Examining Library Accessibility: The Basics

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"Accessibility should be like the air we breathe; I should not have to wonder if it will be there when I wake up in the morning."

- Afi-Tiombe Kambon

What does improving accessibility in our libraries look like?

Improving accessibility includes:

- Awareness
- Training and education
- Auditing
- Willingness
- Removal

Who can work on improving accessibility?

Any person who has an interest in listening, learning, collaborating, and improving accessibility.

We can all:

become aware of issues, advocate for accessibility, and cultivate positive attitudes towards accessibility work.

Agenda

1) Defining accessibility, disability, and ableism

2) Awareness of disabilities and accessibility

3) Accessible and inclusive communication

4) Our plan moving forward

Disability and Accessibility

According to the World Health Organization (2001), **disability** has three dimensions:

- Impairment
- Activity limitation
- Participation restrictions

Accessibility is the measure of how easily persons can access something or participate in it.

Improving accessibility means addressing barriers.

- a physical environment that is not accessible

- lack of relevant assistive technology

- negative attitudes of people towards disability

- services, systems and policies that are either nonexistent or that hinder involvement

WHO, 2001, p.214

Adults in New Mexico:

12% have mobility disabilities

13% have cognition disabilities

7% have hearing disabilities

5% have vision disabilities

Adults in rural areas are around 9% more likely to have a disability.

460,355 adults in New Mexico have a disability[1]

This is equal to 28% or 1 in 4 adults in New Mexico

CDC, 2018

Ableism:

"discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities"

(Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

We may be practicing ableist beliefs without even knowing it.

We might:

- resist necessary change
- ask to see the "business" case
- nitpick accessibility requirements
- prioritize new inaccessible features
- minimize accessibility needs

(Byrne-Haber, S., 2021)

A quick way to check if something is ableist:

Replace accessibility or disability with race or gender.

If it now sounds unacceptable, discriminatory, or offensive, it is most likely ableist as well.

Awareness

To recognize and begin to address accessibility issues and barriers, we must first recognize our privileges and understand who we are serving.

Who are we serving?

Persons with <u>visible</u> and <u>invisible</u> disabilities

Visible vs. Invisible Disabilities (examples)

VISIBLE

Physical disabilities
Persons with visible assistive devices
Low mobility
Low vision
Paralysis
Cerebral Palsy
Tourette Syndrome

INVISIBLE

Severe anxiety
PTSD
Panic disorder
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
Chronic pain
Fibromyalgia
Deaf persons
Persons who are blind
Neurodivergence

SEE
LIKE
ME

Beyond ADA Standards

ADA Requirements are the <u>minimum</u> legal requirement for access.

Hunter's Point Library, Queens, NY,(Kim, E., 2019)

How accessible is this ad?

Due to limited space, the Braille Collection has been moved. It is now located opposite the Juvenile Audio Book Collection.
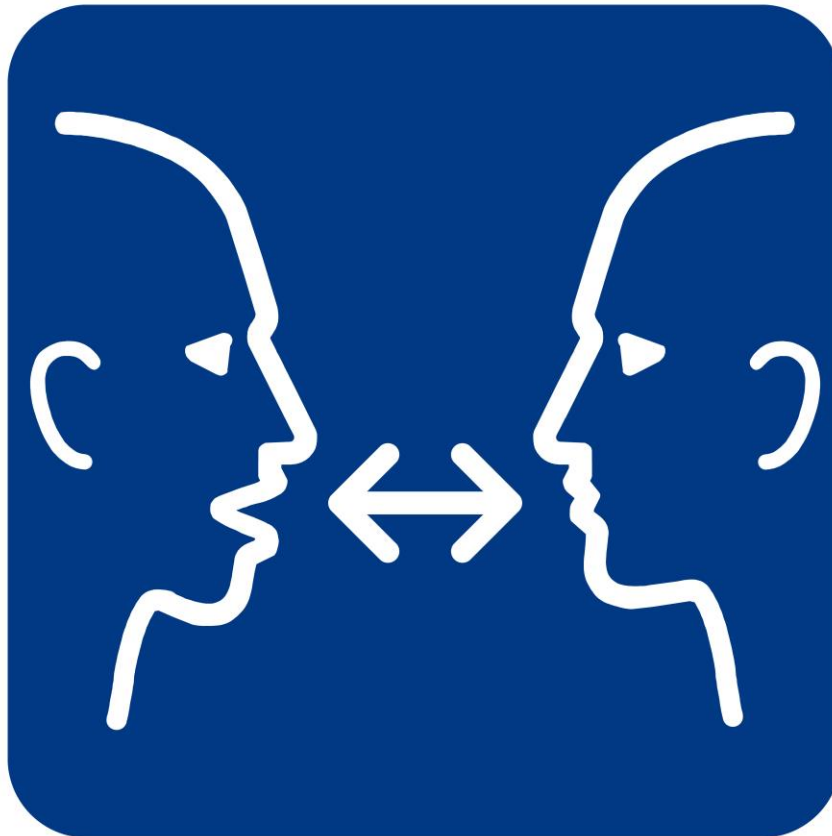
FAIL

Where did this library sign go wrong?

What can I do to practice inclusive communication?

Accessible and Inclusive Communication

Communication Barriers

Barriers to communication can be:

physical, mental, perception-based, or attitudinal.

People who have disabilities that affect their communication can experience a range of barriers when accessing goods and services in their communities.

Persons with disabilities report that people often:

Ignore them, and speak to the person with them

Underestimate their abilities to make their own decisions

Speak about them as if they are invisible

Assume they cannot hear or understand what they are saying

Restrict them to answering yes and no questions

Pretend to understand their messages when they don't

(CDAC, 2021)

Don't say this:	Instead, try this:
Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound	Person who uses a wheelchair
Can't talk, mute	Person who uses a device to speak
Disabled, handicapped	Person with a disability
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy or seizure disorder
Handicapped parking or bathroom	Accessible parking or bathroom
Crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, spastic	Person with a physical disability
Slow, simple, moronic, defective, afflicted, special person	Person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability
Insane, crazy, psycho, maniac, nuts	Person with an emotional or behavioral disability, a mental health impairment, or a psychiatric disability

What other ways can we practice inclusive communication?

Don't make assumptions about the person.

Keep alternative communication modes like pen and paper nearby.

Ask questions if you need clarification.

What else can we do?

What are we doing to get started?

Awareness – Providing training and education resources at the library on accessibility topics

Collaborating – Working with community members and advocacy groups for input

Auditing the library – We are utilizing resources from advocacy groups to assess spaces, services, and staff knowledge

Developing a plan – Where is the library now? Where do we want our library to go? How will our library get there?

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