

## PROCEDURE

**Re:** ACCESSIBILITY STANDARD FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE  
**Issued By:** Richard Newton-Smith  
**Effective Date:** November 29, 2011  
**Reference:** HS-02 Policy

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### PURPOSE

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) is a Provincial Act with the purpose of developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for persons with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises.

Under the AODA, the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service will be enforced as of January 1, 2012 and applies to all organizations (public, private and non-profit) that provide goods or services either directly to the public or to other organizations in Ontario and that have one or more employees in Ontario.

The Society is committed to providing customer service in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities. Without limiting the requirements or expectation for accessibility, specific consideration shall be given to the following:

- **Assistive Devices** – ensuring that staff are trained and familiar with various assistive devices that may be used by clients with disabilities while accessing our services (wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, amplification devices, hearing aids, oxygen tanks, electronic notebooks or laptop computers, communication boards, speech-generating devices);
- **Communication** – communicating with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability;
- **Service Animals** - welcoming people with disabilities and their service animals into areas of the Society that are open to the public. We also commit to finding alternate accommodation when an animal is disallowed under the law; and,
- **Support Persons** – welcoming support persons to accompany a person with a disability. In this circumstance, consent for disclosure may be necessary and will to be acknowledged in writing by the client with a disability (taking into account their disability) and by the support person.

### Notice of Temporary Disruption

In the event of a planned or unexpected disruption to services or facilities for clients with

disabilities, the Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society will notify affected clients promptly.

The Society will provide a clearly posted notice which will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated length of time, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available. The notice will be placed at the main entrance to the office building at 161 Kendall Street, Point Edward or the Family Visit Centre at Durand Street, Sarnia as necessary.

#### **Staff Training**

The Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society will provide training to management, staff, volunteers and foster parents and others who deal with the public or other third parties on their behalf.

This training will be provided initially at orientation and at least annually in a formal, structured forum. Training will include:

- An overview of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard;
- Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid's plan related to the customer service standard;
- How to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disability;
- How to interact with persons with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animal or the assistance of a support person;
- How to use equipment or devices available on the Society's premises or otherwise provided by the Society that may help with the provision services to a person with a disability;
- What to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing the Society's services; and
- Management, staff, volunteers and foster parents will be trained when changes are made to the Society's customer service plan.

#### **Feedback Process**

Clients who wish to provide feedback on the way the Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society provides services to people with disabilities can contact the Executive Director by e-mail, mail or verbally and can expect to hear back within 10 business days.

Complaints will be addressed according to our organization's regular complaint management procedures.

#### **Policy Modifications**

Any policy of the Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society that does not respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities will be modified or repealed.

Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society Accessibility Standard for Customer Service – Availability to the Public

Any individual may request a copy of the Society's Customer Service Standard and when giving documents to a person with a disability, the Society will provide the information in a format that

takes into account the person's disability.

### **General Information**

#### **How to communicate with people with different types of disabilities**

There are many types and degrees of disability. Openly communicating and responding to our clients' needs is the key to excellent customer service for all. When you are not sure about the best approach, just politely ask a person with a disability how you can best communicate with them.

But remember that just because someone has a disability please don't assume that they need help. Here are a few tips for interacting with people who have various disabilities:

#### **People with 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.

##### **Tips:**

- 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 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.

##### **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 client.
- Ask if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them.
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.

#### **People who have 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 client's attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- If your client 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 are Deaf blind**

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

**Tips:**

- A customer who is deaf blind 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 intervener.

**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.

**Tips:**

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

**People who have Learning Disabilities**

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a variety 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 takes into account the client'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 who have Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities**

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can 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 do.
- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.

### **People who have Mental Health Disabilities**

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 disorder.

#### **Tips:**

- If you sense or know that a customer has a mental health disability be sure to treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident, calm and reassuring.
- If a client appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

How to interact with people who use assistive devices, and how to use any equipment that your organization provides to help clients with disabilities

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 things like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes or speech amplification devices.

#### **Tips:**

- 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 client's reach.
- Let your clients know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (e.g. chair lift at FVC, public phones with TTY service, accessible washrooms, etc.).

### **How to interact with a Person who has a Guide Dog or other Service Animal**

People with vision loss may use a guide dog, but there are other types of service animals as well.

Hearing alert animals help people who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf, or hard of hearing. Other service animals are trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.

Under the standard, service animals must be allowed on the parts of our premises that are open to the public. In some instances, service animals will not be permitted in certain areas by law (for example, a kitchen).

**Tips:**

- Remember that a service animal is not a pet. It is a working animal. Avoid touching or addressing them.
- If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your client.

**How to serve a Person accompanied by a Support Person**

Some people with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person, such as an intervener. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help your customer with a variety of things from communicating, to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.

Welcome support people into our workplace. They are permitted in any part of our premises that is open to the public. However, if the assisted person is a client, a confidentiality / consent documentation may be required related to disclosure requirements.

**Tips:**

- Speak directly to your client, not to their support person

**How to assist People with Disabilities who need help accessing our Services**

If you notice that your client is having difficulty accessing our services, a good starting point is to simply ask "How can I help you?" Your clients are your best source for information about their needs. A solution can be simple and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.

Accessibility resources available at [www.Ontario.ca/AccessON](http://www.Ontario.ca/AccessON)

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