

ASSISTING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ON ELECTION DAY

Prepared For:
The City Of London,
Municipal Elections Office

Prepared By:
Accessibility Advisory Committee for
The City Of London

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1.0 Introduction:

The Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) 2001 was passed by the Provincial Government in December of 2001. The purpose of the Act is to improve the opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for their participation in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the Province. The ODA also mandates all municipalities with a population of 10,000 or more, to form municipal accessibility advisory Committees (AAC). London formed its AAC in the fall of 2002. This committee has been assigned the task of advising City Council on all matters that pertain to persons with disabilities, in areas such as, Public Transit, Community Services – Recreation Programs, Parks, Municipal Facilities, Transportation, Parking and Traffic, Site Plan Review and Planning, Housing, Employment, Communication practices, etc.

In Canada, we are fortunate to have fair and democratic methods in place for the selecting of political representation. To not take part in the process or to feel like our opinion doesn't matter would be to waste the incredible power that we possess. The power of a single vote is staggering. It is our right to stand up and be counted. And the way we do that is by casting our ballot. When you don't vote, you let others speak for you.

Persons with disabilities have the same right to vote as everyone else.

The materials provided herein, are intended to provide you with some basic information on how to interact with voters who require special assistance.

2.0 Definitions:

A disability is a problem in functioning caused by an accident, trauma, genetics or disease. People with disabilities may have difficulty with mobility, hearing, vision, speech or mental function. Some people may have more than one disability. A person should never be referred to as their disability.

While some disabilities may be obvious/visible, i.e., wheelchairs,

crutches and canes, others are less obvious/visible, i.e., visual impairment, hearing impairment, developmental disability, mental illness, etc.

A handicap describes a restriction imposed by the physical, social or attitudinal environment that prevents a person from fulfilling a normal role. Handicaps are caused by the contexts in which people live. Handicap is not a synonym for disability.

3.0 General Etiquette:

- ❖ Focus on abilities.
- ❖ Be respectful.
- ❖ Allow individuals to participate at their own pace.
- ❖ Be patient; do not try to rush someone.
- ❖ Be observant; look to see if someone needs help.
- ❖ Speak to the person with the disability, not the individual who may accompany him/her.
- ❖ ASK the person if they require any assistance, and then WAIT for the response. If requested, provide assistance.
- ❖ When requested, provide assistance. Let the person guide you as to what kind of assistance they need.
- ❖ Listen carefully and if you do not fully understand what was said, respectfully ask for something to be repeated.
- ❖ DO NOT raise your voice unless requested to do so.
- ❖ Have a pen and paper handy to assist those who may be hard of hearing or deaf. Many of the Deaf are not literate in English as they consider ASL to be their first language. Therefore, be aware that "broken English" is not a symptom of cognitive disorganization or

delay but rather indicative of limitations in a second language. Therefore, written English may not always be the best way to get important information across.

- ❖ Be familiar with your location and know the most accessible routes. Remember, one small step can be a huge barrier to someone who has mobility impairment or is in a wheelchair or scooter.
- ❖ A person with a disability has the same needs as anyone else. Respect the individual as a human being.
- ❖ Be yourself; it is alright not to know what to do – consider interactions with persons with disabilities as an opportunity to learn something about living with a disability. Have fun.

4.0 Pre-Election Day:

When a voter calls to inquire about municipal polling stations, staff responding to enquiries should:

- ❖ Ensure they are familiar with the location of each polling station and specific route of travel to each polling station.
- ❖ Ensure each polling station is accessible.
- ❖ Be prepared to give specific information including distance, direction and physical obstacles a disabled voter may encounter, and
- ❖ Ensure the voter knows the time polling stations are open as they may require alternate modes of transportation, such as Paratransit services, which require advance bookings.

5.0 On Election Day:

A voter with a disability who requires assistance may ask the Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) for assistance in marking the ballot. The DRO may assist the voter by marking his/her ballot as directed by the voter and place the ballot in the ballot box.

The DRO may provide assistance as indicated above, or, at the request of the voter with a disability who is accompanied by a friend, may permit

the friend to accompany the voter into the voting compartment and mark the voter's ballot for him/her.

Any friend who is permitted to mark the ballot of a voter with a disability shall first be required to take an oral oath that he/she will keep secret the manner in which the voter voted.

The DRO shall enter in the column for DRO's comments in the voting list opposite the voter's name the reason why the ballot was marked by him/her or by the voter's friend.

5.1 When Serving a Person Using Mobility Aids:

- ❖ Permit voters using mobility aids (e.g. crutches, canes or wheelchairs, scooters) to keep them within their reach.
- ❖ Permit voters using mobility aids to sit down rather than having them stand for more than a few minutes.
- ❖ Ensure those who are providing service or answering enquiries sit as well, placing them at eye level with the voter.
- ❖ DO NOT lean onto or touch a person's wheelchair, and
- ❖ DO NOT move a person's wheelchair without the owner's prior permission/instruction.

