

**CNIB**  
**DEAFBLIND**  
**COMMUNITY**  
**SERVICES**



# A Milestone Year

Annual Report 2019/2020



# A Year of Firsts

## Letter from the Board Chair and Executive Director

The last year was a remarkable one for CNIB Deafblind Community Services (DBCS) and everyone we serve. Not only were we faced with some of the most formidable challenges in the history of our organization, but we also had one of our greatest wins - one that will bring intervenor services to Deafblind people in Saskatchewan for the first time.

Like every service organization worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way we serve our clients, almost overnight. We had to work quickly and thoughtfully to meet the challenges of this unprecedented situation, as we fought every day to be there for our clients when they needed us most.

We would like to take this opportunity to highlight the dedication of our staff who continued to provide in-person services to clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals are true heroes, and we could not be prouder of them.

It's remarkable to think that in the midst of this, one of the greatest trials our community has ever faced, we were also celebrating an incredible victory. It was in the early days of quarantining that we learned the Government of Saskatchewan accepted our request to provide funding to initiate our services in the province.

This landmark decision makes Saskatchewan the first province outside of Ontario to provide funding for DBCS, representing a monumental step for Canada's Deafblind community. Suffice it to say, we were elated by this news.

Over the course of this report, you'll learn more about our 2019-2020 year - a year of firsts, of milestones, of joys and of challenges. You'll learn about how we're laying the groundwork to one day expand our services to communities across the country, how we're innovating to serve our clients better, and how we worked tirelessly during COVID-19 to ensure our clients continued to receive our support in what may have been one of the most isolating periods of their lives.

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



**Sherry Grabowski**  
Executive Director



**Kelly Kimens**  
Board Chair



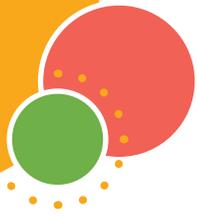
## Did you know?

**1.66% of Canada's population**

has a combined loss of hearing and vision.

## By the numbers

Last year we were proud to provide intervenor services to **198 clients** and literacy services to **56 learners** across Ontario.



# Highlights

## Setting our sights on expansion

We're proud to serve Ontario's Deafblind population, but we know the majority of Canadians who are Deafblind have very limited access to intervenor support, if any at all. One of our most pressing goals is to address the huge gap in intervenor services in regions outside of Ontario. That starts by **opening dialogues** with government representatives and change-makers across Canada to secure funding for Deafblind services, and that's been an important area of focus for us throughout the year.



### Achieving a milestone victory in Saskatchewan

In March, we were thrilled when the Government of Saskatchewan approved our proposal for funding. This **landmark decision** makes Saskatchewan the first province outside of Ontario to provide funding for CNIB Deafblind Community Services, representing a monumental step for Canada's

Deafblind community. To support access to these services, we have started a recruitment strategy to hire one intervenor to begin providing services to those identified in this region, with a goal of expansion in the years to come.

### Spreading the message

In the summer of 2019, we worked closely with CTV Senior Health Reporter Avis Favaro to develop an **in-depth television editorial** focused on the need to expand intervenor services across Canada. Featuring an on-camera interview with DBCS Executive Director Sherry Grabowski and a profile of three of our clients, the piece aired over two nights in August on CTV National News. The result was a very inspiring and compelling feature story that has resulted in people from across Canada reaching out for more information on how they can partner with us on our goal for expansion.

### Providing emergency resources

One of our key accomplishments from the last year was the completion of the **Emergency Assessment Book**. Created in partnership with Canadian Hearing Services, the Emergency Assessment Book is a crucial tool in enabling emergency room staff to communicate with patients who are Deaf or Deafblind for triage in emergency medical situations. The book will be distributed to hospitals throughout Ontario.

## Empowering digital literacy

Computer literacy is a gateway to independence for people who are Deafblind. In the last year, we proudly partnered with Literacy Link South Central, our local planning committee, on a project called **Digital Tech Connect**. Through the Federal Digital Literacy Exchange Program, Digital Tech Connect is designed to create an inclusive digital curriculum for literacy programs to use in teaching basic computer skills. As part of this project, we reviewed and modified digital materials to ensure they are effective for use by learners who are Deafblind, blind or partially sighted.



## Building a global community

In August, 2019, we were proud to attend the **Deafblind International Conference** in Australia where we raised awareness about our innovative emergency intervenor services on a global stage. Access to adequate, essential services around the globe for people who are Deafblind continues to be an ongoing challenge. We were pleased to share information about our services with delegates from around the world, in the hopes that emergency intervenor services may be established for other people who are Deafblind worldwide.

