

Include.
Advocate.
Empower.



CNIB's Beyond the Classroom Program



Children with sight loss are among the most excluded group from the education system.

The World Report on Disability 2011 by the World Bank and World Health Organization showed that education outcomes are poorest among children with sensory disabilities such as sight loss, in comparison with children with physical disabilities.

Levelling the Playing Field for Children and Youth with Sight Loss

For those who are blind or partially sighted, moving through the critical stages of childhood, adolescence and early adulthood can bring unique challenges on a practical, emotional, physical and social level. These years are a critical period where young people develop the confidence, independence and sense of self-identity and worth necessary for long-term success in life. Yet research into the experiences of young people with sight loss suggests they are more likely than their sighted peers to report feeling socially excluded and less likely to be satisfied with their lives, or themselves.

There are 15,000 children and youth with sight loss in Canada today, the majority of those being educated in the mainstream school system. While this approach to education has its advantages, it can also create significant challenges in terms of accommodation and inclusion, and exclude even the brightest and most motivated young people.

CNIB's Beyond the Classroom Program is one of several innovative programs we're building to help children and youth with sight loss develop and thrive. Through this program, CNIB can help them meet the challenges they face and ensure they have the support they need to live connected, rewarding and independent lives - but only with your support.



- **51% of high school graduates and 29% of university grads** with sight loss have annual incomes under **\$20,000 a year**
- **12% of blind or partially sighted students graduate with a post-secondary degree,** compared with over 20% of sighted students
- **74 per cent of children** with sight loss **do not play sports**

Empowering Youth and Families in Our School System

For many Ontario children and youth who are blind or partially sighted and their families, navigating the school system can be a difficult and sometimes adversarial process. Beyond the classroom, many families struggle to coordinate the full slate of community services needed to support their school-aged children's healthy development, socialization and academic success. Thus, youth with sight loss often experience academic challenges, encounter significant pre-employment barriers, and miss out on formative life experiences.

That's why it's essential that children and youth with sight loss and their families have the comprehensive support as they move through these critical developmental stages. The right support is an essential foundation for a well-rounded, successful adulthood.

- **Only 65% of youth with sight loss graduate from high school**, compared to 81 per cent of their sighted peers
- **Only one third** of Canadian working-age adults with sight loss **are employed**.

CNIB's Beyond the Classroom program will combat these troubling statistics through a series of focused initiatives. We will work with departments of education on specific accommodations and strategies to improve the level of high school and post-secondary graduates. We will advocate governments to improve funding opportunities, accommodations and individuals supports to advance post-secondary degrees.



Our Vision

The Beyond the Classroom Program will foster knowledge, social skills, self-advocacy and independence among students who are blind or partially sighted. It will help guide children, youth and their families from preschool through post-secondary, alongside existing resources the family may be working with, including itinerant vision teachers in local school boards, ensuring they have access to the same opportunities as their sighted peers.

Through the Beyond the Classroom Program, we aim to:

- **Aid in achieving the best preschool to post-secondary experience** possible for young Ontarians who are blind or partially sighted and their families, and improve graduation rates at all levels of education;
- **Help kids feel more empowered**, confident, independent and included while building their practical, social and self-advocacy skills and creating opportunities for them to learn and grow;
- **Bridge the gap**, answer questions and provide support to all family members invested in the education and lifelong success of young people who are blind or partially sighted;
- **Provide ongoing support** as a primary program activity, giving students, parents, and educators the knowledge and guidance for daily, monthly, and yearly student success;
- **Work with educators** to share information and provide advice about specific situations they are experiencing in the classroom;
- **Connect parents and educators** who all have a common goal of student success through Parent and Educator Conferences;
- **Prepare students to manage life stage transitions** smoothly and with greater confidence.



Advocacy in Action

“Shari” lives in a rural community with limited access to a specialized teacher of students who are blind or partially sighted. She wants to participate in more clubs at school, but has been met with indifference and a lack of understanding about how these activities can be made accessible to students like her.

Beyond the Classroom will help people like Shari and her family work more effectively in collaboration with the school system, which will ensure Shari is effectively included in the full range of academic, extracurricular activities and social opportunities she and every student deserves.

A child who is blind or partially sighted can be integrated into any neighbourhood school. Partnering with School Vision programs, CNIB provides assistance to ensure that the necessary supports and accommodations are there for that child.

