



# ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

School District No. 85  
Vancouver Island North



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## Territorial Acknowledgement

We would like to recognize the Elders and Knowledge Keepers and peoples from the Kwakwaka'wakw nations, who share these traditional territories with us so we can live, learn, work and play side-by-side. We also want to acknowledge our people who have come before; our ancestors who have guided us and taught us how to live on these lands in a good way.

### 1. Introduction

#### a. About Our School District Community

School District 85, situated on the traditional lands of the Kwakwaka'wakw, covers a total of 22,416 square kilometres of the northern end of Vancouver Island and the adjacent mainland in British Columbia. Forestry, commercial/sports fishing and tourism are the key industries on the North Island. Vancouver Island North School District employs approximately 500 employees, 100 (FTE) teachers and administrators, and 130 support staff for approximately 1200 students in 10 schools. Our leadership team includes a Superintendent and an Assistant Superintendent, a Secretary-Treasurer, a District Principal of Indigenous Programs, and a District Principal of Early Learning and Child Care.

School District 85 serves the communities of Port Hardy, Port McNeill, Fort Rupert, Coal Harbour, Port Alice, Sointula, Alert Bay, Woss Lake, Quatsino and Holberg. Our schools include six elementary schools, an Early Learning Centre, two secondary schools, and Eke Me-Xi Learning Centre, a secondary-level school of choice. While most of our schools are situated around the hubs of Port McNeill and Port Hardy, two of our schools are on islands accessed by BC Ferries, and one is in Port Alice, about a 45 minute drive from either town.

The Kwakwaka'wakw culture has flourished on Vancouver Island North for thousands of years. The presence of Elders in Residence and Role Model programs within our School District has been instrumental in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Kwakwaka'wakw culture among our students. These programs provide a unique opportunity for students to learn directly from Elders and Knowledge Keepers who possess a wealth of knowledge and wisdom passed down through generations.

Through storytelling, traditional teachings, and hands-on activities, the Elders guide our students in exploring the rich heritage of the Kwakwaka'wakw people. They share stories of their ancestors, their connection to the land, sea, sky, self, and the significance of their cultural practices. By immersing themselves in these teachings, our students gain a profound understanding of the values, traditions, and spirituality that form the foundation of the Kwakwaka'wakw culture.

Furthermore, the Role Model programs play a crucial role in inspiring our students to embrace their own cultural identities and to respect and celebrate the diversity within our community. Indigenous role models, who have achieved success in various fields,



serve as mentors and guides for our students. They demonstrate the importance of perseverance, resilience, and cultural pride, encouraging our students to pursue their dreams while staying connected to their roots.

In addition to these programs, our School District actively participates in various cultural events organized by the Kwakwaka'wakw communities. These events provide a platform for students to showcase their learning, talents, and creativity. Whether it's through traditional dance performances, art exhibitions, or athletic competitions, our students actively engage with the cultural fabric of the Kwakwaka'wakw people, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

As a School District, we recognize our responsibility to work towards Reconciliation. We understand that acknowledging and addressing the historical injustices faced by Indigenous peoples is essential for healing and building stronger relationships. By providing opportunities for our students to learn about and engage with the Kwakwaka'wakw culture, we are taking a step towards fostering understanding, empathy, and respect.

Through our commitment to Reconciliation, we aim to create an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment where all students feel valued and empowered. By embracing the teachings of the Kwakwaka'wakw Knowledge Keepers and the guidance of Indigenous role models, we are nurturing a generation of compassionate and culturally aware individuals who will contribute positively to our society and continue to honor and preserve the Kwakwaka'wakw culture for generations to come.

Our School District is situated in a rural area where opportunities to experience nature and place-based learning abound. All of our schools have a focus on place-based learning and include field trips as a regular component of creating engaging learning experiences. In addition, our Forestry Academy offers students in grades 10-12 throughout the District the opportunity to explore the local area through a lens of industry, conservation, and traditional ecological knowledge.

Students with diverse abilities are supported through District and School-Based Inclusive Education Programs. Our leadership team and staff are very committed to providing a positive educational environment that fosters each child's learning in an accessible and inclusive environment.

School District 85 elects a Board of seven trustees who establish policies and direction of SD 85. Board meetings occur the second Monday of every month. On Board Meeting days, trustees visit schools prior to the meeting on scheduled visits to tour the schools, meet students, and hear presentations from students, staff, and school leaders.

