



# keeping [in touch]

DeafBlind Ontario Services | Spring 2025







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# Empowering Connections: Ian's Journey with Accessible Technology

Communicating thoughts, feelings and ideas is a basic human need. For those who don't communicate with words, it can be a much more difficult path to connection, belonging and living a full life. In recognition of Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD) on May 15, 2025, we highlighted the power of accessible technology to break down barriers and foster connection, independence, and self-expression. At DeafBlind Ontario Services, we witness this every day—especially in the story of Ian.

Ian is 25 years old and has lived in a DeafBlind Ontario Services supported living home since 2020. DeafBlind Ontario Services supports people who are deafblind, as well as those living with a developmental disability who are Deaf, hard of hearing or use non-traditional forms of communication. Specialized services are customized to each person's unique needs, method of communication, and goals to live their best life. With a bright personality and a love for music, conversation, and learning, Ian uses a variety of communication tools and accessible technology that empower him to live a vibrant, connected life.

One of Ian's favorite things is catching up with friends and family over the phone. He also enjoys listening to audiobooks on his iPad, playing the piano, and listening to music – with artists like Billie Eilish and Johnny Cash topping his playlists. Through a blend of smart technology, Ian can not only enjoy these interests but actively participate in them.

At the heart of Ian's day-to-day communication is his SmartBox, a dynamic communication device he's used since he was young. The SmartBox, paired with a lite touch switch attached to his wheelchair table, gives Ian control at the press of a button. Each morning, his intervenor ensures the device is ready and accessible. The intervenor is a bridge between the person who is deafblind and the world around them; leading to a better sense of social connectedness. By facilitating the exchange of information and assisting with communication methods, intervenors empower people who are deafblind to thrive.



Once the SmartBox is on, Ian activates it with his switch, and the device begins to scroll through customized audio prompts, offering a voice to Ian's thoughts, needs, and choices.

## **Ian's SmartBox is more than just a tool—it's a gateway to connection.**

It includes pages dedicated to a wide range of topics, including shopping, clothing, colors, people, health needs, and feelings. It even has built-in commands for controlling his Alexa.

In addition to the SmartBox, Ian also communicates using tactile cues and a daily calendar system that helps him choose and anticipate his daily activities. This personalized approach to communication gives Ian a sense of routine, autonomy, and control.

Accessible technology, like Ian's SmartBox, is a powerful equalizer. It bridges communication gaps, honors personal preferences, and creates space for self-expression. For Ian, it's what helps him live his best life.

As we celebrate Global Accessibility Awareness Day, let Ian's story be a reminder of what's possible when accessibility is prioritized. Technology should be designed with everyone in mind—because when we design for inclusion, we all thrive.

# Rooted in Values, Growing with Purpose: Values Refresh Journey

DeafBlind Ontario Services believes in the power of our employees' voices. That's why we embarked on a comprehensive journey to redefine our values, ensuring they authentically represent who we are now and what we aspire to be as we grow as an organization.

Through employee feedback, surveys, roadshows, and virtual connections, we listened and learned.

The result? Two new Foundational Principles and four Core Values that truly reflect our collective vision and aspirations. Together, we're unstoppable.

## Foundational Principles

This is our 'why' - the deep purpose and inspiration behind everything we do here at DeafBlind Ontario Services.

### Person-Centered Dedication

At the heart of everything we do, we place the Individual. We allow their voice, choices, and experiences to guide our actions.

### Infinite Possibilities

We are driven by an unwavering belief that every person, regardless of their abilities or challenges, possesses 'Infinite Possibilities.'

## Core Values

This is our 'how' - our core values shape our interactions, decisions and practices.

### Pursuit of Excellence

Relentless dedication to high standards

### Fearless Empowerment

Taking bold actions that prioritize the well-being of individuals, teams, and the organization

### Collective Success

Collective effort aimed at achieving exceptional results

### Accountability in Action

Achieving success, while emphasizing responsibility for one's actions, decisions, and outcomes



*Culture By Design*  
**Rooted In Values  
Growing With Purpose.**



# Empowering Lives: Joseph's Journey with our Partnership Program

Our Community Services Programs offer customized support services to people who are deafblind, as well as those living with a developmental disability who are Deaf, hard of hearing or use non-traditional forms of communication. Through our Partnership Program, we provide specialized expertise and services to individuals where they currently reside, and in collaboration with their supporting agency. Every partnership is uniquely designed to ensure the needs of each individual are met in collaboration with the supporting organization.

