

**CNIB**

**DEAFBLIND  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICES**



A year of  
**Innovation**

ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

**"A year of Innovation"  
in ASL**



# Expanding our Horizons

## Letter from the Board Chair

“Expanding our Horizons - Letter from the Board Chair” in ASL

This past year has truly been an incredible journey for CNIB Deafblind Community Services and to all whom we provide services to.

As we reflect on the past year and all that we have accomplished, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way that we deliver our services forever. Technology has allowed us to expand our reach, empower clients to feel more confident, and support more people than ever before. This shift in our services has helped us to develop new and innovative ways to ensure our services remain accessible and impactful.

We’ve also been focused on advocating for our clients to ensure that they have equal and equitable access to information and essential services. Our dedicated staff have been integral in this process and have been lobbying the government to continue to break down barriers that have been amplified by social distancing and public health measures.

It has become abundantly clear that our services have never been more essential. But for many Canadians who are Deafblind, accessing these critical services is not an option.

Next year, we’re looking toward the future. We’re focused on continuing to expand our services and reach - to ensure that all Canadians who are Deafblind can benefit from the life-changing services that we provide.

None of this would have been possible without our community of champions and stakeholders. Thank you for your continued support.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Thompson'.

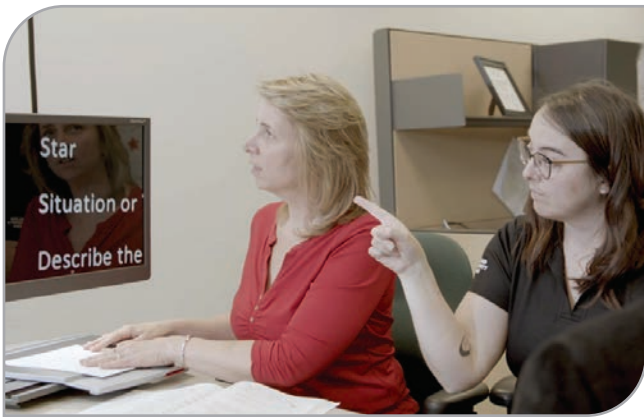
**Charlie Thompson**  
Board Chair

# Highlights

## “Highlights” in ASL

### Literacy

Working quickly to meet the needs of our clients, the DBCS Literacy program developed and implemented a series of educational webinars using video conferencing platforms that promoted wellness and positivity. Clients received intervenor support for these webinars using various forms of technology.



Literacy instructors and intervenors also provided communication support so that learners could attend virtual classes and webinars. To help support the roll out of training to learners with their iPads through the Phone it Forward program, peer-to-peer training has been developed to ensure that all instructors and intervenors are up to date with the accessibility features available through Apple.

### Ambassador Program

In October 2020, we began to work on establishing a formalized Ambassador program. Moving forward, DBCS hopes to have ambassadors across the country available and trained to share their stories and talk about DBCS’ services, and the impact of those services. This program has been beneficial in raising awareness within our communities, attracting the right people to work for our organization.

### National Deafblind Awareness Month

As part of National Deafblind Awareness Month, DBCS launched an awareness campaign to engage staff, volunteers, clients, and the public. The campaign spanned the month of June, and featured a comprehensive marketing and communications plan designed to connect audiences with stories and information about people who are Deafblind. DBCS' media relations strategy saw more than 19 million impressions.

DBCS was proud to celebrate the launch of our first social media platforms, which were met with an overwhelmingly positive response. The campaign saw a combined reach of 22,168 impressions and over 3,400 engagements across Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Yammer.

## Emergency Services Highlights

The Emergency Assessment Book was developed and is ready to be given out to emergency departments for hospital triage as soon as the strain on hospitals eases.

DBCS has also met with Canadian Hearing Services (CHS) to look at ways that both agencies can work together to support clients who are native ASL users. We would like to offer clients the best of both worlds and give them an opportunity to use both an intervenor and an interpreter for more complex appointments.



## Recruitment Highlights

DBCS has now finalized Employer Information Sessions with the University of Toronto, McMaster, and George Brown College, targeting graduating students from Community Services-related programs. These sessions are hosted online and include a short presentation, followed by a question-and-answer period. The purpose is to brand DBCS' services and programs, and introduce the career of intervenors and literacy instructors.



# Embracing the Power of Technology

## Supporting our clients during COVID-19

“Embracing the Power of Technology” in ASL

At the beginning of this year, our clients were experiencing the intense emotional, mental, and physical ramifications caused by restrictions put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While it can be challenging for many people who are Deafblind to embrace new technology, many began to notice the benefits of using technology to decrease isolation and increase their access to information. In fact, the number of clients who now own an accessible device compared to last year has increased by 39 per cent.



Thanks to CNIB's Phone it Forward program, we provided **43 iPads** to DBCS clients across the regions - all at no cost to them.

Recognizing the opportunity to continue to break down barriers to inclusion, DBCS began to offer customized technology training. In response, we saw an increase of 77 per cent of clients who accessed technology training through DBCS.

