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Alberta Society of the DeafBlind

## **Alberta Society of the DeafBlind Support Service Provider (SSP) Function, Role and Responsibilities**

**ASL Summary:** <https://youtu.be/oLdmSdseW90>

### *Introduction*

After researching what is being done in Canada and the USA, we prepared an ASL video and an English document, as information tools, to raise awareness and increase the understanding of the important and complex role and responsibilities of the Support Service Provider (SSP). The 'SSP' term was coined in the USA some years ago. For consistency we are also using this term, though in some parts of Canada the term 'intervenor' is used for the same service role.

When we use the term "DeafBlind person" (in ASL and English) it is meant to include **everyone** who might benefit from Support Service Provider (SSP) services, such as people who are: DeafBlind, Hard-of-Hearing-Blind, Low-Vision-Deaf, Low-Vision-Hard-of-Hearing, and DeafBlind-Plus (other disabilities).

### *SSP Function*

Support Service Providers fulfill an important function in the DeafBlind and mainstream community. SSP services prevent isolation and facilitate integral human needs such as:

- Self-determination, communication, intellectual stimulation
- Social inclusion, community contact
- Access to the physical environment

### *SSP Role*

The SSP works with/for DeafBlind persons as they do their personal errands, tasks, appointments or activities. This is done in a manner that leads and enables the DeafBlind person to be as independent as possible. The SSP at all times empowers the DeafBlind person to make their own decisions, and to conduct their own business however they wish, keeping in mind the safety of everyone (including the SSP). The SSP must maintain a courteous and respectful relationship with the DeafBlind person, and behave in a professional manner.

When using the services of the SSP, the DeafBlind person will determine the priorities of what they wish to focus on. The SSP takes direction from the DeafBlind person.

### *SSP Responsibilities*

The two overarching responsibilities of the SSP are to:

1. Provide safe navigation / guiding while travelling
2. Continuously provide information about the environment.

The SSP must be **fluent** in the language and communication preferences of the DeafBlind person (e.g., English, American Sign Language {ASL}, Pro-Tactile), and the SSP must understand how to guide DeafBlind people in various environments (e.g., walking, escalators, stairs, doors, restaurants, offices, malls, transit, snowy, wet, slippery weather conditions, high traffic areas).

More specifically, the responsibilities of the SSP include facilitating:

#### *Access to the community:*

- Serving as a personal navigation guide while walking / travelling
- Making transportation available (e.g., car, public transit, taxi, airplane)
- Describing the physical surroundings constantly, the activities taking place in the environment, the people present, the people arriving or leaving, what is happening, the mood or atmosphere in the setting.

#### *Access to information:*

- Relaying information from TV, Internet, newspaper, magazines, etc.

#### *Access to communication:*

- Facilitating interactions (e.g., store clerk, bank teller, hair stylist, massage therapist, exchanging greetings, brief conversations with others)
- Reading / writing mail, reading / writing e-mail, texts, web sites, blogs, etc.
- Facilitating telecommunication (e.g., phone calls, video calls)

If qualified, the SSP may also act in a separate role as a “communication facilitator” (CF)<sup>1</sup> for video conversations (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, VRS<sup>2</sup>), as well as for in-person situations where ASL is being used, such as events hosted by the Deaf community, or events that are interpreted (e.g., conferences, workshops, meetings, banquets).

SSPs and CFs are expected to follow a Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct<sup>3</sup>.

### *Navigation*

The SSP guides the DeafBlind person to and from their destination, as well as in and around the location, for the length of the time they are there.<sup>4</sup>

Using techniques appropriate to the DeafBlind person’s navigation needs and preferences, the SSP/IV will assist the Deaf-Blind person to access and maneuver through the environment as they go about doing their business. Settings include, but are not limited to:

- Appointments, leisure and recreational activities, sport or athletic events
- Social gatherings, community events, social events, (e.g., theatre, museums, festivals)
- Place of employment, volunteer commitments, places of worship, family gatherings.

### *Interacting with the environment*

Following the preferences of the DeafBlind person, the SSP role is to continuously describe the physical environment, the activities taking place around them, and the ‘atmosphere’ or ‘mood’ of their surroundings. DeafBlind persons want to be informed of what is happening around them, in order to feel connected to their surroundings, and changes that may be taking place. This awareness of their environment empowers them to determine when they wish to more directly interact with the setting, or to engage with those around them.

The SSP and the DeafBlind person work together to maximize the integrity and empowerment of the DeafBlind person. The SSP and DeafBlind person should agree what is best for each situation, keeping in mind safety, the design of the environment, the demands of the setting and the DeafBlind individual’s medical, physical, developmental and cognitive abilities.

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<sup>1</sup> See ASDB Glossary of Terms available on our web site <http://www.albertadeafblind.ca/>

<sup>2</sup> See ASDB Glossary of Terms available on our web site <http://www.albertadeafblind.ca/>

<sup>3</sup> See ASDB Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct for SSPs available on our web site <http://www.albertadeafblind.ca/>

<sup>4</sup> The means of transportation will vary and must be determined in advance; perhaps the SSP will pick up the DeafBlind person and drive to the desired location, perhaps the SSP will meet the DeafBlind person at their home and they will take public transit together, perhaps the SSP will meet the DeafBlind person at the desired (or another) location and carry on from there. Rendezvous and transportation details must be agreed upon in advance.

