NANAIMO LADYSMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

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PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

NLPS resides within the traditional territories of the Snuneymuxw, Snaw-Naw-As and Stz'uminus First Nations. In addition, the district is a proud community partner with the Tilli-cum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre and the Mid Island Métis Nation.

INTRODUCTION

Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools (NLPS) is committed to providing a learning and working environment that supports all students and staff and provides equitable opportunities to support our diverse community. A key element to supporting our community is the development of a Three-Year Accessibility Plan. This plan identifies system needs, priorities, and action plans, and draws on feedback from our school community and the work of the Accessibility Committee to enhance equity of access to programming and our facilities.

We recognize the importance of accessibility not only for those with disabilities, but also for the benefit of the entire community. We are committed to improving accessibility with regards to our services, as well as our facilities. Through the actions in this Three-Year Accessibility Plan, we commit to continuous improvements in developing an environment that supports all students, staff and the larger school community.

ABOUT OUR SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMUNITY

Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools enrols approximately 16,424 students, with approximately 3,200 students identifying as Indigenous, and 1,331 students with formal ministry designations. The District offers a full range of programs from Kindergarten to Grade 12 with additional programs for pre-school and adult learners. There are: 28 elementary schools, one of which is located on reserve and is co-governed with Snuneymuxw First Nation; eight secondary schools (including Learning Alternatives and Career Technical Centre); one distributed learning school – Island ConnectED (K12); an International Student Education program; and approximately 2,200 employees.

There is a strong partnership with the Nanaimo-Ladysmith Schools Foundation to ensure food security and access to other community supports. The district offers preschool opportunities through our StrongStart programs and is growing the number of onsite childcare centres across the system. For our secondary learners, the district has a variety of opportunities. This includes fine arts and sports academies, outdoor learning and work experience placements. At both the secondary and elementary level, outreach support is available for our students that experience barriers to regular school attendance.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

I am delighted to share the Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools' Three-Year Accessibility Plan, a crucial provincially mandated initiative that underscores our commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for every member of our community.

Every individual, regardless of their abilities, should have equal access to quality education. The Accessibility Plan serves as our roadmap to foster an environment where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

By implementing this plan, we take a significant step towards building an inclusive future together. It reflects our dedication to creating a positive and supportive learning environment, where each student can reach their full potential.

The district utilized principles found in the BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation foundational document when building its plan. It is important to know that this plan is not set in stone, throughout the implementation process here in our district, we remain open to feedback, suggestions, and collaboration. Together, let us create an environment where every student is valued for their unique abilities, and together, we will cultivate a brighter, more accessible future for all.

Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to the success of our students. Together, we will make a difference.

-Scott Saywell
    Superintendent/CEO

DEFINITIONS

ACCESSIBILITY: The state of having programs, services and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers.

ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE: An official group formed by one or more organizations in collaboration with people with disabilities, to create an accessibility plan and feedback mechanism.

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN: A plan developed by an Accessibilit Committee that identifies challenges and solutions for addressing accessibility barriers.

BARRIER: Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society. This includes physical/environmental, attitudinal, information, communications, policy or practice, and technological barriers.

Types of barriers:

a. Physical/Environmental Barrier: A barrier resulting from architectural design, outdoor spaces, which can include certain smells or sounds, internal lighting, the configuration of class and meeting rooms, and the size of doorways.

b. Attitudinal Barrier: A barrier that arises from the attitudes of staff, students and the school community, including discriminatory behaviours and a lack of disability awareness.

c. Communication Barrier: A barrier that arises when communicating or delivering information in person, by telephone or online, inter acting with teachers, peers, receptionists or other staff, and receiving training.

d. Information Barrier: A barrier that arises from inaccessible signage, fonts, brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, etc.

e. Policy or Practice Barrier: Rules, regulations and protocols that prevent a person from performing the essential requirements of their job, classwork, or participating in society. Policy, practice, and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.

f. Technological Barrier: Barriers that result from the use of inaccessible devices, platforms, software programs, photo copiers, fax machines, telephones and switches, including the lack of assistive technologies.

DISABILITY: The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier. (For more information about disability and types of disability and support, refer to Appendix A: Disabilities.)

IMPAIRMENT: A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary or episodic.

