

# Karlen Communications

## Disability Awareness Training Scenarios



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## Introduction

The following activities involve preplanning, strategizing, and information gathering to ensure full access and “enjoyment” of the activity.

The goals and objectives of these simulations are to encourage people to think about the barriers they do not see. Questions are provided to start the discussion and it is not necessary to actually perform the tasks.

There is an ongoing conversation about the usefulness of simulations as people without disabilities are, well, without disabilities and are only experiencing a short time dealing with the stereotypes, stigmas and barriers. There is also the element of negative reinforcement if someone has a phobia or fear and is forced to participate in an activity that confronts that fear.

This series of scenarios is designed to help people think about universal design, how many barriers exist in our communities and to start a discussion and identification of barriers that those of us with disabilities may not be aware of because we have developed strategies for living our lives within the constraints of an environment that presents us with barriers and obstacles on a daily basis. For example, we may go to the store or school and not know that today they are digging up the sidewalk and we can't get into the building. Specialized transportation has left and we aren't to be picked up for hours. What do we do? This is part of our everyday experience.

Customer service in terms of being aware of the obstacles and barriers is an integral part of our daily experience.

How do we know what is in the cafeteria cases? How do we know when to cross roads? What do we do if the lights don't give us enough time to cross roads? Can we really trust the sales clerk who tells us that the outfit looks stunning on us? That the colour flatters us or at least doesn't make us look goofy? How can we apply for a job if we have to ask if the interview or workplace is accessible? By law, we don't have to identify that we have a disability unless we need accommodation and an employer cannot ask; but by needing basic information on the accessibility of the position and environment, we've “raised the flag.”

This “is” another layer of stress we build into our daily activities.

It is hoped that these scenarios will assist in understanding what types of information those of us with disabilities need and when. The intention is not to focus on the negative, but allow brainstorming of solutions and assistance to come forward and be a part of how we interact with each other.

As you work through these scenarios, think of other instances where barriers might exist and good customer service training would be useful. Above all, enjoy and have fun!

## Scenario 1 – Grocery Shopping

Whether you are blind or visually disabled, grocery shopping, or shopping of any kind can be a daunting task. To work through this task, you might want to use special glasses designed to simulate a visual disability or use a blindfold to enhance the experience.



Figure 1 Photo of produce section in a grocery store.

If you are going on-site, take a friend to ensure your safety.

1. How will you create your grocery/shopping list and be able to access it while shopping?
2. How will you determine where the items you need are in the store?
3. How will you determine what you are looking at to ensure that you are buying what you want and the brand you want?
4. How will you get to the store location?
5. How will you locate the entrance to the store?
6. How will you locate the cart area and get a grocery cart?
7. How will you know where the shelves and produce bunkers are?
  - a. How will you know what produce is in front of you?
  - b. How will you determine which bag of fruit or vegetables is the one you want/freshest?
  - c. How will you know the prices of the produce?

- d. How will you weigh your produce and figure out the cost for the amount you want?
  - e. How will you make sure you buy only Ontario grown produce, or organic produce?
  - f. How will you ensure that you don't buy over ripe produce?
8. If the store has assistance for people with disabilities (someone will accompany you through the store and help you find things and manage the cart.) how do you locate the customer service kiosk to get this assistance?
- a. What are the qualities you will need in this person to help you grocery shop? Do you require confidence in their ability to find what you want, not talk you into another brand, be able to read any label information, be patient and not hurry you through your shopping?
9. How will you determine the price of what you are buying and compare pricing?
10. How will you get information on calories, protein, fats, and other ingredients?
11. How will you access the preparation instructions to see if this is something you can or want to do?
12. How will you find the items you want in the frozen food aisles?
- a. How will you know what the prices are for these items?
13. How will you find the dairy products you want, access the "best before dates" of these items (or any other item with a "best before date")?
14. How will you know what is on sale? Were you able to access online flyers?
15. How do you ensure that at the checkout, the correct prices are entered into the cash register?
16. How do you access the credit card/debit card transactions?
17. How do you review your bill to ensure that everything is correct?
18. How do you pack your own groceries (locating them on the checkout and organizing them in your bags?
19. Were you able to access the self-checkout?)
20. How will you navigate back out of the store and to the either the public transit stop or the area to be picked up by specialized transportation?
- a. Are you able to carry everything you purchased?
  - b. What are some of the logistical issues?

Choose a store location and make the necessary arrangements to accomplish the task. This does involved a field trip. Write a detailed report on your experiences.

1. Were you able to find a barcode reader that is accessible?
2. Does the barcode reader work in the store you chose?
3. How did you solve the problem of the credit/debit transactions?
4. How would you work through any of these barriers at a store such as Costco?
  - a. Do you think there would be a difference in strategy?

These are only a few things to consider when working through this scenario. Identify any considerations you found that were not identified in this scenario.

## **Additional Awareness activities**

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone using a wheelchair.
  - a. How will you reach the items you want?
  - b. How many groceries will you be able to manage while using your wheelchair?
2. Someone using a walker.
3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

## **Considerations**

As someone with a visual disability I find it difficult to read many of the items I might need on a label. As a result, if I can't use adaptive technology such as a magnifier to read the best before date, the ingredients or cooking instructions, I often will not get the item rationalizing that "I don't really need this."

I also tend not to browse stores by going up and down the aisles. Since I can't read a lot of the information, it just wastes time. I tend to know where things are in the store that I buy and only go to those places. If the store is redesigned, I find a clerk and go down my list of items I want asking where the new location is. Often I will get a hand wave in a general direction which I can't see except as a movement of the person I'm talking to. Often the numbers of aisles are either too small or are located high in the air over the middle of the aisle.

I hate those obstacles in the middle of the aisle that are separate promotions. I often bump into them or find I have to move them out of my way to get at what I want but this is not a problem specific to those of us with disabilities who cannot see them or who use a wheelchair or walker in a crowded aisle.

Some grocery stores have clerks that will assist you in getting what you want. Sometimes I shop with a friend or neighbours but it is not “their job” to read labels to me. I often feel that I impose or buy new things because I’m with someone who sees them and talks to me about a product. I don’t really want to elevate the stress level by browsing the frozen food lockers or dairy counters. Delicatessen counters are the same. I have no clue what I’m looking at, what the prices are or whether it looks edible or not. I have to trust staff on this.

Another problem is reading the price on the bottom shelves. You’ll often see me on my hands and knees, white cane extended, magnifier in hand trying to read a price on an item on the bottom shelf. Imagine how close to the floor I have to get in order to see the price...and what contortion my head and neck must endure to do so!

