

Issued: June 17, 2011
Revised: November 1, 2012
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Introduction

The Stratford Festival has a long-established practice of providing high levels of customer service to its patrons. We strive for excellence on all four of our stages; the experience that a patron encounters when interacting with employees and volunteers - whether on the phone, through written communication, or in-person - also needs to meet this high standard.

The Festival aspires to extend this level of customer service to all patrons, including those with a disability. Many changes to our programs, facilities, and services in recent years have helped to improve our ability to serve patrons with disabilities.

The Festival is committed providing reasonable accommodation to its patrons with disabilities. The Festival is also dedicated to continuous improvement, and will continue to evolve its practices in this regard.

Definitions

“Disability” as defined by the *Ontario Human Rights Code* means,

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- (d) a mental disorder, or
- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*; (“handicap”).

“Access” means that the Festival is committed to making its premises and services available to patrons with a disability by removing barriers, and in a manner that embraces the principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity.

“Dignity” means that service is provided in a way that allows the person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of other people.

“Independence” means when a person with a disability is allowed to do things on their own, without unnecessary help or interference from others.

“Integration and Equal Opportunity” means that 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 disability to access goods or services. They should not have to make significantly more effort to access or obtain service. They should also not have to accept inconvenience or lesser quality. Sometimes this may mean that the Festival has to treat individuals slightly differently so that they can benefit fully from the services.

Accessible Patron Services

In demonstration of the Festival’s commitment to accessibility, an Accessibility Committee was established in 2007 with a mandate of:

1. Creating, monitoring, and amending policies relating to accessibility;
2. Identifying areas where the Festival may improve its buildings and services for patrons with disabilities;
3. Advocating for changes to policies, practices and facilities to further assist patrons with disabilities;
4. Making recommendations for capital spending in order to facilitate improvements to buildings or services;
5. Keeping abreast of new legislation and best practices in the area of serving patrons with disabilities; and,
6. Researching and reviewing new technologies and assistive devices as they become available.

The Festival recognizes that the provision of fully accessible services in accessible facilities is a process that is under constant review and improvement. Feedback on any aspect of the accessibility program at the Festival is encouraged from employees, volunteers and patrons, and will be reviewed and embraced by the Accessibility Committee.

ASSISTIVE DEVICES & SERVICES

A - 02

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival is committed to serving patrons with disabilities, and ensuring that those who use assistive devices will benefit from enjoying a fulfilling experience at the Festival.

Procedures:

The Festival will ensure that all employees and volunteers are aware of the various assistive devices provided by the Festival that may be used by visitors with disabilities while accessing our programs, products and services. Assistive devices are devices that are used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services of persons or organizations.

The Festival currently provides the following to assist our patrons with disabilities while attending a theatre performance:

- Wheelchairs are available to borrow, on a first come first serve basis and are located in the First Aid Room in each theatre. Patrons are to see an Usher or House Manager.
- Hearing assistive receivers are available for patrons with hearing disabilities and/or requiring hearing assistance. Three different types of receivers are available to accommodate various patron-owned hearing aids, and some can accommodate patron-owned earphones/earbuds. Patrons are encouraged to reserve hearing assistance receivers in advance, but on-site requests can be accommodated if quantities permit. We would welcome a donation to our hearing assistance program to offset the cost of owning and maintaining these devices. Donations can be made at any of our theatres when you come to pick up your headset. A minimum of \$2.00 is suggested. Thank you.
- Motorized door controls on barrier-free doors and accessible washrooms
- Elevators in all multi-level, public use buildings
- Special access parking; spaces at our Festival theatre may be reserved in advance at the time of ticket purchase
- Special access and companion seats, which need to be reserved at the time of ticket purchase
- Special access washrooms with assistive bars
- Hand railings in all theatres
- Braille House programs, which may be borrowed from the Coat Check (Festival Theatre) or House Manager (all other theatres), or downloaded from the Festival's website to a Braille note taker, after the opening of the production(s).
- Magnifying sheets (to assist in reading house programs or other materials), may be borrowed from the Coat Check (Festival Theatre) or House Manager (all other theatres)

Festival employees and volunteers can assist patrons in locating and using assistive devices upon request.

The Festival also welcomes patrons who bring their own assistive devices (canes, wheelchairs, walkers, service dogs etc.) and provides accessible eating areas and theatre seating. Due to fire regulations and space limitations, large assistive devices (eg. walkers) will be stored outside of the auditorium during performances. Employees will assist in storage and retrieval of assistive devices. The Festival is not responsible for any lost/damaged items if they are stored during a performance.

