

COMMUNITY LIVING  
PORT COLBORNE - WAINFLLEET

# **“May I Help You?”**

Understanding Accessible Customer Service

Training Package

## **Part #1: Background**

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) was passed by the Ontario legislature 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 made law, is the Accessible Customer Service Standard. This standard details specific requirements for all service providers.

CLPCW must:

1. Establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities.
2. Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability.
3. Set a policy on allowing people to use their own personal assistive devices to access your goods and use your services.
4. Allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal in those areas of our premises that are open to the public, unless the animal is excluded by law.
5. Permit people with disabilities who use a support person to bring that person with them while accessing goods or services in premises open to the public or third parties.
6. Train staff, volunteers, contractors and any other people who interact with the public or other third parties on our behalf on a number of topics outlined in the customer service standard.
7. Establish a process for people to provide feedback on how you provide goods and services to people with disabilities and how you will respond to any feedback and take action on any complaints.
8. Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access or use your goods or services are temporarily disrupted.

## **Part #2 What is Accessible Customer Service?**

Community Living Port Colborne ~ Wainfleet is committed to providing customer service to persons with disabilities in a manner that:

- respects their **dignity** and **independence**;
- is **integrated** as fully as practicable into the method of service delivery;
- ensures an **opportunity equal** to that given to other customers to obtain and use our goods and services; and

- allows persons with disabilities to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in a similar way to other customers.

Accessible customer service can mean many things. Mostly, it is the understanding that each individual may need a slightly different type of accommodation.

For example, a person who is blind may need to have information read aloud to them; an individual with a learning disability may need to have instructions written down; and someone who uses a wheelchair may need help finding a route they can use. Accessible customer service is **good** customer service - courteous, helpful and prompt.

### **Part #3      What Can I Do?**

Always start with people first. In language, that means saying “person with a disability”, rather than “a disabled person”. In any interaction, it means addressing the person’s service needs, rather than focusing on the disability.

Let’s take some time to understand the definition of different disabilities and some tips to assist you in providing accessible customer service.

A “**Disability**” as defined by the AODA includes:

- any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness;
- a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- a mental disorder, or
- an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*; (“handicap”).

The specific categories of disability and some tips are outlined in the following pages to help you provide service to your customers.

**PHYSICAL** disabilities include a range of functional limitations from minor difficulties in moving or coordinating one part of the body, through muscle weakness, tremors, and paralysis. Physical disabilities can be congenital such as Muscular Dystrophy; or acquired, such as tendonitis. A physical disability may affect an individual’s ability to:

- Perform manual tasks such as holding a pen, turning a key or grip a door knob
- Move around independently
- Control the speed or coordination of movements
- Reach, pull or manipulate objects
- Have strength or endurance

#### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require a wheelchair. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to your customer. Don't speak to someone who is with them
- People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things. Ask before you help
- Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are part of a person's personal space, don't touch, move or lean on them
- Provide your customer information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.)
- Keep ramps and corridors free of clutter
- If a counter is too high or wide, step around it to provide service
- Provide seating for those that cannot stand in line
- Be patient. Customers will identify their needs to you

**HEARING** loss can cause problems in distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words. A person who is deaf, deafened or hard of hearing may be unable to:

- Use a telephone
- Understand speech in noisy environments
- Pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers

**Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. Remember, customers who are deaf or hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating.

Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand
- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout. Speak clearly
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood
- Face the person and keep your hands and other objects away from your face and mouth
- Deaf people may use a sign language interpreter to communicate - always direct your attention to the deaf person - not the interpreter
- Any personal (e.g. financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds
- If necessary, write notes back and forth to share information
- Don't touch service animals - they are working and have to pay attention at all times

**DEAF - BLINDNESS** is a combination of hearing and vision loss. The result for a person who is deaf-blind is significant difficulty accessing information and performing daily activities. Deaf-blindness interferes with communication, learning, orientation and mobility. People who are deaf-blind communicate using various sign language systems, Braille, telephone devices, communication boards and any combination thereof. Many people who are deaf-blind use the services of an Intervener who relay information and facilitate auditory and visual information and act as sighted guides.

**Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating.

Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf-blind:

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deaf-blind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither
- A customer who is deaf-blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them
- Do not touch or address the service animals - they are working and have to pay attention at all times
- Never touch a person who is deaf-blind suddenly or without permission unless it's an emergency
- Understand that communication can take some time - be patient
- Direct our attention to your customer, not the intervener

**VISION** disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Many have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Vision loss can result in:

- Difficulty reading or seeing faces
- Difficulty maneuvering in unfamiliar places
- Inability to differentiate colours or distances
- A narrow field of vision
- The need for bright light, or contrast
- Night blindness

### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Vision disabilities can restrict your customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a vision disability. Others may use a guide dog or a white cane.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have vision disabilities:

- Verbally identify yourself before making physical contact
- If the person uses a service animal - do not touch or approach the animal - it is working
- Verbally describe the setting, form, location as necessary
- Offer your arm to guide the person. Do not grab or pull
- Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it is an emergency
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye

**INTELLECTUAL** disabilities affect a person's ability to think and reason. It may be caused by genetic factors such as Down Syndrome, exposure to environmental toxins, such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, brain trauma or other disorders. A person with an intellectual disability may have difficulty with:

- Understanding spoken and written information
- Conceptual information
- Perception of sensory information
- Memory

**Best practices and procedure for Customer Service:**

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has this disability unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask question or use body language.

As much as possible, treat your customers with an intellectual or developmental disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have an intellectual or developmental disability:

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do
- Use clear, simple language
- Be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information
- Remember that the person is an adult and unless you are informed otherwise, can make their own decisions
- Be patient and verify your understanding
- If you can't understand what is being said, don't pretend. Just ask again
- Provide one piece of information at a time
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their companion or attendant

**SPEECH** disabilities involve the partial or total loss of the ability to speak. Typical disabilities include problems with:

- Pronunciation
- Pitch and loudness
- Hoarseness or breathiness
- Stuttering or slurring

**Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Some people have problems communicating. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

Here are some tips on serving customers with speech or language impairments:

- If possible, communicate in a quiet environment
- Give the person your full attention. Don't interrupt to finish their sentences
- Ask them to repeat if necessary, or to write their message
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'
- Verify your understanding
- Patience, respect and willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools

**LEARNING** disabilities include a range of disorders that effect verbal and non-verbal information acquisition, retention, understanding and processing. People with a learning disability have average or above average intelligence, but take in and process information and express knowledge in different ways. Learning disability can result in:

- Difficulties in reading
- Problem solving
- Time management
- Way finding
- Processing information

**Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Learning disabilities are generally invisible and ability to function varies greatly - respond to any request for verbal information, assistance in filling in forms and so on with courtesy.

Allow extra time to complete tasks if necessary.

**MENTAL HEALTH** disabilities include a range of disorders however there are three main types of mental health disabilities:

- Anxiety
- Mood
- Behavioural

People with mental health disabilities may seem edgy or irritated; act aggressively; be perceived as pushy or abrupt; be unable to make a decision; start laughing or get angry for no apparent reason.

**Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

- Treat each person as an individual. Ask what would make him/her the most comfortable and respect his/her needs to the maximum extent possible.
- Try to reduce stress and anxiety in situations.
- Stay calm and courteous, even if the customer exhibits unusual behaviour, focus on the service they need and how you can help.

**SMELL** disabilities can involve the inability to sense smells or a hypersensitivity to odours and smells. A person with a smelling disability may have allergies to certain odours, scents or chemicals or may be unable to identify dangerous gases, smoke, fumes and spoiled food.

**TOUCH** disabilities can affect a person's ability to sense texture, temperature, vibration or pressure. Touch sensations may be reduced or heightened resulting in a hypersensitivity to touch, temperature, or the opposite, numbness and the inability to feel touch sensations.

**TASTE** disabilities can limit the experience of the four primary taste sensations: sweet, bitter, salty and sour. A person with a taste disability may be unable to identify spoiled food or noxious substances.

**OTHER** disabilities result from a range of other conditions, accidents, illnesses and disease including ALS, asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, environmental sensitivities, seizure disorders, heart disease, stroke and joint replacement.

Disabilities are not always visible or easy to distinguish.

Most importantly, recognize your nervousness and relax! People with disabilities are generally aware they may need some accommodations and will work with you. Just remember how you ask for help.

