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Office of Francophone Affairs Accessibility Plan 2003-2004

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INTRODUCTION

In 2001, there were an estimated 1.5 million people in Ontario with self-disclosed disabilities. This number is expected to increase as the population ages.

In December 2001, the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) was passed into law. Its purpose is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities

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and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

One of the requirements under the ODA is that Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities, and public transportation organizations develop annual accessibility plans to make programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. The plans must be made available to the public.

In the Speech from the Throne, delivered on November 20, 2003, the Ontario Government confirmed its commitment to working with Ontarians with disabilities on meaningful legislation that will allow them to fully participate in building a stronger province.

This document is the first annual accessibility plan for the Office of Francophone Affairs. The plan describes improvements to accessibility that the ministry has made to date and its commitments for the balance of the 2003-2004 fiscal year.

Report on Achievements

Over the past few years, the Office of Francophone Affairs (Office) has been working with the Ontario Realty Corporation to make its facilities more accessible to people with disabilities. For example, we have taken steps to ensure that doorways are wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs, hallways are

well lit and free of clutter to allow full and safe access, drinking fountains and public telephones are accessible for people using wheelchairs, washrooms are large and accessible with grab bars installed, and a TTY is available for people who are deaf and staff have been trained to use it.

In the last twelve months, the Office, as a service provider and as an employer, has taken measures to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities in terms of access to information through the Internet and the Office's publications.

Some examples of initiatives undertaken to improve access to the Office's services by external clients are:

- The Office's website has been made accessible to people with disabilities, as required under section 6 of the ODA, and all updates to the site take into account the requirements of the ODA.
- The Office's publications are available in accessible formats upon request.

As an employer, the Office has taken measures to ensure that the needs of employees with disabilities are accommodated, wherever required, including the use of adaptive equipment, and technology and modifying the office environment and common spaces. Procedures are in place to ensure the safe evacuation of employees and visitors with disabilities in case of an emergency.

To ensure that the Office meets the needs of all clients and employees, its managers have received training on accommodating clients and employees with disabilities. In

addition, an Accessibility Planning Working Group, including representation from all areas of the Office's operations, has been established to develop the Office's first Accessibility Plan and to plan for future improvements. In its 2003-2004 Business Plan, the Office indicated that it would develop an Accessibility Plan to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities and would start implementing the Plan.

Finally, the Office reviewed the French Language Services Act and did not identify any inappropriate use of language with respect to people with disabilities, or any potential barriers to accessibility.

Commitments and Strategies for 2003-2004

The Office of Francophone Affairs is a small organization that is responsible for the administration of the French Language Services Act (FLSA). The Office receives its administrative services, including human resources and information technology, from the Ministry of Citizenship.

During the 2003-2004 fiscal year, the Office will undertake a number of activities to ensure that it becomes more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities.

Methods to be taken to prevent new barriers

As provided in Section 10 (3) (b) of the ODA, the following describes the measures that will be put into place to ensure that the Office assesses proposals

for acts, regulations, policies, programs, practices and services to determine their effect on accessibility for people with disabilities. We will develop an accessibility policy to guide us in our activities.

In the 2003-2004 fiscal year, the following activities will be undertaken to ensure that no new barriers are created:

- Operating proposals put forward in the 2004-2005 business planning submission will be assessed to ensure accessibility;
- Planning templates will be reviewed to ensure that accessibility is considered in all operational planning for the year;
- Training will be provided to staff on how to include accessibility in proposals and in new guidelines produced by the Office on the planning, delivery and monitoring of French-language services;
- The Office's operational plan will document how accessibility improvement strategies will be implemented and managed;
- The Office will participate in the Ministry of Citizenship's review of human resources practices and procedures to ensure that recruitment and selection processes are barrier-free and comply with the requirements of the ODA and with government policies on equal opportunity;
- A guide on planning inclusive events, meetings and conferences will be developed to ensure that Office-organized events do not create barriers

for people with disabilities;

- The Office will provide relevant staff with guidance on how to consider accessibility in procurement activities. All staff with responsibility for procurement will be provided with Management Board Secretariat's "Guidelines for Implementing the Procurement Provisions of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*".

Business areas to be reviewed

This portion of our accessibility plan lists and gives a brief description of the acts, regulations, policies, programs, practices and services the Office of Francophone Affairs will be reviewing in the 2003-2004 fiscal year to identify barriers to people with disabilities. This is in accordance with Section 10 (3c) of the ODA.

Acts and Regulations

The Office is responsible for the administration of the *French Language Services Act*. The FLSA provides an overall framework for the provision of French-language services within the Ontario government. The Office reviewed the Act in 2002-2003 and did not identify any barriers to access by people with disabilities or any inappropriate use of language with respect to people with disabilities.

