



## **Tips to accommodate people with various disabilities**

### **People with physical disabilities:**

- Don't touch items or equipment, such as canes or wheelchairs, without permission
- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact (at the same level).
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.
- Openly communicate and respond to the Persons Served needs.
- If you're not sure about the best approach, just politely ask about how to best communicate.

### **People with vision loss**

- Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some may use a guide dog.
- When you know someone has vision loss, don't assume the individual can't see you. Many people who have low vision still have some sight.
- Identify yourself when you approach and speak directly to the Persons Served.
- Ask if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (for example, application or referral form)
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.
- Let the individual know if you must leave them and when you will return.

### **People who have hearing loss**

- People who have hearing loss may be deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. They may also be oral deaf-unable to hear but prefer to talk instead of using sign language.
- Once an individual has identified themselves as having hearing loss, make sure you are in a well-lit area where they can see your face and read your lips.
- As needed, attract the persons served attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- If the Persons Served uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper).

### **People who are deafblind**

- An individual who is deafblind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many deafblind individuals will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional support person who helps with communication.
- An individual who is deafblind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, perhaps with an assistance card or a note.
- Speak directly to the Persons Served, not to the intervener.

### **People with speech or language impairments**

- Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or may cause slurring.
- Don't assume that a person with speech impairment also has another disability.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no".
- Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish the individual's sentences.

### **People who have learning disabilities/developmental disabilities**

- Be patient-people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and respond.
- Try to provide information in a way that takes into account the Person's Served disability. For example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others have problems with math and numbers.
- Don't make assumptions about what a person can do.
- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.

### **People who have mental health disabilities**

- If you sense or know that an individual has a mental health disability be sure to treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident, calm and reassuring.
- If an individual appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

### **How to interact with people who use assistive devices, and how to use any equipment that your organization provides to help customers with disabilities**

- Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.
- Don't move assistive devices or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of the Persons Served reach.
- Let the Person Served know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (e.g. public phones with TTY service, accessible washrooms, entry system to building, teletypewriter etc)
- Examples of assistive devices our agency might offer include: Lift, which raises or lowers people who use mobility devices, accessible interactive kiosk, which might offer information or services in Braille or through audio headsets, wheelchairs.

### **How to interact with a person who has a guide dog or other service animal**

- Remember that a service animal is not a pet. It is a working animal. Avoid touching them or addressing them.
- If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or service animal, ask the Persons Served

### **How to support a person accompanied by a support person**

- If you're not sure which person is the Persons Served, just ask
- Persons Served may be accompanied by a support person such as a Mediator.
- Support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or friend.
- Support person may assist with a variety of things e.g. communicating, helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.