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using wheelchairs, are deaf or hard of hearing or who use mobility aids.

## Scenario 2: Taking a trip

In this scenario, you will plan a trip to Toronto, go to the Eaton Centre, the Apple Store and get information about the accessibility tools on an iPad. As an alternative or additional task, you can plan to go to Yorkdale Mall, the Microsoft Store and get information on using the accessibility features of a Surface or any other Windows based tablet

If you are going on-site, take a friend to ensure your safety.



Figure 2 Photo of train going along tracks.

In this scenario you have a visual disability.

1. What type of accessibility tools are available for the iPad or Windows based tablets?
2. What operating system version will you need on the Windows tablets to be able to load your own accessibility tools such as screen magnification or screen reading?
3. Before you leave the house, this requires a bit of research on exactly what tools are available so you can ask specific questions to the sales staff.

4. How will you get from your house to the train station?
5. Once you get to the train station, how will you board the right train?
6. How helpful is the staff at the train station?
7. Does the train staff understand any needs you might have?
8. Once the train arrives in Toronto, how do you get from the train platform to the subway?
9. Is there an accessible way/ramp into the subway? Can you locate the stairs easily and navigate them?
10. Once you are in the subway, where can you find the ticket counter?
11. Can you easily find out how much a fare is?
12. Did you research this on the TTC website before you left the house?
13. Are you able to access the credit/debit transaction device?
14. Can you locate the entry into the subway?
15. Can you identify your stop? (Which stop is best to get off?)
16. Can you find your way into the Eaton Centre?
17. Can you navigate to the second floor?
18. Can you locate the Apple store?
19. Once in the Apple Store, does sales staff know where to find the accessibility tools for an iPad?
20. Can sales staff demonstrate those accessibility tools?
21. Can you locate the accessibility tools and activate them to explore the accessibility of an iPad before purchasing it?
22. Can you access the credit/debit transaction device?
23. Can you review your receipt to review your purchase?
24. Can you find your way back to the subway?
25. Can you find your way back to the train station?
26. Can you find the correct gate for your train?
27. Note that for people with disabilities, there is pre-boarding, however we are often forgotten. Did you have to remind the train staff that you require pre-boarding?

28. Once back in Brantford, how did you get home?

Write up your findings in a report and share any new barriers you find for any disability you choose to explore.

## **Additional Awareness Activities**

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone who uses a wheelchair.
  - a. Are there elevators along your route?
  - b. Are they working on the day you want to travel?
  - c. How are you going to get on the train?
  - d. How are you going to access the devices in the stores?
2. Someone who uses a walker.
3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

## **Considerations**

I often use the train for travel and have for years. You get used to the quirks of train travel. For example, telling staff you need pre-boarding and then having them forget about you until everyone else is on the train. You really need to be proactive in “pushing” your way to the attention of the staff up until you are boarded on the train.

Now that we have seat assignments on VIA trains, I have no idea where my row or seat is. The staff is outside the train assisting passengers in locating the right car to enter and there is no staff in the car to help locate your seat. I end up walking a few feet and loudly asking anyone within hearing where I am. I lose count of the rows as I move through the car quickly so that I don't hold people up. Even if I am getting on the train at the start of its journey and the car is empty, staff is outside waiting for other passengers and I am on my own to fend for myself.

I've heard stories about people who get on a train to go somewhere assured that there is a lift at the other end only to find that there isn't. They are now on the train at their destination with no means of getting off the train with dignity and respect. Or people who get off the train at their destination only to find there is no elevator to the station and they are stuck on a track platform until someone can carry them down.

At one train station, none of the taxis will approach anyone with a visible disability to ask if they need a taxi. I've seen people who use guide dogs and white canes stand for half an

hour trying to find the taxi stand. Eventually I ask if I can help, but in the meantime, ten or fifteen taxis have come, waited to be flagged down and left the station empty.

I use the phone to buy my tickets so I know I have a seat. Online ticket purchases are not accessible. Finding a schedule online that is accessible is difficult and going through the payment process online is difficult as it is often a separate page that is also inaccessible. So the two options for ticket purchase is to either buy at the station or by phone.

With the airlines, even if you tell them you are blind and cannot use the online ticket purchase process, you are charged an additional amount. So you are being punished financially for having a disability.

When purchasing an airline ticket, the ticket and reservation information comes in one of two ways:

- Inaccessible PDF document.
- HTML that has so much advertising and other clutter on it that it takes a long time to actually find your reservation information and sometimes information is represented graphically and is not accessible.

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using wheelchairs, are deaf or hard of hearing or who use mobility aids.

### **Scenario 3: Moving about**

This scenario takes place in your local downtown area. As with the other scenarios, we'll begin with those of us who are blind or visually disabled.



Figure 3 Photo of people walking along a sidewalk in town.

If you are going on-site, take a friend to ensure your safety.

1. How do you get from your home to the downtown area of your community?

2. Is the purchasing of any transit tickets accessible?
3. Once you land downtown, how do you determine which direction you want to go?
4. Are there stoplights at an intersection?
5. How do you know when the light has changed?
6. What do you do at a crosswalk with no lights or crossing supports?
7. How many stores were you able to enter?
8. Did any store owners object to your guide dog? Did you ask them about their policy on service animals?
9. Do you know what the Charter of Rights and freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code says about the use of guide dogs or service animals?
10. Do you know what the municipal policy is on the use of guide dogs and service animals?
11. Were you able to read price tags and make decisions on products?
12. Were you able to use a barcode reader for any items?
13. Were you able to determine the colour of any clothing, bedding, linens and so forth?
14. Were staff helpful in assisting you with this information?
15. When it came to clothing, if you tried it on, did you feel the staff were truthful or did they want the sale?
16. Were you able to confirm the amount entered into the cash register?
17. Were you able to use the credit/debit device?
18. Were you able to review your receipt?
19. In a restaurant or coffee shop, were you able to read the menu, get a Braille or large print menu, or have the staff provide an overview of the menu items?
20. How was the food presented to you? (Where you told where everything was on the table and on your plate? Was this done seamlessly or with “fanfare”)?
21. How did you manage your purchases, if any, while managing your white cane or guide dog?
22. Were you able to get back home safely?

Write up your findings in a report and share any new barriers you find for any disability you choose to explore.

