

NEWS RELEASE

**Wilfrid Laurier
University**



Laurier student uncovers gap in rehabilitation of the deafened

Counselling would reduce the negative impact of deafness on the deafened and family

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WATERLOO – A deaf master's student at Wilfrid Laurier University, who has just completed a year-long study of eight deafened adults, is marking Hearing Awareness Month with a call for more counselling during the rehabilitation of people who lose their hearing.

Miguel Aguayo's study found that rehabilitation from adventitious deafness – deafness that occurs during adulthood and which affects more than 150,000 Canadians – relied on medical devices such as cochlear implants and hearing aid provision. None of the study participants were referred to counselling for emotional trauma and social rehabilitation by medical professionals or social service agencies.

Aguayo also found that those around the deafened person chose the way in which deafened people communicate and that deafened people need to be socially empowered. He believes that counselling and a more relationship-based approach to rehabilitation will reduce the negative impact on deafened people and their families.

Statistics Canada reports that there are approximately 201,000 deaf people in Canada. Adventitious deafness accounts for three-quarters of that number. Aguayo's research could increase the quality of life for almost one million people, since it demonstrates that family and friends are also affected by the emotional state of the deafened.

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Aguayo's interest in the rehabilitation of the deafened began when he suffered a severe case of spinal meningitis at age 14. He became deaf overnight and was rushed to hospital in a severely debilitated state; he could not see, hear or walk. Thirty years later he remains deaf

Frustrated with his own rehabilitation process and realizing that many people share the same problems, he began to study the process for his master's thesis.

"I wanted to find out what has been done to diagnose and treat a person's social functioning as well as their auditory functioning," says Miguel. "For some people rehabilitation can mean providing hearing aids or sign language lessons; for others it can mean buying a car or other things not related to deafness."

Aguayo is graduating this summer with a Master's in Social Work from Wilfrid Laurier University. He is a certified social worker and works as a disability consultant. He is also a co-author of a book, *Deafened Adults: Adjustment and Support*, currently under review by publishers.

Throughout May the Canadian Hearing Society is holding Hearing Awareness Month. Events and activities will attempt to heighten awareness of deaf people in our society. On May 14, the Ontario Association of the Deaf will sponsor its annual deaf exposition, Mayfest. This event will draw hundreds of deaf people to Toronto's St. Lawrence Market.