

MOST CANADIANS WITH HEARING LOSS DO NOT SIGN

Deaf people across the country, who use sign language as their primary means of communication, received good news last week. On August 11, 2006, The Honorable Mr. Justice Richard Mosley of the Federal Court of Canada ruled that all Government Services must be made available to Deaf citizens who use sign language as their primary means of communication to access Government services such as the RCMP, Passport Offices, Revenue Canada and other Federal establishments free of charge.

Justice Mosley states that “as Canadians, Deaf persons are entitled to be full participants in the democratic process and functioning of government “. He also wrote that “it is fundamental to an inclusive society that those with disabilities be accommodated when interacting with the institutions of the Government”.

The vast majority of Canadians who identify as hard of hearing, with a loss ranging from mild to profound, do not use or understand sign language. In difficult listening environments, they derive the most benefit from another form of visual communication - print interpretation. This ranges from the open or closed captioning available on television, to note taking in learning situations and, most importantly, Real Time Captioning (also known as CART, computer-assisted realtime). This is a necessary tool that allows hard of hearing people to participate comfortably in court situations and many other government and public services.

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA), a national consumer organization representing hard of hearing Canadians, is very pleased for Deaf Canadians on their hard-fought victory; however, this ruling offers no direct benefit to the vast majority of Canadians with hearing loss who do not ‘sign’. CHHA hopes to work with the federal government to ensure equal access for all Canadians with hearing loss.

Gloria Knous
Director, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
President, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association – Regina District