FRAMEWORK GUIDING OUR WORK

The NLPS Accessibility Plan recognizes global, national, and provincial legislative frameworks and school district-specific actions to promote and support accessibility.

GLOBAL CONTEXT – UNITED NATIONS

In recent years, there has been an emphasis on increasing diversity, equity and inclusion within the workplace and within the larger community. In 2006, the United Nations led efforts to adopt the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In 2010, Canada ratified the CRPD and described it as follows:

"The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human right treaty aimed at protecting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. Parties to the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are required to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities including full equality under the law."

CANADIAN CONTEXT AND LEGISLATION – CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

In 1986, Persons with Disabilities were included in the new federal Employment Equity Act. The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) came into force in 2019, with the overarching goal to realize a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

This act applies to federally regulated entities. The ACA has seven focus areas, and was developed based on the following guiding principles:

1. All persons must be treated with dignity regardless of their disabilities.

2. All persons must have the same opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have regardless of their disabilities.

3. All persons must have barrier-free access to full and equal participation in society, regardless of their disabilities.

4. All persons must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire, regardless of their disabilities.

5. Laws, policies, programs, services and structures must take into account the disabilities of persons, the different ways that persons interact with their environments and the multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization and discrimination faced by persons.

6. People with disabilities must be involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services and structures.

7. The development and revision of accessibility standards and the making of regulations must be done with the objective of achieving the highest level of accessibility for people with disabilities.

B.C. CONTEXT AND LEGISLATION - ACCESSIBLE B.C. ACT

The Accessible British Columbia Act, enacted in June 2021, and initially the accessibility planning requirements only applied to provincial government organizations.

The Accessible British Columbia Regulation, under the Accessible British Columbia Act, came into force on September 1, 2022. These regulations identify schools as prescribed organizations, and school districts and independent schools will be required to have an Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan, and a tool to receive feedback on accessibility by September 1, 2023: The goal of the act is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and involve them in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

PRINCIPLES IN THE ACCESSIBLE B.C. ACT

The Accessible B.C. Act includes a list of principles that must be considered as organizations develop an accessibility plan. The Definitions are adapted from the foundational document BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation.

ADAPTABILITY: Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

COLLABORATION: Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Accessibility plans should create opportunities for organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.

DIVERSITY: Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience greatly inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.

INCLUSION: All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.

SELF-DETERMINATION: Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN: The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as "the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability." An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who interact with the organization.

OUR COMMITMENT TO ACCESSIBILITY

NLPS is committed to providing an environment that is accessible and practical for all members of our diverse community. We recognize the importance of conscious planning, design, and effort in ensuring that barriers are removed and accessibility is increased.

Our school district is committed to working collaboratively with the community to provide equitable treatment to people with disabilities in a way that respects their dignity. To achieve this goal, we have outlined the following commitments:

- To engage with staff, community members an people with disabilities in the developmen and review of its accessibility plan.
- To ensure that our school board policies and rocedures align with the principles of accessibility.
- To improve access to facilities, policies, programs, practices, and services for students, staff, parents/ guardians, volunteers and community members.
- To continually improve accessibility for people wit disabilities in our school community.

OUR APPROACH

NLPS believes that all members of our community have the right to be treated with dignity, given an opportunity to participate, and provided with access to learning and community. Our approach is grounded in the core provincial principles of accessibility, including adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, self-determination and universal design.

In September 2022, we began the process of establishing an accessibility committee and identifying barriers to accessibility in our school district community. This process involved:

- Assessing the current physical and architectural accessibility of our schools
- Conducting surveys and interviews to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities of partners within our school district community
- Calling for applications for members of the Accessibility Committee
- Holding key discussions to identify barriers to accessibility
- Developing a district-wide feedback tool
- Prioritizating of actions to be taken
- Establishing a monitoring and evaluation process

Our approach is designed to recognize the gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility in our school district. By engaging in thoughtful planning, meaningful engagement, training, and direct action, we aim to deliver lasting accessibility improvements for all members of our community.

ABOUT OUR COMMITTEE

PURPOSE OF THE ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, organizations must establish an Accessibility Committee to assist with identifying and preventing barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization. The purpose of the accessibility committee is to work collaboratively to assess and improve community accessibility, focusing on the experiences of individuals with disabilities while encompassing the whole community. The Accessibility Committee also advises the district Administrator/ Board on strategies to reduce barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all aspects of school community life.