# Looking the part

In order to achieve our goal of growing into a nationwide resource for Canadians who are Deafblind, we need to communicate our brand to the country as clearly as possible. That's why, last spring, we launched a new brand identity, including icons representing our three program areas:



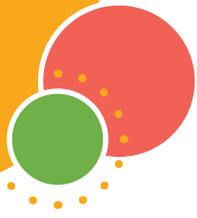
**Intervenor services**



**Emergency  
intervenor services**



**Literacy**



# Rapid Response

## Being there for our clients during COVID-19

At the beginning of 2020, the whole world changed. The COVID-19 pandemic forced people across the globe to hole up in their homes, to close their businesses and to stay physically apart from everyone outside their own household.

We took immediate action to protect our clients and staff from this virus, and although we were forced to temporarily reduce the amount of in-person services we provide, our services didn't stop for a moment. We were determined to continue being there for our clients – especially at a time when the danger of isolation was greatest and they needed us most.

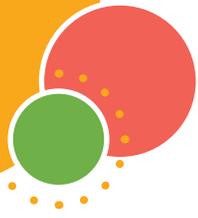
### Here's how we did that:

- We immediately **rallied our staff together** through online platforms like Zoom, ensuring we could create an urgent plan of action to serve our clients as safely as possible.
- We developed a **Pandemic Plan** to not only guide us through COVID-19, but the eventual recovery period.
- Through the Deafblind Network of Ontario, we **successfully advocated** to the Premier of Ontario for intervenor services to be deemed essential services during the pandemic, when clients needed us most.
- Because our intervenor services were deemed essential services, we **continued to provide direct support** to clients for crucial tasks like grocery shopping and medical appointments.
- We provided **personal protective equipment** to our staff to ensure both they and our clients remained as safe as possible during in-person sessions.
- We came up with **creative solutions** for serving clients, like visiting clients living in quarantined long-term care and nursing homes through windows and communicating via ASL.
- We created **virtual programs and social events** to keep clients connected through phone and online platforms, provide advice, and give them up-to-date information about the virus.

"During COVID-19, the intervention service support is still there, so I can do my shopping. Also they keep in touch with me via videoconferencing, like FaceTime, Zoom and Skype. That is very helpful for information exchange and updates on news events. I appreciate the provision made by CNIB Deafblind service during this time."

**- Corey, DBCS client**





# Jennifer's Story

For Jennifer Mountney, American Sign Language has always been part of her life, since she'd been interpreting for her mother from a young age. She was later introduced to CNIB by her sister, who worked for the organization, allowing for a natural transition into her role as an intervenor at CNIB Deafblind Community Services.

“There’s something about the Deafblind community,” says Jennifer. “It’s fascinating and different from what I’ve known. It became the catalyst for me applying and becoming an intervenor.”

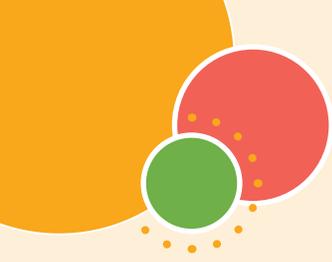
Part of what she loves most about her job is that it’s always different. From shopping and going to the bank, to simply grabbing a coffee with her clients, each day holds something new. Sometimes it even means being involved in sharing in her clients' most intimate moments - doctor’s appointments, weddings and funerals.

“I love what I do,” says Jennifer. “I find being an intervenor to be a privilege - knowing I’m invited into the lives of my clients, and that I’m a tool to help them be exactly who they were meant to be. It’s an honour and something that I don’t take for granted.”

From an intervenor’s perspective, Jennifer wants the community to know that it’s okay to ask questions. She says the only time her clients feel isolated or different is when people make them feel that way by not approaching, engaging or allowing them to participate.

“At the end of the day, this person with hearing loss or vision loss is journeying in the same way you are,” she says. “They’re just using different tools and different ways to do it.”





# In Their Own Words

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

"During my first visit with my intervenor, the light at the end of the tunnel started to get brighter and some music was entering my ears. During the next few visits, the light became much brighter and the music much clearer! Before long we became quite a team, she became my eyes and ears and I, a good navigator and communicator."

**- Armando, client**

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"I like the intervenors because they make my week short and I'm able to get out. Even when I don't go shopping, I'm able to go out and do things that I haven't been able to do, and I just wouldn't do without them now."

**- Wayne, client**

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"Intervenor services make a huge difference in my life. Without them, how would I go places? How would I do things?"

**- Barbara, client**

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"I wish I came to DBCS sooner!... They care about your goals and they help you knock down barriers. They help you to be more independent and prepare for what's to come. It's opened my eyes. It's really changed my life."

