

## **History of the Canadian Deafblind Association Ontario Chapter**

The Canadian Deafblind Association Ontario Chapter (CDBA Ontario) is a registered charity and has provided services to the deafblind community across the province for more than 25 years. CDBA Ontario is recognized within Canada and around the world as a leader in the provision of Intervenor services.

The organization was originally incorporated in November 1990 as the Canadian Deafblind and Rubella Association (Ontario Chapter) Inc. At the time, Rubella (also known as German measles) was the leading cause of congenital deafblindness. However, successful Rubella immunization programs significantly decreased the incidence of Rubella. A decision was made to remove Rubella from the organization's name, which created inclusiveness by recognizing a wider variety of causes of deafblindness. The name change did not affect CDBA Ontario's philosophy or Intervenor services. CDBA Ontario Chapter continues to be a subject matter expert on Rubella.

Canadian Deafblind Association National began as a grassroots organization in the 1970s, spearheaded by a group of parents from across the country who had children in the residential deafblind program at W. Ross Macdonald School in Brantford (WRMS). At the time, the WRMS deafblind program was the only educational program in Canada for children who were deafblind. It was through this connection that a number of parents and dedicated professionals at W. Ross Macdonald School worked together to form CDBA National. In the early days, the work of the organization centred around raising awareness of the unique disability of deafblindness and advocating for appropriate services for their children who were deafblind, both during school holidays and after graduation from WRMS.

In the early 1990s need arose for CDBA Ontario to transition from its role of advocacy and awareness into a provider of deafblind services. The move was largely driven by the lack of services available to students who were graduating from the deafblind program at W. Ross Macdonald School. Today, CDBA Ontario supports more than 75 adults across the province with Intervenor services.

CDBA Ontario offers Intervenor services in three distinct settings: home-based, community-based and residential. Ensuring that people who are deafblind are involved in their local community is a key component of Intervenor services.

The vision of CDBA Ontario is: "All people who are deafblind will live rich meaningful lives."

The Ministry of Community and Social Services designates CDBA Ontario as the single point of access for planning for all people who are deafblind in the province.

CDBA Ontario has been fortunate over the years to have dedicated and visionary board members who together with the staff have continued to develop services for individuals who are deafblind and their family members.

The organization worked with George Brown College to create a Certificate in Congenital Deafblindness.

In 2012, CDBA Ontario achieved its longtime goal of opening a resource centre specially designed for people who are deafblind. It was also the first property owned by the organization, which until that time always leased space. The CDBA Ontario Resource Centre, located in a renovated former elementary

school at 50 Main St. in Paris, Ont., offers expanded services to people who are deafblind through employment opportunities, social and recreational activities, training and a variety of general interest classes. Special features include a soothing and stimulating Snoezelen room, state-of-the-art music room and coming soon a one-of-a-kind outdoor sensory garden. The building also serves as the headquarters of CDBA Ontario.

Another milestone was achieved in February 2016 when CDBA Ontario opened an apartment complex next door to the resource centre to support up to 20 people who are deafblind in the Paris community. A study undertaken by the organization revealed concerns around suitable housing, sustainability and adaptability for people who are deafblind to age in place. The \$2.9-million apartment complex has six three-bedroom apartments and two one-bedroom apartments on the ground floor. The second floor includes space for overnight staff, office space for Intervention Coordinators, storage and a unit for overnight family stays.

CDBA Ontario introduced an annual golf tournament fundraiser in 2014.

A gala was held in November 2015 to celebrate the organization's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

CDBA Ontario has grown significantly from the early days of awareness and advocacy to becoming the leaders in the provision of services to individuals who are deafblind and their families.

The current members of CDBA Ontario -- the stakeholders, the consumers, the staff and the families -- are truly grateful to the early pioneers who had the foresight and the ambition to form the association and bravely pave the path to the services and supports that are available today.