RECRUITMENT OF THE ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, the selection of Accessibility Committee members must, to the extent possible, align with the following goals:

- At least half the members are people with disabilities or individuals who support or are from organizations that support people with disabilities;

- At least one member is an Indigenous person; and

- Members reflect the diversity of persons in B.C.

A call for representatives for the Accessibility Committee was conducted in December 2022 - January 2023 to recruit a diverse representation as outlined above. The Accessibility Committee was formally constituted in January 2023.

Accessibility Committee Membership includes district staff from the Learning Services, Human Resources, Health and Safety and Facilities Departments, representation from the Nanaimo District Teachers' Association, CUPE Support Staff, the Nanaimo School Administrators' Association, a therapist from the School-Aged Therapy Program, a parent and a representative from the Indigenous rightsholders Leaders for Learning group.

BARRIER IDENTIFICATION AND CONSULTATION CONDUCTED

The Accessibility Committee used the following methods to identify barriers:

- Physical Accessibility Gap Analysis - A checklist to identify barriers to our schools' physical accessibility was developed. Staff members conducted the physical accessibility audit in each of our schools. Completed: October 2022

- Survey to Parents/Guardians - An accessibility and inclusion survey was developed and distributed to parents/ guardians. Completed: May 2023

- Accessibility Committee - The Accessible Committee reviewed the input and feedback from the survey and gap analysis. The Committee collaborated to suggest priority areas to target in the Accessibility Plan. This was shared with the Accessibility Working Group, who developed this Accessibility Plan and submitted it to the Board; who gave the final approval of priority areas for the plan. Completed: August 2023

- District Accessibility Feedback Tool - A feedback tool was developed and posted to the district website. Information about the tool was shared with district and school partners (i.e., students, staff, outside professionals and parents/ guardians). Completed: August 2023

FEEDBACK MECHANISM

FEEDBACK MECHANISM DEVELOPMENT

We want to learn about specific barriers that people face when they are trying to:

1. Access a school program, building or school information
2. Receive a service or support

NLPS has developed an online feedback tool that includes a series of questions about accessibility experiences that students, staff and members of the school district community can complete. The tool is posted to the main page of the district website and an information announcement about the tool has been provided to students, staff and parents/guardians. Feedback can be anonymous, or people can add their name and contact information if they wish to be contacted. There is also an option for people to upload a video, voice recording or photo(s).

ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND BARRIERS

ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A. ADAPTATIONS FOR STUDENTS:

- Each school has a School Based Team which assesses student accommodation requirements on a case-by-case basis and use all relevant information to respond to each scenario. Support is provided for learners with and without formal special education designations.

- The district has established practices and procedures by which accommodations are offered throughout our schools.

B. MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SUPPORTS:

The district recognizes the importance of mental health and wellbeing of its students and staff, especially as the world has experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects. Initiatives designed assess and improve the mental health and well-being of students and staff to ensure support and positive outcomes include:

- Creating positions for a 1.0 Manager of Mental Health and a .6 Mental Health Coordinator
- Refreshed processes for tracking and supporting Children and Youth in Care,
- The purchase of resources to assist teachers with delivering sexual health education curriculum to students with intellectual disabilities and other support needs,
- Supporting teachers with mental wellness resources for every grade,
- Staff training to promote student mental health, improve personal mental health and well-being and reduce stigma associated with mental illness.
- Increased access to Non-violent Crisis Intervention (NCI) training, including alignment of student supportive planning processes with NCI principles.

C. THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT:

- The district has established an ongoing collaboration between the Departments of Learning Services, Human Resources and Facilities, to ensure accommodations related to the district's built environment occur in a timely manner when requested at an individual school site or when construction is underway.

- Improvements to accessibility have been made at a number of schools, including accessible and inclusive and accessible was room spaces, floor transitions and ramps, and safety fencing at elementary schools. Work is ongoing to expand these supports across the system.

ACCESSIBILITY BARRIERS

A. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION BARRIERS:

Feedback from the partners survey identified that many individuals who experience barri-ers to accessibility do not feel that their voices have been heard, or suggestions acted upon, historically. Timely follow-up for individuals who responded is key.

