POLICY:	AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities) Customer Service	CREATED:	January, 2024
SECTION:	Section III- Conduct and Conditions	APPROVAL:	Executive Director

AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities) Customer Service

Overview

The goal of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, is to make Ontario accessible to people with disabilities by 2025. The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service have been created to ensure that goods and services are accessible to all Ontarians and the persons with disabilities are treated with respect, dignity, and equality.

Related Policy Statement

The YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin, in keeping with its Mission Statement, shall make every effort to ensure that its policies, procedures and practices adhere to the guiding principles established in the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service; Ontario Regulation 429/07.

The policy applies to all YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin employees, volunteers, or agents who deal with the public or other third parties. The YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin is committed to ensuring that persons with disabilities can access our goods and services.

Definitions

Any person or organization that provides goods or services on behalf of the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin. This includes but may not be limited to subcontractors.

Disability Refers to:

- 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 coordination, blindness or visual impairment, deafness or hearing impairment (inclusive of partial, total or fluctuating hearing loss), muteness or speech impairment, or physical reliance on a dog guide or other animal or sighted guide for persons with visual impairment or total blindness or use of a wheelchair or other remedial or assistive device ; A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;

- A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language, a mental disorder.
- 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").

Dog Guide:

Means a dog trained as a guide for a person with visual impairment or total blindness and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations (*Blind Persons Rights Act 1990* s (1)).

Service Animal: Means an animal acting as a service animal for a person with a disability:

- If it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to their disability; or
- If the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reason relating to the disability; or
- If the person provides a valid identification card or training certificate from a recognized service animal training school.

Support Person:

Means, in relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies them to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

User:

An individual who uses a service animal or dog guide, also handler. YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin service users who use a service animal may be referred to as "users" or "handlers" in this policy.

Procedure Details

1. **Communications**
    a. When communicating with a person with a disability, YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin employees, volunteers, and agents will communicate in a manner that considers the person's disability and takes reasonable efforts to ensure that the person with a disability understands the content of its communication.
    b. Reasonable efforts shall be made to ensure that communication in all formats (e.g.

verbal, written, or electronic) is presented in a manner that is accessible. Special requests regarding communication formats shall be accepted, subject to review by the Executive Director.

Use of Assistive Devices

a. The YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin will allow persons with disabilities to use their own personal assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from the services offered by the YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin.
b. Should a person with a disability be unable to access the YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin's services using their own personal assistive device every reasonable attempt will be made to:
    i. Determine if service is inaccessible, based upon individual requirements.
    ii. Assess service delivery and potential service options to meet the needs ofthe individual.
c. Notify the person with a disability of alternative service and how they can access the service, temporarily or on a permanent.

Use of Service Animals

a. Persons with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal will be permitted to enter YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin premises with the animal and keep the animal with them in areas where the public or other third parties are allowed unless the animal is excluded by law.
b. Service animals may be prohibited from entering certain areas for health and Safety reasons or due to law. Ontario Regulation 562 under the health Protection and Promotion Act states that animals are not allowed in places where food is manufactured, prepared, processed, handled, served, displayed, stored, sold, or offered for sale. It does make an exception for service dogs to allow them to go where food is normally served, sold, or offered for sale. Other types of service animals are not included in this exemption. Please note, some municipalities exclude certain animals from their jurisdiction. Depending on the specifics of the by-law, this may give reason for the YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin to exclude certain service animals from its premises.
c. Identifying Service Animals - Service animals may be used to describe any animal that

assists a person with a disability. They provide a wide range of assistance including but not limited to, guiding a person with a visual impairment or total blindness, alerting a person who has a hearing impairment or who is deaf to certain sounds, opening doors and retrieving items for persons with mobility disabilities, emotional support for persons with mental illness, and many other forms of assistance.

