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You Should Just Know



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THINKING AHEAD- ONTARIO'S ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

The Province of Ontario, through the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service developed as part of its *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, has mandated that all organizations with one or more employee needs to have in place, by January 1, 2012, policies, procedures and practices regarding the accessibility to their goods and services by those with disabilities. Most public sector organizations were to have implemented these standards by January 1, 2010.

While January 1, 2012 may seem like a long way off, this legislation requires each organization to review how it will provide services to those with disabilities, and have plans in place, and training done, by that date. A review of the information provided by the Province would appear to make implementation a two part process. Each organization will need to review their current policies, practices and procedures, and either modify existing or come up with new ones. Then the results will have to be rolled out along with the training necessary.

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HOW ABOUT A NEW HOLIDAY TRADITION OR TWO?

This is the time of year when someone is trying to determine what the staff should do, either as an entire organization or as an individual department, about doing something together for

the holidays. Traditionally, this has been the holiday party. Whether offsite or in-house, this tradition always has the potential for disappointment or disaster, either because someone says

or does something memorable (and often career damaging), or because many are there out of a sense of obligation, not interest. So why not try something

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Establishing a new policy on accessibility for those with disabilities, and reviewing your existing policies is the first step. These need to reflect your organization's commitment to the Standards, and provide information on how you intend to meet them. These policies must specifically address issues such as the use of assistive devices, guide animals, support persons, temporary service access disruptions, staff training, and feedback.

The next step is to review and/or establish procedures and practices that will allow your organization to implement your policies. This may be the most challenging aspect of the process, as it will require you to look at how the organization operates from the perspective of someone with a disability. What, if any, barriers exist if someone who is sight or hearing disabled wants to access your goods or services? How about a person in a wheelchair, or who has a learning disability? And what is in place for someone who has a mental health disability? By 'thinking ahead', you can anticipate potential concerns and proactively deal with them as part of this process. Your best resources would be your staff, who may have already encountered and dealt with situations, and anyone with a disability that you currently provide goods or services to.



The Standards also calls for training to be provided to all staff who deal with members of the public, or who participate in developing your policies, procedures and practices. This also includes Board members and those designated as 'third parties', such as those providing goods or services on your behalf. This training can be provided in a number of different ways, including as part of regular staff meetings, a special in-house training session, or on-line. The required minimum content of the training is very specific, and includes a review of the purpose of and requirements of the Standards, instruction on how to interact and communicate with people who have various types of disabilities, the use of assistive devices (including training on any in-house assistive devices available), and support animals and support persons. This training must be completed by all existing staff by January 1, 2012, and then offered to new staff as soon as practicable. This training is intended to be ongoing, so that any changes in the policies, procedures or practices must be communicated to the staff.

If you have twenty or more employees, there are also documentation requirements. You need to document your accessibility policies, procedures and practices, including those related to service animals and support persons, how you will deal with temporary goods or services disruptions, the content of your training as well as who has taken it and when, and the feedback process that you have established for those with disabilities. You will also be required to file, on-line, Accessibility Reports.

While all of this may be somewhat intimidating, it doesn't have to be. There are currently resources out there that can assist you with becoming compliant with the Standards. **JM Box Consulting Services** is currently putting together a sample Policy related to the Standards, as well as training (both in-house and Powerpoint for internal use) that will assist you in identifying what needs to be done, and providing the staff training you require. If you are interested in learning more, please contact John Box at john@jmbboxconsulting.com.

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different, if it's not something you already do?

Many organizations these days are taking the funds that they would have spent on a holiday party and putting them to a better use. And the neat thing is that these activities can be done as a group, promoting everything a holiday party is supposed to do.

For some organizations, the holiday tradition is a food drive or donation to a local food bank. Sure, you don't get that bit of dried out cheese on a cracker the day before the holidays start, but some needy family might get a holiday meal they might not get otherwise.



