



ST. JOSEPH'S CARE GROUP

A helpful guide to assisting people with disabilities

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# Accessibility Guide

October 7, 2019

**Prepared for**

Accessibility Steering Committee  
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## Accessible Customer Service at St. Joseph's Care Group

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St. Joseph's Care Group (SJCG) is required under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005) to provide customer service training to all staff and volunteers. SJCG has an Accessibility Steering Committee that is responsible for SJCG's multi-year accessibility plan and the implementation of the AODA requirements.

In Ontario, there are different pieces of legislation around accessibility that fit together. The Ontario Human Rights Code is the overarching legislation. Below it is the "Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act" and the "Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation."

The **Ontario Human Rights Code** ensures equal rights and opportunities for all people as well as freedom from discrimination. Its goal is to provide for equal rights so as to create a climate of respect where everyone feels part of the community and can contribute fully. The Code says people with disabilities must be free from discrimination where they work, live, and receive services, and their needs must be accommodated.

**Ontario's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act** provides direction on how to improve accessibility for people with disabilities, using the human rights principles of the Code. Accessibility means giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate fully in everyday life and the intent is to create a fully accessible province by 2025.

The **Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation** is an essential part of the AODA and it includes five standards for accessibility:

- Customer Service
- Information and Communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Design of Public Spaces

*"A true friend knows your weaknesses but shows you your strengths; feels your fears but fortifies your faith; sees your anxieties but frees your spirit; recognizes your disabilities but emphasizes your possibilities."*

William Arthur Ward

St. Joseph's Care Group (SJCG) has an **Accessibility Steering Committee** that provides a forum for discussion and recommendations related to improving accessibility for people with disabilities within SJCG, in keeping with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and related AODA standards. The committee meets four times per year and according to the terms of reference, has responsibility for maintaining and updating the multi-year accessibility plan, creating annual status reports, responding to questions regarding accessibility, and more.

**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 visually impaired 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 in finding a route they can use. Accessible customer service is good customer service - courteous, helpful and prompt.

**People First** means always starting with people first. In language, that means saying "person with a disability," rather than a "disabled person." In any interaction, it means addressing the individual's service needs rather than focusing on the disability, as the disability does not define the person. People with disabilities face daily challenges accessing the necessities of living.

This booklet is designed to provide staff, students, volunteers and contractors with information and tips on how to improve the services provided to people with disabilities. We recognize that many staff are experts at assisting/interacting with people with a range of disabilities. That gives us the capacity to put "people first" as we identify barriers and look for solutions to improve accessibility.

*"I have learned that limitations open doors that have been closed, showing other ways to meet our needs."*  
Robert M. Hensel

## Did You Know?

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- An estimated 1 in 7 people or 1.85 million Ontarians have a disability. By 2036, as the population ages, 1 in 5 people will have a disability.
- In Thunder Bay, one in six people has a disability.
- The aging population has caused a rise in the prevalence of disability with 43% of those aged 65 and over living with some form of disability.
- Approximately 800,000 working-age Canadians with disabilities who are able to work are not currently doing so. Almost half of these individuals have some post-secondary education.
- Lack of mobility, pain, and reduced agility were the three most reported disabilities among adults aged 15 and over.
- 70% of all persons with disabilities report needing support with daily activities.
- Ontario's accessibility law affects 360,000 businesses and organizations throughout the province.
- Persons with disabilities have an estimated spending power of \$25 billion.

# **SJCG Policy Statement on Accessible Customer Service**

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(Policy AD 1-161)

## **SERVICE AND COMMUNICATION COMMITMENT**

In fulfilling its mission, St. Joseph's Care Group strives to provide services to all individuals, including individuals with disabilities, in a way that respects core principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity. This includes communicating with individuals with disabilities in a manner that takes into account their disability. Employees and volunteers should ask individuals directly what is the preferred communication method for them.

## **GUIDE DOGS AND SERVICE ANIMALS**

Persons with disabilities, accompanied by a guide dog or other service animal, are permitted to enter the premises and keep the animal with them, unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from certain areas of the premises.

## **SUPPORT PERSONS**

Persons with disabilities, accompanied by a support person, are permitted to enter the premises together and to have access to each other while on the premises.

## **ASSISTIVE DEVICES**

People who require assistive devices are allowed to use such devices on the premises.

## **DISRUPTION OF SERVICES**

SJCG provides the public with notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services, where it is known that the disruption limits an individual with a disability from accessing the facility or services. SJCG posts the reason for the disruption, the anticipated duration of the disruption, and alternative facilities or services that may be available.

## **FEEDBACK**

Individuals can give feedback on the accessibility of services in person, by telephone, in writing or by email at [accessible.sjcg@tbh.net](mailto:accessible.sjcg@tbh.net). Accessible formats and communication supports are available upon request.

