



DeafBlind
ONTARIO SERVICES

Pre Budget Submission

**Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn
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Standing Committee on Finance
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*When we do the best that we can, we never know what miracle
is wrought in our life, or in the life of another.
Helen Keller*

The Bob Rumball Associations for the Deaf (BRAD), Canadian Hellen Keller Centre (CHKC), CNIB, Community Living Wallaceburg and DeafBlind Ontario Services present the following recommendations for Intervenor Services for the 2016-2017 Ontario Budget:

- ✓ **RECOMMENDATION:** Invest in critical services for individuals who are deafblind and increase compensation for Intervenor Services in the Ontario Government's fiscal framework. Salaries should recognize the expertise, unique skill set and contributions of the profession of Intervenor Services, while including cost of living increases.



Executive Summary

The Bob Rumball Associations for the Deaf (BRAD), Canadian Hellen Keller (CHKC), CNIB, Community Living Wallaceburg and DeafBlind Ontario Services are pleased to provide recommendations for consideration in the 2016 - 2017 Ontario Budget. As organizations working in partnership from across the Intervenor services¹ sector, this input reflects a collaborative, collective approach to addressing a gap in Intervenor salaries. Resources to facilitate communication for individuals living with deafblindness need to be available *now and in the future*.

Deafblindness is a distinct disability. It is defined as a combined loss of hearing and vision to such an extent that neither the hearing nor vision can be used as a means of accessing information to participate and be included in the community.²

Across Ontario, Intervenor services make a significant difference in the lives of persons who are deafblind to *enable* them to become more independent. Professional Intervenor “facilitate the interaction of the person who is deafblind with other people and the environment. The intervenor provides information about the environment and what is happening (using receptive language), assists the individual who is deafblind to communicate (using expressive language), provides or develops concepts where necessary, confirms actions, assists with life skills and most importantly, assists the individual to achieve as much independence as possible within their situation. The intervenor takes direction from the individual who is deafblind.”³

Individuals who are deafblind deserve every opportunity to participate fully in their communities. Intervenor services support “Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, **services, facilities, accommodation,**” in alignment with the principles of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act (AODA).⁴

An investment in Intervenor services is an investment in one of the most vulnerable populations in Ontario.

¹ <http://www.intervenorservices.com/index.php/resources>

² Deafblind International – Guidelines on Best Practice for Service Development for Deafblind People, page 13, <http://www.deafblindinternational.org/PDF/Guidelines%20for%20Best%20Practice%20for%20Service%20Provision%20to%20Deafblind%20People.pdf>

³ *ibid*

⁴ Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11>



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1. Professional Intervenor services compensation

CHALLENGE: Compensation in the Intervenor services sector remains low and non-competitive compared to salaries in other social services sectors. Salaries are not keeping pace with the growing need for more services or reflect the specialized skillsets required of Intervenor to meet the unique, individualized support needs of individuals who are deafblind.

Intervenor services are a critical part of the equation for a person living with deafblindness. Intervenor are professionals who receive specialized training in order to be effective because “deafblindness is a distinct condition, recognised as a third separate impairment alongside deafness and blindness.”⁵

The specialized training and skills required of an Intervenor in order for them to be effective has a profound impact on the lives of some of society’s most vulnerable people, “failure to provide support to the individual ...may result in ...an increased isolation and stress—factors associated with deafblindness and heightened vulnerability. Additionally, lack of communication abilities increases vulnerability to abuse and many deafblind people need specialist support staff to teach and maintain communication strategies.”⁶ Without these critical supports, a person who is deafblind can become vulnerable and disconnected from the world around them.

“My son has been deafblind since he was 6 months old. In addition to being deafblind, he has other health issues.

Although my son cannot verbally communicate, it is through his Intervenor that we were able to discover that he loves to have the sunshine on his face in the summer time as he swings on a tire and loves to feel the wind blow in his hair while going on a boat ride. He loves the rough and tumble of playing with a dog or going for a walk with his buddies. He will laugh, giggle or scream and let you know what he likes or does not like.

