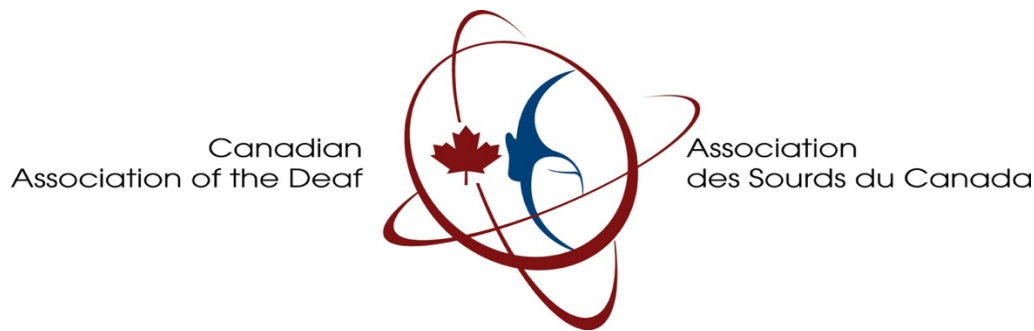


GROUND-BREAKING CHURCHILL FAMILY HONOURED FOR THEIR ROLE IN DEAF EDUCATION IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 18, 2023

Kimberly and Todd Churchill of Newfoundland and Labrador fought over the course of 5 years —and won—a landmark legal victory in March 2023 for the right to a full and fair public education for their now-12-year-old son, Carter, who is Deaf and has cerebral palsy. This victory at the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Board of Inquiry has created a formal legal precedent for full social inclusion as well as access to a sign language rich environment where the curriculum is instructed and assessed in the Deaf child’s first language.

This decision formally documents the right to Deaf-friendly education for all Deaf and hard of hearing children in Canada everywhere, including teachers and assistants proficient in sign language, satellite classrooms specialized to bring Deaf children into the same classroom, and newfound respect and public awareness for sign language in general, specifically American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) and Indigenous Sign Language (ISLs) here in Canada.

Carter’s family, Todd and Kimberly Churchill and his brother Hunter, received the Henry Vlug Award on August 5, 2023, in front of a devoted audience at an Awards Gala in Ottawa, Ontario, hosted by the Canadian Association of the Deaf—Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC). Presenting the award, the wife of the namesake of the award, Leonor Vlug, herself a long-serving Secretary of the Board of this association.

The Henry Vlug Award is presented for political, legal, or advocacy action that has significantly increased the equality of Deaf Canadians and named in honour of Henry Vlug the first Deaf lawyer in Canada.

At the awards ceremony, the Churchills delivered an emotional speech on the toll the human rights ordeal had taken upon the family ever since they filed in May 2017, when Carter was only six years old. During the human rights process, the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) spent almost \$750,000 in legal resources to defend the discrimination of the Churchill's Deaf son but were still found guilty of discrimination against Carter for four (4) consecutive years while a student at Beachy Cove Elementary. The Churchills, while accepting the award, articulated a plea to all school boards nation-wide to properly accommodate all Deaf children, including a recognition of the centrality of sign language in Deaf education.

Along with the Churchill Family, the CAD-ASC believes, that it is unacceptable in this day and age, to witness how Carter was denied his basic human rights to education. CAD-ASC is not surprised that this discrimination continues in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador following the closing of the only Deaf School in the Province in 2010. At that time, Provincial Child and Youth Advocate Jackie Lake Kavanagh's reported on the challenges deaf and hard of hearing students face in the system.

CAD-ASC calls upon Premier Andrew Furey to amend his 2021 mandate letter to the Honourable Krista Lynn Howell, Minister of Education to take into account the history and recent Human Rights Board of Inquiry decision and direct her to reverse the mistreatment of Deaf students in the Province. We ask that her mandate clearly identify her obligation to redress these systemic failures and ensure that the education system address the needs of Deaf and Deaf-Blind students on par with their hearing counterparts.

CAD-ASC further highlights the legal responsibility of all provincial jurisdictions to comply United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which was ratified by Canada in March 2010 with respect to specific provisions for the delivery of Deaf education in Canada. We call upon the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to fully implement the Accessibility legislation and its regulations, that will remove barriers to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in all areas of provincial jurisdiction including Article 24 of the UNCRPD on matters of Education.

During this [International Week of the Deaf](#), the CAD-ASC ask that all decisions and actions taken concerning the Deaf communities and schools, be done in consultation with Deaf leaders, teachers, consultants and experts in education and sign language, as well as the students and parents of the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and hard of hearing communities.

For more information contact:

Shawna Joynt

President,
Canadian Association of the Deaf – Association des Sourds du Canada

Richard Belzile
Executive Director
Canadian Association of the Deaf – Association des Sourds du Canada

Kim and Todd Churchill
Parents of Carter Churchill
www.carterchurchill.ca