## **b. Message from the Superintendent**

Gilakas'la,

School District 85, Vancouver Island North is excited to share and support our newly developed School District Accessibility Plan. As we embark on this journey of making all



aspects of education equally accessible, we recognize that this initial Plan must be a living, breathing document, open to changes and adaptations as we learn and grow together. Many of our community members face daily challenges, both seen and unseen. As a district, we must continue to work towards identifying and recognizing these challenges in our efforts to provide equitable access to opportunities for growth, learning and engagement. I invite you to join us on this path of inclusion, as a commitment to accessibility is a shared responsibility that requires the collaboration of all community members.

### c. 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 Accessibility 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 because of their disability. This includes physical/environmental, attitudinal, information, communications, policy or practice, and technological barriers. Types of barriers include:

**Physical/Environmental Barrier:** A barrier resulting from building design, smells/sounds, lighting, the area adjacent to the building, shape of rooms, the size of doorways, etc.

**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.

**Communication Barrier:** A barrier that arises from difficulties receiving information in person, by telephone or online, interacting with teachers, peers, receptionists or other staff, and difficulties receiving training.

**Information Barrier:** A barrier that arises from inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, and so on.

**Policy or Practice Barrier:** Rules, regulations and protocols that prevent a person from performing their job satisfactorily or participating in society. This includes policy, practice, and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.

**Technological Barrier:** Barriers resulting from computers, photocopiers, 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, which may be permanent, temporary or episodic.

## 2. Framework Guiding our Work

SD 85's Accessibility Plan builds on global, national, provincial, and school district specific actions to promote and support accessibility.

### a. 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. The United Nations has been instrumental in leading education on the importance of recognizing disability as a global health issue. 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 10 and described the CPRD 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."

### b. Canadian Context and Legislation – Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Canada-wide, around one in five people had some form of disability in 2017. Nationally, Canadian accessibility legislation started in 1985 where disability was included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and in 1986, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) 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. PWDs 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 PWDs.

### c. BC Context and Legislation - Accessible BC Act

The Accessible British Columbia Act was 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 in 2022. These regulations identify schools as accessible organizations, and school districts and independent schools are 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.

### d. Principles of the Accessible BC 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.

#### **e. Our Commitment to Accessibility**

Accessibility refers to the degree of ease with which people with disabilities can use and enjoy something such as a device, service, or place. SD 85 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. We are 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:

- Engage with staff, community members and people with disabilities in the development and review of its accessibility plan, and to ensure that this consultation and the plan itself is culturally sensitive and supportive.
- Provide training for all staff to understand what accessibility encompasses, and how to identify barriers to accessibility in our District.
- Ensure that our school board policies and procedures align with the principles of accessibility.
- Improve access to facilities, policies, programs, practices, and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and community members.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities in our school community.

#### **f. Our Approach**

In SD 85, we believe 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 our school community. Our approach is grounded in the core provincial principles of accessibility, including adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, self-determination and universal design.

In the spring of 2023, the Accessibility Working Group met to discuss the vision and direction for our accessibility plan. Working with BCCAISE and Untapped Accessibility, we drafted a plan to begin our work in identifying and addressing barriers. This plan will be further developed as we expand our Accessibility Committee in the fall of 2023 and seek input from our school community. We recognize that in order to have authentic input from community, it is vital to build trusting relationships and provide time for meaningful conversations. We anticipate that this will occur over the course of the next three years as we further develop and refine our Accessibility Plan.



### 3. About our Committee

#### a. 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 seeking input from the whole community. The Accessibility Committee also advises Senior Administration, and in turn, the Board of School Trustees, on strategies to reduce social, physical, sensory and other barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all aspects of school community life.

#### b. 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 persons with disabilities (PWD), or individuals who support or are from organizations that support PWDs;
- At least one member is an Indigenous person; and
- Members reflect the diversity of persons in B.C.
- A call-out is planned for applications to the Accessibility Committee for the fall of 2023. The intent is to grow the committee beyond the Accessibility Committee Working Group who have begun the initial work of drafting a plan to determine direction.