Below is a story shared by parents whose son, Joseph, has greatly benefited from our Partnership Program.

Joseph is a 30-year-old young man who has had intervenor services in his home since he was 18 years old. The intervenors support Joseph in several ways through personal care, activities, and assisting him to participate in community events or programs. They use cues to communicate with Joe, such as showing him a bath pouf or having him smell shampoo to symbolize taking a bath, which allows him the opportunity to anticipate the activity that is going to occur. They also communicate with him by using simple yes or no questions that allow him to respond verbally. This simple gesture is not only respectful but includes him in the decision-making process.



With the help of his intervenors, Joe loves connecting with nature, and spending time with his family in his community. A few examples of Joe's community outings include going to Point Pelee National Park where he has a membership. He thoroughly enjoys strolling the board walk and spending time in nature. He also participates in the local agricultural fair in Comber every year and has participated in the Hospice Windsor Essex's Face to Face campaign for the past ten years, raising money for this amazing organization. However, what he enjoys the most is simply spending time on the farm with his father in the workshop!

We have been associated with DeafBlind Ontario Services since 2022. They provide training and support and ideas that we can incorporate into Joe's program.

**“The guidance and sharing of ideas that we receive is essential to ensuring that Joe has the best quality of life.”**

As a family we always celebrate Joe's victories, and life milestones. We recently planned an open house to celebrate Joe's thirtieth birthday. Joe had a great time spending the afternoon with family and close friends on this special day. Our goal has always been to make memories, and to give Joe the best life possible.

-Cathy and Moe (Joe's parents)





# Honouring Excellence: Recognizing Outstanding Contributions with the King Charles III Coronation Medal

On March 13, 2025, DeafBlind Ontario Services had the privilege to host a Coronation Medal Ceremony with the Honourable Edith Dumont, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and honorary Patron of our organization.

DeafBlind Ontario Services had the opportunity to help nominate individuals for this national honour. The King Charles III Coronation Medal, administered by the federal government in collaboration with partner organizations, commemorates the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III on May 6, 2023. This distinguished award recognizes 30,000 Canadians who exemplify service, sustainability, and inclusivity—values deeply cherished by both His Majesty and Canadians across the country.

We were delighted to honour the following individuals and their remarkable contributions:

- **Diane Gabay** – Family member, donor, and advocate
- **David Lepofsky** – AODA Alliance Chair, retired lawyer, and disability advocate
- **Lorraine Simpson** – Director of Organizational Integration, DeafBlind Ontario Services
- **Roxanna Spruyt** – CEO, DeafBlind Ontario Services
- **Tracey Veldhuis** – Director of Community Services, DeafBlind Ontario Services
- **John Watson** – Donor and advocate

During our afternoon at the Holland Marsh Winery, we were happy to host The Honourable Edith Dumont, members of parliament, employees, people we support, friends and family members to celebrate these deserving recipients. Thank you to everyone who joined us in honoring these remarkable individuals and this prestigious achievement!



Roxanna Spruyt, Lorraine Simpson, David Lepofsky  
Diane Gabay, The Honourable Edith Dumont, Tracey Veldhuis  
(not pictured - John Watson)



# Research Update

## ICF Core Sets on Deafblindness

We are thrilled to announce the completion of the World Health Organization (WHO) International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) Core Sets for deafblindness! This project is the result of a global collaborative effort.

The ICF can serve as a common language, helping to standardize the development and selection of outcome measures for service delivery to people who are deafblind. You can access additional details and free downloadable versions of the brief, intermediate, and comprehensive core sets as follows:

### Comprehensive Core Set:

Consists of 218 codes covering every relevant aspect, including those important for advocacy and policy.



