

# V I B R A T I O N S

**NEWSLETTER OF COLORADO SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE DEAFBLIND**

**Serving Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss,  
Their Families, and Their Service Providers**

**FALL 2001 EDITION: FOCUS ON INTERVENERS**

*This is an edited version of the original newsletter. Only the articles pertinent to working as an intervener or with an intervener have been maintained as resource information. If you copy any of this information, please give credit to its original source.*

## **Out of the Corner and into the Class: The Role of the Intervener with Deafblind Children**

**By Beth Fox**

*Editors Note: Beth attended the 2001 Summer Institute on Deafblindness and this is the paper she turned in for university credit. Beth captured many key points that were made by Linda Alsop during the two-day training. Thank you, Beth, for putting your notes in such an easy to read format about the role of interveners.*

***Who is that child sitting alone in the corner of the room?*** It may be a child who is deafblind. Deafblindness is a complex disability, which is characterized by a combined loss of vision and hearing. The vision and hearing loss is compounded exponentially when there are additional disabilities to create extreme challenges in the areas of communication, development of interpersonal relationships, behavior, sensory integration, and motor and cognitive development.

***Why does this child need extra help beyond conventional special education?*** Due to the child's dual sensory loss, she lacks access to information. This challenge may prevent the child from interacting with her environment and encourages isolation and internalization with focus upon self-stimulation. The less a child interacts within her environment, the fewer chances she has to learn.

***What will it take to help move the child forward and closer to his or her classmates?*** A person who can consistently bridge the gap of sensory deprivation so that the child can receive information and become linked to the world around her is needed. This person is called intervener. The intervener can provide information to child so that she may better understand her environment and act appropriately within it. The intervener serves to interpret information from the child and also acts as a conduit for communication between the child and others. An intervener could be described as a consistent filter, communication cable, facilitator, or bridge. An intervener does not control, create dependency, make decisions for the child, or stand as a barrier between the child and others.

***Is the intervener presented with many challenges in assisting the child along the path toward his classmates?*** The intervener must learn all about the child who is deafblind and appreciate her uniqueness. This person should have a secure understanding of the child's vision and hearing and how information is received. Much time will be spent learning about the child's personal system for information exchange. These things will be the basis for building a communication system that will eventually link the child to her environment and the people who are active within it.

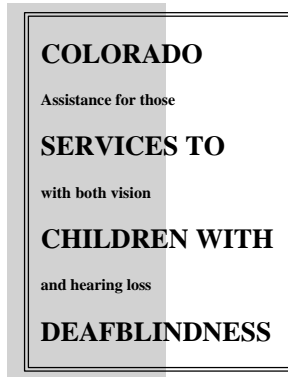
***Why is this interface between the child and intervener so important?*** A monitor and keyboard are cabled to a CPU of a computer so that information can be entered and returned. These pieces are not unlike the relationship between an intervener and the child with combined vision and hearing loss. The child, like the CPU, is a full of power but can only make an impact with the proper access pieces, otherwise, it will be left in the corner and the potential to positively impact the environment will be left undiscovered.

***How will the intervener guide the deafblind child to the middle of the room?*** The child will gravitate toward her peers through learning. Curiosity equals learning and the intervener can fuel the child's motivation for curiosity. The intervener will help the child understand concepts and facilitate this transfer from the home environment so that concepts may be generalized to a variety of situations. The intervener ensures that the child has access to the results her trial and error learning so that education can occur. The constancy of the intervener will discourage stress in the child and allow her to learn more easily.

***Can this child exhibit behavior that is suitable for a classroom setting?*** An intervener can chart behavior so that it can be understood as a means of communicating why the child is frustrated, hurt, etc. "Inappropriate" behavior is generally due to lack of information. Once the behavior is understood and communication systems are established then the proper information can be conveyed to the child.

***How will an intervener significantly improve the life of a deafblind child with regard to their peers and classroom experiences?*** An intervener can include a child with combined vision and hearing loss in class activities and limit problems of isolation by providing information to child and allowing her to interact with classmates. The intervener plays an important role in facilitating introductions of new people to the deafblind child and, over time, can release child to the new person. An overwhelming portion of learning is tertiary (comes from simple observation) and this incidental learning does not occur in individuals with sensory deprivation unless an intervener is constantly present to inform the child about who or what is around her and what is occurring with these people, situations, or objects.