⁵ Deafblind and Neglected or Deafblindness Neglected? Revisiting the Case of Beverley Lewis Peter Simcock* and Jill Manthorpe. Downloaded from <http://bjsw.oxfordjournals.org/> at Staffordshire University Library and Information Service on May 28, 2013

⁶ Deafblind and Neglected or Deafblindness Neglected?



For my son, the support of an Intervenor is essential. An Intervenor is his means of communicating with and understanding the world around him. Without the support of an Intervenor, he would be trapped in his body, unable to participate in life – literally in a prison.” (Parent story)

The Ontario Government’s Throne Speech identified a perspective that aligns with the collaborative, team approach adopted by the Intervenor services sector: “together, we will achieve the promise of an even brighter future for all.” Intervenor work together with a person who is deafblind to not only provide them with the ability to communicate but also the tools to achieve their life’s dreams. Intervenor are part of a brighter future for a person who is deafblind.

It is time to invest in the future by investing in Intervenor services.

Intervenor are equipped with post-secondary education and extensive training in specialized communication methods (in addition to following a professional code of conduct and in some cases achieving certification) to prepare them to meet the variety of needs of the individuals they may work with. Their work requires that they customize their approach to ensure a person-centred standard of care. Because each person’s communication methods are different, each person living with deafblindness will need services that are customised to fit his/her personal support needs and preferences.

It is estimated that approximately 90% of professional Intervenor are female.⁷

Findings from the Gender Wage Gap report confirmed that: “work performed or dominated by women has historically been, and continues to be, undervalued. This is a major contributor to the gender wage gap.”⁸ It also stated that Intervenor are likely to fall into segments of the population where this is a systemic issue, “female-dominant jobs can be undervalued within organizations and by sector. The majority of female-dominant work is found in caring professions in the public sector, including home care, community living, child care, and domestic violence.”⁹

⁷ ISHRS Survey 2015

⁸ Final Report and Recommendation of the Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee, Prepared for the Minister of Labour, the Minister Responsible for Women’s Issues, page 29

⁹ Ibid p 32



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Following through on the recommendations to close the wage gap will alter historic employment barriers and begin to concretely recognize the education and training that Intervenor bring to the job, “the government should consult with relevant workplace parties on how to value work in female-dominant sectors.... [and focus on] determining ways to raise wage rates to reflect the value of the work performed.”¹⁰

Providing an increase in Intervenor compensation would align with recommendations from *Change Work*, which suggested that providing a fair income would be one way to value employees’ productivity by promoting income fairness.¹¹

The Ontario Government is to be commended for their plan to “build Ontario up” so that “more will feel an increased sense of security.”¹² The current focus on job creation and economic growth is encouraging for it will “make sure that everyone shares in the prosperity we are building together.” At a time when the economy is still experiencing challenges, a renewed focus on supporting Ontarians to find and maintain meaningful employment is a welcome response, “because good jobs and economic growth mean you can support your family and our communities can thrive.”

The Ontario Government can help promote growth and stability by increasing Intervenor salaries. It is anticipated that the numbers of persons who are living with deafblindness will increase, given the Ministry of Community and Social Services’ less prescriptive service eligibility criteria. These changes will result in an even stronger demand for more Intervenor across the sector.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in critical services for individuals who are deafblind and increase compensation for Intervenor in the Ontario government’s fiscal framework. Salaries should recognize the expertise, unique skill set and contributions of the profession of Intervenor Services, while including cost of living increases.

¹⁰ Ibid p 34

¹¹ *Change Work: Valuing decent work in the not-for-profit sector*, Ontario Nonprofit Network, Toronto Neighbourhood Centres and Mowat NFP, November 2015

¹² Throne Speech, Ontario Government, September 12, 2016 <https://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2016/09/speech-from-the-throne.html>



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Conclusion

The Ontario Government is encouraged to make an impact in the lives of persons who are deafblind and invest in service provision that can propel the way forward to greater independence.

Individuals who are deafblind can build independent lives, contribute to their communities and achieve success with the support of Intervenor services.

The Ontario Government has demonstrated leadership in recognizing the results between investments in employees and impact on the economy.

Help make a difference in the lives of individuals in society who need additional supports.

Invest in Ontario's professional Intervenors.