With this philosophy in mind, the SSP role is to facilitate the autonomy of the DeafBlind person by describing the environment and guiding the DeafBlind person to engage in activities and tasks, even simple things, themselves. Some basic examples include:

- At a buffet, serving their own food onto their plate
- Bringing their own tray of food from the mall food vendors to the table
- Pouring their own drink into the glass
- Pushing the elevator button
- Opening doors
- Pushing the WALK button themselves to cross the street
- Putting groceries in their cart, then on the conveyer, paying cashier, and packing the groceries themselves

The SSP can provide assistance with tasks when asked, particularly if there are concerns about safety, or other factors, like spilling drinks or food. At the same time, the SSP is not a servant for the DeafBlind person so, typically, the DeafBlind person should be going with the SSP to do things, for example, to buy a meal from a food vendor, even if they cannot carry the food back to the table themselves due to safety or spilling risks.

While in a group or social setting, it is not the SSP's role to keep the DeafBlind person company. It is the SSPs' role to describe the environment, identify the people who are present (especially if known to the DeafBlind person), and what is happening. The DeafBlind person will indicate to the SSP when they want to be led to other people present, or will indicate to the SSP to get the another person's attention so the DeafBlind person can call them over. It is the DeafBlind person's autonomy that should be supported and respected, so the SSP follows the DeafBlind person's preferences about what they want to do - - - this is important!

Generally, the SSP should maintain a constant connection (touch) with the DeafBlind person. For example, the SSP is encouraged to keep their hand on the shoulder or back of the DeafBlind person as they interact and have conversations with other people. The DeafBlind person will know that the SSP is still close by.

If there is no touch, the DeafBlind person may feel lost, or may feel awkward searching for the SSP when they are finished with their conversation. This may lead to discomfort or embarrassment for the DeafBlind person. Again, the SSP and DeafBlind person should agree, in advance, regarding what is best for each situation.

When assisting the DeafBlind person with financial or money situations, SSPs must protect themselves and protect the DeafBlind person by taking actions and making decisions to ensure that no misunderstandings and/or concerns of theft or fraud will occur.

When the SSP is facilitating the DeafBlind person's access to their mail, or video / phone conversations it is important, again, to remain in the role of the SSP, by providing an accurate account of the printed, ASL or (spoken) English source information and to enable the response of the DeafBlind person, as needed.<sup>5</sup>

The SSP role typically does **not** include:

- Interpreting<sup>6</sup> - except for casual or simple social conversations.<sup>7</sup>
- Counseling, advising, or advocating
- Housekeeping<sup>8</sup>
- Personal care (e.g., bathing, grooming, dressing)
- Homecare (e.g., administering medications, cooking, shopping)
- Child minding (babysitting)
- Running errands on behalf of (for) the DeafBlind person
- Acting as a paid friend or companion.<sup>9</sup>

It's important to note that other qualified or authorized persons may provide the above services. To support a healthy, enriched and self-directed life, the SSP may form part of a team networked around the DeafBlind / Hard-of-hearing-blind person.

Because of the specialized skills required to work as an SSP, and the very personal role SSPs fulfill in the DeafBlind person's life - targeted training is required that focuses (minimally) on:

- The diversity of communication methods specific to working with DeafBlind people
- The diversity of navigation techniques specific to working with DeafBlind people
- The scope and limitations of the SSP role and responsibilities
- A code of ethics and code of conduct
- Soft skills such as conflict management, interpersonal dynamics, including concepts of empowerment and oppression, issues of influence and power, and functions of allies and service providers.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on the expectations of the SSP, see the ASDB Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct available on our web site <http://www.albertadeafblind.ca/>

<sup>6</sup> See ASDB Glossary of Terms available on our web site <http://www.albertadeafblind.ca/>.

<sup>7</sup> Generally, SSPs are not professional interpreters so they cannot interpret for appointments such as healthcare, social services, employment, legal, educational, counseling, financial, emergencies, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Where appropriate, the SSP can tell the DeafBlind person about spills, messes or uncleanliness they observe, and, if asked, the SSP can guide the DeafBlind person to clean themselves.

<sup>9</sup> SSPs and DeafBlind people who are friends may arrange to have visiting time together outside of the SSP's contracted (paid) time.

## Resources

*The ASDB SSP Function, Role and Responsibilities document was created using the valuable information provided in the following documents:*

[Communication Access Network Guidelines for Contracted SSPs \(ND\).](#)

[http://www.cancorp.org/pdf/ssp\\_guideline\\_042010.pdf](http://www.cancorp.org/pdf/ssp_guideline_042010.pdf)

Deafblind International. (1999). Guidelines on Best Practice for Service Provision to Deafblind People.

<http://www.deafblindinternational.org/PDF/Guidelines%20for%20Best%20Practice%20for%20Service%20Provision%20to%20Deafblind%20People.pdf>

Morgan, S. (2001). What's My Role? A Comparison of the Responsibilities of Interpreters, Interveners, and Support Service Providers. *Deaf Blind Perspectives*. Vol 9 (1).

<http://www.hadley.edu/IAER2015/comparing%20interpreter,%20intervener,%20and%20Ossp.pdf>

Nuccio J., & Smith T. (2010). Comprehensive Training for Deaf-Blind Persons and Their Support Service Providers. Seattle, Washington. <http://seattledbcs.org/dbssp-curriculum/>

Resource Centre for Manitobans who are Deaf-Blind (ND). Training and service practices. Winnipeg, Manitoba. <http://www.rcmdb.mb.ca>

South Dakota Department of Human Services (ND). Role of the SSP – SSP Fact Sheet.

<http://dhs.sd.gov/sbvi/fos/documents/ROLEOFTHESP.pdf>