

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to aid staff and volunteers in interacting with persons with disabilities. 1 in 7 people in Ontario has a disability. That's almost 2 million Ontarians. By 2036, that number will rise to 1 in 5 as people age. Ontario has laws to ensure all Ontarians can access our organization's goods, services and facilities.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (the Act)

Recognizing the history of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario, the purpose of the Act is to benefit all Ontarians by,

- (a) developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises on or before January 1, 2025; and
- (b) providing for the involvement of persons with disabilities, of the Government of Ontario and of representatives of industries and of various sectors of the economy in the development of the accessibility standards. 2005, c. 11, s. 1.

Guiding Principles

Staff and volunteers of Soo Curlers Association should be guided by the following principles when interacting with persons with disabilities:

Dignity – provide service in a way that allows the person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of other people.

Independence – a person with a disability can do things on their own without unnecessary help or interference from others.

Integration – provide service in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in the same or similar way as other customers, unless a different way is necessary to enable them to access goods, services or facilities.

Equal opportunity – provide service to a person with a disability in such a way that they have an equal opportunity to access your goods, services or facilities as what is given to others.

Tips for interacting with persons with various disabilities:

Below are tips for interacting with people who have various types of disabilities. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of disabilities. When in doubt always interact with the guiding principles described above in mind:

People with physical/mobility disabilities

Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with a spinal cord injury may use crutches while someone with severe arthritis or a heart condition may have difficulty walking longer distances.

Tips:

- ask before you help; people with disabilities often have their own way of doing things
- if you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level
- don't touch items or equipment (e.g., canes, wheelchairs) without permission
- if you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors
- think ahead and remove any items that may cause a physical barrier, such as boxes left in an aisle

People with vision loss

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not.

Not everyone with vision loss is totally blind. Many have some vision.

Tips:

- when you know someone has vision loss, don't assume the individual can't see you; many people who have low vision still have some sight
- identify yourself when you approach and speak directly to the customer
- ask if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (e.g., a menu or schedule of fees)
- when providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive
- offer your elbow to guide them if needed. If they accept, lead – don't pull
- if you need to leave the customer, let them know by telling them you'll be back, or saying goodbye
- don't leave the customer in the middle of the room – guide them to a comfortable location

People with hearing loss

People who have hearing loss may be deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. They may also be oral deaf – unable to hear but prefer to talk instead of using sign language. These terms are used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person’s hearing was diminished or lost.

Tips:

- once a customer has identified themselves as having hearing loss, make sure you are in a well-lit area where they can see your face and read your lips
- as needed, attract the customer’s attention before speaking; try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand
- if your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or if possible, move to a quieter area
- if necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (e.g., using a pen and paper)
- speak directly to your customer – not to their sign language interpreter – if they are accompanied by one

People who are deafblind

A person who is deafblind has some degree of both hearing and vision loss. People who are deafblind are often accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps with communication.

Tips:

- a customer who is deafblind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, perhaps with an assistance card or a note
- speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor

People with speech or language disabilities

Cerebral palsy, stroke, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or express themselves. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

Tips:

- don’t assume that a person who has difficulty speaking doesn’t understand you
- whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with “yes” or a “no”
- read visible instructions for communication devices, if the person uses one
- be patient; don’t interrupt or finish your customer’s sentences

- confirm what the person has said by summarizing or repeating – don't pretend if you're not sure
- speak directly to the customer and not to their companion or support person

People who have learning disabilities

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a range of disorders. One example is dyslexia, which affects how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.

Tips:

- be patient – people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and to respond
- try to provide information in a way that works for your customer (e.g. some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math)
- be willing to rephrase or explain something again in another way

People who have developmental disabilities

Developmental disabilities (e.g. Down syndrome) or intellectual disabilities, can mildly or profoundly limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do every day physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

Tips:

- don't make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do
- use plain language
- provide one piece of information at a time
- ask the customer if they need help reading your material or completing a form

People who have mental health disabilities

Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. It can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. A person with a mental health disability may experience depression or acute mood swings, anxiety due to phobias or panic disorder, or hallucinations.

You may not know someone has a mental health disability unless you are told. Stigma and lack of understanding are major barriers for people with mental health disabilities.

Tips:

- if you sense or know that a customer has a mental health disability, treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else
- be confident, calm and reassuring
- respect your customer's personal space
- limit distractions that could affect your customer's ability to focus or concentrate – loud noise, crowded areas and interruptions could cause stress

People who use assistive devices

An assistive device is a piece of equipment a person with a disability uses to help them with daily living (e.g., a wheelchair, screen reader, hearing aid, cane or walker, an oxygen tank).

Tips:

- don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission
- don't move assistive devices or equipment (e.g., canes, walkers) out of your customer's reach
- let your customers know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs

People who use service animals

There are various types of service animals who support people with various types of disabilities. People with vision loss may use a guide dog. Hearing alert animals help people with hearing loss. Other service animals are trained to alert a person to an oncoming seizure or to help people with autism, mental health disabilities, physical disabilities and other disabilities.

Tips:

- don't touch or distract a service animal, it is not a pet, it is a working animal and always has to pay attention
- if you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer
- you can provide water for the service animal if your customer requests it, but the customer is responsible for the care and supervision of the animal

People with a support person

A support person may accompany some people with disabilities. A support person can be a paid personal support worker, an intervenor, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help your customer with communication, mobility, personal care or with accessing your services.

Tips:

- if you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods, services or facilities, or simply ask
- speak directly to your customer, not to their support person

People accessing goods, services or facilities

If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing our goods, services or facilities, a good starting point is to simply ask "How can I help you?"

Our customers are our best source for information about their needs. Being flexible and open to suggestions will help create a good customer experience. A solution can be simple, and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.

Read and Understand Statement

By signing my name below, I certify that I have read the above information. Any questions concerning these policies have been discussed. My signature also certifies my understanding of the above policies.

Signature _____ Date _____

Additional Materials:

Further reading and training is available at <https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-laws>