

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF THE AEBC: Reflecting on our Past – Planning our Future

Edited by John Rae

Production by Deanna White and Anthony Tibbs

Contents

FOREWORD: THE AEBC AT 25 by John Rae.....	2
THE ROOTS OF THE AEBC by Dave Greenfield.....	2
AEBC SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM by Dar Wournell	4
RECOGNIZING AEBC'S AWARD RECIPIENTS by Dar Wournell.....	7
CHANGING REALITIES FOR THE AEBC by John Rae	8
IS BRAILLE STILL RELEVANT? by Robert Hebert.....	11
FRIENDS FOR A QUARTER CENTURY by Devon Wilkins.....	13
ARE WE THERE YET? By Chantal Oakes.....	14
SO WHAT'S YOUR STORY? by Bob Berrigan	16
JOINING AEBC CHANGED MY LIFE FOR THE BETTER By: Louise Johnson	18
HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED IN SPORT by Shelley Ann Morris.....	20
ONE WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON MAINSTREAM ACCESSIBILITY by Sharlyn Ayotte	22
DISABILITY COLONIALISM AND BEYOND: AN ANALYSIS by Walden Green	26
MY CANADA OF THE FUTURE by Marcia Yale	28

FOREWORD: THE AEBC AT 25 by John Rae

Editor's Note: John Rae is a Past President of the AEBC.

On April 28, 2017, members and friends of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC) will gather in Toronto for the organization's Conference and Annual General Meeting. But this year's gathering will be different and much more significant.

In 2017, the AEBC turns 25, a significant milestone in the life of any organization that is a time worthy of celebration, reflection and planning for the future. Most grass roots groups like the AEBC do not celebrate the accomplishments of their organization and its members nearly often enough.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary is even more appropriate for the AEBC. It is one of, if not the only major national consumer organization of Canadians with disabilities that has had to operate without government core funding that would have enabled it to hire permanent staff to conduct AEBC's many activities.

Throughout its history, the AEBC has added its voice and participated in deliberations on many, many issues. Details of its work can be found on the many pages of its accessible website, www.blindcanadians.ca.

But there is one important aspect of the AEBC's work that may be hard to find on those pages, and it is perhaps the greatest legacy that Canada's disability rights movement - including the AEBC - should be especially proud of; namely, the personal growth within so many individuals who have participated actively in our movement.

For many of us, it provided us our first opportunity to take part directly in developing proposals and activities that directly affect our lives and the lives of those who will come after us. I have had the pleasure to watch numerous AEBC members grow and truly blossom through their participation. I've witnessed the added personal confidence and skills developed through the AEBC and other consumer organizations go with each and every one of us as we try to find a place for ourselves in a world that is not yet constructed with persons with disabilities clearly in mind.

I want to thank each individual who has contributed his/her thoughts to this 25th anniversary publication. These contributions represent their own thoughts, and the submissions are as varied as is AEBC's membership. I hope you will find something in their reflections that will ring a bell in your minds and hearts, and encourage each of you to participate even more actively in AEBC's work in the months and years ahead.

THE ROOTS OF THE AEBC by Dave Greenfield

Editor's Note: Dave Greenfield is President of AEBC's Saskatoon Chapter.

Our organization, the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, (AEBC) has several organizational roots which came together and formed the organization that we have come to be.

During the 1970's in Canada and elsewhere in the western world, a movement for the equality of people with disabilities emerged, inspired by other movements for equality and

social justice such as the black civil rights movement in the U.S., the women's movement, movements of Indigenous peoples, etc. In 1975, one organization that came together was The Blind Organization of Ontario with Self-help Tactics or BOOST. BOOST was an organization of some four hundred blind and sight-impaired Ontarians who stood up and began questioning the structures and assumptions in which blind Canadians were living. Being located in Ontario, the heartland of the CNIB, a certain amount of their time was spent articulating progressive social criticisms of the CNIB and raising a voice and perspective which were clearly distinct from those of the CNIB. At their height, a number of BOOST leaders obtained funding for a project called Developing Alternative Service Models, or DASM, and in 1980, they published a report entitled, "Self Help and Government Commitment: A Call to Action", (often referred to as the DASM Report), which called for a dramatic overhaul of the entire blind service system in Canada, an overhaul which would see the phasing out of the CNIB and its replacement with provincial government funded and administered commissions of the blind.

A combination of some leaders moving on, internal conflict, burnout and co-optation of some members by the CNIB agenda caused BOOST to disintegrate over the following few years. The legend of BOOST, however, and the idea of blind and sight-impaired people forming strong, militant grass roots consumer organizations, continued to live.

In the spring of 1987, a group of blind and sight-impaired people in Saskatoon organized a one day seminar addressing a variety of blind rights concerns, including the question of whether to work with the cross disability movement, whether to work through existing blindness organizations like the Canadian Council of the Blind, CCB, or whether to form a new local blind consumer organization. The organizers invited John Rae, a former leading BOOST activist, to the seminar as the keynote speaker, thus affirming a link to previous years of blind activism. The discussion concluded with the decision to form a new organization, and the Visually Impaired Persons' Action Council, or VIPAC, was born, formally registering as a provincial non-profit corporation in the spring of 1988.

While VIPAC was a local organization, it took an interest in both local and national issues, and held in the back of its mind the idea that one day it may help to form a new national blind consumer organization which could be more progressive than the CCB. In 1990, two members of VIPAC, Brenda Cooke and Stanley Windels, attended a meeting in Ottawa of a short-lived network called the Blind Issues Committee or BIC. While the formal meetings were rather useless, some of the activists met privately outside of the formal meeting to discuss the idea of forming a more permanent fully consumer-driven national organization. Paul and Mary Ellen Gabias had recently arrived in Canada having experienced the exhilaration of being involved in the National Federation of the Blind, or NFB, a large successful blind consumer organization in the U.S. They attended the meeting in Ottawa and expressed an interest in forming a national blind consumer organization in Canada, but largely wanted to model the organization after the NFB in the U.S. One organization name that was floated at the informal meeting in Ottawa was Association of Blind Canadians or ABC. Brenda Cooke brought the idea of a national organization and the proposed name back with her to Saskatoon and shared the idea with fellow VIPAC activist, Dave Greenfield. Greenfield thought about the proposed name for a while and decided that Alliance of Blind Canadians would sound a little more assertive.

Meanwhile, Paul and Mary Ellen Gabias had moved forward with the founding of a national organization. In 1992, they founded the National Federation of the Blind: Advocates for Equality, or NFB:AE. There were mixed feelings among long time Canadian blind activists about these relative new comers to the Canadian blind consumer scene taking the initiative

of founding a national organization, and mixed feelings about how directly they were modeling the NFB:AE on the American NFB, but these long time Canadian blind activists had to admit that Paul and Mary Ellen had taken the step that the previous fifteen years of blind consumer activists in Canada had failed to take, the step of forming a national organization.

Between 1992 and 1996, a number of Canadian blind activists joined the NFB:AE, forming chapters in Kelowna, Vancouver, Victoria, Winnipeg and Toronto. Several members of VIPAC took out individual memberships, but hesitated to form an NFB:AE chapter in Saskatoon.

Then in the late summer to fall of 1996, the next major step in Canadian blind consumer history began to unfold. Beryl Williams, who had been one of the founders of VIPAC, started an email list to discuss blindness issues in Canada called Viewpoints. These were the early days of the internet, when blind people in Canada were just in the process of getting email addresses and going on line. The CNIB had an email list called Sky Club, but there were things you couldn't say on Sky Club such as offering strong criticisms of the agency. Between September and December of 1996, something of a revolution occurred for blind consumer activists in Canada, as activists who previously had only had contact once every few years were suddenly communicating with each other by email on a daily basis.

