

Policy Name: **Accessible Customer Service**
Policy Number: CR – 0080
Section: Client Relations



Approved by Executive Director: January 9, 2013			
Created: December 19, 2012	Revised	Review Cycle: 3 years	Next Review: January 2016

PURPOSE: To ensure that programs and services offered by Neighbourhood Link Support Services are provided in a manner that respects the independence and dignity of persons with disabilities, and that ensures integration and equal opportunity.

SCOPE: This policy applies to everyone who deals with members of the public or other third parties on behalf of Neighbourhood Link Support Services, whether the person does so as an employee, placement student, volunteer or otherwise. The word “employee” is used as the general term.

DEFINITIONS:

Disability:

- a) Any degree or combination 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, brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impairment, deafness or hearing impairment, loss of speech or impediment, or physical reliance on a service animal, support person or assistive appliance or device.
- b) A condition of mental impairment, disorder or developmental disability.
- c) A learning disability or dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language.
- d) An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

Accessible: capable of being entered or reached, approachable; easy to get at; capable of being obtained; able to be understood or utilized.

Assistive Device: a device used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services of persons or organizations covered by the Customer Service Standard, such as communication aids, personal mobility aids and medical aids.

Dignity: respecting and treating every person including persons with a disability as valued individuals and as deserving of effective and full service as any other client.

Independence: freedom from control or influence of others; freedom to make choices.

Integration: the act of combining parts to make a unified whole, leveling barriers to association, creating equal opportunity regardless of ability, and the development of a culture that draws on diversity, rather than merely bringing a minority into the majority culture.

Service Animals: animals that are used to assist a person with a disability if and when;



- a) it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability; or
- b) the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that he/she requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability; or
- c) the person provides a valid identification card or training certificate from a recognized service animal training school.

Support Person: an individual hired or chosen by a person with a disability to accompany them and to provide assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or with obtaining access to goods or services.

POLICY:

Neighbourhood Link Support Services is committed to excellence in serving clients including people with disabilities, and will take all reasonable care to ensure that policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the following principles:

- a) Programs and services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.
- b) The provision of programs and services to people with or without disabilities will be integrated unless an alternative measure is necessary to enable a person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the agency's programs or services.
- c) People with disabilities will be given opportunities equal to those available to people without disabilities to obtain, use or benefit from programs or services.
- d) To ensure the best possible client service, the agency encourages open two-way communication and expects people with disabilities to communicate their needs for accommodation or assistance, and to work with employees to find mutually agreeable solutions.

PROCEDURES:

1. Communication:

Neighbourhood Link is committed to communicating with persons with disabilities in ways that take their disability into consideration.

- a) Employees are trained in how to communicate with people with disabilities, incorporating the principles of dignity, independence and equality.
- b) Employees work with people with disabilities to determine how to best communicate with them.
- c) People with disabilities are offered alternative communication formats that meet their needs as promptly as possible, (i.e., documents provided in large print; information provided verbally; providing such assistive devices as are available, such as magnifying glasses)
- d) In the event that a planned temporary service disruption occurs that would limit a person with a disability from gaining access to agency programs or services, Neighbourhood Link will communicate to clients directly when possible, and through messages posted on the agency web site and/or notices posted at the affected site. Notices will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, alternate means of accessing services if applicable, and a description of the alternative services.



If an unexpected disruption occurs, Neighbourhood Link will make efforts to accommodate people with disabilities by providing programs and services at a different time, or at a different site, or through such other alternatives as are appropriate. Notices will be posted as above.

2. Use of Assistive Devices, Service Animals and Support Persons

Neighbourhood Link will ensure that the access and benefit of programs or services are not compromised for people with disabilities who require assistive devices, or who are accompanied by a service animal or support person.

Assistive Devices

Persons with disabilities shall be permitted to use their own assistive devices, when necessary, to access agency programs and services. Exceptions may occur in situations where the agency has determined that the assistive device may pose a risk to the health and safety of others on the premises. In these situations, if a person with a disability is hindered from accessing programs or services, Neighbourhood Link will accommodate the client by providing an alternative where possible.

Employees are to avoid touching an assistive device without the permission of the user.

It is the responsibility of the person with a disability to ensure that his or her assistive device is operated in a safe and controlled manner at all times.

Service Animals

Service animals, such as, but not limited to Canine Vision Guides, Hearing Ear Dog Guides, Seizure Response Dog Guides, and other certified service animals are welcomed in Neighbourhood Link facilities that are open to the public, and where allowed by law. Exceptions may occur in situations where the agency has determined that the service animal may pose a risk to the health and safety of others on the premises. In the rare case where a service animal is to be denied access to a facility or area, other accommodations may be offered, such as delivery of programs or services at an alternate time or location.

Where it is not readily apparent that an animal is a service animal, employees seek clarification from the owner before advising him/her that pets are not permitted at the site.

It is the responsibility of the owner/user to attend to the needs of the service animal while on agency premises. Employees are not to pet, talk to, or feed service animals.

Support Persons

Neighbourhood Link welcomes clients with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. Neighbourhood Link will accept a client's identification of a companion as a support person.

Employees address the person with the disability directly. If confidential information is to be shared or requested, employees must obtain the permission of the client, and there may be circumstances when a consent form or confidentiality agreement will have to be signed by one or both parties.

Neighbourhood Link holds meetings, events, and workshops. For such events, support persons shall be permitted entry to all facilities and meeting rooms that are open to the public, except when there are fees applied by a third party and the support person was not pre-registered and/or no vacancy exists.



If admission to an event is permitted and fees are payable to a third party, payment of entrance fees and/or service costs are the responsibility of the support person.

If admission to an event is permitted and fees are payable to Neighbourhood Link, the support person may attend at no cost for admission. Cost for other services (i.e., food, etc.) will be the responsibility of the support person.

3. Training

Neighbourhood Link provides training to employees and volunteers, which meets the requirements of the Access for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Training is provided as part of new employee and volunteer orientation and on an ongoing basis to ensure that employees stay current with any policy or procedural changes as it relates to the AODA Customer Service Standard. Training records are kept by the Human Resources Manager.

4. Feedback

Neighbourhood Link welcomes feedback in order to continue to improve the programs and services we offer. Feedback can be made in person, by telephone, through our website, by mail or by email. Comments may be made anonymously, although, for effective communication and resolution of issues contact information is necessary. It is recommended that feedback be in written form when possible. Feedback will be directed to the Human Resources Manager unless otherwise addressed.

Feedback will be handled in accordance with the agency's client feedback and complaints process.

5. Communication of Policy

This policy is available to employees online and to the public on our website. Upon request and within a reasonable amount of time, Neighbourhood Link will provide policy and procedure documents in print or other available formats.

REFERENCES:

Ontario Human Rights Code	
Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA), 2001	
Accessibility of Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005	
Client Feedback and Complaints Process	CR-0020
Policy Development and Communication	AD-0060