

# **Quick Tips to Begin or Expand Your Access Journey**

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# Overview

**A little preview of things we'll speak about**

- **About me**
- **AODA (just a bit!)**
- **Access Points**
- **Language**
- **What can we do?**
- **Two suggested events that centre access & build community**
- **Questions and Discussion**

# This is a Relaxed Meeting

- Before we begin today, please know that this is a relaxed meeting - please eat, drink, move, vocalize and interact in whatever way(s) feels most authentic for you
- If you need a break at any time, I invite you to take one and return when (and if) you can
- If content becomes heavy or overwhelming, please take a moment to yourself and decide if you are able to return - we encourage self-regulation techniques
- All questions are welcome and will be received with an open heart and mind - I ask that the group agrees to this before we proceed
- Is there anything missing from the list above? What can we add to make everyone feel safe and respected?

- Today we will talk in general terms. Not every Autistic person acts the same way. Not every Disabled person wants to be treated the same way. And not everyone prescribes to the same model of disability. We will discuss some broad strokes approaches to Accessibility and welcoming Disabled audiences to performances.
- Expanding audience reach via Accessibility is meant to be a positive and successful process/event for patrons and staff alike.
- Also, just so you do not think I am being offensive or harmful with my language - the currently accepted Social model language around disability is Disabled, or Disability Identified. We can definitely talk about that later and I'm very open to answer any questions you may have around current disability language.

**Disabled is not a bad word**



# **It's me!**

**Former Box Office and FOH staff**

**Former SM**

**Playwright**

**Autism Worker**

**Theatre Teacher**

**Relaxed Performance & Processes  
and Disability Access Consultant**





**Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 27

# Overall, Access is....

The act of setting people up for success  
and managing expectations in order to develop  
a successful relationship with a (potential) patron.



**AODA**

# AODA

## Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

- The AODA became law on June 13, 2005 and applies to all levels of government, non-profits, and private sector businesses in Ontario that have one or more employees (full-time, part-time, seasonal, or contract).
- “...(the AODA) is legislation that requires the province of Ontario to develop, implement, and uphold accessibility standards for persons with disabilities in the areas of customer service, transportation, employment, information and communications, and public spaces.” (<https://snow.idrc.ocadu.ca/accessible-media-and-documents/applying-the-aoda-to-educational-content/>)
- The core principles of the AODA – independence, dignity, integration, and equality of opportunity for d/Deaf or Disabled people

# Access Points

# Different Access Points To Use

- How do people access your access points?
- Image Descriptions and Alt Text
- Drop the industry lingo!
- Venue Guides/Fact Sheets
- Quiet Room
- Microphones & Interpreters
- Moveable seating
- Note takers
- Buddy System
- Active Listeners
- Maps & Signage
- Breaks between workshops - pace of event
- Detailed descriptions of events/outings
- Staff Training
- Service Dogs
- Normalize accommodations

# How do people access your access points?

- How do I find it....?
- Let's chat about websites....



# Image Descriptions & Alt text

- All of your marketing should have BOTH image descriptions and Alt text - whether you are offering Audio Description at the event or not

# Drop the industry lingo!

- Although I like big words and I cannot lie, it's always PLAIN language for the win
- Want to keep posts “pretty”, consider adding a plain language version

# Venue Guides and Fact Sheets

- Family friendly - each page has a picture and short, succinct, statements that help people to prepare for their trip to the venue; in first person
- Adult - Less photos, more info on one page, plain language, third person
- Venue Guide covers the entire experience for the patron - including getting to the venue
- Allows patrons to prepare for their visit - think of a very detailed visitors guide
- The Fact Sheet provides event/session specific information - including format of session/event, what other access points there may be (ASL, captions), it can also cover any content that may be considered sensitive (perhaps a play contains smoking or swearing or death)
- Managing expectations to ensure success

# Quiet Room

- What is a Quiet Room? And who goes there?
- Consider setting one up

# Microphones & Interpreters

- Always encouraging speakers to use microphones and not say the usual “can everyone hear me” or “I don’t need a microphone, I am loud enough” - this means people need to “out” themselves as Disabled when they may not be ready to
- Sign Language Interpreters - a great addition, but where do you find them?