#### c. Accessibility Committee Membership

The following Accessibility Working Group Committee members look forward to working with the expanded Accessibility Advising Committee in the 2023-24 school year:

- Christina MacDonald, Superintendent, SD 85
- Irene Isaac, District Principal, Indigenous Programs, SD 85
- Rena Sweeney, Assistant Superintendent, SD 85 (portfolio includes Student Supports and Inclusive Education)



## 4. Our Consultation Process

### a. Barrier Identification Methodologies

It is intended that the Accessibility Committee will utilize the following methods to identify barriers:

- Audit of policies and practices - A review of current policies and practices that promote accessibility and inclusion will be conducted by key staff members. Completion date: Late Spring 2024  
  
Feedback and suggested changes to policy will be presented to the Board at the December Policy Meeting.
- Physical Accessibility Audit - An assessment for our school's physical accessibility will be developed and the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee at each site will conduct the physical accessibility audit in each of our schools and worksites. Completion Date: Late Spring 2024
- District Accessibility Feedback Tool - A feedback tool has been developed and posted to the district website. Information about the purpose and use of the tool will be shared with district and school stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, outside professionals and parents/guardians) through school and district communications in early September.
- Accessibility Committee - The Accessibility Committee will review the input and feedback from the survey, assessment, and feedback tool. Members will collaborate to suggest priority areas to target in our work toward increasing accessibility. This will be shared with the Board for their approval.

## 5. How to Give Feedback

### a. Feedback Mechanism Development

School District 85 has developed an online feedback tool that includes a series of questions designed to collect information on accessibility experiences of students, staff and members of the school district community. The tool is posted to the main page of the district website and an information announcement about the tool will be provided to students, staff and parents/guardians in early September. 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).



## b. Report an Accessibility Barrier



# SD85 Accessibility Feedback

Members of the public that interact with School District 85 Vancouver Island North can use this form to provide feedback on accessibility within our organization. To find out more about the Accessible BC Act see our page at <https://www.sd85.bc.ca/accessibility>

Use this form to:

- Describe experiences and how they impacted you
- Make recommendations for how barriers can be removed
- Tell us about something that has improved accessibility in School District 85

All of the questions in this form are optional. You can share as much or as little as you want.

The relevant departments and school leaders will read the information you provide. We will make every effort to protect privacy but can't guarantee total anonymity if you include personal information.

### 1. What is your role?

- I am describing a barrier that I experienced.
- I am describing a barrier that someone else experienced.

### 2. Please provide the date the barrier was experienced.

Enter your answer

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3. Please select the location the barrier was experienced.

- A.J. Elliott Elementary
- Alert Bay Elementary
- Cheslakees Elementary
- Eagle View Elementary
- Eke Me-Xi Learning Centre
- Fort Rupert Elementary
- North Island Secondary
- Port Hardy Secondary
- Sea View Elementary / Jr Secondary
- Sunset Elementary
- Other (please provide location details in #5)

4. What were you or someone you know trying to access?

Enter your answer

5. Accessibility Barrier Details (be as specific as possible).

Enter your answer

6. What recommendations do you have for School District 85 to improve accessibility and remove barriers?

Enter your answer



7. Do you have a file you would like to provide (video, voice recording, photos)?

Please send file to [chunt@sd85.bc.ca](mailto:chunt@sd85.bc.ca) with "Accessibility Feedback" in the subject line.

Yes

No

8. Optional: If you wish to provide your contact information, please do so here.

Enter your answer



<https://forms.office.com/r/npXQV87Wwb>

## 6. Accessibility Accomplishments and Barriers

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform SD 85's programs, policies, practices, and services to reduce and minimize barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. We strive to create an environment that is accessible and to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

### a. Key Discussion Themes - Accessibility Accomplishments

Feedback from the school community will assist in planning to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities, as well as to enhance and extend the measures already in place which are identified as effective.

### b. Key Discussion Themes - Accessibility Barriers

Feedback from the school community will assist in planning to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.



## 7. Our Three-Year Plan

### a. Overview

This Accessibility Plan outlines the measures that School District 85 will take to identify barriers to inclusion and full participation of individuals with disabilities in our school district community. Any measures planned to address these barriers will be based on the Accessibility Principles of adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, self determination, and universal design, as set out in the Accessible B.C. Act. These measures will become part of the Accessibility Plan once it has moved through the stage of initial feedback collection. It is anticipated that SD 85's Accessibility Plan will be a living document which will be updated and refined over the next three years.

### b. Accessibility Priorities

Based on the feedback gathered from students, staff, parents/guardians, and other school community members, and the Physical and Architectural Environment Audit, the Accessibility Committee will identify areas as the top priority for improving accessibility in the school district community. These priorities will become part of the Accessibility Plan once it has moved through the stage of initial feedback collection.