## **Additional awareness Activities**

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone who uses a wheelchair.
  - a. Is there enough time at lights to cross the street safely?
  - b. What do you do at crosswalks or intersections without lights?
  - c. How many stores are you able to access?
  - d. How many products in stores are you able to access?
  - e. What is your experience trying on clothing?
2. Someone who uses a walker.
3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

### **Considerations**

Where I live, there is a bylaw saying that you have to allow five feet of sidewalk space for pedestrians. You can put “stuff” out on the sidewalk in any configuration as long as you have the five feet width for pedestrians. This creates an obstacle course of board signs, produce, tables and chairs, plants for sale, and the usual assortment of planters, garbage bins and lamp posts.

Within the past year, stores have begun to put large planters on either side of the entrance to their stores which might seem to be a way to identify the store entrance. However, this creates “too much of the same thing” and a snake like configuration as you walk down the sidewalk. Consider that as you walk down the sidewalk in a straight line, you have large planters with small trees to your left appearing randomly at the store entrances and at the same time you have sidewalk board signs tented to your right near the store entrance but not necessarily directly opposite from it that you must keep track of and navigate without injury.

In an older community sidewalks might not be kept clear in winter and if they are, for some reason the snow gets piled at the corners. While living downtown near a fire hall and a busy street, winter was the time when the fire hall plowed its parking lot and piled the snow on the sidewalk blocking access to half the block and the crossing lights. One had to walk in the nearest lane of this major street through downtown in order to get to the lights to safely (?) cross the street. It became safer to pay the bus fare to go one stop, from just before the blocked sidewalk to just after it, than to risk bodily harm circumventing the large snow pile. And yes, this was a fire station!

I find the same think where I live now. The local library shovels its sidewalks but puts the snow on the sidewalk on either end of the sidewalk in front of the library, effectively preventing anyone from using the sidewalk on either side of the library.

In one town I lived in, audible signals were put in at the main intersection. They were great, you swiped your hand down the box and were told to wait, that you had successfully activate the audible signal. Some local restaurants complained and the useful, audible signal part was turned off. Now, as someone who can't see the light change, I am told to wait for the light to change by the audible signal buy have no way of knowing when the signal changes. Traffic at this intersection is not known for its patience or strict adherence to traffic signals.

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using wheelchairs, are deaf or hard of hearing or who use mobility aids.

## **Scenario 4: At work**

As with the other scenarios, this task begins with an awareness of those who are blind or visually disabled.

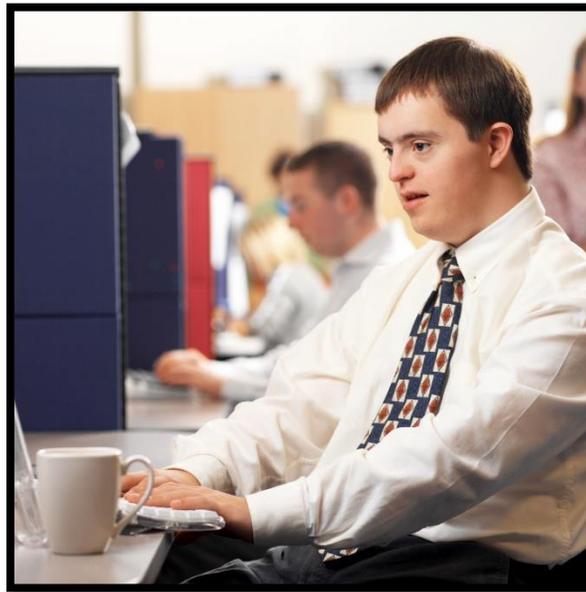


Figure 4 Photo of person with a disability at work.

If you are going on-site, take a friend to ensure your safety.

1. How are you going to get to work using public transit (this includes any use of specialized transportation.)
2. Once you exit public transit, how far do you need to walk to get to your office?

3. What changes in your current daily schedule will you need to make to ensure that you are at work on time each day?
4. Can you enter the building?
  - a. Does it have a ramp?
  - b. Does it have an accessible door?
  - c. If it has a revolving door, how will you strategize to use it without injury?
5. Once in the building, can you locate the elevators?
6. Can you select your floor without having to look at the panel?
7. Do the elevators let you know which floor you are on?
8. Once out of the elevator, can you locate your office/workplace?
9. Once at your desk, can you access your calendar using your screen magnification or screen reading software?
10. Can you access any of the applications you use on a normal workday with your magnification or screen reading software?
11. If you read a lot of PDF documents, are they tagged and easy to read with your screen magnification or screen reading software?
12. Is the lighting appropriate for accessing information and duties of your position?
13. Is the monitor large enough to be useful with screen magnification?
14. What tools are you using: screen magnification with Text-to-Speech or full screen reader?
15. Are you able to find the right washroom when needed?
16. If you work in a secure location, can you enter and exit the workplace easily?
17. What are the emergency procedures?
  - a. Who is responsible for ensuring your safety in the event of a fire drill or real emergency?
  - b. How will you exit the building in the event of an emergency?
18. Is all the information you need to perform your duties accessible to you?

Write up your findings in a report and share any new barriers you find for any disability you choose to explore.

## **Additional awareness Activities**

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone who uses a wheelchair.
  - a. Is your building accessible?
  - b. Are washrooms accessible?
  - c. Is there an accessible washroom on your floor?
  - d. Can you use your wheelchair at your desk? If not, what would you need to be able to work comfortably at your workstation?
2. Someone who uses a walker.
3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

Is there a way to create an ergonomic universally designed workplace?

## **Considerations**

I've applied for many positions but am limited to what I can apply for because cash registers are not accessible, often pricing devices are not accessible, counters are not accessible and any type of on-the-spot-verification of anything that requires good vision is a barrier. This means that I can't just go into a store and apply when I see a help wanted sign. Neither can people who use wheelchairs, use walkers nor who are def. or hard of hearing.

Most of us with disabilities know what types of work we can do and how our adaptive technology will interact with basic off the shelf tools such as Microsoft Office.

However, if an employer uses custom software for customer service delivery (for example) it is often either custom to the company and accessibility is not part of the development process or it is a commonly used software such as Human Resources or academic registration software that is also not designed to include people with disabilities as employees.

One glaring example of this is when the Ontario Ministry of Education decided in the late 1990's to make report card creation digital. I attended a session on the development needs for this tool. I brought up the need for the software to be accessible to teachers with disabilities and was told that there are no teachers with disabilities so this "feature" wouldn't be needed. It is still not accessible. Teachers with visual disabilities do not qualify for a "TA" or teaching assistant for the administrative duties and are often the first laid off or deemed "redundant" losing their jobs.