***Is the intervener a classroom teacher?*** The intervener is not the classroom teacher but provides no less a vital service than his or her counterpart. The intervener is under the direction of the teacher and the relationship between the two must be emotionally strong. It may take much effort for each person to be able to discuss, explore, and work together to create the best possible learning situation for the child. The teacher and intervener must respect each other and all people who work in various roles with the deafblind child. When this practice occurs teachers, interveners, and all students will meet at the center of the room and will benefit greatly.



# Fact Sheet

## **The Role of the Intervener with Children Who Are Deafblind**

To children with a dual sensory impairment, or deafblindness, the world may not exist beyond their fingertips. Although a child may have some hearing or vision, neither sense may be strong enough to compensate for the lack of the other. Without this sensory information, the child may become isolated and unable to make a connection with the world. In order to be able to understand the world that is out there, the world must be brought to them. The child with deafblindness needs to be provided with strategies to interpret, understand, explore, communicate with, and given access to the world around them. All of these things will allow the child to have access to the world and eventually become more independent.

An intervener is a paraeducator that has been specifically assigned to the person with deafblindness in the home, school, or community environment. The intervener should be able to facilitate the process that creates access to visual and auditory information. The intervener should have specific and intense training in deafblindness, acquire a variety of specialized techniques for communication and intervention and promote independence of deafblind individuals. The intervener should also be exempt from other duties of the school such as, cafeteria duty, bus duty, and such.

The intervener has a specific role as the 'eyes' and 'ears' of the person with deafblindness. A key role is to provide support, to enable effective communication and the receipt of clear information for the child with deafblindness. The role of the intervener is also to help the child be as independent as possible. Interveners make it easier for persons with deafblindness to get information and to interact within the environment. Another component is that of the social emotional piece. The role of the intervener is to develop and maintain a trusting, interactive relationship that promotes social and emotional well being.

The intervener:

1. Provides a bridge between the child and the world.
2. Interprets the world for the child in a form he can understand.
3. Provides constant non-distorted information to the child.
4. Provides information so that the child can know what is going to happen before it happens, what is happening, when it is over and what is going to happen next.
5. Provides motivation so that the child can reach out beyond himself and explore.
6. Provides enough support to the child that can be successful in a reasonable length of time. Also provides appropriate pacing to the activity.
7. Facilitates communication between the child and others.
8. Facilitates the child's participation in all of the routines of the class and / or home environment.

9. Helps the child see the results of his actions.
10. Provides emotional bonding that can expand to other people.

When planning a program for a child with deafblindness who will be using the services of an intervener, there are some things to consider.

1. Does the child have access to ongoing sensory information, which is needed for teaming and interaction with the environment and which is equal to that of the other learners?
2. Does the child have access to natural and least restrictive environments, the general curriculum and appropriate activities?
3. Does the current Individual Family Service Plan or Individual Education Program include the accommodations and modifications that are necessary for concept and skill development, individualized learning, appropriate activity pacing, and positive reinforcement?
4. Does the child have a communication system that allows for interaction – both receptive and expressive – with parents, siblings, peers, teachers, service providers, and others? Do the people know how to interact with the individual?
5. Does the child use assistive listening devices and vision aides? Do environmental and instructional accommodations need to be made to maximize the use of residual vision and/or hearing?
6. Does the programming include strategies to support social and emotional well-being, and does the child have trusting relationships with others?
7. Does the programming ensure that the process of intervention will be in place for the child?

The definition of the intervener fully supports the definition of inclusion. The intervener provides the information needed so that the individual with deafblindness has full access to the general education curriculum, as well as to his non-disabled peers.