Some Challenges Faced by Children and Youth with **Visual Disabilities**:



- **Parents don't always know** how best to support their children with sight loss, or what resources are available to help. Overprotectiveness and low expectations can sometimes stifle kids' talent and potential.
- **Schools can find it problematic** to effectively integrate children with vision loss into the classroom, and make the mainstream curriculum accessible. Thus, kids with sight loss can be left on the sidelines.
- **There can be challenges** between CNIB, schools and board administrators when it comes to ensuring enrolment and retention of students with sight loss, and coordinating needed services.
- **Accessibility is an issue**, with students often experiencing long waits to get curriculum content in formats they can read, and lacking the technology they need to read it.
- **They're often alone in their school**, with few blind or partially sighted peers to turn to for friendship and advice when it comes to their unique needs and experiences.

How Beyond the Classroom Programs Can Help:

- **Educational initiatives for parents** to build their knowledge and confidence in raising an independent, successful blind or partially sighted child. For example, this may include information sessions on a wide range of practical topics relating to healthy child development, navigating and advocating in the school system, awareness of the Extended Core Curriculum (ECE), understanding Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), braille, accessible technology, the roles and responsibilities of vision itinerant teachers, etc.
- **Support for educators**, including in person, telephone, online, and in-classroom support addressing sight loss and access issues.
- **Enhanced collaboration with educators and schools**, looking holistically at the student's needs and working together to coordinate the in-school and extracurricular supports needed.
- **Stronger advocacy** for accessibility in the classroom, including timely availability of alternative-format curriculum material and the technology students need to access it.
- **Peer connections for students, parents, and educators**, including student mentorship opportunities, parent support groups, parent and educator conferences, post-secondary student groups, and referrals to education-based summer programs for students, student panel discussions, group activities and training sessions, online communities and resources, and more.



Coordinated, Holistic Support for Every School-Aged Child

Ninety per cent of learning in the first few years of life is through sight.

Children who are partially sighted can do virtually all the activities and tasks that sighted children take for granted, but they often need to learn to do them in a different way or using different tools or materials. For instance, a child may need reading materials in braille rather than in print or may need to examine a physical object with their hands to understand what it is, rather than learning from a picture in a book.

As part of our school-aged program stream, if a family needs additional resources, CNIB will inform them about available options and help coordinate what they need. CNIB also will help foster inclusion in elementary or secondary school classrooms through specialized training offered in partnership with vision itinerant teachers and education professionals.

To augment school-based supports, CNIB proactively works with each family to explore other programs and services available in their community, such as summer camp, youth empowerment programs, supplementary independent travel training and more. CNIB also connects families together through parent associations and local peer groups, enabling them to learn from one another's life successes and challenges.

The Beyond the Classroom Program will foster knowledge, social skills and independence among blind and partially sighted students, guiding them and their families through the school years, ensuring they have access to the same opportunities as their sighted peers.



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Confidence.
Skills.
Opportunities.

CNIB

Post Secondary
with VISIO

Paving the Way for Post-Secondary Success

Post-Secondary Connect is a specialized stream of the Beyond the Classroom program, offered to students entering or enrolled in post-secondary programs. This program activity focuses on the social inclusion, safety, mental health, wellness, dating, and relationship aspects of the post-secondary experience.

As part of the Program, students meet regularly in a group setting to discuss the issues and challenges that matter most in their lives, and learn from each other. Groups are facilitated by volunteers in specific regions and/or post-secondary institutions, with flexibility in scheduling to accommodate student needs and preferences.

Additionally, professional mentorship is a key component of the program with a view to effectively preparing post-secondary students to move into the workforce. In partnership with CNIB's career support programs, young professional mentors would provide guidance and advice to students navigating the post-secondary landscape. Mentorship could occur in person, over the phone or online via email or Skype.

Post-Secondary Connect will also leverage technology to connect blind and partially sighted post-secondary students to information and advice from peers. An accessible, online solutions database will be developed, allowing students to easily view and share solutions for a range of social and academic issues and challenges encountered in their post-secondary experience.

Many elements of the program will be supported by an active online social community through which students and families can exchange their stories, insights and resources across the country.



Topsy

Building Best-In-Class Programs

CNIB is committed to delivering high quality, evidence-based programs for Ontarians with sight loss. Through an inclusive process of program development and delivery, we strive to make the greatest possible difference in their lives.

The **Beyond the Classroom Program** is offered free of charge to all who need it, but the process of developing and delivering it is resource-intensive. In each stream of the program, this ongoing work involves:

Consultation and Planning – We review research, collaborate with experts, consult with educators and professionals and, most importantly, consult those we serve to gain a robust understanding of the barriers and challenges faced by people with sight loss, the needs they have, and the programs they want.