I have an Ontario Teacher's Certificate and now an M.Ed... After graduating I faced huge systemic barriers in finding teaching positions. I got my teaching degree in Windsor Ontario and my students often came from low income environments and had significant baggage. Learning anything was the furthest thing from their minds. Not only did I get the degree but an acknowledgement that I am a "natural teacher" and did manage to reach a few of the more difficult students.

After successfully navigating the university who wanted to disallow me from attending once they found out I had a visual disability, I faced statements from principals and HR folk such as "how can we tell parents that a blind person is looking after their children!" "If you were in a wheelchair, we could take a chance on hiring you, but with a visual disability you can't control a classroom." "You special needs people are what is bringing the rating of my school down and I wish you weren't here." I could not find any teaching position in Canada in the elementary or secondary panels for which I was trained.

I've had to conduct my own accommodation assessment because one place I work laid off the "accessibility person" and had not replaced the position nor given the duties to anyone else.

I've had to bring my own adaptive technology to the workplace and argue with IT staff that I really do need this and it must be installed.

At one college when teaching, I asked about accommodation and use of the adaptive technology that the college supported and was told that "that is only for students with disabilities, not for the teachers to use" by HR. They also did not have a person in HR responsible for accommodation assessment or support.

I've applied for positions that I am qualified for only to be "weeded out" when the interviewer found out I have a visual disability. The change in tone and body language combined with the "your interview was great but we found someone else" notification is frustrating and demoralizing.

I've been hired by a company who knew about my visual disability and embraced the opportunity only to realize that they hadn't thought the hiring through and, after moving halfway across Canada to accept the position, found myself unemployed again...without any supports.

I've spent more hours in interviews justifying my skills and abilities than I care to count. How do we know your technology will work with ours? What does a screen reader sound like, do you have one with you so we can hear it? How will you get to work? Can you really take public transit? What if it rains? What if it snows? Can you really use a computer?

Then the IT guys are asked to come to the interview and are asked about my adaptive technology. Many don't know what the heck any adaptive technology is and are gob smacked deer in the headlight stunned.

Those of us with disabilities do have better things to do instead of going to endless interviews where we lose self-esteem, become frustrated with the lack of acceptance, are not treated with dignity and respect and are sent off to do it all over again.

I've found over the years that most employers don't really understand the impact to their organization of the statement "equal opportunity employer."

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using wheelchairs, are deaf or hard of hearing or who use mobility aids.

## **Scenario 5: Job Interview**

As with the other scenarios, this task begins with an awareness of those who are blind or visually disabled.



Figure 5 Photo of two people shaking hands after an interview.

If you are going on-site, take a friend to ensure your safety.

1. Were you able to read a job description/posting while blindfolded or using simulation glasses?
2. Were you able to create your resume and cover letter?
3. Were you able to tell from the job description if the interview or workplace were accessible and to what level they were accessible?
  - a. Did you have to call and ask these questions?
4. Were you able to determine from the job description what adaptive technology the company supports?
5. Were you able to determine from the job description whether the custom applications and file management systems were accessible/usable with adaptive technology??

6. Were you able to get to the interview site?
7. If you were not able to find out whether the workplace is physically accessible or whether the applications/tools were accessible or what adaptive technology the company/organization uses, what information do you need to get from the interview?
8. How will you frame your questions?
9. How will you showcase your skills and ability to perform the duties of the position?

For this scenario, after you've done your research, it would be an extension of this exercise to hold mock interviews with someone who is not in your training group. The interview should be realistic with appropriate questions and responses.

After you write a report on the considerations to get to an interview, add reflections on the interview process itself and your feelings once it is over.

## **Additional awareness Activities**

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone who uses a wheelchair.
  - a. Is the interview site accessible?
  - b. Is the workplace accessible?
  - c. Are washrooms accessible?
  - d. Is there an accessible washroom on your floor?
  - e. Can you use your wheelchair at your desk? If not, what would you need to be able to work comfortably at your workstation?
2. Someone who uses a walker.
3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

## **Considerations**

Have you ever had to interview someone with a disability for a position? Have you considered the impact to any position your organization posted and you interviewed for in terms of what you need to know before you go to the interview? Keep in mind that those of us with disabilities are under no obligation to disclose our disability. Any "moral" obligation comes when the disability would require accommodation. Given our collective

experience with negative interviews/barriers, how would you handle an interview with someone who has a disability?

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using wheelchairs, are deaf or hard of hearing or who use mobility aids.

## Scenario 6: Taking a taxi

As with the other scenarios, this task begins with an awareness of those who are blind or visually disabled.



Figure 6 Photo of a taxi with its light on.

If you are taking a taxi, take a friend to ensure your safety.

1. Were you able to find the information for a taxi company?
2. Do they have accessible taxis?
3. Did you ask the average wait time for an accessible taxi?
4. Once you are in the taxi, how can you access any information about the taxi number, or other posted information?
5. How can you ensure what the meter is saying?
6. How did you get your fare information without looking at the meter?
7. Did you feel confident that the amount was appropriate?
8. Were you taken the shortest route to your destination?
9. How did you know this without being able to see outside the vehicle?

10. Were you offered assistance in leaving the vehicle such as where on the street/sidewalk you were, how far away from your destination you were or if there were any obstacles in your way?
11. If your destination was near construction, were you advised of this by the taxi driver as you left the vehicle?
12. If you paid cash, how did you count out the correct amount?
13. If you used credit/debit, how were you able to do this blindfolded or using simulation glasses?

Write a report on your experiences and reflect on what information would have been helpful if it were available.

## **Additional awareness Activities**

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone who uses a wheelchair.
  - a. Was an accessible vehicle available when you wanted to travel?
  - b. Was it a front loading or mid loading vehicle?
  - c. Did you notice any difference in the ride? (Research is now showing that rear entry taxis/vehicles are not comfortable for those using wheelchairs and people are often jolted more frequently than when mid loading vehicles are used.)
  - d. Were you able to read the meter from where you were seated?
  - e. Were you tied in safely into the vehicle?
  - f. Were you able to de-board the taxi with dignity and confidence?
2. Someone who uses a walker.
3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

## **Considerations**

As stated in the scenario on planning a trip, I've witnessed people with disabilities being completely ignored by taxi drivers at train stations...even in the dead of winter, with temperatures of minus 12C with snow blowing and a wind chill.

I've been in a taxi with someone who is blind and I am purposely not using my ID cane. At the end of the trip the driver looks around the back seat when asked how much the fare is

and after assuming I have vision and am deferring to my companion, gives an accurate meter reading. I knew this because my friend usually goes from work to this restaurant and up until that point had been charged five dollars more for each ride...no matter which driver he got.