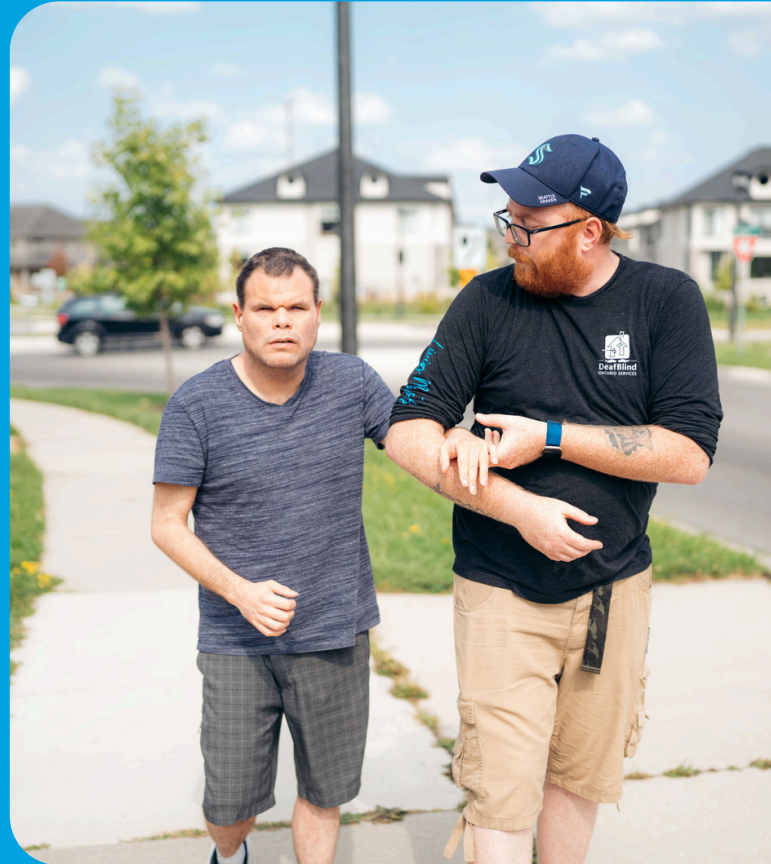
### Intermediate Core Set:

Contains 137 codes chosen for interdisciplinary communication.



### Brief Core Set:

Made up of 33 codes prioritized for individual clinical encounters.



DeafBlind Ontario Services is continuously advancing research through our collaborative efforts. Here are a few of our latest published articles:

**Sensory Health and Universal Health Coverage in Canada - An Environmental Scan**



**Aging and Sensory Loss: Considerations for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs)**







## Sureyya's Story of Confidence and Community

At DeafBlind Ontario Services, we believe that everyone has the right to shape their own life, based on choice, dignity, and connection.

For Sureyya, affectionately known as Sue, that journey began two years ago when she moved into a DeafBlind Ontario Services-supported living home. At 43 years old, Sue has cultivated a life rich with independence, confidence, and meaningful connections, thanks to the dedicated support of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs).

Sue, who is Deaf, has flourished with the communication support she receives from DSPs. She has established a daily routine that reflects her interests and aspirations. Each morning, Sue prepares breakfast, an activity that has sparked her love for cooking. With encouragement and guidance, she has gained the confidence to use the stove and oven, proudly preparing meals for herself and her roommate. Cooking classes may be on the horizon, offering Sue an opportunity to expand her skills and creativity.

Sue is thriving, and her days are filled with activities that enhance her well-being. Her active lifestyle includes weekly sewing classes, where she has crafted various items, including a beautiful bag that she uses to hold her phone.



She also goes to the gym to stay fit and is learning to maintain a healthy lifestyle, which she says is very important to her.

An active and social person, getting out into the community is important to Sue. Last year, she visited Ripley's Aquarium in Toronto for the first time and described it as an unforgettable experience. Her social life has also significantly improved; she has developed a strong friendship with someone from another supported living home. They enjoy spending their free time together, and have made a tradition of monthly trips to the movies.

Sue's story demonstrates what is possible when people are empowered to live their best lives. When asked about her future goals, Sue shared that she would like to secure a volunteer position or paid employment, showcasing her determination to contribute to her community and continue her personal growth. With her resilience and ambition, there is no doubt that Sue will achieve whatever she sets her mind to.



# Building A Legacy = Building a Brighter Future with DeafBlind Ontario Foundation

Legacy giving is a powerful way to make a lasting impact on the lives of the people we serve. At DeafBlind Ontario Foundation, legacy gifts play a critical role in ensuring that we continue to provide essential services and support for years to come. These gifts are not just about financial contributions, they are about creating a future where everyone has the opportunity to live a full, independent life.