5.2 When Serving a Person who is Blind or is Vision Impaired:

- ❖ Greet the voter by identifying yourself and introduce anyone else present with you.
- ❖ When offering the voter a seat, place their hand on the back or arm of the seat; verbal cues may be helpful as well.
- ❖ Let the voter know if you move or need to end the conversation.
- ❖ NEVER touch a service animal without the expressed permission of its owner.
- ❖ If requested, the DRO may read out loud the list of candidates and their affiliations. By feeling the notches, visually impaired voters can find the candidate of their choice and mark the circle immediately to the left of the notch. Provide templates available to make this process even more convenient.
- ❖ Provide the voter with a magnifier sheet, which is available

at each polling station.

- ❖ Permit the voter to have a companion mark their ballot for them. (The DRO may also act in this capacity). If a companion marks the ballot, both the voter and the companion must take the appropriate oral oath, administered by the poll official.

5.3 When Serving a Person with Speech Impediment:

- ❖ Speak directly to the person with the speech impediment, not to the person who may accompany them.
- ❖ Do not assume that a person with a speech impediment has a developmental disability.
- ❖ Do not finish the person's sentences.
- ❖ If clarification is needed, reword what you think the person is saying then WAIT for them to confirm that you have understood them correctly.
- ❖ Do not assume that you must speak more loudly or more slowly to the person with a speech impediment; be patient and allow the person to express him or herself.
- ❖ Never pretend to understand what the person has said. Ask them to repeat their question or answer as often as is required for you to understand.

5.4 When Serving a Person who is hard of hearing or deaf:

- ❖ If a sign language interpreter is available, seat the interpreter beside staff, across from the person who is hard of hearing or deaf.
- ❖ Remember, the interpreter facilitates communication and should not be consulted as an active participant in the conversation.
- ❖ Maintain eye contact with the person who is hard of hearing or deaf when asking and responding to questions and when that person is asking and responding to questions.
- ❖ If the voter can lip read, then look directly at the person, speak clearly and at a normal pace. Do not exaggerate lip movement or shout. Only raise your voice if requested to do so. Place yourself facing the light source, keep your hands, food or cups away from your mouth while speaking, and

- ❖ Remember, if you need to get the attention of the voter touch them lightly on the shoulder or wave your hand discreetly.
- ❖ If you are still having difficulty communicating, you may want to try written communication – have a pad and pen nearby. Note, however, that many of the Deaf consider American Sign Language (ASL) as their first language and English as their second language. Thus, they may not be fluent in spoken or written English.

A Way With Words:

A word list of appropriate terminology for the portrayal of persons with disabilities:

Do Not Use	Use Instead	
Aged (The) Elderly (The)	Seniors	Adjectives like frail, senile, feeble suggest a negative image of seniors and should not be used
Birth defect	Persons with a disability since birth	
Congenital defect	Person who has a congenital disability	
Visually impaired (The)	Person with a visual impairment	
Blind (The)	Person who is blind	
Confined to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair	For persons with a mobility impairment a wheelchair is a means to get around independently
Wheelchair-bound	Person who uses a wheelchair	
Cripple, crippled, lame	Person with mobility impairment, Person with arthritis, a spinal cord injury, etc.	
Deaf (The), Deaf-mute, deaf and dumb	Person who is Deaf	Only when referring to the Deaf population and their culture is it acceptable to use "the Deaf"
Hearing impaired (The)	Person who is hard of hearing	These persons are not deaf and may compensate for hearing loss with an

		amplification device or system
Epileptic (The)	Person who has epilepsy	
Fit, attack, spell	Seizure	
Handicapped (The)	Person with a disability	Unless referring to an environmental or attitudinal barrier. In such instances, "person who is handicapped by" is appropriate.
Insane, lunatic, maniac, crazy, etc	Person with a mental health disability	
Mental patient Schizophrenic, psychotic, psycho, etc	Person with a mental health/psychiatric disability; person who has schizophrenia	
Mentally Retarded	Person with an intellectual disability	
Learning disabled, dyslexics	Person with a learning disability	
Physically challenged	Person with a disability	
He/she has a problem with	He/she has a need for....	
Suffers from, afflicted by, stricken with	Person with a disability, person who has cerebral palsy, etc	Having a disability is not synonymous with suffering
Victims of MS, CP, etc	Person who has MS, CP, etc	
Normal	Person who is not disabled	Normal is only acceptable in reference to statistics (i.e. "the norm")
Invalid	Person with a disability	The literal sense of the word "invalid" is "not valid."

Source: Office of disability issues, Human Resources Development Canada, 2002



www.accessleisure.org

Partners In Leisure
PRESENTS
ABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING
FOR THE
LONDON MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY

Ability Awareness Training is the process of educating the community about the abilities of persons with disabilities and the barriers persons with disabilities experience in their day-to-day lives. The training will provide the community with knowledge and enhance the development of positive relationships.

VISION STATEMENT: To ensure that all individuals are treated in a respectful, dignified manner within an accessible & inclusive society.

MISSION STATEMENT: To ensure that every individual in London Middlesex has the opportunity to participate in Ability Awareness Training.

Ability Awareness Training Interactive Workshops

Minimum 10 people/maximum 50

*Full day sessions

Non-Profit Organizations: \$50.00/pp includes Resource material

Profit Organizations: \$50.00/pp plus \$15.00/pp for Resource material
Maximum fee = \$500.00/session

Presentations: A brief Information Session is available to your organization to clarify workshop content and goals.

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