**With support from DBCS' intervenor and literacy services, clients were able to harness the power of technology in new and innovative ways:**

- Access to critical information.
- Virtual intervenor and literacy services.
- Accessing online shopping services such as grocery shopping or online banking.
- Increased communication with family and friends.

# In Their Own Words

Here are just a few pieces of feedback we've received from the people we serve...

## "In Their Own Words" in ASL



“ I'm grateful for Deafblind Community Services because they are my bridge to life. They fill in the missing pieces. They help me by letting me know

where things are in stores. They will help me cross a street or navigate, whether in a store, street, or house. The peace that this brings me is incredible. ”

- Sylvana, DBCS Client

“ I am so grateful for the time with my intervenor as it allows me to get out into the community. During the lockdown, I had the opportunity to get to know other intervenors as they have been calling me from London when I cannot get out. I value knowing they are there to support me and making sure I am safe. I believe every province should offer Intervention services to their local Deafblind communities. ”

- Donald, DBCS Client

“ I am proud to be Deafblind. Because of DBCS, they really helped me identify myself as a Deafblind person. My involvement has allowed me to continue my learning through the Literacy classes with DBCS. I have intervenors helping me in the community, we attend doctor and dentist appointments...If DBCS did not exist I would not be as independent as I am today. ”

- Kristeen, DBCS Client

# Merico's Story

## "Merico's Story" in ASL

For Merico Tesolin, hearing loss has been something he has lived with since he was born.

When it was time to make the decision to decide his post-secondary career path, he had no idea what his passion was or what he wanted to do. Unsure of what his future would hold, Merico decided to reach out to CNIB Deafblind Community Services in London, Ontario - becoming both a client and a volunteer.

"As a client, my journey was really helpful to learn more about myself, through the community...I think it would have been more difficult for me to learn all of that without the community."

After joining DBCS as a volunteer, Merico began to speak with other Deaf and Deafblind members in the community. Also facing the long-term outcomes of Usher Syndrome, he began meeting more clients, learning more about what life was like with Usher Syndrome - and what to expect when it came to living with sight loss.

"Meeting some of these clients was very inspiring to me to hear about their identity, their experiences, what they have gone through emotionally and physically.

It was really helpful to me to realize what my future might be like."

After speaking with more and more people in the community, Merico found that advocacy came naturally to him. Soon after, Merico was offered an exciting new position at DBCS. Merico's new title is now Advisor, Client Relations and Advocacy.

"Being offered that position was very helpful because it made me [realize how] passionate I am about [advocacy]. I realized that was what I wanted to do, and I learned a lot about how to advocate for people and support clients with large goals or even small day-to-day issues. A lot of clients struggle with advocating [for themselves] or are not even aware that they have rights. I want to be able to give the skills and help educate on the process."

Now, as the advocacy lead for Deafblind Community Services, Merico is able to connect with members of the community to provide advocacy support. As a member of the community himself, Merico is uniquely qualified to help ensure their stories are shared.

Now, as he looks to the future, Merico is helping to establish DBCS' first ever ambassador program - a program that he hopes will continue to help amplify the stories and experiences of individuals from the Deafblind community.





# Financials

## “Financials” in ASL

CNIB Deafblind Community Services takes pride in upholding the highest standard of ethics and accountability in stewarding the funding we receive from our provincial government partners.

Our financial statements for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021 were prepared in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations and were audited by Deloitte LLP.

Visit [deafblindservices.ca](https://deafblindservices.ca) for more information.



# Board of Directors

**“Board of Directors”  
in ASL**

CNIB Deafblind Community Services is made up of a diverse team of passionate and enthusiastic professionals.

We are proud to be governed by a board of directors comprised of leaders in the field of Deafblind services and advocacy, including individuals who are living with a loss of both hearing and sight, as well as a talented executive leadership team.

## Board of directors

**Charlie Thompson**  
Chair

**Penny Leclair**  
Vice Chair

**Lindee David**

**Shari Bancarz**

**Denise Beaumont**

**Robert Froom**

**Kelly Kimens**

**Christy Sebastian**

**Cheryl Wilson**

## Executive leadership team

**John M. Rafferty**  
President and CEO

**Maria Ash**  
Chief Transformation Officer

**Sherry Grabowski**  
Vice President Deafblind Community Services

**Betty Leeson**  
Director of Operations

**Angelina Algranti**  
Director of People and Culture

**Jessie Grewal**  
Senior Director Finance

**Alison Byczok**  
Director, Marketing and Communications

**CNIB**

# **DEAFBLIND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Back cover in ASL**

CNIB Deafblind Community Services is one of Canada's leading providers of specialized support and emergency services for people who are Deafblind.

Our services enable people who are Deafblind to maximize their independence and engagement with the world around them.

- Visit **[deafblindservices.ca](https://deafblindservices.ca)**
- Email **[info@deafblindservices.ca](mailto:info@deafblindservices.ca)**
- Call **1-855-862-6001**



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