I've been at an airport and asked for a taxi and been ushered into a limousine which has an additional charge. I realize this as we pull quickly away from the curb and there is no going back.

I've been taken off route to my destination and have been overcharged.

There is technology now that would allow those of us with visual disabilities or those who are positioned in the taxi where they can't see the meter to access this information without having to depend on drivers. It is the same video system that has the advertising on it but when someone swipes the screen with a card or app, it becomes a turn by turn GPS with auditory calculations of the trip as you go. This gives those of us with disabilities the same information someone who can see the meter has.

For those using wheelchairs or walkers, I've heard stories of some drivers turning the meter on when they pull up to the curb and start loading their passenger (which is against the law), or charging to store a mobility aid in the trunk (also violation of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulations).

Think of someone who is deaf or hard of hearing and is asked where they want to go while the driver is facing away from them. How is the person going to communicate a specific route they want to take?

Not all drivers will attempt these types of stunts. But it is always something you are aware of when you need to take a taxi as a person with a disability.

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using

## Scenario 7: In the kitchen

As with the other scenarios, this task begins with an awareness of those who are blind or visually disabled.



Figure 7 Photo of a kitchen.

If you are performing this task, make sure you do it with a friend to ensure your safety.

1. The task is to make a peanut butter sandwich or if you have peanut allergies, any other type of sandwich.
2. Put on the blindfold or simulation glasses before you enter the kitchen.
  - a. This can be your kitchen or someone else's.
3. Locate all the ingredients you will need to make the sandwich.
4. Make sure you handle the knife with care.
5. What is your strategy to keep track of the ingredients?
6. Were you able to make a sandwich for you and your friend?
7. Were you able to safely wash the knife and return it to the drawer?
8. Were you able to return all ingredients to their proper place?

Do not attempt to cook anything on a stove unless you have had proper orientation and mobility training. It takes a lot of practice to measure ingredients and use a stove if you are blind or visually disabled.

An additional exercise while you are blindfolded or using the simulation glasses is to choose what you will wear tomorrow or to brush your teeth. Again, putting on make-up requires practice so that you don't injure yourself, so do not attempt this

## **Additional awareness Activities**

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone who uses a wheelchair.
  - a. Are you able to make a sandwich with your kitchen designed the way it is?
  - b. What changes to the design or location of ingredients you commonly use would you need to make to have a functional kitchen?
2. Someone who uses a walker.
3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

## **Considerations**

There are strategies for working in your kitchen if you have a disability. The most important is that your kitchen is configured for your needs. In my case, I am tall and had all counters in my home raised to 38 inches so that I don't have to bend over as much. Given that I sometimes use magnifying aids to read measurements, that I often had to bend over to look into a pot on the stove and washing dishes while bent over gave me a back ache, I am happy with my "accommodation."

I found, by accident, measuring cups in a boutique kitchen store that have large print and Braille on them! And they were on sale!

I organize ingredients so that I don't have to look at the item to use it/bring it out of the cupboard and no one is allowed to move anything in my kitchen in terms of my work area.

I took cooking classes at a local restaurant and the chef was shocked at the way I chopped something. I tried to explain that my "safety" was to ensure that the thing didn't slip while I was chopping. I learned the correct way to chop things which is quite handy, but there are things that require a modification to that technique to add safety if you have a visual disability.

In thinking of a redesign of my kitchen to make it even more functional, I would have two sets of two burners side by side instead of the standard configuration. I find I never use the back burners because, again, I need to lean over the front burners to see the progress of what is in the pots.

Appliances are a whole different matter! I had one fridge that had the temperature dial in the back and I could not adjust the temperature independently. I kept forgetting which way to turn the dial for warmer or colder and the numbers/words were not readable. Even if the numbers were readable, I couldn't get my head at a comfortable angle inside the fridge to read them with my magnifying glass.

Any stove with dials on the back is useless. I usually guessed at what temperature I was using, three o'clock was low, six o'clock was medium and so forth. Same with the oven. I never knew what temperature I was cooking at as I couldn't see the dials.

Microwaves are another headache. I tend to figure out one set of temperatures and times and just use them for everything. The readouts are often not easy to see although very colourful.

I have a coffeemaker with an LED display. I can't read the thing to adjust any of the settings. The text is thin and black or light gray on a pretty light blue background. I could use my magnifier but to the immediate left of the screen is the housing for the water and again, I can't get my head close enough to the LED display to read anything.

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using wheelchairs, are deaf or hard of hearing or who use mobility aids.

## **Scenario 8: Get coffee!**

As with the other scenarios, this task begins with an awareness of those who are blind or visually disabled.



Figure 8 Photo of person using their computer with coffee in front of them at a coffee shop.

If you are performing this task, make sure you do it with a friend to ensure your safety.

1. You need coffee...or tea, and maybe a snack.
2. Count your money while wearing a blindfold or simulation glasses.
3. Make your way from your current location to the nearest coffee shop.
4. If you have to cross an intersection, were you able to do it with confidence, not wondering where cars are or if they were moving?

5. What strategy did you use to cross the road and keep track of vehicles and other pedestrians?
6. Were you able to locate the coffee shop?
7. Were you able to enter the coffee shop? (Sometimes storefronts or buildings with glass walls don't identify entry or exit points well. Sometimes we walk into glass walls!)
8. Were you able to find the right place to order your coffee?
9. Were you able to find the end of the line of customers?
10. Were you able to know that you are next in line and move to the counter?
11. Were you able to find out what types of coffees or teas the store has?
  - a. How did you do this?
  - b. Did you also want a pastry or cookie?
12. How did you figure out what pastries or cookies they have?
  - a. Many times, when someone tells a clerk that they are blind or legally blind, they are treated as if they are illiterate.
  - b. At other times, a clerk will simply wave their hand toward the pastry case and say "it's all right there" even if you have a guide dog or white cane.
13. Were you able to find your coffee or tea and snack on the counter once it was presented to you?
14. Were you able to purchase your coffee/tea and get the right change? Did the clerk tell you the cost?
15. Did the clerk count your change for you and clearly identify all change? (Many people just dump change into your hand and you have to figure it out.)
16. Were you able to locate the cream and sugar? (For this exercise, you take either cream or sugar.)
17. Were you able to locate the correct cream or sugar/sweetener?
18. Were you able to pour the cream or sugar into the coffee without incident?
19. Were you able to find the serviettes to mop up a spill?
20. Were you able to access the cream and sugar without getting your hands or sleeves in any mess on the counter?
21. Were you able to find the lids for the coffee?