Another new tradition is the adopt-a-family concept. This is done by contacting the appropriate agency, who will provide you with the information on a family that would not otherwise receive any gifts during the holiday season. You get gender, ages, and sometimes even first names to personalize the activity. The idea is for your group to take the information and buy appropriate gifts for the members of the family. This is often a lot of fun for the staff involved, particularly those who no longer have young children to buy for. It can be a team building activity, a lot of fun, and really benefits the community.

In Windsor, you can contact Andrea Madden, community Initiatives Coordinator at the Windsor/Essex Children's Aid Society (519-252-1171) for more information about their Family Sponsorship Program. Your family sponsorship will benefit families who are experiencing a variety of difficulties and problems in their lives and who are receiving services from the Society to resolve these problems. Each sponsor receives a copy of the Family's "Wish List". This List has the gender and age, and clothing & toy wishes for each child. Each parent is also allowed to list 2 personal items for themselves and up to 4 household items that they may need. Household items requests often include food vouchers, towels, sheets, dishes, pots & pans, coffee pots, blenders, etc. These are items that are often financially difficult for our families to obtain and are a welcome and essential gift that goes beyond holidays. All gifts must be new items.

Also offering similar programs in Windsor are Drouillard Place (519-253-1073) and the Salvation Army (519-253-7473).

So if you are thinking about the dreaded 'Secret Santa' party, particularly the ones where you can swap the gift with someone else (ah, the hurt feelings of the person who contributed the pot holders with Santa's face on them, as they are swapped for the tenth time), think about doing something nice for the community instead. You are working this holiday season- not everyone is.



"Your sponsorship will benefit families who are experiencing a variety of difficulties and problems."



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A FAVOURITE HOLIDAY MEMORY FROM WORK

No matter where you work, there is often something special things that happen around the holiday season that make you realize why you do what you do.

A number of years ago, I worked for a long term care facility. All of us there had a good sense of why we were there- to provide service to our residents, even if that service was in a support capacity to those providing hands on care. One day, one of the residents came into the administration area. My office was the first he encountered, and so he decided to ask me his question- was I in charge of the facility's newsletter? I replied that I was not, and that the person who looked after it was not there that day. The resident, who was clearly on an important mission, dressed as he was in nice shirt, tie, pants and new bedroom slippers, was disappointed. I asked if I could help him. The resident's face lit up, and he began to tell me his story.

In the resident's hand were a few sheets of lined paper, on which he had written something. He asked me to read it and give him my opinion if it was worth putting into the newsletter. What I read was a beautiful story, about the resident as a young boy in the 1930s. He recounted that all he had ever wanted for Christmas for a number of years was a Meccano set. For those who might not know what that is, Wikipedia states that it is "...a model construction system comprising re-usable metal strips, plates, angles, girders, wheels, axles and gears, with nuts and bolts to connect the pieces. It enables the building of working models and mechanical devices." With a little imagination, a young boy or girl could build almost anything, and it was the start of many an engineer's career.

The resident story continued that, because of the depression, he woke up on a number of Christmas mornings to discover that there was no Meccano set for him. That was, until one magical morning when, to his surprise, there was a Meccano set under the tree for him. The resident recounted how happy it had made him, something he still recalled over 60 years later.

I was quite moved by the story, and told our resident how good it was. I would make sure that it was in the newsletter for the holiday edition. The resident seemed very happy, and I wondered if this is how he looked as a boy getting the Meccano set. I made arrangements to have the story placed in the newsletter, as I promised.

Shortly after the story was published, but just before Christmas, the resident died. At Christmas dinner that year, I told my family about the resident and his story, and proposed a toast to his memory.

At the resident's funeral a few days after Christmas, I went to his son to express my condolences. I mentioned meeting his father over the Meccano story. His son told me that his father had mentioned that to him, and how proud and happy his father had been that it had been put in the newsletter. I went away reflecting on how something that I had done, so small to me, had such an impact on someone I was there to assist.

