

# Customer Service and Accessibility Standards Full Policy November 2009

## Policy

Contact Hamilton which administers Developmental Services Ontario Hamilton-Niagara Region, will provide an environment in its facilities that reflects and values diversity, dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity.

Staff and volunteers' conduct will demonstrate that we value diversity, dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity for our clients, families, the public, staff and volunteers.

Staff and volunteers will provide an environment that is accessible and will provide services in a manner that is accessible to people with a variety of disabilities.

## Preamble

Contact Hamilton is committed to giving people with disabilities the same opportunity of access to our services and in a similar way that these services are available to all others we serve. Contact Hamilton is committed to providing services to clients, families, the public, and staff that are free of barriers and biases. (Also see Confidentiality Policy; Complaints Policy)

Following are definitions of the five principles of customer service that Contact Hamilton adheres to.

- Dignity - service is provided in a way that allows the person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of other people.
- Independence - when a person with a disability is allowed to do things on their own without unnecessary help or interference from others.
- Integration - service is provided in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in the same or similar way as other customers, unless an alternate measure is necessary to enable a person with a disability to access goods or services.
- Equal opportunity - service is provided to a person with a disability in such a way that they have an opportunity to access your goods or services equal to that given to others.
- Social Inclusion – all individuals have the right to be included in the social fabric of their community and contribute to the best of their ability

Contact Hamilton is committed to welcoming and serving people with needs that require the use of assistive devices, those who require a support person, and those who require the use of a service animal.

## Definitions

- Assistive devices are any devices used by persons with disabilities to help with daily living and tasks such as auxiliary aids, communication aides, cognition aids, personal mobility aids and medical aids. Assistive devices include a broad range of products such as wheelchairs, walkers, white canes, crutches, oxygen tanks, hearing aids,

portable chalk boards and electronic communication devices that people may bring to the premises.

- Support persons assist people with disabilities in a variety of ways, by aiding with communication such as an intervenor, sign language interpreter or a personal support worker providing physical assistance. The support person could be a paid professional, a volunteer, a friend or a family member. He or she does not necessarily need to have special training or qualifications.
- Service animal is an animal that a person with a disability uses for support. Such use is either readily apparent or is supported by a letter from a physician or nurse.

## Procedure

- 1) Employees and volunteers will welcome all members of the community to our facilities and provide service that respects the diversity, dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity of people, including those with disabilities and those requiring supports.
  - 1.1 Employees and volunteers will ensure that wheelchair accessibility signage is maintained and visible. All signage will have recognizable symbols and be at an appropriate height.
  - 1.2 Employees and volunteers will ensure that the facilities' accessibility elements, including the wheelchair accessible door, are functioning, and will ensure they are knowledgeable on how to operate these accessibility elements.
  - 1.3 The Executive Director will ensure any parts of the facilities that are not open to the public are marked "Employees Only".
  - 1.4 When services that are normally provided to a person with a disability are temporarily unavailable, the Executive Assistant will post a notice at all entrances to Contact Hamilton and on the website. The notice will include the reason for the disruption, its duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available. All efforts will be made to accommodate the person through an alternate means or location, when services are temporarily unavailable. Directions and maps (if necessary) will be provided for finding alternate accessible locations. Also, see Policy RM-07-20 Business Continuity, RM-07-25 Pandemic Planning, and RM-07-40 Office Closure (Inclement Weather or Other).
- 2) Employees and volunteers will welcome people who use their personal assistive devices to access our services, and will make every attempt to ensure that assistive measures are made available, including but not limited to staff assistance, sign language interpretation, and oral interpretation.
- 3) Employees and volunteers will allow people with disabilities to bring their service animals into the Contact Hamilton facilities. To be considered a service animal under the Accessibility Standard, it must either be readily apparent that the animal is being used because of a person's disability or the person with a disability must provide a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that it is required because of his or her disability.
  - 3.1 When serving a customer who has a service animal, employees and volunteers must be prepared to respond to special situations, such as other clients, staff or

service providers having an allergy or great fear of animals, by discussing the situation with all and making every effort to meet the needs of all individuals.

- 4) Employees and volunteers are committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. They are in fact, encouraged to do so if it would result in a more positive experience and the provision of better service. A support person may be required to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to the disclosure of personal information.
- 5) Employees and volunteers will ensure communication with a person with a disability is in a manner that is respectful and takes into account the person's disability.
  - 3.1 Employees and volunteers will change the method of communication to meet an individual's need and flexibly provide services such as in person, by phone and online.
  - 3.2 Employees and volunteers will ensure that any requested documents made available to people with disabilities, are either in a format that takes into account the person's disability, or supports are provided to ensure the person is able to understand and use the documents. This might include large print, audiocassette, CD-ROM, DVD, email or other format.
  - 3.3 Publications and website information will be provided in plain language whenever possible.
  - 3.4 Contact Hamilton will have a TTY system installed for clients with hearing impairments.
- 6) The following organizational policies will be provided to individuals upon request in a format that takes into consideration their needs and abilities:
  - 1) Customer Service and Accessibility Standards C-08-02
  - 2) Handling of Complaints Policy C-08-20
  - 3) Organizational Training Policy
  - 4) Customer Feedback Policy
- 7) The following documents are available in 'plain language'.
  - 1) Abuse Policy (PL)
  - 2) Accessible Customer Service Policy (PL)
  - 3) Complaints Policy (PL)
  - 4) Eligibility
  - 5) Privacy & Consent Statement
  - 6) Statement of Rights for People Seeking Service
  - 7) We Want Your Feedback!
  - 8) Supporting People with Disabilities – Suggestions and Considerations
- 8) Employees and volunteers will ensure they have received appropriate training from Contact Hamilton on how to serve people with disabilities.
- 9) Employees and volunteers will use person-first language at all times.

- 10) Employees and volunteers will modify their interactional behaviours according to the needs of the persons with disabilities such as ensuring that a person with a hearing impairment can see the speaker's face while talking, or providing more tactile cues for someone with a visual impairment.
- 11) Employees and volunteers will follow the Complaints Policy for all individuals' feedback.
- 12) Employees and volunteers will encourage clients to provide feedback about any issues or concerns that they might have. See Customer Feedback Policy.
- 13) Employees and volunteers will consider the impacts on customers with disabilities when planning a new initiative or when purchasing new equipment or technology.
- 14) Employees and volunteers will inform the Executive Director of any physical barriers, architectural barriers, information/communication barriers, technological barriers, or a policy or practice that pose barriers for people with disabilities.

14.1 The Executive Director will address these barriers in a timely manner and inform the Board of Contact Hamilton of any identified barriers as well as recommended solutions.

- 15) The Executive Director will file an Accessibility Compliance report with the OADA in compliance with the prescribed guidelines.