

Accessibility Certification Talk with Community Living Toronto's Self-Advocates Group

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Tracy and Sarah from Deloitte had a video call meeting with a group of 11 self-advocates with intellectual disabilities. Deloitte wanted to talk to this group about how Accessibility Certification might make their community more accessible and to hear what they have to say about accessibility in their everyday lives.

Certification and Accessibility

Certification would be:

- A different way, besides the law, of making businesses more inclusive
 - The law makes people do something by saying they have to
 - Certification would have businesses and other places in the community sign up to be accessible because they want to
- A way for places in the community to show that they are accessible

The group said that they want to make sure that this program will have an impact. Even if it is not the law, businesses should not be ignoring people with intellectual disabilities.

The group also made the point that accessibility means something different for everyone.

Accessibility is:

- how someone is welcomed by a business
- how someone is served
- how someone feels when they go to a store or a restaurant or a hotel

Accessibility means:

- For people with intellectual disabilities, being able to understand a sign or a service or what someone is saying
- Thinking of people who have more than one disability; for example, someone may be in a wheelchair and be a slow learner

Accessibility means being inclusive of everyone, no matter what their abilities.

Accessibility in the Community

The group came up with some good examples of places in their neighbourhood that should be accessible:

- Swiss Chalet
- Tim Hortons
- the gym
- McDonald's
- the mall
- the subway station
- the bank

For example, when you go to Tim Hortons, do you know what's on the menu? What if you can't read? Will a manager explain it to you?

What Certification Could Look Like

The group talked a lot about what an inclusive certification system could look like. For example:

- Tim Hortons has ratings cards so people can let them know how they're doing. But what if you can't write? What if you can't speak to an employee?
- You could rate a store with stars to show if it is accessible for you: five stars if you felt valued or one star if the staff were rude to you. The group did not think this was an accessible system, since stars would not make sense to everyone
- Rather than words or stars, stores could use smiley faces, or a card to swipe, or pictures to show how accessible they are

Certification would be for businesses in your neighbourhood:

- For example, you could rate the Tim Hortons in your neighbourhood instead of Tim Hortons across all of Canada
- A certification system could also let people know if a business starts off doing well but then gets worse or less accessible

Most importantly, the group wanted to be able to decide for themselves whether a business was accessible, instead of having someone else decide. It is important that they are able to speak about their experience.

What Makes Someone Feel Included

The talk ended on a really important question: what makes each self-advocate feel included when they go to a restaurant or the mall? What would make them have a good experience at Tim Hortons or at the bank? The group agreed that the two most important points were:

- Being treated with respect
- Being treated equally to other customers

Some of the group had had bad experiences in stores where staff were rude or impatient with them.

- The group members often felt like their needs were ignored
- When they had support staff with them, store clerks and restaurant servers would often speak to the staff rather than speaking directly to the person with the intellectual disability
- Many people have invisible disabilities that staff do not consider

The group agreed that training employees to know how to interact with people of all abilities would be really helpful. It can be an anxious experience to go to a store or a restaurant. It is so important that people slow down, be patient, and take the time to be welcoming.

Thank you to everyone who shared their stories and their thoughts! If you would like to add anything, please email Sarah Wilson at sawilson@deloitte.ca.