One topic that inevitably came up was the topic of forming a national blind consumer organization. Now there were three options: working with the CCB, working with the NFB:AE and possibly trying to change it to be somewhat less directly modeled on the NFB U.S., or starting yet another national organization. After a certain amount of discussion, a decision was made to work with the NFB:AE and transform it into being its own self-governing, Canada-based organization.

This process of transforming the NFB:AE unfolded in three steps. At the 1998 national NFB:AE convention, the members present elected Richard Marion as president, rather than re-electing Paul Gabias. Then at the 1999 convention, the members present passed a resolution stating, in essence, that the organization would proceed from that point forward, grounded more solidly in Canadian blind consumer history and perspectives. Finally, a few years later, the NFB:AE changed its name to the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, a name which signifies that we are not specifically aligned with any larger consumer organization outside of Canada.

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of our organization, originally named the NFB:AE, but known for over a decade now as the AEBC. In truth, BOOST, VIPAC, the Viewpoints community and the NFB:AE can all be considered to be founding organizations of the AEBC. Among us, we bring the best of forty to forty-five years of Canadian blind activist experience to our contemporary organization. Our organizational roots are like different streams that flow into and blend into the great river that is the AEBC.

AEBC SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM by Dar Wournell

Editor's Note: Dar Wournell is AEBC's current President. She lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC) is celebrating its 25th anniversary throughout 2017. Since 2000, the AEBC has offered scholarships to assist outstanding blind, deaf-blind, and partially sighted post-secondary students to pursue their studies.

In August, 2012, the AEBC partnered with T-Base Communications. This company, which pioneered the production of bank and credit card statements into braille contributes \$2,000 annually towards AEBC's Scholarship Program.

Also in 2012, Deborah Wilson began contributing \$2,000 annually to AEBC's Scholarship Program in memory of her sister, Jennifer Wilson, which continues today as the "Jennifer Laura Eve Wilson Memorial Scholarships". Jennifer was always there for someone in need. She developed her vision impairment from complications associated with Type 1 diabetes. She was committed to making this world a better place for others, and these annual AEBC scholarships continue her tradition of helping others.

We are proud of our on-going partnerships with both T-Base Communications and Deborah Wilson, and thank them for their on-going support of this important program.

To commemorate our Silver anniversary, we would like to acknowledge past recipients of AEBC's Scholarship Program. Please join us in congratulating them on their accomplishments!

AEBC Scholarship Program Recipients

2000:

- Kimberly Brownlee
- Kristina Kolley
- Kevin Shaw
- Jennison Asuncion

2002:

- Tammy James
- Roger Bercey
- Anthony Tibbs

2003:

- John Robert Doyle
- Chris Riccomini
- Fiona Chow
- Tejinder Kaur

2004:

- John Robert Doyle
- Chris Riccomini
- Norah Good-Broughton
- Larianna Brown
- Tejinder Kaur

2005:

- Yves Brunet

- Quyen Le
- Abebe Abay Teklu

2006:

- Laura Bulk
- Jacob Vaynshteyn
- Danielle Laplante-Ip
- Jennifer Dillon

2007:

- Christine Nieder
- Chima Andrew Akomas
- Natalie Martiniello
- Deborah Adams

2008:

- Darren Minifie
- Marc Workman
- Marie-Josée Blier
- Gabriel Tremblay-Parent

2009:

- Allan Angus
- Anthony Tibbs
- Helen McFadyen
- Koceïla Loualin
- Stephanie Berry

2010:

- Tommy Leung
- Daniel Huang

2011:

- Vytautas Bucionis Jr.
- Ruby Szpeflicki

2012:

- Mia Losier
- Jennifer MacDonald
- Dominic Manuel

2013:

- Jennifer Dillon
- Avril Rinn

2014:

- Millaz Khalil
- Danica Blackstock

2015:

- Tyler Harris
- Georgia Pike

2016:

- Laura Yvonne Bulk
- Rumana Monzur

T-Base Communications Scholarship Program Recipients

- Lisa Kovac (2012)
- Michael Staffen (2013)
- Brian Kijewski (2014)
- Rebecca Jackson (2015)
- Brian Hill (2016)

RECOGNIZING AEBC'S AWARD RECIPIENTS by Dar Wournell

AEBC Volunteer of the Year Award

The AEBC volunteer of the Year award is presented at the National Conference and Annual General Meeting to a member who has contributed a significant amount of work to AEBC in the previous calendar year.

As we reflect over the past 25 years of AEBC, we believe in recognizing the accomplishments of our members who have made a significant volunteer contribution to the AEBC since 2006.

Please join us in congratulating them on their accomplishments!

- Louise Johnson (2016)
- Stephen Ricci (2015)
- Chantal Oakes (2014)
- Darlene Wournell (2013)
- Susan Pinder (2012)
- Henk Pauelsen (2011)
- Richard Quan (2010)

- Janet Hunt (2009)
- Anthony Tibbs (2008)
- Phil Wiseman (2007)
- Mike Hambly (2006)

Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) Award

Although this award was discontinued in 2014, this Award was given to recognize individuals who have made a significant contribution to the disabled community over a number of years. We would like to recognize those blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted individuals who have, through their efforts, made a significant improvement in the lives and lived experiences of other blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted Canadians. Please join us in congratulating them on their accomplishments:

- Albert Ruel (2014)
- Paul Thiele (2013)
- Sharlyn Ayotte (2012)
- Robin East (2011)
- Irene Lambert (2010)
- Chris and Marie LaPorte Stark (2009)
- Richard Marion (2008)
- John Rae (2007)
- Denise Sanders (2006)
- Beryl Williams (2005)
- Penny Leclair (2004)
- Alan H Neville (2003)

CHANGING REALITIES FOR THE AEBC by John Rae

When I first heard of the National Federation of the Blind: Advocates for Equality, (NFB:AE) I was immediately interested, excited and intrigued as I was looking for a new independent organization of blind consumers to join. In years past, I had been in the forefront of BOOST (Blind Organization of Ontario with Self-Help Tactics) and had served as its President before I became a provincial civil servant in 1980.

In those early days of the NFB:AE, its fledgling Toronto Chapter was meeting at the CNIB, and I considered it an inherent contradiction for an independent consumer organization to meet at CNIB Headquarters, so I waited awhile before joining.

Founders of the NFB:AE had a clear vision, to bring an NFB-style organization to Canada. However, as more individuals joined, a desire for a more made in Canada organization emerged. After meeting at several NFB conventions in the U.S., a watershed event in the history of consumerism for blind Canadians took place in Vancouver in 1998. At that first NFB:AE Canadian Conference, two slates of candidates vied for election, and Richard Marion defeated Paul Gabias to become the organization's second President. I was the only other member of Richard's team to be elected. This ushered in a fractious year that culminated with the 1999 Victoria Conference where organizational differences came to a head.

At its second Canadian conference in Victoria in 1999, the Canadianization of the NFB:AE was further solidified, and the split in the NFB"AE ultimately led to the formation of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB). I believe that, if a spirit of compromise had been present, this split would have been avoided. The process of Canadianization was completed when the NFB:AE's new name, the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians officially took effect on March 17, 2005.

At NFB:AE's 2002 Conference, I was elected 2nd Vice President, and thought I was safe! However, sometimes events move in very unexpected ways, and several short months later, the Board basically imploded, several members resigned, and I found myself President. At that point, two options were available. Hold a Special Membership meeting and conduct elections to fill the vacancies or seek some new Board members and get on with the work at hand. Thanks to Marcia Yale's persistence, the latter course was adopted, the Board vacancies were filled, and the organization proceeded with its work.

Throughout the AEBC's history, our work has focused on public awareness and advocacy. The AEBC has been involved in so many, many issues that are of such direct importance to our daily lives - transportation, income adequacy, blindfolding of staff, information access, website access, library services, and the movement's overall call for greater, direct involvement in all deliberations that directly affect us. Most recently, following a Town Hall meeting, a Brief was submitted to the Consultations that are expected to lead to a National Act sometime in 2018, an Act that all Canadians with disabilities hope will result in tangible progress in our situation in Canada.