22. Were you able to put the lid on the coffee successfully?
  - a. For example, did the lid snap on easily or in the case of the lids with the pull-back area, were you able to pull the tab back and anchor it without spilling the coffee?
23. How did you navigate this part of the task without bumping into other people trying to put cream or sugar in their coffee?
24. Did you lose track of your snack or were you able to put it in your purse/bag or pocket?
25. Were you able to carry your coffee and snack along with handling your guide dog/service animal or white cane?
26. Were you able to navigate to the exit of the store?
27. Were you able to navigate out of the store and back onto the sidewalk without bumping into other pedestrians or customers entering the coffee shop??
28. Were you able to navigate your way back to your starting location?

Write a report on your experiences and reflect on what information would have been helpful if it were available.

## **Additional awareness Activities**

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone who uses a wheelchair.
2. Someone who uses a walker.
3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

## **Considerations**

For some reason, when in a coffee shop after asking what the flavours of coffee are or what types of pastries there are and telling the clerk that I have a visual disability, the clerk assumes that I am either illiterate or deaf or both.

This is a good place to identify the disconnect between the built-environment or building codes related to accessibility and the planning process for the storefront. One coffee shop I was in had a wonderful large well-equipped washroom...but in order to get in the store there were two steps and no ramp and once in the store, you had to go up three steps with no ramp to get to the service counter.

At a coffee shop at an airport, I was looking for a breakfast sandwich. It is easy to hold, easy to exchange for money and just easy to deal with. They didn't have breakfast sandwiches but did have either Oatmeal or cookies. I chose the oatmeal. Big mistake. First, there was a lineup behind me and while the oatmeal itself doesn't take long and is in a single container, all the add-ons need to be gathered. These included raisins, brown sugar, nuts, cinnamon and something else, each in their own packaging. If I wanted, I could go to the counter where the milk and cream were and add milk. By the time I had my oatmeal and coffee with my carry-on bag and white cane, I was overwhelmed. People behind me were impatient, the Disability Services person was impatient (and didn't offer to help at any point) and I no longer really wanted any breakfast.

Once I got back to my seat at the gate I attempted to sort everything out. I ended up just eating the oatmeal with nothing on it as I couldn't balance it on my lap and access the individual packages of stuff and then drank my coffee.

Although I didn't think the oatmeal option through, the clerk didn't give me a "summary" of what had been put in the bag. This is also an instance where change was simply plunked in my hand with the receipt and I had to sort through it to organize it and make sure I got the right change. The clerk did not tell me the amount and denominations of currency.

This is a huge problem if you can't see what is being given you and it is presented to you in a lump of paper and currency. It is even worse at Canadian Tire where you get Canadian Tire money mixed in with real currency.

But back to the coffee shop. I buy coats with large pockets so that I can put a muffin, sandwich or cookie into the pocket which lets me balance the coffee and my ID cane along to get the cream for the coffee and then to my table or out the door. If I am carrying a backpack with my computer, I always make sure that the front compartment is lined with a plastic bag and the zipper is undone before I get to the counter so I can quickly deposit whatever I buy to eat in the backpack without holding up the line.

Getting cream or sugar for your coffee and the right lid for your coffee is another adventure. Often you can't tell which one is the cream, which one is the 2 percent milk, which one is skim milk or what is non-fat milk. It is the same if you take sugar or a sugar substitute, how do you locate what you want on a counter with many little containers. Finding the right lid is daunting and I waste so many lids trying to find one that fits. Then there are the lids that don't snap on easily and you walk a few steps only to find yourself spritzed with coffee. The lids with the pullback tabs that are supposed to snap in place are another adventure.

The lines for the coffee are often challenging and I've found myself waiting at the line for getting what you've already ordered instead of the actual coffee line. People also tend to think that if you can't see, it is OK to just get in front of you or swoop in from the side and take your place as next in line. Clerks will often gesture for who is next and I can't always see that a spot at the counter is now empty and that someone is waving to me.

Consider all of this for someone using a wheelchair who can't see what is on the counter, may not be able to see the labels in the food counter and may not be able to reach the debit/interact device.

Many stores are now anchoring these devices to the counter making it impossible to position them so that you can use them. At one store a complete renovation to update the space last year (2013) resulted in credit/Interact devices being bolted down next to the cash register which protruded into the space of the credit/Interact device. This meant that I could not get my magnifier close enough to the screen without putting an eye out in order to use the device independently. The solution? The clerk suggested that I give them my pin numbers! Again, this is an opportunity for me to say "I don't really need this," and walk away.

This bolting down of these devices makes it difficult for those using a wheelchair to access the credit/Interact devices as well. Counters are often too high to see the device or the screen on the device.

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using wheelchairs, are deaf or hard of hearing or who use mobility aids.

## **Scenario 9: Attend a conference**

As with the other scenarios, this task begins with an awareness of those who are blind or visually disabled.



Figure 9 Photo of a row of seats in a conference room.

If you are performing this task, make sure you do it with a friend to ensure your safety.

1. The conference is located in London Ontario at the Convention/Conference centre.

2. What information do you need to be accessible for screen magnification with Text-to-Speech or screen reading?
  - a. Registration.
  - b. Registration form.
  - c. Proposal submission form?
  - d. Schedule.
  - e. Information about the location and map of rooms to be used.
3. How will you get to London Ontario from Brantford?
  - a. What is the train schedule like?
  - b. The conference is from Monday to Thursday.
4. There is no conference hotel so you will need to find a hotel that is accessible and has accessible rooms.
5. Once you arrive in London Ontario, what is the train station like/what is the layout?
6. How far is it from the train station to the conference centre?
7. How far is it from the train station to the hotel you chose?
8. What restaurants are nearby? How far is the Market?
9. If you are looking this information up on the Internet, you will need to use screen magnification with Text-to-Speech or a screen reader...or ask for help.
10. Once you are at the hotel, how do you find the registration desk?
11. Once registered, how do you locate the elevators?
12. Were you able to sign the agreement form with pricing information on it? Did the clerk read it to you or just say, "This is standard and it has your room rate on it."
13. , Once on your floor, how did you find your room?
14. Once in the room, what is your strategy to orient yourself to your new surroundings?
15. Are you able to order room service?
16. Are you able to access the restaurant in the hotel and the menus?
17. What is your strategy for getting food from a buffet?
  - a. How do you know what is in front of you? (At a conference of Special Education teachers, I asked what was in front of me at the buffet and was told

“it starts with salads, then there are sandwiches, then some desserts.” Not really enough information to make a choice!)