## Why Legacy Giving Matters

Legacy gifts, like a gift in your will, a donor-advised fund, a gift of life insurance, a donation of securities, or a gift within your retirement funds, allow you to leave a meaningful mark on the world. It's a way to ensure that your values and interests continue to make a difference beyond your lifetime. While DeafBlind Ontario Services receives some provincial funding, it doesn't meet all the needs of the people we support. DeafBlind Ontario Foundation helps to bridge that gap to provide funding for the priority needs of DeafBlind Ontario Services and the people it serves.

For DeafBlind Ontario Foundation, legacy gifts are vital in maintaining programs and services. They help fund essential resources like specialized equipment, wheelchair accessible vans, accessible housing and assistive devices, and recreational and social programs that improve the quality of life for those we serve. One of the most significant benefits of legacy giving is its ability to provide long-term stability for our programs and services. Unlike one-time donations, legacy gifts can be planned and structured to support the organization over an extended period. This allows us to plan for the future with confidence, knowing that we can continue to meet the evolving needs of the people we serve.



## Personal Impact

Jocelyn Willoughby, a donor and board member of DeafBlind Ontario Foundation, understands the importance of planning for the future. As a Senior Investment Advisor, she recognizes the value of long-term planning and the significance of legacy giving. Jocelyn's decision to leave a planned gift to the Foundation was both an emotional and rational choice.

**"It's an emotional return for me. Even though I won't see the impact, I know my gift will make a difference."**

She adds, "Even a small investment, just 1% of my estate, can have a big impact."

**We invite you to reflect on the meaningful impact of your legacy.** Leaving a gift in your Will to DeafBlind Ontario Foundation is an expression of your personal values; it provides purpose, pride, and enjoyment, ensuring your influence endures beyond your lifetime. Imagine knowing that you've helped build a fully accessible, supported living home to accommodate the needs of people with sensory loss. Jocelyn advises, "Don't procrastinate. Get it done. It provides clarity and peace of mind for you and your loved ones."



Reach out to us at [Development@deafblindontario.com](mailto:Development@deafblindontario.com) to request more information.



# May is *Leave a Legacy* Month

This month, we celebrate the transformative power of legacy giving, a simple yet impactful way to be remembered while making a lasting difference. By including DeafBlind Ontario Foundation in your estate plans, you're providing gifts of independence and opportunity. Your legacy gift touches the lives of people who are deafblind, as well as those living with a developmental disability who are Deaf, hard of hearing or use non-traditional forms of communication, so they receive the specialized support they need to thrive, now and in the future. Let's make sure that every person supported has access to the resources they need to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives.

Contact a member of DeafBlind Ontario Foundation at 1-855-340-3267 or email [development@deafblindontario.com](mailto:development@deafblindontario.com) to discuss the options.



**Create a lasting impact.**

[Visit the Will Power website for details on how to get started](#)



## Our Donors

**November 2024 - March 2025**

**Thank you to the following organizations for helping us transform lives, one gift at a time.**

Bingo World & Gaming Richmond Hill  
BNI Business Elite  
Conseil scolaire catholique Nouvelon  
Crate Designs Furniture  
Delta Bingo Peterborough  
Jeff Smith Plumbing-Heating Ltd.  
Kits For A Cause  
London Health Sciences Centre Foundation  
Luke Four Foundation  
Magna International  
Market Brewing Company  
National Mah Jongg League Inc.  
Needham Promotions Inc.  
Neighbourhood Network  
R.A. Beamish Foundation

Resident Care Pharmacy  
River Rock Laundry Inc.  
Russell Lions Club  
Sifton Family Foundation  
Silver Linings Healthcare  
Snyder Construction  
The Catherine and Maxwell Meighen Foundation  
The Charles Norcliffe Baker and Thelma Scott Baker Foundation  
The Harry E Foster Charitable Foundation  
The Peterborough Foundation  
The Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Command Charitable Foundation  
The Victor & Rhoda Shields Charitable Foundation  
Valley East Lions Club



## Why I Give: Fiona's Friends with Vision Story

Fiona's brother, Sean, was born deafblind in 1957 due to complications from Rubella. At that time, resources for individuals with deafblindness were scarce. With limited options and in need of additional support, their parents placed him in a government-run institution in Blenheim, Ontario, when he was five years old. Sean lived there until his early 50s, when the facility closed in the 1990s. He then moved to a DeafBlind Ontario Services supported living home in Kitchener, which provided a safe and nurturing environment where he could thrive. DeafBlind Ontario Services supported living homes offer accessible, barrier-free, affordable housing and specialized support services 24/7.