B. BARRIERS IN THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

As schools continue to have high enrollment, it was noted that crowding and noise were significant barri-ers for learners at a number of sites. In addition to making it challenging to navigate the building, there is limited space for break-out groups or quiet spaces to encourage self-regulation.

There are barriers to outdoor spaces for children with physical and sensory disabilities in our schools (e.g. playground groundcover; fencing; accessible outdoor learning areas).

C. ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS

There is lack of a disability awareness and presence for learners in our system. For example, there are few books or posters about disability rights or individuals with disabilities in our schools.

Individuals with disabilities sometimes lack access to support and interventions for general mental wellness, as well as specific concerns such as anxiety, prosocial behaviours, and sexual health. Thus, there is a need to deepen staff awareness of disability and universal strategies to ensure accessible environments are established. It is important to create a "baseline" awareness across the organization.

D. SCHOOL POLICY AND PRACTICE BARRIERS

NLPS found that a fulsome review of policy and practice barriers across the system is still required to ensure that there are no unforeseen barriers in our policies and practices. In the survey, a lack of access to required academic and behavioural support was identified as a barrier for some learners. The level of support and specialist staffing to meet student needs is constrained by recruitment and retention, as well as financial limitations. These areas will be given additional consideration as the three-year plan is finalized.

OUR THREE-YEAR PLAN

OVERVIEW

This Accessibility Plan outlines the measures that NLPS will take to remove and prevent barriers and to promote inclusion for individuals with disabilities in our school district community. The plan is based on the Accessibility Principles of Adaptability, Collaboration, Diversity, Inclusion, Self-Determination, and Universal Design, as set out in the Accessible B.C. Act.

ACCESSIBILITY PRIORITIES

Based on the feedback gathered from staff, parents/guardians, students, and the Accessibility Gap Analysis, the Accessibility Committee has identified the following areas as the top priorities for improving accessibility in the school district community. These areas of priority will be the areas of focus as the details of the three year plan are created.

PRIORITY #1: EMPLOYMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY PRACTICES

NLPS will review the support staff levels required to provide services to students with accessibility needs in schools. This will include:

- Conducting a review of classroom, specialist, and support staffing levels.

- Developing a framework for further staff training on accessibility issues; including physical, mental, and social accessibility needs.

PRIORITY #2: THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

NLPS will improve the accessibility of the physical and architectural environment for all individuals, including those with disabilities, through the following actions:

- Establishing a set of key criteria that is in alignment wit provincial and federal standards, to ensure that the built environment supports accessibility in a dignified and respectful way for all individuals. These criteria will encompass both indoor and outdoor spaces.

- Ensuring the plan includes strategies to address accessibility gaps in the physical environment

PRIORITY #3: INCLUSION, MENTAL HEALTH AND PEER CONNECTIONS

NLPS will review and revise policies and practices for staff, to ensure they align with the principles of accessibility, and to address any identified gaps in staff training or knowledge on accessibility issues. This will include:

- Summarizing and celebrating current accessibility practices within the district.

- Creating a framework for universal capacity building for all staff.

- Creating a framework for staff providing student-specific coaching/support; including consideration of mental health supports and socialization for individuals experiencing barriers to accessibility.

PRIORITY #4: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

NLPS will increase the accessibility of information and communication for all individuals, including those with disabilities, through the following actions:

- Developing and implementing a clear and easy-to-navigate mechanism on the district website for receiving ongoing feedback from staff, students and community members regarding accessibility needs in the district.

- Developing guidelines to ensure that all communication to staff, students and parents/guardians is written in plain language and available in alternative formats upon request.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Accessibility Committee will meet monthly to review available data and feedback and to hear directly from individuals who are experiencing barriers, as well as those who support individuals with barriers.

The committee will provide an update to the Board regarding progress toward the goals of the Accessibility Plan twice per school year. This update will be shared on the Accessibility page on the public website. Feedback regarding the plan and updates to the action steps and timelines will be provided annually.

The full Accessibility Plan will be renewed on three-year cycles. As part of this renewal, NLPS is committed to evaluating the impact of this plan and determining that the goals set forth are having a positive impact on the lived experience of our students and other partners.

