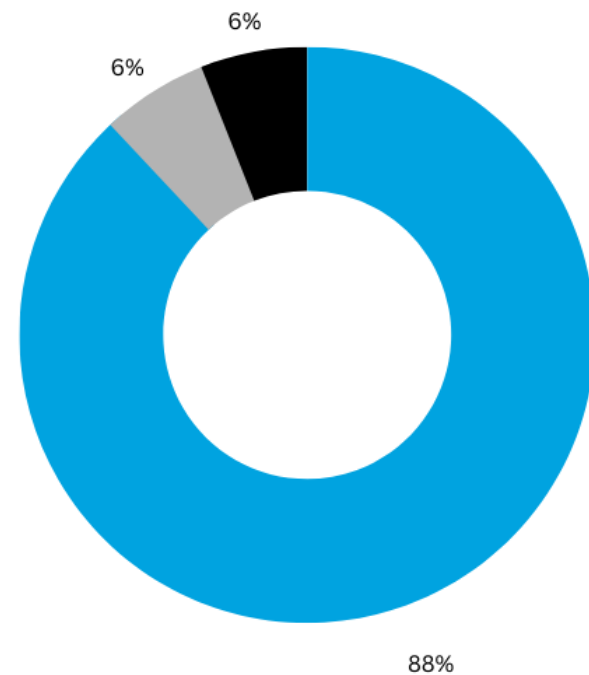
Our Financials



Revenue-Operating Fund



Expense-Operating Fund



The above was summarized from the draft audited financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2023. The complete audited financial statements are available on our website at www.deafblindontario.com.

Our Impact, By The Numbers

DeafBlind Ontario Services is committed to providing high quality support for people who are deafblind as well as people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or non-verbal with a developmental disability. Our specialized support team is committed to ongoing development to deliver on our unique *Living My Best Life* service model that puts people first.

34
Years
of service

07
People
on wait list

3
New people supported

108
People
supported in total

- 87 Supported Living homes & Tremplin program
- 12 Community partnerships
- 10 Supported Independent Living Program

Community Training

2022
2023

45
Introduction to
Sensory Loss

12
Sensory
Integration

96
Communication 101
Bridging the Gap

39
Adapting
Environments for
Sensory Loss

42
Agencies trained with
TOUCH™ & other
community training

37
Personality
Dimensions

Our Employees

234 Full-Time
65 Part-Time
64 wrote CDBIS beta exam
31 passed the CDBIS exam
79% are in direct service

299

Skilled employees
*As of March 31, 2023

6.06

Average years of service

\$59.26

Cost of one hour of direct service for Supported Living Homes
*Based on 2021-2022 fiscal year

321,758

Hours of direct service were delivered in Supported Living Homes
* Based on 2021-2022 fiscal year

Specialized Training

TOUCH™ (Training Ongoing Unique Committed Holistic) strengthens the competencies of those who touch the lives of people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, non-verbal and deafblind.

91

TOUCH™ 1 trained employees

16

TOUCH™ 1 trained community agency employees

16

TOUCH™ 2 trained employees

13

TOUCH™ 2 trained community agency employees

Our Employee & Volunteer Service Awards

Volunteer Service Awards:

5 Years

Rick Boychuk

10 Years

Tiffany Barker

Employee Service Awards:

5 Years

Sogol Akhlaghiesfahani

Lori Brewster

Chantelle Carriere

Osnat Dash Addi

Sariena Foley

Brianna Horvat

Sara Johnson

Ruth King

Rhonda Kuchma

Sherry Matheson

Laura Parsons

Jody Wedow

10 Years

Crystal Curtis

Miranda Komar

Victoria McEwen

Rachel Papineau

Patricia Slocum

Laverne Smith

Cherrissa Sutherland

Sue Wookey

Alyssa Young

15 Years

Andrea Bierhals

Chenayi Bote

Angela Brown

Amy Holden

Arlene Jandles

Natasha Langley

Melinda Macato

Longina Masvosva

Lori Reid

Michele Schnarr

Martha Wehrens

20 Years

Terry Dyball

Roxanna Spruyt

Nga Tu

25 Years

Barb Downey

Michelle James

Natalie Manneh



Vision for tomorrow

DeafBlind Ontario Services is building on the solid foundation set in 2022-23 with our new service model and strategic plan designed to respond to the needs of our broader community, today and into the future.

As we plan for tomorrow, each of our objectives is underpinned by our goal to be the provider of choice for people who are deafblind as well as those who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or non-verbal with a developmental disability. In order to do this, we must embrace opportunities and find creative solutions to key challenges.

Our Living My Best Life service model sets us apart as a provider that empowers the people we support to be leaders in crafting an evolving, adaptable support plan. We are also heavily invested in our direct service employees earning the new Certified Deafblind Intervenor Specialist designation, as it reinforces our expertise in the sector.

However, in order to meet a growing need in the province, we must attract more direct service employees and explore all options for increasing our housing capacity.

Purchasing or building new housing is especially challenging given market conditions, and there are considerable renovation costs on top of the purchase price to make existing homes accessible and safe. So, we are exploring alternative ways to expand capacity, such as renovating basement space in some of our homes to provide additional rooms, and other creative solutions.

With another year well underway, we are embracing a limitless mindset, inspired by those we support.



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