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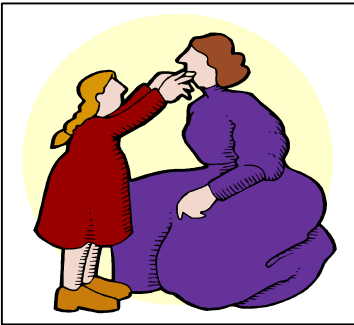
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*Fact Sheets from the Colorado Services to Children with Deafblindness Project are to be used by both families and professionals serving individuals with vision and hearing loss. The information applies to children, birth through 21 years of age. The purpose of the Fact Sheet is to give general information on a specific topic. More specific information for an individual student can be provided through personalized technical assistance available from the Colorado Deafblindness Project. For more information call (303) 866-6681 or (303) 866-6605.*

*Information for this Fact Sheet taken from a lecture by Linda Alsop, 2001 Colorado Summer Institute on Deafblindness*

## *Jennifer McEachen: A Student with an Intervener*



*This article was found in the Provincial Outreach Program for Students with Deafblindness Newsletter and was reprinted by them with permission from the Prince George Citizen. It was written by a student who is deafblind about the effects that her intervenor has had on her life. Note the Canadian spelling has an “or” ending to the word intervenor.*

Jennifer is, as described by staff, a student who is always smiling. Her sunny disposition prevails regardless of the tasks set her. At school Jennifer helps out in the office, story tells in the primary classrooms, runs the sign language club, and assists other students with computer skills. Her long range plan is to be a teacher. In October 1995, Jennifer was a guest speaker at an Introductory Workshop on Deafblindness, facilitated by the Outreach Program and hosted by the Prince George School District. She gave a very informative presentation during which she discussed intervention, demonstrated some role plays that her intervenor had done with her when she was learning new social skills, and then answered our questions. Everyone who attended the workshop was very impressed with how articulate Jennifer was, and thoroughly enjoyed her presentation. The following are notes from this presentation.

### What It Was Like For Me Before I Had An Intervenor:

- Couldn't understand the teacher
- It was scary going to hearing impaired rooms by myself
- Felt unorganized, didn't do homework because I didn't understand it
- Kids teased me at recess and lunch
- Had one friend, an older girl
- People kept saying “Jennifer, pay attention”
- Hated math and all other subjects
- Didn't like school
- People bossed me around when my intervenor wasn't there (ie) telling me to do something that I knew I wasn't supposed to do like getting my hearing aids wet at fun day
- Played alone

### After Getting My Intervenor:

- I felt happy with my intervenor and safe but still hated school
- Had a pen pal book with intervenor's daughter who was in grade 8
- Like the Friendship Club my intervenor started
- Liked the sign language club that my intervenor had twice a week

### What Does Mrs. Ko, My Intervenor Do?

- Writes or types my notes from the board or movies when I can't see or hear
- Helps me with math. I love math now.
- Tells me instructions in gym
- She is calm and nice and talks to me and helps me if I have a problem
- Sometimes helps me at Judo
- Is my best friend
- Is helping me get ready for high school
- Takes care of FM and Closed Caption problems
- Teaches me about using TTY and Fax machines
- Helped me learn to type, before I hated it and now I love it.
- Tells me when I misunderstand information
- Helps me in the school office sometimes
- Teaches me about money
- Goes with me to the primary classes when I go to explain about Deafblindness
- Teaches me new signs
- Goes to workshops to learn more about deafblindness
- Explains idioms
- Shows me about how to act in certain situations so kids won't make fun of me
- When kids are laughing in class or someone is getting into trouble, my intervenor tells me what is going on. She helps me to understand.
- When kids ask questions I can't hear the answers because the teacher is wearing the FM. My intervenor tells me what is being said.

### What Kinds Of Things Do I Have Trouble With At School?

- Seeing the board
- If more than 1 person is talking I can't hear what is being said
- Afraid of balls in gym
- Afraid of running in the woods and on hills because of the uneven land
- Finding friends was one of my biggest problems but that is getting better now
- Some people think that I am the same as other deaf people, but I can't use my vision the same way that they do, so it's different for me

### What Kinds Of Things Would Make School Life Easier For Me?

- To have the whole school know how to use the FM

### What Worries Me About High School?

- Going from one class to another because the hallways are so crowded and because I am used to staying in one room
- I wonder what the teachers are going to be like and what the other kids are going to say to me
- I'm anxious to find out what subjects I will be taking.

# "What's My Role?"

## A Comparison of the Responsibilities of Interpreters, Interveners, and Support Service Providers

By Susanne Morgan, M.A., C.I., C.T.

