

The National Deafblind Intervener Initiative

Purpose:

The purpose of the National Deafblind Intervener Initiative is to establish the use of qualified Interveners as an accepted practice for individuals who are deafblind, to emphasize the need for competency-based training for interveners, and to support the recognition of interveners as related service providers under IDEA laws.

Goal:

To have Interveners listed as a related service under IDEA.

What is Deafblindness?

Deafblindness involves a combined vision and hearing loss to the extent that neither of these senses can compensate for the lack of the other one. Deafblindness creates a disability of access to the visual and auditory information about people and things in the environment that is necessary for learning, communication, and overall development. This results in isolation and disconnection from the world, and adversely impacts equitable access to learning and participation in educational environments.

What is the Educational Impact?

“Access” is a key term in the requirements of IDEA, and under IDEA, a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is mandated for children with disabilities. FAPE involves access to general education, the general curriculum and activities, and access to specialized educational services in the Least Restrictive Environment. “Access” is a critical issue for children who are deafblind, because educational environments are restrictive without “access” to the information needed for learning and interactions. The intervener is an individualized support that facilitates “access,” participation, and progress in the general education curriculum.

What is an Intervener?

Perhaps the most well-known example of an Intervener is Annie Sullivan who acted as Helen Keller’s Intervener and connected her to the world. An Intervener is an individual who works consistently one-to-one with a child who is deafblind and who has training and specialized skills in deafblindness. The intervener provides: (1) Access to clear and consistent visual and auditory information, (2) Support for the development and use of receptive and expressive communication, and (3) Support for social and emotional well-being.

What is the Need?

Currently under IDEA, an “Interpreter” is listed as a related service for children with hearing loss in order to provide them with access to language and communication. The law also mentions “special interpreting services” for children who are deafblind, but this is broad in scope and refers to varied methods of interpreting. The term “Intervener” should be specifically listed as a related service under IDEA for children with both hearing and vision loss, in order to provide them with access to language, communication, and environmental information.



Christian Knapp with his Intervener, Ann Bielert



“Ever since she took my hand on the doorstep of my home, she has been not only my eyes and ears, but also a light in all dark places, a bond between me and the life of the world.” Helen Keller

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