During my Presidency, the AEBC joined Canada's cross disability movement when it became a member organization of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, (CCD). This move has become somewhat controversial at times, as some members consider the blind community has given more support to the cross disability movement than it has received in return for our issues,. However, I firmly believe persons with disabilities are much stronger when consumer organizations collaborate with each other. At present, members of the AEBC are active in work surrounding the promised national Act, and I believe AEBC's involvement is critical to ensure blindness issues receive their fair share of attention in the proposed national Act.

In recent years, the landscape in which the AEBC operates has changed quite dramatically. Let me discuss just four areas.

About thirty years ago, technology was promised as the new vehicle that would "set us free and make us equal," and while advances in technology now give us access to far more information than most of us thought would ever happen, this same technology is creating an increasing number of new barriers that are only making it much harder for Canadians who are blind, Deaf-blind and partially-sighted to keep up with the pace of technological change and to find and retain employment.

Technology makes it much easier for employers to get the same amount of work done with fewer and fewer staff, and whenever a position is posted, employers get swamped with applications, which makes it easy for them to pass over a candidate with a disability, even when that person is equally or better qualified. Many employers do not adequately discharge their legal duty to accommodate short of undue hardship. Some companies are making business decisions and upgrading their technology to systems they know are inaccessible to staff who are blind. In addition, the growing trend towards short-term,

precarious contract positions without benefits are hurting everyone, but I suggest this trend has disproportionately negative effects on persons with disabilities.

Governments are expecting organizations to work more in partnerships than ever before. Unfortunately, there is a tremendous disparity in resources between most service providers and consumer organizations like the AEBC, which makes it difficult to adequately assert our fundamental belief in the phrase "Nothing about us without us," and to play our rightful role as "rights holder" organizations.

For years, the federal government has indicated the Program that has provided core funding to 18 national organizations will finally be opened up and accept applications from some additional organizations. The AEBC looks forward to applying when the Program is opened up, and it hopes to finally secure reliable core funding to support its extensive work.

The CNIB remains the most controversial issue among AEBC's membership. I believe that it is fair to say there are a variety of views on CNIB within the AEBC. In the past, consideration has been given to allotting a significant block of conference time to an in-depth discussion of CNIB, its services, and its overall position in the blindness community. This idea has always been postponed to a future time, believing it could become a very divisive discussion. However, the changing landscape may make it difficult for the AEBC to postpone this examination much longer.

CNIB has moved extensively into advocacy, has restructured and is looking for government funding for rehabilitation, services and guide dog training. In the guide dog area alone, CNIB's entry into this area is likely to make it more difficult for existing organizations to secure the funding they already required to deliver their programs.

Over the past several years, the AEBC has basically decided that we should go about our own work and leave CNIB to its own devices. Is this approach still viable in these changing times?

The AEBC, as an organization that focuses on public awareness and advocacy fulfils a vital role in the Canadian blindness system. It provides a vehicle for self-determination and self-expression on issues of mutual concern. It also provides the opportunity for self-development and self-expression for blind consumers who get involved in our movement. It offers an annual scholarship program for students pursuing post-secondary studies, and its members are available as a vital source of peer support and information sharing.

Looking to the future, the AEBC needs to secure new sources of reliable funding in order to be able to hire dedicated staff to help with its extensive programs, and it must reach out to groups that have historically been under-represented throughout the entire disability rights movement in Canada, youth, seniors, and blind persons from racial minorities and indigenous communities.

For those of us who have participated in a meaningful way, we have contributed and gained many new skills that will remain with us throughout the rest of our lives. I am glad that I joined, and have been honoured to have been elected several times to serve our membership on AEBC's National Board.

Advocacy can be difficult work. It is a bit like farming: you plant seeds. Some of them blow away in the wind and fail to take root. Others take root for a while, have some impact, but ultimately disappear before they have the chance to achieve real impact.

And then there are those seeds that take firm root, help bring about change, maybe quickly but more often not until a future time. Advocates like me often do not know the impact we have, and it is always encouraging when a member tells you that something that you said or an encouraging word made a difference in that person's life.

If you haven't become directly involved in the work of the AEBC to date, our 25th anniversary year would be an ideal time to jump on board and add your talents, thoughts and energy to our extensive agenda of work. Together we are stronger, and the stronger we become, the more changes we can bring about for both ourselves and those blind persons who will follow us.

IS BRAILLE STILL RELEVANT? by Robert Hebert

Editor's Note: Robert Hebert is a former AEBC National Treasurer, and a passionate lifelong braille reader.

Learning to read and write is both a requirement and a necessity for every student in the Canadian educational system today, therefore it is critical despite a plethora of advances in computer and speech technology that blind kids be given both every opportunity and encouragement in the learning and use of braille. As a blind individual, I cannot stress strongly enough how important this is.

As a child or youth, or a parent, you may feel that learning braille is peer differentiating; the exact opposite is the case. As an adult, a firm knowledge of braille will not only enhance your personal enjoyment but will aid greatly in competing with your peers both at university and in the work place.

With the dissemination of computer technology and text to speech screen reading software that verbalizes or speaks aloud all text on a computer screen, many may question the need to learn braille if one is able to listen while screen-reading software reads aloud everything to them hence no need for him/her to learn to read for themselves; namely, to learn braille.

The good news is that the process of learning braille is actually surprisingly simple.

Several years ago a board member of a national blindness organization asked if learning braille was difficult. "Oh extremely difficult" replied the chairman--"it takes at least six months just to learn the alphabet." "Excuse me" I said. "That is totally incorrect; I can teach you braille right now in twenty minutes." I then proceeded to teach them the braille alphabet.

Braille is written using various combinations of dots in a two by three six cell grid, three on the left side from top to bottom and three on the right.

The first ten letters: A to J use the four upper dots of the grid while the next ten, K to T are produced by adding the bottom dot on the left-hand side. Letters U V X Y and Z are formed by adding the two bottom dots of the grid. Thus K to T are simply A to J with one extra dot and U V X Y Z are equivalent to A to E with the two bottom dots added. The letter W was

not part of the French alphabet in the 1820's when Louis Braille invented braille and as W was added in English braille later, it does not follow the sequence of the other letters. I also explained how many of the first ten letters somewhat represent the appearance of the print letters. Both the chairman and the other board member were astounded that braille could be learned so quickly.

What does take some time and patience in mastering braille is developing the sensitivity in your index finger pads--either left, right or both. I use both though my left index finger pad is dominate.

So, who needs braille and why, if a computer can read to us aloud?

When it comes to reading, braille is the equivalent of seeing with ones fingers. Mathematics is one reason why braille should be taught. It is much easier to understand and solve math problems when you can perform this task by reading and working through a problem on paper rather than having a computer read the problem to you. At university I found statistics impossible to master with the assistance of readers trying to explain how things worked, but when I obtained the books in braille, my marks were at or near the top in all my stats classes.

Taking notes is yet another reason to learn braille. People who do not know braille must record their lectures then spend countless hours listening again and again to the same lecture. Taking notes in braille in class meant I could review the salient points of a lecture within five to ten minutes.

What about braille music? Although learning music from a braille score is more time-consuming than sight reading, still to be able to learn any piece of music one desires is a wonderful experience. With the ability through braille to read the music oneself.

Finally, the use of braille in reading literature, and especially poetry can never be compared to synthetic speech or even by having someone read to you. To be able to open a book and ponder the beauty and meaning of a poem is an experience that can never be replicated by any other means.