*Reprinted with permission from Deaf-Blind Perspectives, Vol. 9, Issue 1, Fall 2001.*

Individuals who are deaf-blind access the world differently from their hearing-sighted peers. To ensure meaningful linkages to the environment and equal access to information, a variety of trained personnel and support persons are required. In recent years much attention has been given to the different roles that individuals play in providing this support.

The most familiar type of support is that provided by sign language interpreters. Formal interpreting services were established to meet the needs of deaf individuals. In recent years, these services have been expanded for persons with combined hearing and vision loss. This type of support, however, does not meet all of the unique communication needs of deaf-blind individuals.

Normal everyday life takes place in a variety of settings, including home, school, work, and recreation. For individuals who are deaf-blind, different settings require different types of communication supports. As the developmental, educational, and social needs of deaf-blind children and adults in these settings are better understood, the roles and responsibilities of support professionals evolve. Terms used to describe these roles, include interpreter, intervener, and support service provider (SSP). The following chart attempts to capture the current understanding of these roles and responsibilities.

<b>An Interpreter</b>	<b>An Intervener</b>	<b>Support Services Provider</b>
<b>Someone who</b>	<b>Someone who</b>	<b>Someone who</b>
Translates information from one mode or language to another (spoken language to sign language and vice versa).	Intercedes between a child and the environment, allowing access to information usually gained through vision and hearing.	Provides support that enhances independence (e.g., facilitating communication, providing sighted guidance, and transportation to/from events).
Works with deaf-blind people of all ages.	Primarily works with children and young adults.	Provides services to deaf-blind youth and adults who are able to make independent decisions.
Is a conduit through which information flows.	Facilitates learning and the development of skills (e.g., receptive and expressive communication, interactive behavior).	Facilitates interaction between a deaf-blind person and the environment.

<b>An Interpreter</b>	<b>An Intervener</b>	<b>Support Services Provider</b>
May have received professional training in an interpreter training program.	May or may not have received specific training (however, training or coursework is recommended).	Is encouraged to receive basic training in the area of deaf-blindness, including communication strategies, sighted-guide techniques, and cultural issues.
Should hold national and/or state certification/licensure and may have a college degree.	Has varying educational and vocational experiences (some states offer coursework/certification).	Has varying educational and vocational experiences.
Abides by a code of ethics.	Acts in a manner that is governed by the local education agency and federal education laws. Is considered a paraprofessional and works with, but does not replace, the teacher. Uses the Individual Education Program as a roadmap for learning. Maintains an educational (teacher-student type) relationship	Abides by standards established by the coordinating agency.
Belongs to a national/regional organization of certified interpreters (e.g. Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, National Association of the Deaf).	May or may not be in contact with other paraprofessionals.	May belong to the coordinating agency's network of SSPs. May interact with other SSPs during local and national events.
Will work in various environments (e.g., educational, medical, religious, social).	Works mainly in an educational setting but may also provide assistance in the community (e.g., daily living skills, medical situations, vocational environments).	Provides assistance in various settings, including the home and community.
May be paid independently, through an agency or by an employer. Is paid commensurate with certification and local standardized fees.	Is paid by the local educational agency or a community provider.	Is usually a volunteer, unless funds have been allocated.

<b>An Interpreter</b>	<b>An Intervener</b>	<b>Support Services Provider</b>
Is required to independently maintain certification through professional development.	Is expected to attend workshops offered in educational settings.	Is usually not required to attend further training, but is encouraged to improve communication skills and interact with the deaf-blind community.
Must remain partial at all times.	Wears “different hats” (e.g., an interpreter, guide, facilitator) Empowers the individual to make his/her own decisions.	Remains impartial, but has more flexibility than an interpreter.
Must keep all information confidential	Is allowed and expected to share pertinent information with team members (e.g., parents, teachers, related service providers).	Is expected to keep information confidential.
Is expected to keep a “professional” distance.	Maintains an educational (teacher-student) relationship.	Is expected to act in a “professional” manner, but may develop personal relationships.
Acts as a conduit (does not “teach” and is not responsible for ensuring that the deaf-blind individual learns what is being shared).	Is accountable for decision-making to enhance learning.	Does not teach, but does provide access to the environment to empower the deaf-blind person.
Always keeps opinions to him/herself.	Empowers individual to make his/her own decisions.	May provide feedback/opinions when asked.

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