

Disability Awareness : The Basics

Goals of Today's Presentation

- Leave you with a better understanding of the various types of disabilities
- Help us to appreciate the similarities we all have able bodied and disabled
- Demonstrate that everyone has a role in valuing diversity
- Present effective ways of assisting people with disabilities
- Demonstrate that it's a win-win situation when we effectively assist and interact with our customers and staff with disabilities.

Background Information

- Approximately 1.8 million Ontarians have disabilities
- Over the next 20 years as people age the number of people with disabilities will rise
- Projected Labour Shortage in Canada
- Tremendous Purchasing Power

Some Interesting Things To Consider

- In an instant we could be a person with a disability
- If we had a son or daughter with a disability how would we want them to be treated
- We have so much to gain by being an institution that values our students with disabilities and values diversity in general
- What would we gain if we were nationally recognized for the way we value diversity

Interesting Considerations Continued...

- Have you ever made an assumption about a person with a disability that you realized was incorrect?
- Attitudinal barriers are far and away the worst kind
- They create the most pain and hardship for our students and staff with disabilities
- It's partly about changing policies and structures but it's mostly about changing hearts

What is a Disability

- According to the *Ontario Human Rights Code* a disability includes:
 - any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement
 - a condition of developmental disability
 - a mental disorder
 - an injury for which benefits were claimed under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act
 - a learning disability

Disability Groups

Learning Disabilities	40%
Mobility Impairment	5%
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	3%
Blind and Low Vision	3%
Medical Conditions	30%
ADD/ADHD	6%
Brain Injury	3%
Mental Health	10%

Many Disabilities are Invisible

- Brain Injuries
- Mental Health
- Medical Conditions
- Learning Disabilities
- Vision
- Hearing

Impact Can Be Varied

- Moods
- Fatigue
- Memory
- Financial
- Housing
- Self Esteem
- Can be caused by the disability or by medications or other issues related to the disability

How The Behaviour May Be Interpreted

- Rude
- Difficult
- Obnoxious
- Laziness

What is a Learning Disability?

- Neurologically-based information processing difficulties
- Occur in individuals with average to above average intelligence
- Typically cause a discrepancy between the individual's potential and achievement
- Life-long conditions manageable with appropriate support and direction
- Diagnosed by a registered psychologist

Organizations are Obligated To Accommodate

- Ontario Human Rights Code requirement
- Must provide reasonable accommodation
- Accommodations can't bankrupt the organization or result in a threat to an individual's safety
- Levels the playing field
- Not an advantage

Accommodations

- Note-takers
- ASL Interpreters
- Alternate-Format Print Material
- Assistive Technology Training
- Elevators, Ramps

Terminology Tips

- Put the person first – person with a disability
- Avoid outdated terms such as handicapped and crippled
- Be liberating not confining – wheelchair user vs. confined to a wheelchair
- Avoid negatives like victim or sufferer – person with aids vs. aids sufferer

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The Basics

- Ask before you help
- Be sensitive about physical contact
- Avoid personal questions
- Think before you speak
- Be considerate about the extra time it might take for a person with a disability to say or do something
- Don't make assumptions
- Respond graciously to requests

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When Meeting a Person With a Disability...

- A handshake is not a standard greeting for everyone. A smile and spoken greeting is always appropriate
- Speak to the person not their attendant
- Treat adults as adults
- Be patient and listen. Don't pretend to understand
- It's ok to use common expressions
- Relax and have a sense of humour

When Assisting a Person Who is Deaf or Has a Hearing Impairment

- Let the person establish the communication mode – lip reading, sign language, writing notes
- Talk directly to the person even when an Interpreter is being used
- If the person lip reads, speak clearly with a moderate pace

When Meeting With a Person With a Disability That Affects Speech

- Be patient, listen closely. Do not finish a sentence for the person
- Ask the person to repeat what they said if you don't understand it.

When Interacting with a person with a visual impairment...

- When greeting identify yourself and the others who may be present
- Don't leave without excusing yourself first
- When asked to guide someone never push or pull them. Let them take your arm and then walk slightly ahead.
- As you enter a room describe the layout

When assisting a person who uses a wheelchair

- Do not push, lean or hold on to the wheelchair. The wheelchair is part of their personal space.
- Try to put yourself at eye level
- Be prepared to offer assistance with reaching for, grasping, lifting, opening doors etc.

When assisting a person who has a mental illness...

- Remember they do not have lower intelligences
- Remember they may have difficulty processing or expressing emotions
- Be understanding of the fact that some people with mental illness may overreact to topics or conversations

When assisting a person who has a Learning Disability

- Discuss openly the preferred way to communicate
- Remember that some information processing problems may impact social skills

When assisting a person who has an intellectual disability....

- Interact with the person first
- Break down information into small easy to understand chunks
- If necessary involve an advocate
- Provide information in writing

Thinking About Accessibility In Your Organization

- Is your department accessible by wheelchair
- Are handouts available in large print or on-line
- Are instructions available in print form? Are they simple and to the point? Is the font size large enough?
- Have your staff taken disability awareness training

Irmo and Terry's Stories

- Don't underestimate the potential of a person with a disability
- They have the same wants, needs, desires and dreams as everyone else
- The greatest thing we can do for a student with a disability is believe in them
- Focus on the ability not the disability.
- Fight those assumptions we make about people with disabilities (people in general)

Final Thoughts

- We can't go wrong if we apply the principals of good customer service
- The way an institution assists its customers and staff with disabilities says a lot about its values
- If that student were our son/daughter/, brother/sister, mother/father what would we expect
- We are so fortunate to have the opportunity to make a difference in a student's life. We are all involved in work that improves the human condition.
- We have an opportunity to go through life looking at every encounter as a chance to make a positive difference.

Do We Want To Be The Best at Valuing Diversity?

- It's up to each and everyone of us.
- Demonstrate through our actions and choices
- Remember it's about changing hearts

It's About Being Human

- It is in interacting with people who are different from us that we grow as humans. People who learn differently, people who see things differently, people whose values are different... help us to grow.

•The mystery is this, is that it is true that I have lived now for 42 years with people with disabilities, and they have taught me what it is to be human. You see, it's really important that we discover the mystery: that we are healed by those we reject. We are healed by those who are weakest. We are healed by those who have broken hearts. Jean Vanier