**Part #4      How should I interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive equipment, the assistance of a service animal or a support person?**

1. **First**, let's take some time to understand what these different assistive options are:

**“Assistive Equipment”** are:

- devices that people may bring with them or that are already on the premises and are used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services provided by Community Living Port Colborne ~ Wainfleet.
- Assistive devices include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, walkers, white canes used by people who are blind or who have low vision, not taking devices, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks and devices or grasping.

**“Service Animal”** is:

- an animal which is specially trained to assist an individual with disabilities
- An animal is a “service animal” if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to his or her disability, for example, a guide dog wearing a harness.
- If it is not readily apparent that the animal is a service animal, then a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability is required.

**“Support Person”** means:

- In relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.
- May be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.

2. **Next**, let's take some time to understand how you should interact with persons with disabilities who may use one or more of these assistive options.

Customers using **Assistive Equipment**:

- Inappropriate to lean on or reach over them.
- Ensure that the person is permitted to enter the premises with the device and to utilize the device unless excluded by law.
- Potential barriers to the use of assistive devices must be removed where possible.
- Ensure persons with disabilities are aware of assistive devices available to the providers' premises or otherwise supplied by the provider.
- Assistive devices must be offered in a manner that respects the persons' dignity and independence.

Customers with **Service Animals**:

- Allowed anywhere the customers normally have access
- Customer is responsible for the care and supervision of the Service Animal
- Avoid talking to, touching or making eye contact with the Service Animal
- Customer is permitted to keep the animal with him or her unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises (e.g. areas where food is prepared)

### Customers with **Support Persons:**

- Both persons are permitted to enter the premises together
- The person with a disability is not prevented from having access to the Support Person while on the premises
- Consent is required if confidential information is going to be shared when a Support Person is present
- Support Person rides free of charge
- Speak directly to your customer, not the Support Person

## **Part #5 Clear Print - Accessibility Guidelines**

Readability shouldn't be an afterthought when producing materials. It should be the first step in making your merchandise, service, location or information accessible to everyone. Keep Clear Print guidelines in mind as you design your products and you'll reach a wider audience.

### **Contrast**

Use high contrast colours for text and background.

Good examples are black or dark blue text on a white or yellow background, or white/yellow text on a black/dark blue background.

### **Type Colour**

Printed material is most readable in black and white.

If using coloured text, restrict it to things like titles, headlines or highlighted material.

### **Point Size**

Bigger is better. Keep your text large, preferably between 12 and 18 points, depending on the font (point size varies between fonts).

Consider your audience when choosing point size.

### **Leading**

Leading is the space between lines of text and should be at least 25 to 30 percent of the point size.

This lets readers move more easily to the next line of text.

Heavier typefaces will require slightly more leading.

### **Font Family & Font Style**

Avoid complicated or decorative fonts.

Choose standard fonts with easily-recognizable upper and lower case characters.

Arial and Verdana are good choices.

### **Font Heaviness**

Opt for fonts with medium heaviness and avoid light type with thin strokes.

When emphasizing a word or passage, use bold or heavy font. Italics or uppercase letters are not recommended.

### **Letter Spacing**

Don't crowd your text: keep a wide space between letters.

Choose a monospaced font rather than one that is proportionally spaced.

### **Margins & Columns**

Separate text into columns to make it easier to read, as it requires less eye movement and less peripheral vision.

Use wide binding margins or spiral bindings if possible.

Flat pages work best for vision aids such as magnifiers.

### **Paper Finish**

Use a matte or non-glossy finish to cut down on glare.

Reduce distractions by not using watermarks or complicated background designs.

### **Clean Design & Simplicity**

Use distinctive colours, sizes, shapes on the covers of materials to make them easier to tell apart. CNIB is a nationwide, community-based, registered charity committed to public education, research and the vision health of all Canadians. CNIB provides the services and support necessary to enjoy a good quality life regardless of vision loss.

## **Part #6 Terminology - Talking About Disabilities and Choosing the Right Word**

Words can influence and reinforce the public's perception of people with disabilities. They can create either a positive view of people with disabilities or an indifferent, negative depiction.

Here are some general tips that can make your communication and interactions with or about people with all types of disabilities more successful.