18. How long will it take you to get from the hotel to the conference centre?
19. Will you need to take public transit? What is the fare?
20. How many intersections will you need to navigate from the train station to the hotel and then to the conference centre or any other place you want to go?
21. Do the intersections have lights or are they crosswalks or just intersections with no means of stopping vehicles?
22. How will you find the registration desk once you arrive at the conference venue?
23. How will you find the right rooms for your conference sessions?
24. Once the conference is over, what is your strategy to make sure everything gets back into your luggage?
25. How will you access your bill to ensure that charges are correct?
26. What is your strategy for getting back to the train station, finding the right area to sit and getting on the right train?
27. What is your strategy for buying food on the train? How do you know what they have for sale, how will you balance everything on the tray and add cream or sugar to your coffee or tea? (Someone who has had customer service training or who is aware of the needs of those with disabilities will often ask if they can add the cream or sugar before handing it to you.)
28. Once you are back in Brantford, how will you get home?

Write a report on your experiences and reflect on what information would have been helpful if it were available.

This actually happened in April 2014: Person who uses a guide dog was going to Brantford to London Ontario. The ticket agent told them that there were no seats together so the person would be sitting at the front of the car and the guide dog would be “sitting” near the end of the car.

Comments?

## **Additional awareness Activities**

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone who uses a wheelchair.
2. Someone who uses a walker.

3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

## **Considerations**

I just returned from a conference where all the helpers for the conference had on red T-shirts. We were told that if we needed help, just find someone in a red T-shirt and they will help you.

Two Thirds of the male population is red/green colour blind. Then you have the people with visual disabilities whose disability involves colour deficits. Red was not the colour to use to get help!

I've been at a conference of special education teachers where no one would assist me in finding rooms and the rooms did not have signs outside of them to tell you what session was inside. The names of the rooms were over the top of the door in black letters on a glaring gold background with the lighting bouncing off of them. Not only were they outside of my visual capability, but the glare off of them was incredible.

For anyone planning a conference, boxed lunches are the best way to move people and ensure that we are not balancing food that we cannot control.

I attended a day long forum on disability where the sessions were in the basement and the only accessible washroom for approximately 25 people using wheelchairs, was on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor and you had to get someone with security clearance to go with you.

At that same forum, there was only one elevator designated that we could use and when we weren't leaving the main area of the forum, a "helper" said to another helper, "Let's yell fire and get them moving." The forum participants were composed of those of us with various disabilities and the topic of the forum was Disability Rights.

Maps are important for those of us with disabilities. Even though I might want the conference content in digital format so I don't have to carry it around, a hard copy large print map of the locations of the conference rooms would be helpful. Telling me that my map is on a CD because I checked off digital on the registration form isn't thinking ahead or thinking about the logistics of the conference.

The worse conference venues are those where there is nothing around them and it is a \$20 plus taxi ride to go to a fast food place or restaurant. Those of us with disabilities need a way to access transit, restaurants and things not in the conference hotel. In attending a conference held in a self-contained resort, the cafeteria food wasn't always fresh, the cafeteria wasn't always open and the only alternative was a formal dining room. There was no way to leave the conference venue and see the surrounding area without paying more than 20 dollars for a taxi.

At the same conference, I asked the concierge if there was shopping nearby. The response was yes, just across the street. The “street” was a six lane highway or main thoroughfare. I asked if there were stoplights that I could safely cross at, holding my white ID cane a bit higher, and was told, “no, but if you run quickly you should be able to get across.”

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using wheelchairs, are deaf or hard of hearing or who use mobility aids.

## Scenario 10: No place like home

As with the other scenarios, this task begins with an awareness of those who are blind or visually disabled.



Figure 10 Photo of a living room.

If you are performing this task, make sure you do it with a friend to ensure your safety.

1. In your own home, identify any barriers or obstacles you would encounter if you were blindfolded or using visual disability simulation glasses>
2. This might include the positioning of furniture, stairs, the basement utility room, thermostat for heat/air conditioner, controls on the oven, stove, dishwasher, microwave, or coffeemaker/tea kettle.
3. How will you find a TV program you want to watch using the on-screen menu of your satellite or cable provider?
4. How do you turn on video description? What is video description?
  - a. How would you turn on captioning if you needed it?
5. What modifications to your home and backyard would you want or need to make in order to ensure full access and safety?

Write a report on your experiences and reflect on what information would have been helpful if it were available.

### Additional awareness Activities

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone who uses a wheelchair.
2. Someone who uses a walker.

3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

## **Considerations**

As with the kitchen scenario, no one is allowed to move anything in my home. I've renovated the interior to be accessible to my needs and with the thought that this is my "toes up" home that I will grow old in. It is a single level, open concept, any doors will fit a wheelchair or walker, while there is a tub, there is also a walk in shower and everything is arranged for optimal movement. Now I'm working on ensuring that the outside is just as accessible, replacing stairs with ramps which are much easier to use when coming back from a trip with luggage or bringing groceries into the house.

The Thermostat is my most challenging item outside of the ones mentioned in the kitchen. Even with a large print temperature display, the settings are small and the button to change from heat, cool and off shows very tiny light print on a pale green LED display.

I do have talking call display on the phone so don't have to get up to see who is calling and if I don't want to answer it, I haven't had to disturb what I've been doing.

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using wheelchairs, are deaf or hard of hearing or who use mobility aids.

## **Scenario 11: At the buffet**

I've copied this scenario from the conference scenario as it happens at restaurants as well as conferences. Buffets can be difficult to navigate for anyone with a disability. You can encounter them at family get together, Sunday brunches or a spontaneous choosing to just go out for dinner to a new place to eat.

As with the other scenarios, this task begins with an awareness of those who are blind or visually disabled.

If you are performing this task, make sure you do it with a friend to ensure your safety.



Figure 11 Photo of food on a buffet table with a stack of plates to the left.

We'll start this task after the stress of getting into the venue and locating your seat after finding the place to hang your coat.

