

## **ACCESSIBILITY STANDARD FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE: TRAINING MANUAL**

### **Background**

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)* as passed in 2005 with the goal of creating standards to improve accessibility across the province. The *AODA* allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility that are designed to help make Ontario more accessible.

One of the specific standards that has been developed and legislated is the Accessible Customer Service Standards. Under the Accessible Customer Service Standards, Organizations must:

- Document in writing all their policies, practices and procedures for providing accessible customer service to people with disabilities;
- Notify customers that the documents required under the customer service standards are available upon request;
- When giving documents required under the customer service standard to a person with a disability, provide the information in a format that takes into account the person's disability;
- Ensure policies exist for dealing with people's use of their own assistive devices to access goods or services;
- Ensure that communication with a person with a disability is in a manner that takes into account their disability;
- Let people with disabilities bring their service animals onto the parts of the premises open to the public or other third parties, except where the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises;
- Let people with disabilities be accompanied by their support persons while on the parts of the provider's premises open to the public or other third parties;
- Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities usually use to access goods or services are temporarily disrupted;
- Train anyone who interacts with the public on topics outlined in the customer service standards and on the organization's policies, practices and procedures; and
- Establish a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the way the organization provides goods or services to people with disabilities, including the action to be taken if a complaint is received, and make information about the process readily available to the public.

### **Who Are People with Disabilities**

The *AODA* uses the same definition of disability as the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. Disability is defined under Section 2 of the *AODA* as:

- a) Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical coordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;

- b) A condition of mental impairment or developmental disability;
- c) A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- d) A mental disorder; or
- e) An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

### **How to Interact and Communicate with People with Various Types of Disabilities:**

Being able to interact and communicate with people with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service. First and foremost, get to know your customer because many disabilities are invisible. By focusing on the individual, you will better understand their needs. Sometimes the best approach is to ask a person with a disability how you can best communicate with them. The following are tips on how to interact and communicate with people who have various disabilities:

#### **People who have hearing loss**

People who have hearing loss may be deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. These are terms used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face and read your lips.
- If your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper).

#### **People who have 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.

- Don't assume the individual can't see you. Many people who have low vision still have some sight.
- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them
- Ask your customer if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (for example a menu or list of fees).
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.

## **People who are deafblind**

A person who is deafblind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps them with communication.

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

## **People who have physical disabilities**

There are many types and degrees of physical 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.

- 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 such as canes or 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.

## **People who have learning disabilities**

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a variety of disorders, such as dyslexia, that affect 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.

- 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 takes into account the customer's disability. For example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.

## **People with speech or language impairments**

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

- Don't assume that a person with a speech impairment has another disability.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no".
- Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences.

## **People who have mental health disorders**

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity.

For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or panic disorders.

- Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident, calm and reassuring.
- If a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

### **People who have intellectual/developmental disabilities**

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

- Don't make assumptions about what a person can do.
- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.

### **Assistive Devices**

As well as learning to interact with customers with disabilities we need to be aware of and have an understanding of who or what our customers may need to use to assist them in their daily lives. An assistive device is a tool, technology or other mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks and activities, such as moving, communicating or lifting. Personal assistive devices can include:

- Wheelchairs or walkers;
- hearing aids;
- white canes;
- note taking devices;
- portable magnifiers;
- recording machines;
- assistive listening devices or speech amplification devices;
- personal oxygen tank;
- devices for grasping; or
- TTY machines.

When interacting with a customer who uses an assistive device:

- Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.
- Don't move assistive devices or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of your customer's reach.
- Respect your customer's personal space. Don't lean over him or her or on his or her assistive device.
- Let your customer know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (eg. Accessible washrooms, etc.).

## **Use of Equipment or Assistive Devices at NCSSM**

At Canterbury High School, the following assistive devices are available:

- Elevator- ensure that you are comfortable using the elevator and that you know the location;
- Wheelchair accessible ramp- ensure that you know the location; and
- Wheelchair accessible washrooms- ensure that you know the location.

## **Service Animals**

Under the standards, NCSSM is required to allow service animals on the parts of the premise that are open to the public or to other third parties, unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law. An animal is a service animal if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability, or if the person has a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that the animal is required for reasons relating to his or her disability. Examples of service animals are guide dogs, hearing alert animals, and animals that are trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.

When interacting with a customer who uses a service animal:

- Remember that a service animal is not a pet. It is a working animal.
- Avoid touching or addressing service animals- they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Avoid making assumptions about the animal. If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer.

## **Support Persons**

A support person is an individual hired or chosen to accompany a person with a disability to provide services or assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to goods or services. The support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.

A support person must be allowed to accompany an individual with a disability on to any part of the premises that is open to the public or to third parties.

When interacting with a customer who has a support person:

- If you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services, or simply ask.
- Speak directly to the customer and not to their support person.

## **What to Do if a Person with a Disability is having Difficulty Assessing Services**

If you notice that a customer is having difficulty accessing NCSSM services, a good starting point is to simply ask how you can best help. Customers are our best source for information about their needs.

## **Disruption in Service**

If there is a temporary disruption to our facilities or services that are usually used by people with disabilities to access our services, notice needs to be provided to the public. The notice should include information about the reason for the disruption, its expected duration and a description of alternate facilities if available. The notice needs to be placed in an obvious location, such as the website.

## **Feedback**

Feedback about how services are delivered to people with disabilities shall be invited, forwarded to the appropriate personnel, responded to, documented and tracked. Feedback shall be collected by phone at 613-569-7995, by email, [info@suzukimusic.ca](mailto:info@suzukimusic.ca), in writing or in person at any NCSSM staffed location. Feedback will be addressed and actions will be taken according to NCSSM's regular complaint management procedure.