Today with the advent of electronic (refreshable braille)" there is more reason than ever why every blind student should be taught braille. Electronic braille is produced on a small portable device. These devices until recently could display only one line of braille text at a time from 16 to 80 characters. Shortly, a multi-line braille display will be available and technology is in the works that will soon produce an entire page of braille with line lengths of 40 characters and 25 lines per page. Braille text is stored on a secure digital (sd) card and turning a page is very similar to turning a page on any e-book reader.

Braille is simply one more tool that a blind person can use to help them be more competitive in the workplace. Employment among blind people who read braille is much higher than those who have never learned braille. How unfortunate to think that people who are already at a disadvantage are disadvantaged even further by not being given every opportunity possible to compete in a demanding world.

The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians promotes the teaching and availability of braille as an alternate reading format. We believe that this should be an inherent right of every Canadian citizen and that every step possible be taken to assure implementation of this right.

FRIENDS FOR A QUARTER CENTURY by Devon Wilkins

Editor's Note: Devon Wilkins was President of the former South Georgian Bay Chapter and a former national Board member. She now lives in Peterborough, Ontario.

Did the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians have anything to do with establishing any of the guide dog training centres here in Canada? In a word, no. Many of the training programs had already opened back in the mid to late eighties.

Does AEBC feel that it's necessary to establish another training centre in this country? Again, no. The training centres already in existence are doing a fine job. Whenever individuals wishing to train with guide dogs find themselves on waiting lists, it probably has more to do with the availability of suitable dogs.

When the AEBC was founded in 1992, however, guide dog users finally had somewhere to turn for assistance with individual advocacy. In 1997, for example, Vancouver resident Richard Marion, the second vice-president of the AEBC at the time took a Calgary taxi company to court for refusing access to his guide dog. There was also attorney Yvonne Peters who took the government of Saskatchewan all the way to the Supreme Court to gain public access for people partnered with guide dogs. AEBC even lent support to the American Council of The Blind's law suit against the government of the state of Hawaii, seeking a relaxation of its quarantine laws for people partnered with guide dogs.

In August of 1999, Guide Dog Users of Canada (GDUC) rose like a phoenix out of the ashes of a previously defunct organization known as CAGDU (the Canadian Association of Guide Dog Users).

In the early years of this century, AEBC and GDUC worked with blind individuals and blindness organizations around the world to pressure the British government to relax its quarantine restrictions for those partnered with guide, hearing and service dogs wishing to enter the UK.

The AEBC still stands ready to assist whenever necessary. Our website contains a brochure which provides general information about guide dogs, and links to sites where more specific information can be gleaned.

As the current past-president of GDUC, and a member at large of AEBC, I'm proud to say that Since GDUC's inception, we've always been able to count on AEBC whenever push comes to shove. We are two autonomous organizations, but we have one particular goal in common—the enhancement of rights for Canadians who are blind, deaf-blind, and partially sighted

ARE WE THERE YET? By Chantal Oakes

Editor's Note: Chantal Oakes is President of AEBC's Central Okanagan Chapter.

In this article I will attempt to answer the question which we often hear children ask. The phrase "Are we there yet," is a phrase we wish we could all say "yes" to and while we have made progress, we are still on the road to finding our way. Is there anything wrong with admitting we haven't solved all the puzzle? I don't mean to seem flippant about who we are as blind deaf/blind or vision impaired persons, I simply mean we need to stay a bit more positive and look at the glass as half full instead of thinking it is half empty. Could we have done things differently, perhaps but we would be better served to implement new strategies, concentrate on what is happening today rather than worrying about the things we haven't accomplished in the past.

I am attempting to express my opinions and feelings only, rather than putting the focus on statistics and facts. There is much information which can be found on the AEBC website about how the organization has developed into the advocacy vehicle we have come to know; all its pains, joys, disappointments and its sorrows. However, I want to share with you how I have enjoyed the work, the experiences and often the frustrations if things didn't go my way.

Over 20 years ago, I joined the organization which was then named National Federation of the Blind: Advocates for Equality. Years later, we decided to change the name to Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, with expectations that we would be recognized as an organization with a clear voice. While I had some volunteer experience with consumer based organizations at the time I joined, I felt I had truly found something I could sink my teeth into and positively make a difference in the lives of those who are blind, deaf/blind and vision impaired. By way of change, this was going to be a forum where I would not only have a say but rather have the opportunity to affect changes where it counted. It would take much effort on our parts but we set out to attract the attention of Government with all levels in mind, and any other law makers who previously thought they could bypass us when deciding our fate. Yes, I write this in simple language, because that is what I thought getting involved would mean at the time. Needless to say, I quickly found through the help of other members I was a disillusioned young woman with the task of raising a family, remaining employed and making sense of all that stood in my way as a vision impaired person.

Let's look at the circumstances which brought us to where we are today. Many of us have gone to great lengths to ensure the voices of members are heard. We have given of our time tirelessly, and through this, we have examined our lives so meticulously to ensure we are treated with respect and dignity that we may be accused of complaining a little too much. Where Government entities are concerned, we have made an impression on some as we have been invited to a variety of round table discussions throughout the years. The problem we face is usually that we are not always taken seriously enough to prevent our recommendations from getting lost in the shuffle.

Way back then, I quickly learned from friends who were a bit wiser than myself that I have rights, and I must do whatever it takes to ensure my place in this world isn't always sitting at the back of the class or remaining quietly on the sidelines. I remember thinking in the early years of AEBC's existence that there were not enough of us to make a difference. Spreading the word, we attracted many more members, we formed alliances with those who were in a position to enforce some of our suggestions and we insisted on our

being present where and when ever our well-being was in judgement. This should be considered an improvement of sorts, right? Throughout all of this, my husband Rick and I raised two beautiful daughters, and still, we found the time to contribute to what would later be described as more for us.

We have seen many changes which I have appreciated over time and I cannot possibly name them all. Please keep in mind, I am very aware that there are many more issues to resolve and it will probably never end as far as the work goes. My priorities may differ from yours and this is why we must always keep focussed on the ever changing world we live in and that we are all individuals with different challenges.

I was thrilled when I realized I could use a bank machine on my own. After all, if I was old enough to work, I should have been able to do my own banking. Maintaining privacy is important to all of us I'm sure. Access to information in an alternate format of our choice, this was not readily available back in the 90's. While technology kept advancing at high speed, we soon had more access to information by using computers however, this could only be made possible if you had the means to purchase needed adaptive equipment and the opportunity to learn how to use it. I dare say this is likely one of the biggest obstacles in a blind person's life which seems to be hidden within walls of steel. Is it unattainable maybe? I'm not sure I can answer that as I don't have all the facts. Have we done enough, giving everyone the same opportunities to access to information? Most definitely not and this is where we should be able to continue the work instead of thinking we have failed. Without rambling on about how the techno world has evolved, let's just go back to basics and talk about day to day living. Think about issues such as point of sale, universal products, accessible transportation access to any information allowing all of us to remain independent and the list could go on. We can admit that times have changed and for better or for worse, we have more choices than ever before. Can we attribute any of this to the work of AEBC? My answer would be yes in a heartbeat.

The way I feel, all of us can say we are in part responsible for change happening and it is evident even when we don't realize it. For example, through work I have done with AEBC I have learned to be more pro-active whenever the opportunity presents itself. The way I see it, if I am able to help one person in a day's work I have succeeded in advocating for us. Remember, you must learn to walk before you can run. Instant gratification isn't in the cards when advocating for change.

Measuring the amount of positive things we have accomplished in the past 25 years is not that simple to do. There are some who would say we haven't done enough; while others may say our community is too fragmented and that is why we don't achieve all our objectives. But I say as long as we keep our eye on the ball, we will prevail. Granted, all the improvements we have witnessed in the past 25 years should be recognized as such but don't ever forget they are not privileges given to us. They are rights which we keep fighting for as though it was food to put on our tables. Everyone should be able to travel independently, read their own mail, be gainfully employed, enjoy a good book, pay bills and live in a world where we are all accepted socially and where we are economically viable. One would think all of this shouldn't be too much to ask?