1. You are told that this is buffet only. So there is no opportunity to order a la carte.
2. How are you going to manage your guide dog or white cane as you hold a plate and move along the buffet line?
3. Will you ask your server to assist you?
4. Will you ask someone else at the table to assist you?
5. Will you ask someone at the table to just go get your food?
  - a. How will you determine what is available and what you might want to try?
6. Assuming you are going to get in line with a plate and get your own food:
  - a. How do you locate the buffet area in the venue?
  - b. Is it all in one area or is it spread out?
  - c. Are there staff that can help you get going in the right direction or can describe the layout of the buffet area?
  - d. Are they too busy to assist you?
7. Now that you are in line and moving forward, as you pick up your plate, do you remember if there was cutlery at your table or do you have to pick it up here?
8. Is the cutlery and serviettes with the plates and if not, how will you locate them?
9. You are now at the first set of choices. How will you know what they are?

10. Can you locate the tongs and then the basket of bread and put a piece of bread on your plate?
11. Are you able to find the butter or any other spread that might be available?
12. If there are different types of spreads, how do you know which one you picked up?
13. Were you able to locate any signage that would tell you what types of bread and spreads are before you?
14. As you move to the next set of choices, what are they? Are you able to locate signage that describes the choices?
  - a. Is the signage easy to read or is it handwritten? (No place I've ever been has had Braille signage on a buffet.)
15. Assuming you have a choice of salads, cheeses and/or fresh vegetables in this next set of options, how will you know what the salad ingredients are?
  - a. If salads have nuts or other items you might be allergic to, how will you determine this?
16. How will you locate the tongs in the salad you want, navigate to the right bowl, pick up some salad and place it on your plate?
17. How will you determine which cheeses are on the plate, where they are located on the plate and where the tongs or fork is to choose some cheese for your plate?
18. How will you pick up the cheese you want and place it on your plate (keeping in mind that you are not going to simply pile everything in the middle of your plate as a "safety zone")?
19. Moving along the line, are you able to move at the pace everyone else is moving at? Are you slowing the line down? Are you not having food just because you can't figure out what is before you? Are People around you helpful or frustrated?
20. You are now in front of the main course items:
  - a. If it is lunch, what are the sandwiches in front of you?
  - b. Is the signage readable? Can you locate the signs, pick them up and bring them close enough to read them, then replace them?
  - c. If it is breakfast, the main course items might be spread out around a large area with an Omelets station, a cereals station, a waffle, French toast and pancake station, an egg and meat station and a fruit station. How will you make a decision on what to have for breakfast? Is it becoming a matter of whatever is the easiest to just get this over with or are you confident that you will be able to get the breakfast you want?

- d. If it is dinner, what potato or rice options are in front of you? What are the vegetable options? Is all of the meat located here or is there a carving station? If there is a carving station, how will you locate it?
21. Once you locate the main course items, how will you locate the spoons, forks, tongs or tools used to pick the items up and place them on your plate?
  22. Are you able to target the right container for what you want?
    - a. How is your guide dog doing, can you still manage your white cane, is your plate getting unmanageable?
  23. How much room is there on your plate and where will you place items so that they are not all piled together?
  24. Is there gravy or “au jus” and how will you add this to your plate? Will you just not have any because it is not an easy task or are you determined to have what you want? What strategy will you use to add this item to your plate?
  25. What about condiments? Will you want cheese for the top of your pasta, maple syrup for your pancakes or French toast, dressing for your salad, dip for your vegetables, any of those incidental items you like?
  26. With your plate full, how are you going to navigate back to your seat at the table?

## **Additional awareness Activities**

Examine this same task from the perspective of:

1. Someone who uses a wheelchair.
  - a. How are you going to manage your wheelchair, see over the table top, reach the food you want and put it on your plate? Where do you put your plate while going through the line?
2. Someone who uses a walker.
  - a. Same questions as above.
3. Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
  - a. How are you going to ask questions about the food in front of you and decode the answers?
4. Someone with tremors or mobility disabilities.
5. Someone with a learning disability (although navigating through the line might be easier, reading the signage for each item might be difficult).

What new considerations must you consider with each disability?

## Considerations

I was out to brunch with friends recently and was determined to “put the Customer Service Standards to the test.” I told my friends to just go about getting their food and not to worry about me. I went to the wait station and asked if there was someone who could help me identify the food on the buffet. And yes, I was balancing a plate with my ID cane and trying to navigate the other people.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that a wait staff was immediately called to assist me. The person was great in their description and knew what ingredients were used for the dishes. (I hate peas!) Of course if you had an allergy to a spice the person might have to ask the chef, but I found the experience so stress free that I enjoyed my meal.

Although I can ask my friends to help me, I long to be able to read the names of the dishes and make my own choices. Again, hating peas, I can't always see them in a dish. But by and large, I should be able to get my own food.

Some of the barriers are that the names of the dishes are written on the glass in a scrawling unreadable handwriting, that they are staggered at the top of the glass and the bottom of the glass covering the dish (so I can read the bottom one but not the top one), that there are no labels, or that there are heavy covers on the dishes that are awkward to lift and put anywhere else.

Condiments are especially frustrating and I often choose no dressing on salads and no butter for bread simply because I can't “elegantly” spear a butter cube or locate the handle for the dressing/or the spoon.

Bread is problematic in only getting one piece and trying to figure out what is the correct width for the tongs to only get one piece.

This is true for cheese, bacon, meat, vegetables, anything that you want to “delicately” not pick up half the plate of food.

Of equal frustration is using the tongs to try and fish out one piece of meat from a container with gravy or au jus.

Omelets are so much easier in one way, although I have to ask what the ingredients are that are available. It is one station and you can generally

Get most of what you want in the omelet. Then the only additional things you need to find are bacon and home fries if you want them. The last conference I was at, I had asked what the ingredients were that I could have in an omelet and didn't find out until the last day that the chef forgot to tell me spinach was one of the ingredients I could have.

I was at a conference of special education teachers and there was a buffet for lunch. I thought that since I was among people who “understood” those of us with disabilities, that lunch would be a pleasure! I asked the person in front of me to tell me what was on the

buffet explaining that I have a visual disability. The response was “it starts with salads, then there are some plates of meats and cheeses and then there is dessert.” The person quickly distanced themselves from me and I was left to fend for myself. The person behind me declined to help as they were talking with their friend.

Sometimes buffets are a unique eating experience because I never know what is on my plate until I’m back at the table and can examine it more closely!

This is my experience. Consider additional barriers and the barriers that face those using wheelchairs, are deaf or hard of hearing or who use mobility aids.

## Contact Information

If you have comments or suggestions for other scenarios, [contact Karen McCall](#).<sup>1</sup>

Visit the [Karlen Communications website](#)<sup>2</sup> for more handouts on using Microsoft Office applications with adaptive technology, to purchase books on creating more accessible documents or for more information on the AODA and Disability Rights Advocacy.

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