APPENDIX A: ABOUT DISABILITY

MEDICAL

ENVIRONMENTAL

THE DISABILITY CONTINUUM

There is no universally accepted meaning for the word "disability". However, the Ontario Human Rights Code provides definitions of disability that form our guiding principles. Definitions of disability can be placed on a continuum. At one end, disability is explained in terms of medical conditions (medical model). At the opposite end, disability is explained in terms of the social and physical contexts in which it occurs (environmental model).

Find out more

TYPES OF DISABILITY AND FUNCTIONAL LIMITATIONS

A person's disability may make it physically or cognitively challenging to perform everyday tasks such as operating a keyboard, reading a sign, differentiating colours, distinguishing sounds, climbing stairs, grasping small items, remembering words, or doing arithmetic.

There are many kinds of disabilities, including physical, sensory, hearing, mental health, developmental and learning. Disabilities can be visible or invisible.

VISUAL DISABILITIES

Visual disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Some have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Impaired vision can restrict a person's ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Others may use a guide dog or white cane.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with visual disabilities:

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.

- Speak normally and clearly.

- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".

- Unless it is an emergency, only touch the person if you have bee given permission

- If you offer assistance, wait until your receive permission. Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.

- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times.

- Refrain from engaging with the animal.

- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear.

- For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.

- Don't just assume the individual can't see you.

- When entering a room, show the individual to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.

- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.

- Ensure you say good-bye prior to leaving the individual.

- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

HARD OF HEARING AND DEAFNESS

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. People who are hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating. While some people may use sign language, notes or hearing aids when communicating, others may also use email, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.

- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped". Attract the person's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.

- Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where the person can see your face.

- Look at and speak directly to the person. Address the person, not their interpreter.

- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for

  example a pen and paper.

- Keep your face clearly visible when speaking.

- Be clear and precise when giving directions and repeat or rephrase if necessary.
  Make sure you have been understood

- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times.
  Refrain from engaging with the animal.

- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room
  to avoid other people overhearing

- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf is different because their

  first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).

  - If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing
  sounds

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all require a wheelchair. For example, people who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions, or amputations may also have difficulty moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to the person rather than someone who i with them. People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things. Ask before you help.

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- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".

- Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.

- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching any assistiv devices, including wheelchairs.

- Provide the person with information about accessible features of the mmediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with intellectual disabilities:

- As much as possible, treat the person with an intellectual disabilit like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, an they will appreciate you treating them with respect.

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.

- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped"

- Use simple words and short sentences.

- Make sure the person understands what you've said.

- If you can't understand what's being said, ask again.

- Give one piece of information at a time.

- Be polite and patient.

- Speak directly to the person, not to someone who is with the person

LEARNING OR COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

Learning or cognitive disabilities can result in a host of different communications difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with the person's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with learning disabilities or disabilities:

• Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

• Recognize that some people with communication difficulties us augmentative communication systems such as Signed Englis and Picture Exchange System.

• When you know that someone with a learning disability need help, ask how you can best help.

• Speak normally and clearly, and directly to the person

• Take some time — people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.

• Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works bes for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.

• If you're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging an supportive.

• Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped"

• Be courteous and patient and the person will let you know ho to best provide service in a way that works for them.

MENTAL HEALTH DISABILITIES

People with mental health disabilities look like anyone else. You won't know that the person has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let the person tell you how you can best help.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with mental health disabilities:

• Treat people with a mental health disability with the same respect and consider ation you have for everyone else.

• Be confident and reassuring and listen to persons with a mental health disabilit and their needs.

• If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help

• Take the person with a mental health disability seriously, and work with the to meet their needs.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISABILITIES

Some people have communication challenges. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards, sign language or other assistive devices.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with speech and language disabilities:

• Just because a person has one disability doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.

• If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.

• Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".

• If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.

• Take some time. Be patient and polite and give the person whatever time they need to get their point across.

• Allow the individual to finish their sentences themselves without interruption.

• Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

DEAF-BLIND DISABILITIES

A person who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating. Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deafblind:

• Make no assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Some deaf-blind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.

• Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".

• A deaf-blind person is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.

• Speak directly to the person, as you normally would, not to the intervener.

• Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach the person who is deaf-blind.

• Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.

• Unless it's an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

APPENDIX B: SUGGESTED REFERENCES/RESOURCES

Accessibility context and planning help for schools and school boards. Find out more