

Accessible Customer Service

Legal References: *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 & Ontario Regulation 427/07; Ontario Human Rights Code, R.S.) 1990, C.H19.*

Background: The following policy is adopted in accordance with Ontario Regulation 427/07, the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service*, which came into force January 1, 2008. That Regulation establishes accessibility standards for customer service within public sector organizations and other persons or organizations that provide goods and services to members of the public or other third parties. This policy is required, based on the specification of *O.Reg.427/07*, to ensure consistency from all persons delivering municipal services.

Indeed, Stratford Public Library's Vision and first Goal, approved November 15, 2005, echo the ideas contained with the *Accessibility Standards*:

Our Vision

Through our response to their needs and the space we provide, **every member of the public** will recognize SPL as an essential resource for personal aspirations and community development.

Our Goals

- G1. Every individual in the community, regardless of age or ability**, will be encouraged to receive, and will have access to, open provision of library resources. [emphasis added]

1.0 General

The Stratford Public Library strives to be accessible to all patrons. Specifically, Library services and materials will be provided in a manner that respects the dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity of all users.

1.1 Applicability

This policy applies to all staff and volunteers who deal with the public or other third parties on behalf of the Library, and ensures that all patrons with disabilities are accommodated.

1.2 Components

In accordance with the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service*, this policy addresses the following:

- The provision of library materials and services to persons with disabilities

- The use of assistive devices
- Service animals
- Support persons
- Notice of temporary disruptions in services and the facility
- Staff and volunteer training
- Customer feedback regarding the provision of materials and services to persons with disabilities
- Notice of availability and format of documents produced by the Library or at any other location used to deliver Stratford Public Library programs and service.

1.3 Definitions

Assistive Device: a device used to aid persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services of persons or organizations covered by the Accessible Customer Service Standards.

Disability: using the same definition as is found in the Ontario Human Rights Code (R.S.O. 1990, Chapter H.19, P. II, s. 10 (1)):

“Disability” means,

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,*
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,*
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,*
- (d) a mental disorder, or*
- (e) 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”).*

2.0 Provision of Library materials and services to persons with disabilities

The Library will use reasonable efforts to ensure that its policies and practices are consistent with the following principles:

- The Library’s materials and services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.
- The provision of the Library’s materials and services to persons with disabilities is integrated with that provided to persons who do not have disabilities unless an alternative method is necessary. Persons with disabilities are given an opportunity equal to that of persons without disabilities to obtain, use or benefit from the Library’s materials and services.

- When communicating with disabled persons, Library staff and volunteers will do so in a manner that takes into account the person's abilities.
- Persons with disabilities may use assistive devices and/or support persons in the access of materials and services.

2.1 Assistive Devices

Persons with disabilities shall be permitted to obtain, use or benefit from Library materials or services through the use of their own assistive devices. Exceptions may occur in situations where the Library has determined that the assistive device may pose a risk to the health and safety of another patron. It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the person with the disability to ensure that his or her assistive device is operated in a safe and controlled manner at all times.

Assistive devices may include, but are not limited to:

- Communication Aids
- Cognitive Aids
- Personal Mobility Aids
- Medical Aids

2.2 Service Animals

Service animals, such as (but not limited to): guide dogs, hearing dogs, seizure response dogs and other certified service animals shall be permitted entry to the Library areas and programs that are open to the public. Service animals are required to be leashed or otherwise properly controlled so that the animal does not run at large.

Service animals are not permitted:

- Where food preparation is being undertaken, or
- As otherwise disallowed by law.
- Where a service animal is to be denied access to a program or area, other accommodations may be offered, such as:
 - Alternative meeting or program format, such as teleconference, videoconference, etc. where technology permits;
 - materials or services delivered at an alternative time or location;
 - Using any other assistive measures available to deliver a good or service to ensure equality of outcome.

The person with a service animal that is disruptive (e.g. barking) may be asked to remove the animal from the municipal facility.

2.3 Support Persons

Where a support person is necessary to protect the health or safety of a person with a disability, or the health and safety of others in the Library, a person with a disability shall be accompanied by a support person while on the premises.

If admission to an event is payable to the Library, support persons are permitted to attend at no cost.

Support persons shall be permitted entry to all Library areas and programs that are open to the public, except:

- When there are fees for participants charged by a third party and
- The support person was not pre-registered, and
- No vacancy exists.

If admission to an event is permitted and fees are payable to a third party, the support person is permitted to attend the event at their own cost. Where admission fees are charged, the Library or the service provider will provide notice ahead of time on what admission, if any, would be charged for a support person with a person with a disability.

2.4 Notice of temporary disruptions in services and facility

The Library is important to Stratford citizens; however, temporary disruptions in the services and/ or the physical plant may occur. Library staff will make reasonable efforts to provide notice of any disruptions, including:

- The reason(s) for the disruption;
- The anticipated duration
- A description of alternative services if any may be available.

Library staff will make reasonable efforts to provide prior notice whenever possible.

To inform the public of temporary disruptions, staff will provide notice by posting information in visible places such as the entry doors, on the Library website, and by any other method that may be reasonable under the circumstances. Notices should be placed as quickly as possible and shall include:

- name of the program or service
- normal service being impacted
- alternative services or methods
- contact information
- anticipated duration

If an unexpected disruption occurs, persons with disabilities will be accommodated by the use of other means, such as:

- alternative location or time;
- if appropriate, the delivery of the service or materials to the person's residence;
- Any other measure deemed appropriate.

2.5 Staff and Volunteer Training

All staff and volunteers providing direct service to persons with a disability shall be trained in the various aspects of accessible customer service delivery.

All training, regardless of format, shall have regard for:

- An overview of the purposes of the AODA and an awareness of the corresponding corporate policy;
- Instruction on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities;

- Instruction on interacting with people with disabilities who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a guide dog, other service animal or a support person;
- Instruction on the use of equipment or devices available, such as wheelchairs;
- Instruction on what do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing Library services.
- Orientation to this policy, the Library's own Accessible Customer Service Standards.

Training will be provided as soon as possible, once an individual is assigned duties. Ongoing training will be provided if there is any change to the Library's policies, practices or procedures governing the service of those with disabilities. The Library will maintain records of the training, including the date, training type and the names of the individuals trained.

2.6 Customer Feedback

The Library is committed to providing excellent services to all members of the public. Feedback from citizens is welcomed: it potentially identifies areas requiring improvement.

Feedback from patrons with disabilities may be received in a manner most convenient to the person with the disability whether by telephone, in person, in writing, in electronic format, TTY or other methods.

All customer opinions will be kept in strict confidence and used to improve customer service. In addition, any patrons providing feedback will be provided with a response in the same format it was received. If appropriate, Library actions in response to the feedback will be outlined.

2.7 Notice of Availability of Documents

This policy and any other document deemed essential in the delivery of Library materials and services will be made available upon request in a format that takes into account a person's disability. This applies to any person to whom the Library provides materials and services.

Notwithstanding the above, this policy will be made available on the Library's website and made available to any person to who it provides materials and services by any other format or method as is reasonable in the circumstances.

3.0 Guidelines

Accessible practice and procedures statements and requirements are consolidated and attached in an Appendix to this policy.

[To be developed by staff]