



CDBRA-BC APPLAUDS STEPS TOWARDS EQUALITY FOR PERSONS WITH DEAFBLINDNESS

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For an individual with deafblindness, life as a Canadian is not an equitable one. To fully participate as Canadian citizens, one must be granted the same rights to access and inclusion as the balance of society. Individuals who speak multiple languages are provided interpreters, individuals who require legal assistance are provided with lawyers, but if you are a deafblind person in Canada who requires assistance to communicate, you must fight for your rights.

On August 12, 2006 the Federal Court of Canada released a decision dictating that all government services must be available in sign language free of charge. The decision declared that deaf, deafened, deafblind and hard of hearing Canadians should have the same access to government services and programs and that when required the Government of Canada should provide for the required communication services.

Over the past number of years there have been many decisions supporting efforts to include these individuals fully in Canadian life. Almost ten years ago, the Supreme Court of Canada declared that sign language interpreters must be provided to deaf persons in hospitals. Sometimes equality takes a long time.

Deafblindness is frequently referred to as a communication disability; in that the only disability is the inability to clearly receive data from ones surroundings and/or to clearly provide data to ones surroundings. Providing written and electronic media, technology, intervenors, interpreters and other communication specialists would allow Canadians with deafblindness to have the access they need. The Canadian Deafblind and Rubella Association of BC (CDBRA-BC) hopes that the government will utilize these communication formats as they move towards providing full and equitable services to deafblind Canadians.

"This decision is a huge step towards communication equality for our members", said Wylie Bystedt, President CDBRA-BC, "We support this recent decision and as an agency that focuses on deafblindness we want to encourage any activity that enhances or contributes to our members' ability to fully participate as citizens in our society."

Like all Canadians, individuals who are deafblind want to work, raise their families, enjoy recreational activities and talk or work with their government. Hopefully we can continue to move in positive steps towards these outcomes.

Canadian Conference on Deafblindness

On September 21, 2006, individuals from across Canada and around the world will be attending the 7th Canadian Conference on Deafblindness in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This conference is co-hosted by the Manitoba and the National Chapter of the Canadian Deafblind and Rubella Association. Experts in the field of deafblindness, medical professionals, intervenors and individuals with deafblindness will be provided the opportunity to share resources, exchange information and discuss advocacy issues that affect us all.

Further information on deafblindness and the Canadian Conference, please go to the CDBRA-BC website at www.cdbrabc.ca.

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