## Talk about Disabilities — Choose the Right Word

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Words can influence and reinforce perceptions of people with disabilities. They can create either a positive view of people with disabilities or an indifferent, negative view.

Here are some tips that can help make your communication with or about people with disabilities more successful:

- Use “disability” or “disabled” not handicap or handicapped.
- Put people first. **Person with a disability** puts the focus on the person instead of their disability.
- For specific disabilities, say “person with epilepsy,” “person who uses a wheelchair” or “person with schizophrenia.”
- Avoid statements that make it seem like a person with a disability should be pitied such as “victim of,” “suffers from,” or “stricken with” a particular illness or disability.
- If you’re not familiar with the disability, wait until the individual describes his/ her situation to you instead of making assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong.






## What Else Can I Do?


Always start with people first. In any interaction, it means addressing the person's access and accommodation needs, rather than focusing on the disability.

Take some time to understand the definition of different disabilities and learn some tips to assist you in providing accessible customer service.

If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing your goods, services or facilities, a good starting point is to simply ask "How can I help you?" Your customers are your best source for information about their needs. Being flexible and open to suggestions will help create a good customer experience. A solution can be simple and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.

Each of the following tables defines a specific category of disability and outlines tips to help you provide service to your customers. First and foremost, get to know your customer because many disabilities are invisible. By focusing on your customer, you will better understand their needs. Also, don't assume what the customer can or can't do.

Vision Loss 	
Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most individuals who are legally blind have some remaining vision</li> <li>• Low or no vision can restrict ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards</li> <li>• May use guide dog or white cane</li> <li>• May need to view written documents in large print, or with help of a magnifier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak directly to customer</li> <li>• Offer your elbow to guide</li> <li>• If the customer accepts, walk at an appropriate pace for the environment</li> <li>• Identify landmarks</li> <li>• Be precise and descriptive with information</li> <li>• Don't leave the customer without letting him or her know</li> <li>• If you are wearing a name tag, let the person know your name</li> <li>• Don't touch or talk to a guide dog (remember it is working)</li> </ul>

Hearing Loss 	
Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deaf</b> – severe to profound hearing loss</li> <li>• <b>Hard of Hearing</b> – a person who uses residual hearing and speech to communicate</li> <li>• <b>Deafened</b> – hears poorly or not at all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract customer's attention before speaking – gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand</li> <li>• Look directly at the person</li> <li>• May have to use pen and paper</li> <li>• Speak clearly, keep your hands away from your face</li> <li>• Reduce background noise</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate lighting</li> </ul>

## Culturally Deaf

Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The deaf community is a healthy sociological community of deaf people who have been deaf since birth</li> <li>They are a cultural linguistic minority whose primary language is American Sign Language (ASL) or Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written English is a second language and in complex situations an ASL Interpreter provides the best quality access for communications</li> <li>Access an ASL Interpreter through the Canadian Hearing Society at (807)623-1646</li> </ul>

## Deaf-Blind

Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cannot see or hear to some degree</li> <li>Many will be accompanied by a support person (a professional who helps with communication by using Sign Language that involves touching the hands of the client)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speak directly to your customer, not the support person</li> <li>Identify yourself to the support person</li> <li>Some may wish to take your hand and finger spell, and have you respond in the same way</li> </ul>

## Physical/Mobility Disabilities

Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May restrict a person in the following ways:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Control or speed of movements</li> <li>⇒ Coordination and balance</li> <li>⇒ Ability to grasp some objects</li> <li>⇒ Ability to walk long distances</li> <li>⇒ Ability to sit or stand for prolonged periods</li> </ul> </li> <li>Disabilities can be permanent or temporary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speak directly to the customer</li> <li>Ask before you help</li> <li>Respect personal space</li> <li>Don't move any items they may have</li> <li>Describe what you are going to do beforehand</li> <li>Don't leave your customer in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position</li> </ul>

## Mental Health

Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A health condition that changes a person's thinking, feelings, or behaviour (or all three) and that causes the person distress and difficulty in functioning</li> <li>• Features of mental health disabilities can include:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ panic attacks, phobias</li> <li>⇒ delusions, hallucinations</li> <li>⇒ mood swings (depressive &amp; manic episodes)</li> <li>⇒ social withdrawal</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat all customers with respect and consideration</li> <li>• Be confident and reassuring</li> <li>• Do not be confrontational</li> <li>• If the customer is in crisis, ask how best to help</li> <li>• Take customer seriously</li> <li>• Don't take things personally</li> </ul>

## Speech or Language Large Print

Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May restrict a person in the following ways:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Control or speed of movements</li> <li>⇒ Coordination and balance</li> <li>⇒ Ability to grasp some objects</li> <li>⇒ Ability to walk long distances</li> <li>⇒ Ability to sit or stand for prolonged periods</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Disabilities can be permanent or temporary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak directly to the customer</li> <li>• Ask before you help</li> <li>• Respect personal space</li> <li>• Don't move any items they may have</li> <li>• Describe what you are going to do beforehand</li> <li>• Don't leave your customer in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position</li> </ul>

