

Ottawa Chamber Orchestra Guidelines and Policies for Serving Members of the Community with Respect 2014-2015

In keeping with the OCO's anti-harassment policy, it is a policy of the OCO that all members of the community (whether patrons, volunteers, or members) are to be treated with respect and care. The following guidelines are provided for OCO volunteers and members alike. Included are the 4 policies (P1 to P4) relating to serving disabled persons.

Guidelines

Providing guidelines can be challenging, as different groups will measure respect in different ways and not all community groups are currently represented in the guidelines below. So far we have identified Trans and Disabled persons where guidelines and policies needed specific clarification. This does not limit us from considering and developing future guidelines and policies, should the need arise.

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1.0 Trans People

Trans people are a part of our society yet their issues are the most misunderstood. The term “Trans” is an umbrella term that includes Transgender, Transsexual, Cross-dressers, Trans-identified, etc. The equivalent legal term “Gender Identity” has been added as an enumerated ground for discrimination in the Ontario Human Rights Act (Bill33, Toby’s Law passed on June, 18, 2012) and the Canadian Human Rights Act (Bill C-279 passed Parliament on March 20, 2013 and is currently before the Senate).

In our role as service providers we need to understand how best to treat Trans people. If you are unsure if a person is a male or female don’t panic. We are not here to “out” or judge a Trans person. Avoid doing things to call attention to a Trans person. Being Trans is one part of that person’s human persona. Make them feel comfortable.

A few tips:

- Best to use gender neutral language like, “welcome”, “thank you for supporting us”, “enjoy the concert”.
- If you are unsure of which pronoun to use, and you really need to know, ask respectfully. For example, “I need your help, how would you like to be addressed?” Most Trans people won’t be offended and see this as a sign of respect.
- Use common sense and respect and you will be fine.

Reference: City of Ottawa, A City for Everyone, Equity and Inclusion Lens, Community Snapshot GLBT (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, trans) 2010.

2.0 People with Disabilities

2.1 General

Note: Much of the following text is taken from The Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services “Serve-Ability: Transforming Ontario’s Customer Service” on-line course. The purpose of the course is to give organizations obligated to meet Ontario Regulation 429/07 (“the customer service standard”) under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005(“AODA”) basic information and training on serving customers with disabilities.

Here are some things to keep in mind when serving people with disabilities:

- If you're not sure what to do, ask "May I help you?" People with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Not everybody with the same disability experiences the same things. Don't make assumptions about the types of disability a person has. People are not required to tell you about their disabilities.
- Take the time to get to know the person’s needs and focus on meeting those needs just like you would with any other person. Some disabilities are not visible.
- Remember that all people have a range of needs and preferences.
- If you can't understand what the person is saying, politely ask him or her to repeat it.
- You may want to ask if the information you are conveying needs to be repeated.
- Ask: "Do you understand this?"
- Exercise patience.

2.2 Specific Disabilities

2.2.1 Physical or Disabilities Affecting Mobility

The common image of someone with a physical disability who uses a wheelchair is a stereotype. For example, physical disabilities can also arise from arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputations.

Here are some tips:

- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things, so it's a good idea to ask before you help.
- Respect the person's personal space. Don't lean over them or on an assistive device.
- Don't move items or equipment, such as canes or walkers, out of the person's reach.
- If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair remember to make sure the person is ready to be moved and that you describe what you are going to do beforehand. Don't leave the individual in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.
- Where appropriate, inform the person of the accessible features in the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, elevators, ramps, etc.).

2.2.2 Speech or Language Impairments

Some people may have problems communicating because of their disability. Cerebral palsy, stuttering, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for the person to pronounce words or may cause slurring or stuttering. A person with this type of disability may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

Here are some tips:

- Don't assume that just because a person has this disability they also have another.
- Give the person whatever time they need to get their point across. If appropriate, offer to move to a more comfortable location.
- Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no," if possible.
- Don't interrupt or finish the person's sentences. Give them time to finish.

2.2.3 Vision Impairments

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards. Some people may use a guide dog or white cane; others may not. Some people simply need to view written materials—like documents, receipts, menus, brochures, instructions or labels—in large print, or with the help of a magnifier.

Here are some tips:

- Don't assume the individual can't see you.
- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to him or her.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person. If they accept, walk slowly, but wait for permission before doing so.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- If you're giving directions or providing any information, be precise and descriptive. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.
- Don't leave the person in the middle of a room. Guide them to a chair or a comfortable location.
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye.

2.2.4 Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, perform certain physical activities and live independently. You may not be able to know that someone has this disability unless you are told, or notice the way the person acts, asks questions or uses body language. However, they may understand you more than you realize.

Here are some tips:

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language.
- Make sure the person understands what you've said. You can be direct and ask: "Do you understand this?"
- Provide one piece of information at a time. You can break down the information into simpler concepts, without exaggerating speech or gestures or being patronizing.
- You may want to ask if the information needs to be repeated.

2.2.5 Deaf/Oral Deaf/Deafened/Hard of Hearing

People who experience hearing loss may be deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. People experiencing hearing loss may use assistive devices, like hearing aids, special telephones, sign language interpreters, various amplifiers or a pen and paper.