Service animals may be identified by any one of the following methods:

I. The animal may be wearing a service animal vest, harness, or saddle packs; The animal may be observed providing assistance.
II. The person may have a letter from a physician or nurse stating that they require the animal for reasons related to a disability.
III. The person may show a valid identification card or training certificate from a
IV. recognized service animal training school.

d. The care and control of service animals is the responsibility of the user. The YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin is aware that service animals are usually well- trained and well-behaved. In the unlikely event that this is not the case, service animals may be removed from YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin premises after discussion with the user for any one of the following reasons:
   I. Disruptive or aggressive behavior, such as growling or other signs of threatening or aggressive behavior. Please note, if the dog guide in this case is a seizure response dog, this is an expected response from the animal when assisting the person with a disability.
   II. Causing damage, including causing damage to any person or property, poor health, such as a contagious disease where the animal risks spreading the disease to others.

e. In situations where a person who requires a service animal may be in contact with a person who is allergic to or fearful of animals, the YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin will make reasonable attempts to accommodate both persons while respecting their needs.

Use of Support Persons

a. A support person will be permitted access to all public areas in facilities owned and/or operated by the YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin.

b. A support person is required to abide by the same rules and regulations as any other person on the premises.
c. A support person will not be required to pay admission/fees for services provided to a person with a disability unless they are also a recipient of the service. Charges may apply in the case of covering costs of materials used or catering expenses.
d. A support person will be expected to attend to the needs of the person with a disability at all times during the use of YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin programs and facilities.
e. When addressing a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person, employees and volunteers will communicate directly with the person with a disability. If confidential/personal information is being exchanged and the person with a disability request to discuss the information in private, the request will be accommodated, and the support person asked to wait in another area.

Notice of Temporary Disruption

a. On occasion, some of the services and facilities usually used by persons with disabilities to access YWCA goods and services may not be available due to temporary disruptions. In the event of a temporary disruption, YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin will provide a notice of the goods/services that are temporarily unavailable. Notice will be provided within a reasonable timeframe of an unplanned disruption and will be provided in advance when disruptions are planned.
b. Notices will contain the following information:
    iii. The reason for the disruption.
    iv. Its expected duration.
    v. Alternative facilities or services if they exist.
c. Notices will be placed in a conspicuous place at the YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin premise in a format that considers the types of disabilities of persons who use the disrupted service and posted on the YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin website and/or social media sites.

Training

a. The YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin will ensure appropriate levels of training to all employees, volunteers, agents, and others who interact with the public on behalf of YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin as well as those who are involved in the development and approval of policies, practices and procedures dealing with the provision of goods

and services to the public or other third parties. Training will be provided in a manner that is consistent with the requirements of Ontario 429/ 0 7.

b. Training will include the following topics:
    vi. The purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.
    vii. The requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service.
    viii. How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities.
c. How to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person.
d. How to use the assistive devices available at YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin premises and otherwise made available by the YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin for persons with disabilities; What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin goods and services.
e. The YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin's policies, practices and procedures relating to the provision of goods and services to the public and other third parties.

Records of Training

Records of training will be kept that include the dates on which training occurred, and the number of people trained.

Complaint and Feedback Process

a. The YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin will make information about its feedback and complaints process readily available to the public (i.e. printed materials, website). feedback or complaints about the delivery of goods and services from persons with disabilities may be given in person, by telephone, in writing, electronically or through other methods.
b. Accessibility complaints received from persons with disabilities will be recorded and reviewed by the YWCA St. Thomas - Elgin Senior Management Team. Information about the feedback and complaints process and, where applicable, of the progress and outcome of a person's particular situation will be provided to the complainant in an accessible format.

Accountability

The AODA Customer Service Policy will serve as the guiding policy for all YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin programs, staff, volunteers, and agents. Given the diversity of goods and services offered by YWCA St. Thomas- Elgin, as well as the service userele, each program will be expected to develop and implement specific procedures as needed for their own program requirements.

References:

- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) and Ontario Regulation 429/07
- Canadian Red Cross City of St. Thomas
- Guide to the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Ontario Regulation 429/07 under
- The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), Ministry of Community and Services and Social Services