# Moveable Seating

- Allows for people with mobility devices (specifically wheelchairs that they are not transferring out of) to sit with friends/peers
- Allows for people who can transfer to choose where they sit
- Allows for people who use canes/crutches to move seat so they can stretch legs if needed, and/or elevate feet if needed by using another chair

# Note Takers, Buddy System, Active Listeners, and Maps & Signage

- Why offer scribes/note takers?
- Who benefits from a Buddy System?
- Have you ever experienced an Active Listener at an event?
- Maps - maps, maps, and more maps!
- If you think you have enough signs - check again

# Breaks/Pacing

- Be prepared to offer longer breaks for movement from one spot to another or for mental/processing breaks
- Pacing is important as it makes people feel thought of

# Detailed Descriptions for Events/Meetings

- Think of it like a security blanket - another way to assuage people's anxiety - a venue guide & a fact sheet could go a long way here!
- Just good hosting!

# Staff training

- Take advantage of trainings offered by local service providers - Down Syndrome Society, Alzheimer's Society, Blind groups etc. (check with Community Consultants first)
- Often free and can break down some of the nervousness that holds us back from helping or doing our best



# Service Dogs

- In Canada it's the law - but it's also just good policy
- What do you do when you see a serve dog without their human?

# Normalize offering, and asking for, help and accommodations

- Communicating what you are providing - how and why
- Why is it important to communicate what you can't/aren't offering?
- How to empower staff to offer help

# Language

# Language

What (not) to say

Instead of .... - use ....

- Hearing Impaired — d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Visually Impaired — Blind, Partially Sighted, Low Vision
- Wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair — Mobility Device/Wheelchair user
- Rrrrr (i can't even type it) — Developmentally Disabled, Intellectually Disabled, Down Syndrome
- Handicapped - Disabled
- Special needs, differently-abled, challenged, impaired, handi-capable - Disabled or Disability Identified
- Normal - Non-Disabled, Temporarily abled

**What can we  
do?**



# What can we do?

- Be patient
- Don't be afraid - sometimes we wonder if our efforts are enough, or if we will do or say something "wrong"
- Be direct - this is the best way to communicate with anyone
- Use plain language
- Try to limit body language/gestures when not using accompanying words and vice versa
- Be clear, give precise directions/instructions, be ready to repeat, find different words if the patron is not understanding
- We all make mistakes based on our past education — language is fluid and sometimes it can take us awhile to learn new terms/accepted words, that is ok — learn and move on, forgive yourself and begin fresh

# How can we make our spaces more inclusionary for Disabled folx?

- ASK THEM!
- Be flexible - stimming, fidgeting, snacks, and doodles - oh my!
- Understanding, compassion and education
- What you can and can't see - most of the arts world has responded to visual disabilities (those **we** can see), but what about the Neurodiverse community? The d/Deaf community? The Blind community?
- Be honest and upfront about what you can offer, and what you are not able to offer - set people up for success and manage expectations
- Ask your colleagues what they are doing - sharing IS caring

**Two events that  
centre access**

# Ramp Days

- Stop Gap style ramps
- Branded with town logo and committee logo
- Can local high school make them?
- Advertise Ramp Days so Mobility device users know they are happening
- Businesses pay flat fee for ramp and get guaranteed advertising
- These events are growing around the country

# Sensory Shopping or Early Entry

- Can events/businesses open an hour early for sensory shopping/attendance?
- No recorded sounds
- Low lighting
- No flashing lights
- Soft open
- Relaxed atmosphere
- Welcoming staff who have been trained

# It's all about relaxing

Let's face it - front line staff have a hard and very important job and usually there are a lot of rules that you have to enforce for many reasons - safety, artistic integrity of the show/concert, accepted social norms etc. - so it is very hard to turn around now and say that for X event we're doing things differently, so I want to give you permission to relax in your role and enjoy the experience.

**Do not underestimate the impact this, and other, access points will have on the people in attendance - many may never have felt comfortable enough to attend your event/business/venue prior to this. You are providing a safe place for people to be themselves and to engage in an outing like never before!**

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