**- Santo, client**

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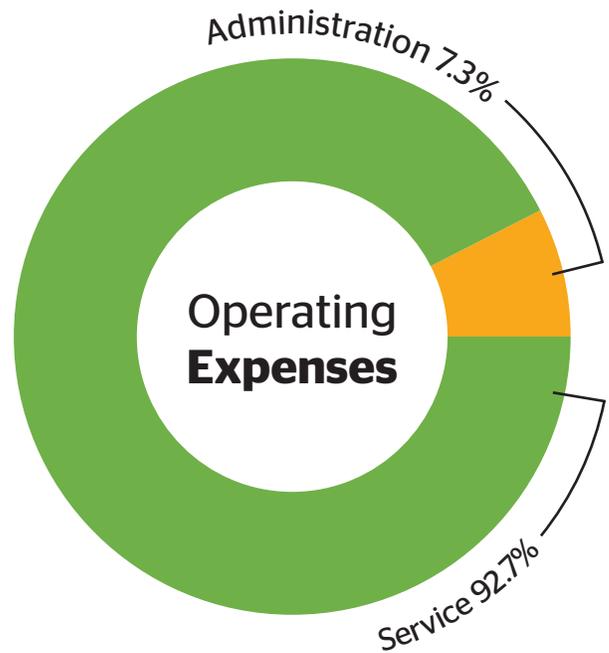
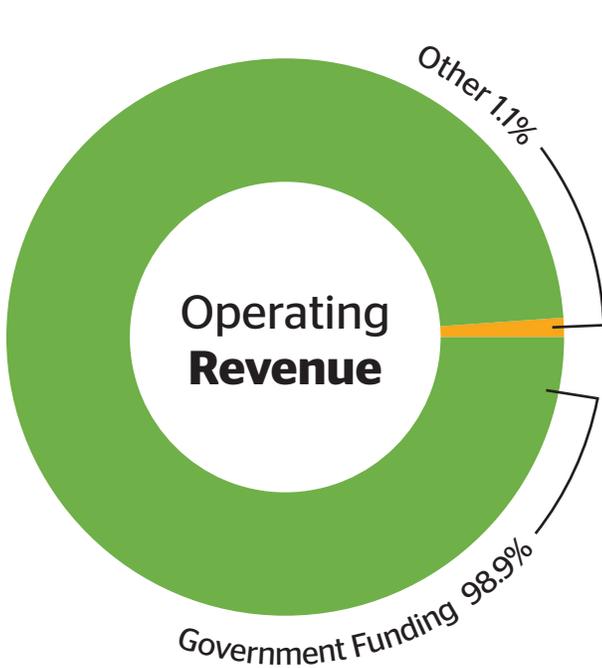
"In 2014 the outside world disappeared from me. I no longer could travel by myself with Wheel Trans, do my errands or whatever I wanted to do... I contacted Deafblind Community Services at CNIB... Finally, what I thought was the end of my outside world contact in 2014, I got my life back!"

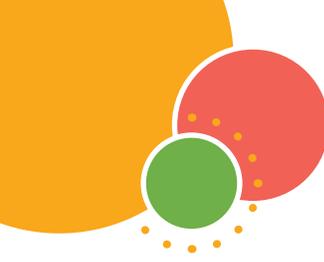
**- Ilona, client**



# Financial Overview

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, 2020 were prepared in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations and were audited by Deloitte LLP. Visit [deafblindservices.ca](http://deafblindservices.ca) for more information.





# Our Team

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

**Kelly Kimens**  
Chair

**Denise Beaumont**  
Vice Chair

**Charlie Thompson**  
Treasurer

**Shari Bancarz**

**Lindee David**

**Robert Froom**

**Penny Leclair**

**Cheryl Wilson**

## Executive leadership team

**John M. Rafferty**  
President and CEO

**Maria Ash**  
Vice President, Business Support Services

**Sherry Grabowski**  
Executive Director

**Betty Leeson**  
Director of Operations

**Angelina Algranti**  
Director of People and Culture

## Our people make the difference

Because one-on-one support is the foundation of what we do, we know that having the right people in place is crucial to providing our clients with the quality of services they need and deserve. Here are just a few ways that we worked to foster a strong team in the last year:

- **Celebrating outstanding service** with the Kerry G Wadman Award, which was given to Provincial Project Coordinator Janine Tucker in 2019.
- **Attracting the best talent** by participating in job fairs across Ontario and launching a new applicant tracking system, Workable, to proactively attract applications, boost team collaboration, and promote internal mobility.
- **Prioritizing continuous improvement** by holding an ASL Immersion Week for staff with a "no voice" rule in effect.
- **Sharing the voices of our team** through the newly launched DBCS Blog on our website.

# CNIB Deafblind Community Services

is one of Ontario's leading providers of specialized support and emergency services for people who are Deafblind. Funded by the Government of Ontario, our intervenor services, literacy program and emergency intervenor services enable people who are Deafblind to maximize their safety, independence and engagement with the world around them.



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