I could keep writing until this becomes a book. It is my hope that Government has listened to our plea for a Canadians with Disabilities Act and that we will have legally and morally persuaded those who have the final say that we must be included in every sense of the word. I am proud to be a Canadian, I have a vision impairment, not a social disease. We must believe in our ability to remove barriers big or small and take our rightful place with

conviction. Stand up and be counted as someone who won't be told no you can't. The more we achieve, the sooner we can say: "yes, we have arrived."

SO WHAT'S YOUR STORY? by Bob Berrigan

Editor's Note: Bob Berrigan is a former AEBC National Board member. This letter originally appeared on the AEBC Members Mailing List in the mid-summer of 2016,

Hi, Everyone!

As summer settles in with its usual heat, I thought I'd share a little personal story with you. I'm sure we can all use a laugh or two, am I right? This is a true story, nothing exaggerated, nothing made of wishful thinking or with publicity in mind. I'm sure each of you have had something equally hilarious happen to you! If so, I'd love to hear about it!

For those of you who don't know much about me, I live in a little town named Alexandria, in far eastern Ontario. If you were to take Via Rail between Ottawa and Montreal, Alexandria is roughly the halfway point.

I have Retinitis Pigmentosa, and retain some usable vision. I have been blessed with four guide dogs in my life, and presently walk with Gus, a big Black Lab. For those of you with RP, I'm sure you can understand what I mean when I say that my remaining vision can sometimes be a gift, and at other times, a hindrance. When I do see things, my depth perception is off, or I mistake what I'm seeing for something else. For instance, I'll freely admit that I once asked a department store mannequin where the washrooms were.

For the last ten years, my main source of employment income has been as a gardener. I worked for the town of Alexandria from 2006 until 2013, when I was downsized. Since early September of 2015, I've been working for a public housing corporation. My duties include locating, digging, building, planting, watering and maintaining a total of twenty flower beds and about 720 flowers in two different locations.

I do most of my work by touch, and plan my beds by both imagination and memory. That's fine when I'm working slowly, planning things out, putting the flowers into their respective beds or weeding by tactile identification. Gus loves these days, as he's always lying beside me, basking in the sun or sound asleep in the shade of a nearby tree. However, once summer arrives and I have to get into the watering phase of my job, well, this is when my remaining vision can give me a hand. Or not.

One of my work locations is called Lakeview Manor, and is seniors' public housing. I have two flower beds out front of this building, and eight out back. These eight beds are in a lovely square piece of property that measures 100 by 100 feet, and has a picnic table, two benches, and a large gazebo. Of course, as mentioned, part of my job is that I have to water these beds.

That area is much too far away from the building to use a hose, so what I usually do is connect a little hose to the outdoor faucet and fill my two eight-litre watering cans right at the back of the building. This hose is identical to those that run into your own washing machines at home, so you know what I mean. Filling each can literally takes only seconds, as the water pressure in that building is incredibly impressive.

Well, one morning last week, Gus and I wandered over to Lakeview to do my watering. As I arrived, I cursed myself for forgetting that little hose at my other worksite, and realized that I had to use the big hose out front to fill my cans.

It would have been a struggle to carry this hundred foot hose from the front of the building to the back. It's very heavy, for one thing. So, what I did instead was to unwind it to its full length, which brought it about three quarters of the way along the concrete walk to the area I wanted to water.

That damned hose! Well, actually, it's the nozzle I dislike. I've tried using it to water the beds out front of the building, except that there's no medium spray to this nozzle. It's either a tiny little mist-spray like a Windex bottle, or it's full blast, knock people over force. Nothing in between, and the handle tends to stick in one place. It's very old, too, with the trigger not within the finger grip, but rather, on the back of the nozzle, where my palm maintains pressure.

Okay, that's the scenario. Gus was under the shade of an oak tree, enjoying his late-morning nap, and there I was, filling up my watering cans on the walk to the back area, minding my own business, happy in myself, where I was and what I was doing. Until I came back with two empty cans and picked up the hose again.

I dropped it. It simply slipped out of my fingers. And it landed on the handle.

Honestly, I think it would have been easier to herd a dozen cats than to grasp that damned hose! The nozzle didn't just settle on the little misty spray, oh, no! That would have been fine. Nope, it hit on the handle, went right into fire hose strength, and of course, it was pointed straight up. It went up my pants leg. It sprayed me in the face, knocking off both my sunglasses and my cap. Then the force of the water in the hose made it start dancing around like a Cobra, spraying water into my chest, my groin, against the windows of the apartment behind me, into my face again, giving me an unwanted drink, water going everywhere and anywhere. I thought I saw the hose, lunged for it, but nope. I tried to grab it, and got only a fistful of water. It danced away again, this time coming back and spraying up my other pants leg. My legs and crotch were completely soaked by this time, and the damned hose was still hissing and spraying and winding its way around like a hyper active snake on amphetamines. When I did manage to grab the hose, again of course, I didn't grab the nozzle, but just below it, and for the third time, had my face blasted by this damned nozzle at full strength. I'm surprised I have a nose left. I managed to grab the handle and pull it back at the same time I sneezed out about half a litre of water.

I stood there gasping, snorting, dripping and drooling, and just started to laugh aloud. I couldn't help it. Oh, how I laughed at myself!

There's a man from Barbados up on the second floor with a wonderfully musical Caribbean accent. His name is Edsel. He came out onto his balcony, looked down at me, took in my soaked clothes, my cap and sunglasses sitting in an inch of water on the walk, my dripping nose and chin, and said, "Did you have a problem with the hose, Bob?"

That, Dear Friends, was my morning at work!

Regards to all,

Bob and His Royal Harness Gus

JOINING AEBC CHANGED MY LIFE FOR THE BETTER By: Louise Johnson

Editor's Note: Louise Johnson is President of AEBC's Metro Vancouver Chapter and BC Affiliate.

I, Louise Johnson, am writing this for the person who I looked up to most in my life, my Grandfather [my Mother's father]. He was blind and hearing impaired.

He always said "you can do anything you put your mind to." I remember him helping my parents to build a house from the ground up when I was 7 years old. I would like to make the world better for people like him who believe they can do anything.

When I was born March 24 1966, I only could see light. In the first 18 months of my life I had 7 eye operations. At 18 months old they put my first pair of glasses on my face and my life began to change for the better.

Early in my childhood years my parents found out 2 things and one of them was that I was missing the flapper on the back of my ton and speech was going to be difficult for me to learn. I had speech therapy until I was about 11 years old to help me learn to talk like others. The other thing that my parents figured out was that I had a learning disability and I was always behind in learning.

In 2009 I became a member of AEBC's Metro Vancouver Chapter. In that spring, I went to my very first conference that was held locally. I didn't know much about the AEBC before going to the conference and that weekend I learned a lot, but that was only the very beginning of changes in my life.

Sitting there I felt lost at times, not understanding everything that was going on but, by attending that Conference, I learned so much more than I realized at that time. The highlights of that weekend for me were a dinner boat cruise and meeting other AEBC members from across Canada.

Over the next two years, I attended Vancouver chapter meetings and any social I could afford. In the spring of 2011 I was voted in as a member at large. That meant that I became the AEBC rep to ASIC (Association of Sight Impaired Consumers), and remain involved with ASIC where I have also learned a lot.

I started advocating for others and, to this day, enjoy doing that. I had a learning curve as I only shared a family computer for email and creating simple documents. I wanted to learn more, but I didn't have my own computer or other technical equipment at that time. In early 2012 I started applying to obtain my own equipment and received it in the spring of 2013.

In the late fall of 2012 I became vice president of the Metro Vancouver chapter.