Additional Assistive Services

The Festival contracts bus companies to provide direct round-trip transportation to Stratford from Toronto daily throughout the performance season. Patrons requiring accessible bus transportation need to reserve this in advance, and request an accessible vehicle at the time of reservation.

The Festival provides a live audio description service for patrons who are blind or have low vision on select performance dates at the Festival Theatre. These performance dates are marked on the performance calendar with a  symbol.

The Festival offers occasional American Sign Language interpreted performances for patrons who are deaf or deafened and communicate using ASL. These performance dates are marked on the performance calendar with an **ASL** symbol.

The Festival also offers an accommodation booking service for local hotels, bed & breakfasts and other lodgings. Patrons requiring accessible accommodations should discuss available options for accessible rooms with a member of the Box office staff.

The Festival is committed to researching and implementing additional assistive devices as technology evolves and additional solutions become available.

COMMUNICATION

A - 03

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival's customer service policies and procedures take a person's disability into account when communicating with the individual. Two-way communications is a process of providing, sending, receiving and understanding information. To communicate in an effective way, Festival employees and volunteers consider how the disability affects the way that the person expresses, receives or processes communications. Where possible, the Festival employee or volunteer asks the patron directly the best way to communicate with him/her.

Procedures:

The Festival uses a variety of ways, wherever possible, to make communications more accessible by:

- Considering the needs of people with disabilities during the planning stage of services and communication development.
- Using plain language to make a document easier to read for people with certain learning disabilities.
- Offering information in alternate formats:
 - Passing hand-written or typed information back and forth;
 - Braille house programs;
 - Printed hand-outs of commonly used information;
 - Magnifying sheets for reading;
 - e-mail as an alternate channel to provide accessible communication.

The Festival is continuing to research new technologies and is committing to improving the communications options available to patrons with disabilities.

SERVICE ANIMALS

A - 04

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Service Animals

Policy:

The Stratford Festival is committed to welcoming patrons with disabilities who are accompanied by a trained, accredited service animal. A service animal may accompany a patron or any third party with a disability to all parts of the premises that are open to the public. Service animals may be used for, but not limited to, the following disabilities: vision loss, physical disability, hearing loss, autism, epilepsy etc. Although service animals are most commonly dogs, other service animals could include, but are not limited to, ferrets, monkeys or other animals. The Festival ensures that all employees, volunteers and others dealing with the public are properly trained in how to interact with people with disabilities, who are accompanied by a service animal.

Procedures:

To be considered a service animal under this 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 may be asked to provide a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that it is required because of his or her disability. The Festival enforces a general policy that does not permit pets on the building premises, however, service animals are not considered pets - they are working animals. They are used by people with disabilities to overcome barriers much like assistive devices such as a white cane or a wheelchair.

Guide dogs or other service animals, including service animals in training, are allowed to accompany people with disabilities on the Festival premises open to the public. If a patron with a service animal is intending to see a performance he/she needs to advise the Box Office representative when purchasing tickets so that an appropriate seat (aisle or special access) may be assigned. The House Manager and Stage Manager of the performance will also be advised that a service animal will be in the theatre.

At times, due to capacity, patrons with disabilities, accompanied by service animals may be advised that the crowded conditions may make it difficult to manoeuvre. If the service animal is causing a disturbance for other visitors, the patron and accompanying service dog may be required to leave the area or the Festival premises.

The owner is responsible to "stoop and scoop".

Patrons bringing a service animal should review any patron advisories about special effects that are in a production that may affect their service animal (eg. noise, lights, other animals, etc.)

This information may not be known at the time of booking, but can be confirmed by the box office staff and/or on site staff closer to the date of the performance. The Festival anticipates there will be special situations and is prepared to make every effort to accommodate the circumstances on an individual basis, as they arise, keeping safety to all patrons and service animals in mind.

For more information, patrons may contact our Box Office staff at 1-800-567-1600, or speak directly to an onsite staff member when they visit our premises.

SUPPORT PERSONS

A - 05

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival is committed to welcoming patrons with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. Any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person is allowed to enter the Festival's premises with his or her support person. At no time will a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person be prevented from having access to his or her support person while on the Festival premises.

A support person is an individual hired or chosen by a person with a disability to provide services or assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or with access to goods or services.

Procedures:

Each patron with a disability and his or her accompanying a support person attending a performance or event is required to have a valid ticket to that performance or event. Admission prices will be charged for both attendees based on the location of the seating section chosen.

Complimentary admission for one support person accompanying a patron with a valid CNIB card or an Access2Entertainment card will be granted. The Festival will consider additional requests on a case by case basis.

Patrons may contact the Festival box office at 1-800-567-1600 or orders@stratfordfestival.ca for more information, or to request that their situation be considered.

TEMPORARY DISRUPTION OF SERVICE

A - 06

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival is aware that temporary disruptions of services (daily functions – elevators, physical operations) and programs may occur due to reasons that may or may not be within the Festival’s control or knowledge. These disruptions of service may be particularly challenging for patrons with a disability.

The Festival will make all reasonable efforts to provide advance notice of the disruption to the public, including information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration and a description of alternative facilities or services, if any, that may be available.

Procedures:

Advance notice of a disruption of services will be made, if possible, through the following communication channels, as appropriate:

- The Festival’s website: www.stratfordfestival.ca
- Temporary on-site signage
- Social Media (eg. Facebook, Twitter)

In the event of an unexpected disruption, advance notice may not be possible. In such cases, the Festival will provide on-site signage.

Staff and volunteers will be kept informed through pre-shift meetings, emails, and the Intranet as appropriate.

Patrons with a disability who are inconvenienced, or cannot access the Festival premises due to a temporary disruption of service should speak to a Box Office representative or House Manager for assistance and accommodation.

FEEDBACK

A - 07

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival values feedback from its patrons and has established processes in place to receive and respond to such feedback. The Festival welcomes feedback from patrons with disabilities about their experience at the Festival, and the quality of their interactions with Festival employees and volunteers.

Procedures:

Patrons with disabilities can offer their feedback in the following ways:

- Patron Feedback Forms available at all Box Office and Theatre Stores or through the House Manager at each theatre;
- Mail correspondence to: Audience Services, 55 Queen Street, P.O. Box 520, Stratford, ON N5A 6V2
- E-mail to audience@stratfordfestival.ca
- Telephone customer service at 1-800-561-1233, ext 5502
- In person to Festival staff, management or volunteers;

Patrons providing feedback will be asked to provide their name and contact information (phone, e-mail and/or address).

Once feedback is received, the following actions will be taken:

- The feedback will be directed to the appropriate person.
- The feedback will be assessed for appropriate action.
- A response, if required, will be made in a timely manner.

The feedback process is readily available to the public through:

- A notice on the web site;
- A sign in all theatre locations;
- A document describing the feedback process, available on request in different formats;

TRAINING

A - 08

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Policy:

The Stratford Festival provides training to all employees and volunteers who work with patrons and all those who are involved in the development and approvals of customer service policies and procedures on providing goods and services to visitors with disabilities. The Festival also ensures that contracted third parties who deal with the public, have the required AODA training.

Procedures:

Individuals in the following positions will be trained by the Festival:

- Board of Governors;
- Senior Management Staff;
- Managers of Customer Service;
- Front Line Staff;
- Volunteers.

Training on serving patrons with disabilities will supplement the larger training program, which includes basic orientation, training on effective communication, general customer service expectations, and specific Festival policies and procedures. A variety of training methods may be employed, including formal and informal training sessions, presentations, train the trainer, e-training, hand outs, fact sheets, and videos, depending on the type of position.

The training content, required by the Customer Service Standard, includes no less than the following:

- The Festival's commitment to access and customers with disabilities
- The history of the legislation and the purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard.
- How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.
- How to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person.
- How to use the assistive devices available on the Festival's premises or otherwise that may help with the provision of goods or services to people with disabilities.
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing the Festival's goods and services.
- The Festival's policies and procedures relating to the customer service standard.

- On-going training in connection with any changes to the Festival's policies and procedures governing the provision of goods and services to people with disabilities is provided.

Training records are kept for staff and volunteers who have completed training and include the name, date and content. An evaluation process is in place for continuous improvement in training content and delivery.

All training was completed by December 31st, 2011 for all required staff and volunteers. Commencing January, 2012, new staff and volunteers receive training as soon as practicable, after an employee or volunteer commences their duties.

A sustainability plan for ongoing training has been developed and includes:

- Budget guidelines;
- Resources;
- Incorporating access into the orientation program;
- Training updates.

POSTING OF POLICIES

A - 09

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Policy:

Notices are posted, informing the public that the documents required by the Customer Service Standard are available upon request and will be provided in a format that takes a person's disability into account.

Procedures:

Documents are available through the following networks, as appropriate.

- Web site: www.stratfordfestival.ca
- Intranet (*Willpower*) and HR bulletin boards for staff and volunteers;
- At each theatre's Box office and House Manager's office
- From the Customer Service Coordinator at 1-800-561-1233 ext 5502 or audience@stratfordfestival.ca