



International Week of the Deaf- With Sign Language Rights, Our Children Can!

September 21-27, 2015

World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)'s Theme

“With Sign Language Rights, Our Children Can!” draws upon the principle of basic human rights in relation to (sign) language acquisition at birth. It is about recognising deaf individuals as primary visual beings belonging to a linguistic minority (deaf community) and calls for sign language to be made available to deaf persons as a birthright. Article 24 Section 3b of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) obligates governments to facilitate the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community.

“With Sign Language Rights, Our Children Can!” recognizes sign language as a valid linguistic means of conveying thoughts, ideas and emotions. This fact has been accepted and enacted into Article 2 of the CRPD, which defines sign languages as equal to spoken languages. As such, acquiring sign language shall not be considered as the last resort, least desirable or temporary option for deaf children and consequently they must not be denied access to sign language from birth.

“With Sign Language Rights, Our Children Can!” stresses that the use of sign language does not hinder the learning of a spoken language and that literacy and language does not equal speech and communication. Language development must precede everything else, speech development can occur later. Conversely, early speech development alone will not guarantee language and literacy skills. The brain, without adequate stimulation during the critical learning years, ages 0-3, may atrophy as much as 30%. In fact, hearing babies whose parents use sign language have a head start in communicating with their parents. Due to insufficient family and community support during this critical learning period, deaf children are needlessly found to be stalled in language acquisition when commencing formal schooling.

Canadian Association of the Deaf-Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC)'s Theme

1. In compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the federal government must introduce an Act of Parliament recognizing, promoting, and protecting our human rights to Deaf people's first languages in Canada-- American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des Signes Quebecoise (LSQ) -- and the linguistic identity of the Deaf community to integrate with both English and French societies.
2. All provincial and territorial governments, under their constitutional responsibility for education, employment, immigration services, court administrative services, health care and social programs, must provide ASL and LSQ so that Deaf people will have equal access to such services and programs.

3. All early intervention programs must include Sign language on at least an equal basis with oral methods. This includes equal funding, equal support services, and equal opportunity for deaf infants and children to be taught ASL/LSQ as their first language. Research proves this is the essential and most effective route to Deaf literacy and language skills.
4. The provincial and territorial governments must provide sufficient and sustained funding in support of Sign-based Deaf education, particularly the Deaf provincial schools. Sign-based education is the key to linguistic and cultural identity that gives Deaf individuals a strong personal base from which to achieve full citizenship, education, and employment. The unacceptable alternative is high rates of unemployment, educational failures, mental health issues, and addiction problems. In other words, governments should spend money on Deaf education now, instead of spending multi-millions of dollars later on the long-term poverty, unemployment, and social and health care expenses that are the end-product of their failure to adequately support the best Deaf education possible.
5. Federal and provincial/territorial governments must provide a legal structure to recognize and promote certified, qualified, and professionally-trained ASL-English interpreters, LSQ-French interpreters, Deaf Interpreters and ASL-LSQ interpreters to ensure communication access between Deaf people and government programs and services.