Program Development – We work with our in-house experts, volunteer advisors, professionals and other leaders in the blindness field to develop innovative programs that respond to participant needs and reflect international best practices.

Program Implementation – We recruit and train dynamic staff and volunteer leaders to roll out programs in selected locations across the province. As programs are launched and piloted, we seek to optimize all aspects of delivery and marketing and improve participant experiences.

Impact Reporting and Expansion – We routinely monitor program effectiveness to ensure participants have the best possible outcomes and reaching their individual goals. We use the data we gather to continually evolve and expand our programs, and identify emerging needs for the future.



Measuring Success

When it comes to helping Ontarians cope with the challenges of sight loss, success is our only option. That's why it's vital that our Beyond the Classroom Program leads to proven, positive outcomes in the lives of those we serve.

CNIB is committed to measuring and maximizing the impact of each of our programs. While research and literature review are underway to determine the best measurement tools for this program, we plan to leverage a range of methodologies to examine the impact of our programs from a range of perspectives, including:

- **Uptake and demand** – How many students and families are registered and participating actively in each of our programs? How many programs can we fill, how many educational partnerships can we establish – and how many more are needed?
- **Participant outcomes** – To what extent are participants meeting the goals and objectives of the program? How much more knowledgeable, independent, confident, connected, optimistic do they feel?
- **Participant, family and educator experiences** – What do participants, families and educators like most about the programs? What learnings have been the most helpful? Where do they see opportunities to enhance and expand the programs?
- **Online engagement** – How engaged are participants with our phone and online resources? How do participants rate the quality of information and resources provided?



We Need Your Support

As we approach CNIB's centenary in 2018, we are proud to unveil a new path for the future – one that sees us working in partnership with those who we serve, as well as provincial governments, school boards and program professionals, educators, the medical community, volunteers and supporters, to create a future in which every Canadian can fully participate in life, regardless of sight loss.

CNIB is levelling the playing field for Canadians with sight loss by developing life-changing programs, imparting vital knowledge, enabling people to lead fuller, more independent lives, demanding societal reform and inspiring change. **But we cannot do it alone.**

It is critical that we work together to ensure that these programs are successful. We can only accomplish this with your support.

Please consider making a gift to support our Beyond the Classroom program in Ontario. Your gift will change lives and empower young people who are blind or partially sighted to achieve their goals and reach their highest potential.

Join us today!



To Make a Donation or Learn More:

Phone: 1.800.563.2642



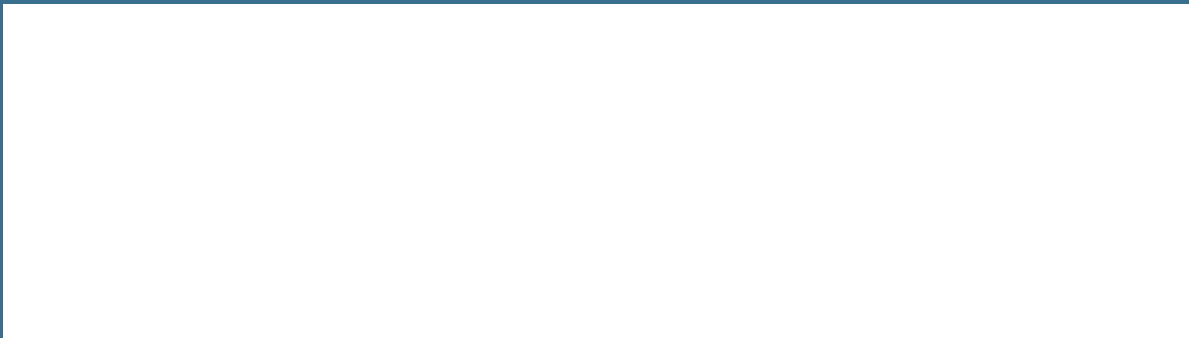
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CNIB Mission

To change what it is to be blind through innovative programs and powerful advocacy that enable Canadians impacted by blindness to live the lives they choose.

About CNIB

Celebrating 100 years in 2018, the CNIB Foundation is a non-profit organization driven to change what it is to be blind today. We deliver innovative programs and powerful advocacy that empower people impacted by blindness to live their dreams and tear down barriers to inclusion. Our work as a blind foundation is powered by a network of volunteers, donors and partners from coast to coast to coast.

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