Here are suggested ways to serve people with hearing loss:

- Attract the person's attention before speaking. For example, try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- Don't shout.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where the person can see your face.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.

2.2.6 Deafblind

A person who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some degree. Many people who are deafblind 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. (See Support Persons for the OCO policy on treatment of support people).

Keep these suggestions in mind when you interact with a person who is deafblind:

- Speak directly to the person, not to the intervener.
- Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach the person who is deafblind.
- A person who is deafblind 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.

2.2.7 Learning Disabilities

This refers to a variety of disorders that affect how a person acquires, retains, or takes in information. People with learning disabilities just learn differently. Learning disabilities affect people from all backgrounds and are not caused by culture, language or a lack of motivation. Learning disabilities are specific impairments that can result in problems with reading and language based learning (dyslexia), problems with mathematics (dyscalculia), or problems with writing and fine motor skills (dysgraphia).

This disability may become apparent in your interactions when the person has difficulty reading material or taking in and processing the information you are providing.

Here are some tips:

- Take some time — people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process, understand and respond.
- Provide information in a way that works for the person. For example, keep a pen and paper handy. That way, you can explain, and then review and repeat the information using your notes. If you're discussing confidential information, consider giving the notes to the person or offering to destroy them.
- Be prepared to explain any materials you provide for the person.

2.2.8 Mental Health Disabilities

The important thing to remember: focus on completing the transaction in a calm, patient way and meeting the person's needs. Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember. Mental health disability is a broad classification for many disorders that can range in severity. People may experience anxiety due to phobias or panic disorder. Hallucinations, mood swings, and a deep lack of motivation may be signs of a mental health disability. A person may have a clinical depression or bipolar disorder. The major barrier for people with mental health disabilities is the stigma associated with it and the lack of understanding.

Here are some tips:

- Be confident and reassuring. As with all people, listen carefully and focus on meeting the person's needs.
- If the person appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.
- If a person appears to show signs of a mental health disability, it may be helpful to keep in mind that the person's reactions are not connected to you personally. The person may simply be showing symptoms of mental illness.

3.0 Other Considerations

3.1 Service Animals

You've probably seen someone with vision loss who uses a guide dog. There are other types of service animals who help people with other disabilities as well. Service animals are trained to assist people with:

- Autism
- Mental health disabilities
- Physical disabilities

There are also hearing alert animals that help people who are deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing and there are animals trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.

You might recognize service animals when they wear a harness or a sign, or when they are helping someone. Their owner might carry a certificate or a letter from a doctor or nurse that states that the individual requires the use of a service animal because of a disability. You can ask to see such a letter. You might also observe the animal helping someone by opening doors or alerting them to certain sounds.

The owner is responsible for the care and supervision of the service animal. Avoid touching, talking to or making eye contact with the service animal. They are working animals and need to stay focused.

(Policy 1) It is OCO policy that unless an environment strictly prohibits the entry of service animals (which is rare) that service animals are to be admitted and seated with their owners. Service animals in training are also welcome at OCO events.

3.2 People with Support Persons

Some people with disabilities that you encounter will be accompanied by a support person. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend of the person with a disability. A support person might help the person with a variety of things from communicating to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.

According to the regulation, support persons must be allowed to accompany an individual with a disability to any part of your organization that is open to the public or to third parties.

A person with a disability might not introduce their support person. If you're not sure which person is the support person, you could take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services or simply ask. Once you've determined who is who, speak directly to the person requiring service, not to the support person.

(Policy 2) It is OCO policy that support persons do not require a ticket for OCO concerts and are to be treated with the same courtesy as ticketed customers. Please ensure that for OCO events, the patron is seated with their support person.

3.3 Personal Assistive Devices

Most assistive devices used by people with disabilities are "personal assistive devices" – such as wheelchairs. They belong to the person using them and they are part of that person's personal space. As such, it's generally inappropriate to lean on or reach over them. Also, it is unacceptable to restrict anyone from moving around by holding onto the person's personal assistive device. There are many assistive devices that you won't even notice at first glance, such as a hearing aid and some that aren't used all the time, such as a speech amplification device or a white cane.

(Policy 3) For OCO events please ensure that patrons are seated in a location where they can be in close proximity to their assistive devices. If the device (e.g. canes or walkers) is liable to interfere with the flow of traffic, you may ask the patron if you can remove the device to a safer location for the duration of the event. If you do this you must ensure, as a priority, that you return the assistive device immediately upon intermission and at the end of the event (and in the case of any emergency).

(Policy 4) For patrons in wheelchairs, please ensure that the patron is seated in a location appropriate for wheelchairs – these locations may have been identified in advance of the event by the event co-ordinator.

The goal of such identified seating is to ensure that the patron is seated in a location that will enhance their enjoyment of the event and also to ensure that the location of the wheelchair does not block the flow of traffic for safety reasons.

If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair remember to:

- Wait for and follow the person's instructions.
- Confirm that the person is ready to move.
- Describe what you are going to do before you do it.
- Avoid uneven ground and objects that create bumpy and unsafe ride
- Don't leave the person in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors