

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Annual Accessibility Plan
- Updated IASR Policy & GAP
- Classroom Resources
- Invisible Disabilities

A Dufferin-Peel ACCESS

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Annual Accessibility Plan

Dufferin-Peel's Annual Accessibility Plan 2013 describes measures the Board has taken to date and those to be taken in 2014 onward, which identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities who use the Board's facilities and services. This plan is now available on the Board's website. As always, ACCESS Dufferin-Peel will continue to monitor the requirements of the AODA (2005) and work to achieve all deadlines and goals that apply to our Board. Two significant changes occurred in 2013 which were noted in the plan. One was the new Board website, which is compliant as required by the AODA (2005). The second change was the addition of the Built Environment Standard. Again, the Board continues to meet the requirements as set out by the AODA (2005) and all our new buildings, as well as all major renovations, meet the standards.

Policy and GAP Updates: Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulation

The original Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulation (Policy 11.01) was approved by the Board in January 2013. Since that time, the Ontario Accessibility Directorate revised the IASR to include the Built Environment Standard. The revised policy was approved by the Board in January 2014.

In order to ensure compliance with the Board's revised Policy 11.01, the Board has adopted GAP 901.6 - Integrated Accessibility Regulation Standard. This procedure captures the intent of Policy 11.01 and identifies how the Board will comply with and meet the requirements of the AODA (2005).

CLASSROOM RESOURCES: The TeachAble Project



The TeachAble Project offers program and classroom staff with a rich array of resources designed to build accessibility awareness, including: model lesson plans that are aligned with Ontario curriculum, lesson summaries, community connections and curriculum requirements. For more information, visit www.theteachableproject.org.

What you should know about Invisible Disabilities

What is an invisible disability?

A disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, such as seeing, hearing, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, thinking, communicating or working. When a disability is visible, (i.e. wheelchairs, hearing aids, etc.), the general public views the individual sympathetically and generally accommodates them accordingly. However, when the disability is “invisible” and not immediately apparent, the individual’s needs are camouflaged. This can make life a little more challenging. Accommodations can pertain to direct physical or mental assistance, but it is equally significant to rectify surrounding ATTITUDES of the general public.

With today’s focus on mental illness as an example of an invisible disability, we must become accustomed to the fact that the term is also used, unofficially, to cover conditions like chronic pain, fibromyalgia, diabetes, cognitive or learning issues, fragrance or chemical sensitivities, chronic fatigue syndrome, and even certain visual and auditory impairments. (*Yonge Street Media*)

While we are taking steps in the right direction, the issue deserves greater attention. An understanding of what people with invisible disabilities experience in terms of barriers and struggles, is key.

Individuals with an Invisible Disability (IIDs)

- IIDs struggle to cope with barriers and fit into our world. IIDs can be assisted by tools such as hearing aids, glasses, medication, etc. But, sometimes these tools are not enough, and frustration levels can rise and sensitivities can become heightened.
- IIDs get tired of constantly advocating for themselves and too many give up. Constant adversity makes some withdrawn, cynical, suspicious and bitter.
- IIDs face serious social barriers of being misunderstood and disbelieved. A proportion of those administering accommodations do so

suspiciously. Disclosure is not mandatory in Canada. In fact, over 80% of people with invisible disabilities have a negative view of disclosing their disability, and fear a negative reaction to disclosure.

(BC Coalition of People with Disabilities)

The Law Helps

There is no legal difference in terms of accommodations between an invisible disability and a visible disability. Some things to consider:

- Canadian Human Rights Act’s “duty to accommodate,” which calls us to provide accommodation to individuals with disabilities, differentiates between “visible disabilities, such as the need for a wheelchair,” and “invisible disabilities” such as “cognitive, behavioural or learning disabilities, and mental health issues.”
- The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005), mandates organizations in the province to adhere to certain standards of accessibility.
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusive Education Policy – Board policies give us direction on how we can address issues related to inclusivity, equity and diversity.

Real problems lie, not within the law, which emphasizes looking at each case individually, but with people’s failure to catch up in terms of their attitudes towards invisible disability. Discrepancies remain between policy and reality regarding accommodations.

Barrier removal is an ongoing process

- Be open-minded and a good listener - increase awareness and attitudes around invisible disabilities
- Help to establish a supportive environment
- Research and address the unique sets of behaviours associated with different disabilities and focus on what they can do, rather than what they cannot do
- Don’t be an accommodation Scrooge. It doesn’t cost anything!

Submitted by Angela Deo, Principal, St. Agnes School