- Use *disability* or *disabled*, not *handicap* or *handicapped*
- Never use terms such as *retarded*, *dumb*, *psycho*, *moron* or *crippled*. These words are very demeaning and disrespectful to people with disabilities.
- Remember to put people first. It is proper to say *person with a disability*, rather than *disabled person*.
- If you don't know someone or if you are not familiar with the disability, it's better to wait until the individual describes his/her situation to you, rather than to make your own assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong.

The following preferred words and phrases will help you choose language that is neither demeaning nor hurtful. People with disabilities prefer these terms.

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Please use</b>
Afflicted by cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.	A person who has cerebral palsy. A person who has multiple sclerosis. A person who has arthritis, etc. A person with a disability.
Aged (the)	Seniors
Autistic	A person with autism. A person who has autism.

Birth defect, congenital defect, deformity	A person who has a congenital disability. A person with a disability since birth.
Blind (the), visually impaired (the)	A person who is blind. A person with a vision disability. A person with vision loss. A person with a visual impairment. A person with low vision.
Brain damaged	A person with a brain injury. A person with a head injury.
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound	A person who uses a wheelchair
Crazy, insane, lunatic, psycho, mental, mental patient, maniac, neurotic, psychotic, unsound mind, schizophrenic	A person with a mental disability. A person who has depression. A person with schizophrenia.
Cripple, crippled, lame	A person with a disability. A person with mobility impairment or more specifically, a person who walks with crutches. A person who uses a walker. A person who uses a mobility aid. A person with arthritis, etc.
Deaf (the), hearing impaired (the)	A person who is deaf. A person who is deafened (deaf later in life). A person who is hard of hearing. A person with a hearing loss. When referring to the deaf community and their culture, it is acceptable to us “the deaf”.
Deaf and dumb, deaf mute	A person who is deaf without speech.
Deaf-Blind (the)	A person who is deaf-blind.
Differently abled	A person with a disability.
Disable (the)	People with disabilities.
Elderly (the)	Seniors, older adults.
Epileptic	A person who has epilepsy.
Fits, spells, attacks	Seizures.

Handicapped (the)	A person with a disability. The term handicapped may be used when referring to an environmental or attitudinal barrier as in “a person who is handicapped by a set of stairs leading to the entrance”.
Hidden disability	Non-visible disability.
Invalid	A person with a disability.
Learning disabled, learning disordered, the dyslexics	A person with a learning disability or people with learning disabilities.
Mentally retarded, idiot, simple, retarded, feeble minded, imbecile	A person with an intellectual disability. A person with a developmental disability.
Midget, dwarf	A person of short stature. A person who has a form of dwarfism. A little person. A person diagnosed with “Achondroplasia, SED, or what ever their specific diagnosis is”, a form or dwarfism.
Mongoloid, Mongolism	A person with Down Syndrome. One can use this terminology only when it is directly relevant. A person with an intellectual or developmental disability.
Normal	A person who is not disabled. A person who is able bodied. Specifically, a person who is sighted, a hearing person, or person who is ambulatory.
Patient	A person with a disability. The word patient may be used when referring to a relationship between a medical professional and a client.
Physically challenged	A person with a physical disability.
Spastic	A person who has muscle spasms.
Stutterer	A person with a speech impairment or impediment.
Victim of/suffers from/stricken with cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.	A person who has cerebral palsy. A person who has multiple sclerosis, etc. A person with a disability.
Visually impaired (the)	A person with visual impairment. A person with low vision. A person with vision loss. A person with a vision disability.

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Please use</b>
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Visually impaired (the)	A person with visual impairment. A person with low vision. A person with vision loss. A person with a vision disability.
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**Part #7      What happens if for some reason we can't serve a person with a disability?**

It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in service, such as an elevator under repair, renovations that limit access to an area, or technology that is temporarily unavailable. If a disruption in service is planned, and expected, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

People with disabilities may often go through a lot of trouble to access services, such as booking transit or arranging a ride. By providing notice, you can save that person an unnecessary trip. Notice can be provided on your website, by telephone, or in writing.

In the even of an unexpected disruption in service, provide notice in a variety of ways and as quickly as possible. Please refer to the unexpected disruption of service template. Consider offering alternative methods of service while informing those that may be impacted personally.

It is important to recognize that there are available internal and external resources for you to use and assist you in delivering services to persons with disabilities.