## Intellectual or Developmental

Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual development and capacity that is below average</li> <li>• Can mildly or profoundly limit ability to learn, communicate, do everyday activities and live independently</li> <li>• May be an invisible disability</li> <li>• They may understand you more than you know</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't assume what customer can or cannot do</li> <li>• Use plain language</li> <li>• Take your time, be patient</li> <li>• Ask: "Do you understand this?"</li> <li>• Provide one piece of information at a time – step-by-step instruction</li> <li>• Offer information in simpler concepts</li> </ul>

## Learning

Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affects how person acquires, interprets, retains or takes in information</li> <li>• In many cases individual has average or above-average intelligence</li> <li>• May affect:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Language-based learning</li> <li>⇒ Mathematics</li> <li>⇒ Writing, fine motor skills</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take some time, be patient</li> <li>• Demonstrate a willingness to assist</li> <li>• Speak normally, clearly and directly to your customer</li> <li>• Provide information in a way that works for your customer (e.g. pen and paper)</li> <li>• Be prepared to explain any materials you provide</li> </ul>

## People Who Use Assistive Devices

Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An assistive device is a piece of equipment a person with a disability uses to help them with daily living (e.g. a wheelchair, screen reader, hearing aid, cane or walker, an oxygen tank).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission</li> <li>• Don't move assistive devices or equipment (e.g. canes, walkers) out of your customer's reach</li> <li>• Let your customers know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (e.g. public phones with TTY service, accessible washrooms, elevator)</li> </ul>

## People Who Use Service Animals

Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are various types of service animals who support people with disabilities.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ People with vision loss may use a guide dog.</li> <li>⇒ Hearing alert animals help people with hearing loss.</li> <li>⇒ Other service animals are trained to alert a person to an oncoming seizure or to help people with autism, mental health disabilities, physical disabilities and other disabilities.</li> </ul> </li>   <li>• While service animals may be prohibited from certain areas, service dogs are allowed in areas where food is sold, served or offered for sale. This includes a public dining room.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't touch or distract a service animal, it is not a pet, it is a working animal and has to pay attention at all times</li> <li>• If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer</li> <li>• You can provide water for the service animal if your customer requests it, but the customer is responsible for the care and supervision of the animal</li> <li>• If the service animal is prohibited by another law, explain why to your customer and discuss other ways to serve them (e.g. leaving the dog in a safe area or serving your customer in another area where the animal is allowed)</li> </ul>

## People with a Support Person

Definition	Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A support person may accompany some people with disabilities.</li> <li>• A support person can be a paid personal support worker, an intervenor, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.</li> <li>• A support person might help your customer with communication, mobility, personal care or with accessing your services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you're not sure which person is the customer, simply ask</li> <li>• Speak directly to your customer, not to their support person</li> <li>• If there is an admission fee or fare, be familiar with its policy for support persons</li> </ul>

### **People accessing goods, services or facilities**

If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing your goods, services or facilities, a good starting point is to simply ask “How can I help you?”

Your customers are your best source for information about their needs. Being flexible and open to suggestions will help create a good customer experience. A solution can be simple and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.

## **Other Resources**

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Recognizing barriers to good customer service and improving accessibility is a shared responsibility. There are internal and external resources that can be accessed if you have questions, need more information or have suggestions on how we can improve delivery of our services.

- Speak to your manager, supervisor, or team leader
- Become familiar with the accessibility features at your work location (e.g. automatic door openers, TTY units, accessible washrooms)
- Contact a member of the Accessibility Steering Committee or check out the resources available on the iNtranet
- Review the Government of Ontario website at [www.accesson.ca](http://www.accesson.ca)
- Visit:
  - [www.facebook.com/AccessON](https://www.facebook.com/AccessON)
  - [www.twitter.com/ONAccessibility](https://www.twitter.com/ONAccessibility)
  - [www.youtube.com/accessontario](https://www.youtube.com/accessontario)



*Care  
Compassion  
Commitment*

## Mission

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St. Joseph's Care Group is a Catholic organization that identifies and responds to the unmet needs of the people of Northwestern Ontario, as a way of continuing the healing mission of Jesus in the tradition of The Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie.

## Vision

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A leader in client-centred care.

## Core Values

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### Care

St. Joseph's Care Group will provide quality care for our clients' body, mind and spirit, in a trusting environment that embraces diversity.

### Compassion

St. Joseph's Care Group will demonstrate dignity and respect for those in need, accepting people as they are, to foster healing and wholeness.

### Commitment

St. Joseph's Care Group is committed to our community, the people we serve, the people we employ, and our faith-based mission through a continued pursuit of excellence.

*Care  
Compassion  
Commitment*



ST. JOSEPH'S CARE GROUP

**St. Joseph's Hospital**  
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