In 2013 I sat and listened to the whole conference on the stream. That was the year when members began asking about the future of AEBC, both short and long term goals. I sat on each call after the Conference, and was there for members like me who do not have as much education or income or understanding of their equipment.

That next year I learned so much and in 2014 I became the president of AEBC's Metro Vancouver Chapter due to the sudden death of our chapter President. I was very sad to lose a friend and encourager. I didn't just decide to become the chapter president right away I took about six weeks and talked with friends and took my time making my decision. That September I chaired my first chapter meeting and I can share I was very scared. I didn't know if I could do it but others were saying I could and looking back I can say it was a big stepping stone in my growth.

That year, I started sitting on a national committee as I wanted to advocate more for others.

In the summer of 2015 I joined the Accessible Copyright committee and became the chair of this committee. The board rep Leo Bissonette has, over almost two years, encouraged me and helped me to become a better chair and let the committee work together. Through his guidance, I have learned you can chair a committee and still learn from others. You can understand part of the work, and others can understand other parts, and you can become a team to get the work done.

2015 was a busy year between my work for AEBC and my other volunteer commitments. In that year I was learning to plan out my time and realized that volunteer work could become a full time job if I allowed it to be.

In 2016, while listening on the conference stream, I learned I became the recipient of the Volunteer of the Year Award for 2015 and that was a moment I won't forget when Leo announced my name. I was so happy and overwhelmed as there were others who also work very hard for AEBC.

We all are advocates but some are ones who work on the front line and that is very important. I am not that kind of person. I would rather work in the back ground and help us get the work done.

I also enjoy helping others, so I joined the leadership committee so I could encourage others to help put together workshops so members can learn from each other. We all have things we know, and other members know other things we don't so having workshops is an important way to help each other learn new skills.

We should stand together as members and encourage each other not only to think of our own needs but also the needs of others.

I have learned much from my family and husband, who have different levels of vision. I had a grandfather who was blind and hearing impaired, and my parents and sisters are vision-impaired. All of us have different needs, so when I advocate I try to remember that each of us have different needs and no two people are the same.

When we look in our membership, we see people with so many different needs and skills, and we have to stand and work in the future as a team, and not fight with each other. I would like to see us reach out and learn more about each other as that may help us work more effectively together as advocates.

I became a life time member of AEBC in 2016 and hope to always help the AEBC grow to become a group of people who will encourage each other and help each other learn to become more effective advocates. I have learned I am a person who works hard but always will stay in the back ground, as I prefer to help others to step forward to grow into more effective advocates.

In closing I work hard but get so much more from each of you as you all have something to give. If you are a member of the AEBC and are not sure if you can be a help please take time and look over your life and look at the committee's and find an interest and join it. You don't need to have all the answers you just have to give a few hours of your time and you will find that your life will be enriched and you will make friends and will help make a difference for our community

HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED IN SPORT by Shelley Ann Morris

Editor's Note: Shelley Ann Morris is past Secretary of AEBC's Ottawa Gatineau Chapter.

The past 25 years have seen unprecedented and accelerated changes for those of us with limited or no vision. Change has made its way into almost every aspect of our lives, including sport.

I was born with low vision, and when I was a child, there were very few opportunities for kids like me to be included in sport. We often sat on the sidelines during gym class and were seldom chosen when picking teams. Sports would be too dangerous--what if we got hurt or, worse, hurt others? My determined parents helped me find outlets for my seemingly boundless energy--adapted swimming, horseback riding and skiing allowed me to enjoy being active, too.

We are all presented with opportunities that change our lives. Mine came in September 1990 when I was invited to join an 'aerobics' group through the Canadian National Institute for the Blind in Ottawa. Each week, our instructor led the class through verbal cuing that we would follow. I was hooked! After our instructor moved away, I found other fitness centres that were happy to provide the accommodations I'd need to participate fully. I attended classes at the Dovercourt Recreation Centre, and what started as a weekly step interval class soon evolved into a well-rounded program as I added strength training, skip-circuit and SPINNING to the routine.

In 1994, I was presented with another physical challenge when my sister dared me to do the annual CN Tower Stair climb. This sisterly dare turned into an annual pilgrimage to the 1,776 steps to raise money for worthy causes and push myself to finish the climb within a respectable time.

I caught the running bug in 2008 while sitting on the sidelines, minding the gear while my sister and a friend ran the 5K race during Ottawa Race Weekend. Bruce Springsteen blared from the loudspeakers "Baby we were born to run!" OK, I thought, if I could climb the CN Tower's steps, surely I could run five kilometres. My sister was my first sighted guide. Since then, I have run numerous 5- and 10-K races and completed 3 half-marathons. Not bad for a gal who once said emphatically "I'm NOT a runner!"

In 2011, I was invited to join Won with One, a national team of blind/visually-impaired triathletes. We race in all distances, from try-a-tri to Ironman. We swim and run while tethered to our sighted guide and ride tandem bikes on the bike course. Guides and athletes alike say that the experience is life-changing.

As I have evolved as an athlete, the world of sport for those with disabilities has evolved around me. Barriers to participation are falling, and new opportunities are opening up. Race directors are becoming more aware of the needs of blind participants, and have taken steps to welcome us. When we sign up online for a race, the forms are becoming more accessible for screen readers or magnifiers. Many races now include a para category. In Ottawa, Somersault Events provides disabled triathletes with their own transition zone, allowing more room for our large tandem bikes and/or specialized race equipment. Announcements are made to caution other triathletes that there are blind participants on the course and to give us more room as we run tethered side-by-side. Blind triathletes wear different-coloured swim caps to make us easy to identify, and our body markings include a "P" so that we may be recognized as a 'para' triathlete. When we run in most road races, our tethers and race bibs identify us as blind runners, and our guides' bibs include the word "Guide". Everyone, guide and athlete alike, get finisher medals when we cross the finish line.

I swim with the Ottawa Triathlon Club's swimming program. My coach ties pool noodles to the ropes at each end of my lane, providing me with a tactile warning I do bike and strength training at the Ottawa Triathlon Club where I spin on a stationary bike and then take a class designed to build strength and prevent injury in triathletes. This is a fully integrated class, and coaches and fellow participants alike offer me a little assistance when needed.

The annual Bring on the Bay swim raises money for Easter Seals. They implemented a Swim Angel program--swimmers requiring assistance in the water swim with an 'Angel.'" Some of us guided triathletes take advantage of this program, guide and Angel swim side-by-side, completing a 3-kilometre swim.

In Ottawa, there are plenty of ways to get active. On most Friday nights at the Jack Purcell Community Centre, there's a happy group of blind folks and volunteers working out together in a group fitness class. Lead by an instructor who understands vision loss, this class provides a total body workout suitable for all fitness levels and degrees of vision. On Saturday mornings at the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB), blind/visually-impaired people downward dog their way through a gentle Hatha yoga class. Other sports are also available, such as curling, running and five-a-side, a kind of soccer game for those with limited or no vision.

Technology has literally put information and communication at our fingertips. Our devices provide speech, zoom and magnification, giving us access to all kinds of fitness apps that track everything from distance ran to food intake. There are podcasts on just about every subject having to do with sport. Technology also allows us to communicate more effectively with fellow athletes via social media.

Canada now has a Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities--the Right Honourable Carla Qualtrough, a former Paralympian. Much of the 2015 Para Pan-Am Games was broadcast on mainstream TV and there was more coverage online and through apps so that we could proudly follow our Canadian athletes as they competed in the 2016 Paralympic Games.

Attitudes toward blind/visually-impaired athletes are changing. We are increasingly being viewed as athletes and not simply human interest stories. We are being seen as the athletes that we are and not just a curiosity. There's plenty of good-natured kidding and camaraderie, and we are met with a lot of "Way to go!" from fellow participants, blind and sighted alike.

We have come a long way, but this is no time to rest. As Lawrence Gowan says in his song "Keep the Tension On" we must "Beware the rotting wind of complacency." Those with and without disabilities will face barriers to participation. Budgets for health and fitness programs get slashed and some sports are prohibitively expensive. Those with disabilities face other barriers. Unlike our sighted peers, we cannot simply sign up and show up—our participation often depends on assistance from others and requires some logistical gymnastics. The constant cat-and-mouse game of technology upgrades and the lag of adapted software will suddenly render our 'go-to' fitness apps inaccessible through voiceover. Children will continue to be born with vision loss and there will be those who will lose sight later in life. As blind people, we must be ever - vigilant to make sure that the gains that we have made now will continue to move forward rather than in reverse, and be ready to speak up when access is denied.

I am fortunate to be living in a world where there are numerous opportunities to keep fit, healthy and fully engaged in my community. As I head into my 55th year, I'm able to maintain fantastic health and wellbeing. I'm looking forward to my 2017 race season and whatever new opportunities lie ahead.

ONE WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON MAINSTREAM ACCESSIBILITY by Sharlyn Ayotte

Editor's Note: Sharlyn Ayotte is founder of T-Base Communications, a former 1st Vice President and Treasurer of AEBC, and currently a member of AEBC's Ottawa-Gatineau Chapter.

Like most business sectors, Canadian publishers have been challenged to adjust their business models to reflect the evolving economic and technological realities of doing business in a modern digital world. With the growing prevalence of Internet and personal access technology, the world as we have known it has altered in the most incredible and empowering ways, making it possible for many more blind, deaf-blind and partially-sighted people who are fortunate enough to have accessible devices to connect with each other and act collectively on systemic barriers that are digital in design.

Today, many more blind people are questioning why the systems that support the general public are limiting our access at a time when this same technology has the means to serve our needs as well. Instead of implementing mainstream solutions that have the potential to reduce costs of licencing special library services, those same fees can be used to purchase books directly from the publishers in the formats used by all publics and distributed through the same public library systems which has the capability to serve blind people.

Governments and corporations have the means to affect real change in the lives of blind people by using the purchasing power already available to them. By mandating accessibility as a requirement in the procurement process, it is possible to:

- Drive opportunity in the private sector where innovation thrives;
- Lower costs through Increased competition;
- Provide more choice and options to library clients;
- Expand the market for mainstream library services; and
- Remove disability labels for people who simply want to borrow a book.

In the matter of our public libraries, there is a much better understanding of a new and growing market for published materials, regardless of formats, to meet the increasing customer market for accessible books and Government documents that provide information about initiatives that inform decision making.

Many dynamic digital-centred businesses understand this market well; are responding to the significant new opportunity to provide world class digital innovation in a new, expanded and more accessible market for accessible products and services; and are reaping the rewards. We are now seeing the results of this innovation everywhere. As businesses fill the voids in information programs and services with innovative digital technology products and services, they are providing customers with high quality choice of an ever expanding range of accessible digital technology, websites, and online content such as audio and large print, available in a wide range of media types and digital formats and downloads including audio, large print and braille.

I became an audio book user about ten years after losing most of my sight in 1976, when I discovered that there was a library program offered by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. Why it took almost ten years to learn about the service after being a client of the Institute is a question which I do not propose to address here. Suffice it to say that by the time I discovered that there was a talking book service, I was starved for information of any kind.

Books back then were recorded on four track audiotapes for the purpose of copyright protection and both the reading technology and books were supplied through the CNIB. This proprietary reading system failed frequently, leaving listeners without the means to access books while repair of the technology took place.

I next discovered however that I could access the audio books from the CNIB library through the public library system on two track cassettes as a special program. Clients of the CNIB would place their request with the public library. The order was filled from CNIB inventory and shipped to a branch in the clients' community. Since the books were on two track tapes, there was no need to use proprietary reading technology, therefore, standard off the shelf tape players could be used. Given that a priority 4 track system was used to provide copyright protection, the issue of copyright exemption was certainly a question as the two track system provided no copyright protection.

During the early 1990's, I realized how audio books were becoming very popular and had a large mainstream audience as people everywhere were discovering the joy of listening. Whether in the garden, driving to and from work, while luxuriating in a bubble bath or relaxing at the cottage, audio books had made it to the mainstream and were gaining increased popularity with public audiences.

One day, while picking up the special 2 track books at the public library that had been sent by CNIB, I was told that there was a collection of commercially available audio books in the general collection which I simply did not know about. Like any other library patron, I discovered that I could access books in an audio format, and it didn't require any proof of disability, or proprietary technology to access the collection. The only requirement to use these incredible resources was an up to date library card, a two track tape or CD player, and knowledge that the public collection existed. Was this an indication that we were actually making it to the mainstream?

It was at this juncture that I began my transition from the special library service to the public system exclusively. I enjoyed the quality, titles and selection. Once North American book publishers understood that there was a market for audio, large print and e-books, they began producing new titles commercially and offering the titles to libraries as well as through the regular book distribution channels such as Chapters, Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Indigo and more.

The commercially available audio books were fantastic, as they used professional narrators with single, and sometimes several, voices for quality high fidelity performances. And the consumer was not obliged to be identified as a person with print restrictions in order to borrow these books. Most blind and print restricted people are not even aware this option exists. If the service was promoted, there would most certainly be far more blind and print restricted people availing themselves of the public library system and choosing superior quality books through this mainstream channel which we all pay for through our taxes.

So why do blind Canadians have a segregated an inferior service which costs the Canadian taxpayer more, limits the market for the Canadian publishing sector, and grants a monopoly to a charity which is not accountable to its client base? Let alone the voting public that funds the segregated system and threatens our privacy and independence?

Why does our government extract taxes from all of us to ensure that services are available to people in the mainstream while services to people with disabilities are off loaded to a charity at a time when the internet makes CNIB services less relevant in our lives?

The market for audio books continues to grow as more and more titles are introduced into the mainstream and greater numbers of people from all communities discover how enjoyable listening to books can be. These are both abridged and unabridged books that are professionally narrated, high quality, high fidelity audio performances. Blind people, just like all other citizens, have the right to access these cultural works as well.

Given that digital information, books, art and music are being evaluated for ways to protect the intellectual property rights of the copyright holder for material delivered over the Internet, why would we address digital information resources differently for blind people? Whether we are discussing braille, large print, audio or digital content of any kind, these formats are digital files in the same fashion as e-books and need to be dealt with in the same manner.

The primary barrier to participation for blind people is not our blindness, but rather, the degree to which systems and formats are utilized. In this case, access to books is in the information design stage and the ability to deliver the preferred format is simply a function of the will to act

Today commercial audio books are available for sale over the Internet. New businesses are emerging every day, providing consumers with access to options for purchasing digital reading materials of the highest quality at rates that are comparable to those for the print versions. Best of all, royalties are paid to the copyright holders and there is nothing wrong with that. Personally, I prefer this model because as a consumer, I want greater selection. I also want the author to make a decent living from their efforts. By exercising my consumer prerogative, I can go to any online store to select books in the format I choose, at a price I can afford. One such bookstore is www.audible.com. The interface is accessible, the selection is extensive, and best of all, it is unnecessary to identify myself as a blind person merely to access reading material. Most importantly, I trust the source. These days the audio books can be listened to on commercially available MP3 reading technology or downloaded to personal mobile devices such as smart phones, so there is no requirement to use proprietary reading technology to enjoy the magic of a book.

Nearly all existing DAISY format books were made for free libraries for the blind. Although the DAISY standard format was introduced as a copyright protection application, it was adopted by the mainstream for the improved functionality and is now available as a mainstream app for smart phones. Copyright protection is now questionable, since these protections were digitally produced as exemptions/exceptions in accordance with the Canadian copyright Act specifically for print restricted people and delivered through non-profit organisations. This clause in the Canadian Copyright Act may limit opportunities for the publishing sector to produce digital and alternative format books and puts at risk investments of small and medium sized business innovations with the capacity and capability to deliver accessible options and choice where customers, libraries, publishers, on-line stores and Canadian taxpayers benefit.