In these initial stages of the Accessibility Plan, it is important that all staff have a clear understanding of types of barriers and accessibility. Staff training on accessibility issues will be first offered to Administrators in the fall of 2023, with the understanding that they will ensure this training is subsequently provided to their staff during staff meetings.

## 8. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Planning Committee will meet three times in a school year to review progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's implementation and plan for increased accessibility throughout the school. The committee will ensure the following steps are taken regarding the Three-Year Accessibility Plan:

- Prepare an annual status report on the progress of the measures taken to implement the plan.
- Review and update the Three-Year Accessibility Plan every three years in consultation with persons with disabilities and other relevant community members.

## 9. How to Give Us Feedback

In addition to the public availability of the plan, School District 85 will continue to post an annual status report on the progress of the Three-Year Accessibility Plan on the district website. Accessible formats of the plan will be made available upon request.

Questions, comments or feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan may be directed to:

Catrina Hunt, Secretary, Student Services (250) 949-6618 ext 2223 [chunt@sd85.bc.ca](mailto:chunt@sd85.bc.ca)



## 10. Appendices

- Appendix A: About Disability
- Appendix B: Suggested References & Resources





## Appendices

### Appendix A: About Disability

*Information from Untapped Accessibility as provided to BCCAISE.*

#### 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).

The medical model focuses on deficiencies, symptoms and treatments. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 1976 definition for disability, for example, is "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Medical model definitions promote the idea that disability is a deviation from the norm. Many people with disabilities are troubled by definitions that regard disability as abnormal, preferring instead to portray disability as commonplace, natural, and in fact, inevitable. As people age, they experience gradual declines in visual acuity, auditory sensitivity, range of motion, bodily strength and mental powers. Significant functional limitations affect almost half of people between the ages of 55 and 79, and over 70% of people over 80 (World Health Organization (WHO) report titled "Ageing and health", 2015). Beyond middle age, disability is the norm. The environmental model explains disability in relation to social and physical contexts. In this view, the environment, not an individual's medical condition, causes disability. For example, during an electrical blackout, a person who is completely blind can effortlessly navigate around the home, hammer nails, and, if a Braille user, read a novel. A sighted person would be unable to perform these tasks easily, if at all. In this example, the environment disables the sighted person.

The environmental model emphasizes that people with disabilities are capable individuals, and it is the barriers in the built and human environments, not their medical conditions, that create disability. Disability occurs when the world is designed only for a certain way of living, without considering the natural variation among human beings. Barriers are created by humans, and modifying how we live, the tools we use, and our understanding of the proper way to do things can eliminate or minimize design problems that cause barriers. Systematic barriers can be eliminated by modifying policies, plans, and processes. Attitudes that cause barriers can be addressed through disability awareness, respect, and positive interactions with people with disabilities.



## 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 been given permission.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you 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 is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- 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 assistive devices, including wheelchairs.
- Provide the person with information about accessible features of the immediate 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 disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and 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 use augmentative communication systems such as Signed English and Picture Exchange System.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs 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 best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Be courteous and patient and the person will let you know how 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 consideration you have for everyone else.



- Be confident and reassuring and listen to persons with a mental health disability 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 them 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 deaf-blind:

- 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.

## ACCESSIBILITY PLAN



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



## Appendix B: Suggested References/Resources

### Global, Canadian and Local Accessibility Context and Legislation

- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Canada Ratifies UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)
- [British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#)
- [Accessible British Columbia Act](#)
- [BC Accessibility Legislation Plan Language Summary](#)

### Accessibility Planning Resources for Schools and School Boards

- [BC Accessibility Hub](#)
- [Universal Design](#)
- [Special Education Technology BC \(SET BC\)](#)
- [Accessible Resource Centre - BC](#)
- [Standards Council of Canada](#)
- [B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design](#)
- [A Guide to Creating Accessible Play Spaces](#) (Rick Hansen Foundation)
- [Canadian National Institute for the Blind \(CNIB\)](#)
- [Canadian Hard of Hearing Association](#)
- [Canadian Hearing Services](#)
- [Auditory Outreach Provincial Resource Program](#)
- [Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program \(Complex Needs\)](#)
- [Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada](#)
- [Learning Disabilities Association of Canada](#)
- [Brain Injury Canada](#)
- [Spinal Cord Injury Canada](#)
- [Tourette Canada](#)
- [Kelty Mental Health \(BC Children's Hospital\)](#)
- [Gifted Children's Association of BC](#)