Initially, Fiona worried about how Sean would adjust, but her fears quickly faded. From the moment he arrived, he seemed visibly relaxed. **"It was as if he breathed a sigh of relief,"** she recalls. "And I know I did too!" With the support of intervenors—professionally trained to act as the "eyes" and "ears" of a deafblind person through the sense of touch—Sean gained access to a world he had never known. "They were kind, gentle, and caring," Fiona says. **"They opened up a world he didn't know existed."** He learned to communicate, engage with those around him, and make choices about his own life. Sean participated in activities both inside and outside his home, such as music therapy, farm visits, grocery shopping, and overnight camping trips.

Fiona watched as he transformed from a lonely, withdrawn person into someone who was seen, valued, and embraced by his community. "It always brought to my mind the image of a caterpillar emerging as a free and colorful butterfly." The impact of DeafBlind Ontario Services extended beyond Sean's daily care. Regular meetings ensured Sean's evolving needs were met, and when he was hospitalized in his final days, his intervenors remained by his side.



Fiona knew she wanted to give back. A thorough researcher when it comes to charitable giving, she decided to become a Friend with Vision monthly donor, not just as a way to express gratitude, but to ensure that others could receive the same support.

**"The simple knowledge that this incredible work is continuing gives me fulfillment. It's my way of saying thank you to those to whom my family and I owe so much."**

Monthly donations provide a continuous, sustainable source of funding, helping to cover critical needs like accessibility items, wheelchair-accessible vans, and essential programs that government funding does not support. "What could be more obvious than the importance of donations?" Fiona reflects. "They are essential for creating new opportunities and enriching experiences for each person supported at DeafBlind Ontario Services."

For those considering giving, Fiona offers this encouragement: **"Becoming a Friend with Vision monthly donor will stand out in your mind as one of the most rewarding and fulfilling decisions you'll ever make."**

### Donate today!

Make a difference in the lives of people who are deafblind, as well as those living with a developmental disability who are Deaf, hard of hearing or use non-traditional forms of communication.



**DeafBlind**  
ONTARIO FOUNDATION

#### Donation Amount:

☐ \$55 ☐ \$75 ☐ \$110 ☐ Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

or

☐ Become a monthly Friend with Vision donor

Please process \$ \_\_\_\_\_ on the 1st ☐ or the 15th ☐ of every month.

#### Donor and Payment Information:

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Cheque (enclosed)

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Card #: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_\_ CVV: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Send your donation to:  
DeafBlind Ontario Foundation  
17665 Leslie Street, Unit 15  
Newmarket, ON L3Y 3E3

or  
Make your donation online:  
[deafblindontario.com](http://deafblindontario.com)

We respect your privacy. Collection of any personal information may be used by DeafBlind Ontario Foundation, but will not be shared with other parties. Charitable Registration # 796914679 RR0001





# Yarn Bombing

**Be a part of weaving connections for National Deafblind Awareness Month!**

Throughout June, community spaces across Canada and beyond will be transformed with vibrant yarn creations. This colorful street art, known as yarn bombing, is all about spreading joy and raising awareness during National Deafblind Awareness Month.

DeafBlind Ontario Services yarn bombing pieces will be on display in various locations across the province, including Newmarket, Ottawa, London, Greater Sudbury Area, Peterborough, Innisfil, and more!

These amazing installations are crafted by individuals supported by DeafBlind Ontario Services, intervenors, friends and family, local craft clubs, and community members from across the province.

## Why do we Yarn Bomb?

By coming together to yarn bomb objects in as many cities and countries as possible, we strive to foster connections and unite a community with individuals, service and advocacy groups in the field, Deafblind International members and partners, and the wider global public.

Be a part of this incredible initiative to foster connections and raise awareness about deafblindness on a global scale!



## Watch for Yarn Bombing installations in your community!

Check out our event page for a list of locations and make sure to stop by.

While you're there, snap a photo and share it on your social media. Don't forget to tag us and use the hashtag #CreateAndConnect

You can also email your photos to Amy (the leader of our Yarn Bombing Crew) at [a.stevenson@deafblindontario.com](mailto:a.stevenson@deafblindontario.com)

Scan the QR code to visit our website for more information and to learn more about Yarn Bombing!