Canadians pay taxes to ensure that all public programs and services are available and accessible. Why would we support a model of service delivery that would limit options through the establishment of a publicly sponsored monopoly which uses proprietary technology which limits options and choice to access information? Regardless of whether it is for leisure, National or community based information about programs and services or educational materials, why can't it be made available for all public audiences?

Why would the Government of Canada support a model of service through Grants and Contributions, where there is clearly a capacity and capability to deliver these services on a competitive basis with an opportunity to fuel an important and expanding digital market?

Why would blind people voluntarily step into a box which limits our opportunity to better participate and contribute in the public dialogue about a collective future which needs to include all of us?

Accessible and cost effective digital technology, information and channels is not just happening in the publishing sector. Old models of business are being rocked by the popularity of mobile options. Take, for example, what's happening with some of the largest retail stores. News of trouble for large stores which have not adapted to these digital times are going away and/or forced to restructure as a result of online options and competition in the same market space, where once their dominance was unchallenged. Amazon is only one example of how new digital models have disrupted traditional businesses. Apple has built accessibility into every computer system and device and made their products and on-line digital services work for the broadest possible audience and is reaching many more customers than ever before. Digital downloads of movies; music heralded the demise of music stores selling CDs, while traditional book publishers witnessed the loss of market

share with the rise of online digital options. As customers of digital products and services, we are becoming even more connected and engaged through accessible social networks like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn where we share experiences. We identify organisations that want our business by making access a priority in both the on-line and at retail premises. Their websites, content describing products and services and physical locations have installed beacons to digitally guide us to and inside retail stores.

For blind people who are connected, these digital times are perfect for us. However, not all of us are online and not everyone knows how to use the very powerful tools which exist which give us access to social networks. LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook provide us with the reach and influence to assist in changing the story, and so does our individual and collective advocacy efforts. As blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted people, we are natural innovators. We find workarounds everyday as we push passionately to be included in the mainstream of our country.

We are making progress but there is still much to do if we are to finally participate fully in all aspects of a healthy democracy which respects our diversity and recognizes our contributions in moving our country forward.

There are still more questions than answers, but that only creates the opportunities to find accessible solutions. Those answers herald the innovation that can drive us to the future that we design for ourselves, individually and collectively, and that is the direction where our contributions are valuable. It has the potential for the employment and escape from the poverty endemic in the lives of far too many people in Canada.

We are advocates for equality and our job is to always challenge the status quo. Challenge the systemic and attitudinal barriers that hold us back and change what it means to be a blind or print restricted person living in the best country in the world.

Libraries are our source of knowledge and can enable all of us together. I encourage you to visit your public library and ask how we can participate in the mainstream. Librarians want to help, and like many of us, would welcome a change in the current model.

My name is Sharlyn, but I am known as Charlie. I live in Ottawa and importantly, #IAmYourCustomer.

DISABILITY COLONIALISM AND BEYOND: AN ANALYSIS by Walden Green

Editor's Note: Walden Green is a member of AEBC who lives in western Canada.

Movements of oppressed people working for social change need to begin with an analysis of why and how they are oppressed, and then discern what courses of action to take to strive toward social justice.

In my own analysis of things, I take an anti-colonialist and left anti-capitalist perspective.

In my view, the blind and sight-impaired community, and indeed the disability community as a whole, is very much like a colonized people. The situation differs from that of classic colonialism in the sense that in classic colonialism an economic power or empire occupies

land, and the people living on that land, in order to have access to the resources on and beneath the land, as well as to the cheap labour of the colonized people.

In our case, we do not have land that somebody else wants to occupy, and our labour is not particularly wanted. Instead we represent a section of society who are seen as being inefficient and as being a burden on the profit margins of capitalism. In a system whose dictum is maximum efficiency and profit, we are the inconvenient ones. We clog the wheels of the machine by our presence.

The system's primary response to this reality has usually been to construct paternalistic agencies to manage us, to keep us happy enough that we don't revolt, but segregated enough that we don't interfere with the wheels of the main stream machine. This kind of arrangement is a type of colonialism, even if the motivations appear to be somewhat different. The motivations are in fact strongly parallel in that in classic colonialism, the motivation is ultimately the creation and defense of profits; in disability colonialism the motivation is likewise the defense of profits, in our case through the paternalistic management of people with disabilities in a separate and lesser system.

A key aspect of this separate but lesser system is charity-based funding rather than state funding. By funding disability services through charity, i.e. charitable giving by corporations or individuals, rather than through tax dollars, it helps enable the corporations to avoid paying their fair share of taxes, and enables corporations to display their logos and associate themselves with what is seen as the positive act of voluntary charitable giving. I have never known of a corporation that says, "Buy our products; we're wonderful; we paid our taxes last year."

In the history of the Canadian blind community, the CNIB has been the primary vehicle through which capitalism has colonized the blind community. The CNIB's purpose is warehouse management with blind and sight-impaired people being the objects in the warehouse. The CNIB is not a vehicle of liberation; it is a vehicle of oppression.

I say all this, not in anger, but in a matter of fact stating of my analysis.

Of course, the CNIB is not the only vehicle of oppression or colonialism, and disability colonialism is not the only form of oppression. The entire working class in capitalist society might be said to be in a state of class colonialism. The ruling capitalist class, a fraction of the one percent, who own the means of production, do indeed colonize the rest of society. Members of racialized groups, women, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, the GLBT community and various specific groups such as refugees and migrant workers, experience a deeper degree of colonization within the broader class colonization system.

A progressive movement, by its nature, must recognize the deeper level of oppression experienced by these doubly colonized groups and build a movement that moves outward from the experience and truth-speaking of these groups. Meanwhile, members of a particular community, such as people with disabilities, have both a responsibility to stand up for their rights and dignity, develop an analysis of how and why they are oppressed, and come to understand how their oppression fits into the broader scheme of oppression under capitalism. It is only when all oppressed groups are able to work together, while each stands up for itself in its particular battles, that the oppressed peoples of the earth are able to bring about progressive change.

Ultimately our goal should not be to achieve individual success within capitalism, but to achieve the dismantling of capitalism and to create a truly just, classless, cooperative society.

As we prepare to celebrate twenty-five years of existence, we need to ask, have we stood up for ourselves, have we developed an all-encompassing analysis of our own oppression and how it relates to oppression in capitalism as a whole, and have we worked toward an overall vision of social equity, or have we simply allowed ourselves to be pawns in the systems that oppress us

MY CANADA OF THE FUTURE by Marcia Yale

Editor's Note: Marcia Yale is AEBC's National Secretary.

In my Canada of the future, there will be equality and inclusivity, not as afterthoughts, but as normal behaviours. Everyone will be judged on his/her own merits--what he/she can offer, and differences will be celebrated, not feared. Access to information, transportation, employment, and all other aspects of societal life will be proudly extended to everyone who lives here.

In my Canada of the future, I will never be told that I have to use a separate website, or a separate application process. Since difference will be celebrated, everyone will be asked the same questions, and the information will be collected, not to be used to discriminate against someone, but to assist in providing the best possible experience for that person.

In my Canada of the future, people who have a disability will be offered the same respect and dignity offered to people who do not currently have a disability today. We will not be seen as inspirations, but as people who deserve to live in peace and prosperity with our neighbours.

In my Canada of the future, people will understand that deaf people need captioning and blind people need described video, and both accommodations will be universal.

In my Canada of the future, service animals will be accepted and their handlers respected for the independence they gain by working with one.

I hope I will awake one day in this future Canada, but know we have a long way to go. We must not give up the fight.