

Women with Disabilities and Women's Events

The women's movement provides rich opportunities for sharing, learning, and growing, through partnerships and friendships between women. Women with disabilities face greater social barriers, including violence, poverty and isolation. We need the friendships and partnerships as much as, if not more than, non-disabled women.

Sixteen percent of Canadian women have disabilities. Even in a city like Metro Toronto, where there are over 300,000 women who have disabilities, many of these women still find themselves excluded from some women's events and services.

What are the problems?

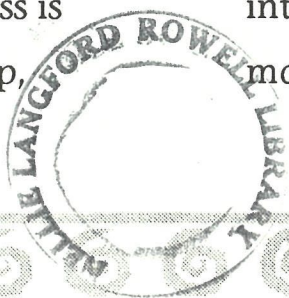
Physical access is a major problem encountered by many women with disabilities who want to be involved in women's events. Unfortunately, not many people fully understand the terms "access" or "accessibility". Access is more than just providing a ramp,

adapted washroom or attendant care. It means providing for the accommodation needs of women who are: deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing, developmentally disabled, psychiatric survivors, learning disabled, environmentally disabled, blind and women who have low vision.

A woman's disability need not be visible for her to have certain accommodation needs. Yet women who have invisible disabilities are often questioned by event organizers or conference participants when they use reserved wheelchair access elevators or wheelchair accessible washrooms.

Progress we have made

Over the years women with disabilities have seen improvements in the levels of accessibility provided at women's events. For example, it is more likely that women's events will provide wheelchair access, sign language interpretation, attendant care, and material in large print and braille.



How can we work together?

- Include women with disabilities on event planning committees from the beginning.
- When budgeting for accessibility, contact disability organizations for accessibility costs so that you will not underbudget for these costs.
- Events need to be widely publicized so that disabled women know about the event and whether it is accessible. In addition to event calendars, flyers and newsletters to the women's community, consider outreach to include disability-specific organizations. Some of these organizations have telephone newslines, printed newsletters and computer bulletin boards.

All women's events need to provide the following access according to the needs of its participants:

- wheelchair access
- TTY access, sign language and oral interpretation, assistive listening devices, real-time reporting and captioned videos

- braille, large print and audio tapes
- volunteers and attendants.

Women with disabilities can contribute expertise, spirit, knowledge, and creative energy to the women's movement. We have developed unique strengths and insights through our experiences. From our ideas, contributions, and support, we can all benefit from working together.

Resources

DAWN Ontario. **Access Checklist.**

A handy checklist to help planners ensure their events are accessible. 1993.

For more information contact:

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