Policies and Programs

Program Design

This year, the Office of Francophone Affairs will review its Violence Against

Women Prevention Public Education Program with stakeholders to ensure that the program is accessible to Francophones with disabilities and that groups requesting funding under the program are aware of the government's commitment to make Ontario more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. This review will include the design and processing of project proposals and the eligibility criteria.

The Office will initiate a review of the policies and guidelines it has developed to assist Ontario ministries and agencies with the implementation of the French Language Services Act to ensure that they are inclusive and do not create barriers for people with disabilities.

Human Resource Programs and Policies

The Office will include a learning component on accessibility awareness in all staff's performance agreements.

The Office will participate in the Ministry of Citizenship's review of human resources practices and procedures and will identify areas for improvement with respect to the Office's management of job competitions. This will include all stages of the process, from recruitment through to exit including orientation, training, and performance management.

The Office wishes to ensure that an environment is created where:

- recruitment and selection processes are barrier-free,
- training, job design and development

opportunities are accessible and

- managers are accountable for ensuring compliance with the requirements of the ODA and with government policies on equal opportunity.

Practices and Services

Communication Practices

The Office will review its *Guide to French Language Communications in the Government of Ontario* to include mention of meeting the needs of Francophones with disabilities.

We will examine how we communicate to clients and stakeholders the accessibility features of the Office, including access to the building and TTY services.

In addition, we will review our planning practices to ensure that events organized by the Office are accessible and do not prevent people with disabilities from full participation.

Administrative Practices

The Office will review its administrative procedures to ensure that employees take into account people with disabilities when providing services such as reception/telephone services and planning a meeting with a community group.

Actions to be taken

Section 10 (3)(d) provides that accessibility plans include a description of the measures the ministry intends to take

in the coming year to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities.

Barrier Identification and Prevention

As a part of our activities to identify and prevent barriers, the Office of Francophone Affairs will:

- Conduct an accessibility audit of reception/public areas to identify communication and architectural barriers;
- Organize an information session for managers and staff on the Office's obligations under the ODA and on how best to provide services to clients with disabilities;
- Remind managers of the obligation to provide accommodations for Office employees and job applicants.

The Office of Francophone Affairs will continue to work with the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario and Management Board Secretariat to ensure that the implementation of the government's obligations under the ODA takes into account the needs of Francophones with disabilities.

The Office's Accessibility Planning Working Group will monitor implementation of the plan throughout the coming year and will provide regular reports to the Office's Senior Management Committee and updates to Office staff. The Working Group will continue to consult with the Accessibility Directorate on implementation of the plan and on the preparation of the 2004-2005 Plan, as

required under Section 10 of the ODA.

Improved accessibility in communications

In the 2003-2004 fiscal year, the Office will undertake a number of specific actions to improve accessibility in the way we communicate with staff and the public.

We will explore options for how we can best incorporate accessibility into the orientation of staff, including the development of procedures to follow when providing publications in accessible formats.

We will review procedures to ensure that planning for meetings with stakeholders includes a proactive offer of accommodation to Francophones with disabilities who may wish to participate. Potential areas where accommodation may be required are: logistics of meetings, physical requirements, communication requirements, including aids such as sign language interpreters, real-time captioning etc.

We will post, on the Office's Intranet site, a reminder to ministries and agencies that Francophones who are hard of hearing or deaf may use Quebec Sign Language (QSL); this is an important factor when organizing meetings or conferences to which deaf or hard of hearing Francophones may attend.

We will put a link on our website to the Ministry of Citizenship's Accessibility Directorate's website to ensure that Francophones with disabilities are fully aware of the provisions of the ODA and

their rights under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

We will publish the Office's TTY number on business cards and letterhead.

Improved accessibility of facilities

To improve the accessibility of our work environment, we will ensure that all lighting provides the optimal safety and convenience for visitors and employees with visual impairments.

We will provide signage that serves all clients. Signs will be written in plain language, in both English and French, clearly posted, readable and at an appropriate height.

As part of the regular health and safety activities, the health and safety officer will include regular inspections of corridors and hallways to ensure that they are well maintained, clearly lit and free from clutter. In addition, we will provide a means for staff to submit identified barriers and safety concerns.

Improved accessibility in technology

The Office will continue to ensure that all new material posted to its Internet site is tested for usability by people with disabilities, reflecting the broad definition of 'disability' under the ODA.

We will initiate a review of our Intranet site to determine potential barriers to OPS employees with disabilities.

For more information

Questions or comments about the Office of Francophone Affairs' Accessibility Plan are always welcome.

Please phone:

General inquiry number: 416 325-4949

TTY number: 416 325-0017

1-800 number: 1 800 268-7507

E-mail: ofa@ofa.gov.on.ca

Ministry website address:

www.ofa.gov.on.ca/www.oaf.gouv.on.ca

Visit the Ministry of Citizenship's Accessibility Ontario web portal at:
www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility.

The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free province.

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