Chicago AA (Area 19)
Accessibilities Committee (Email: accessibilities@chicagoaa.org)

Best Practices for Making and Keeping Your Meeting Accessible to Members with Disabilities

Background: The AA Traditions remind us to carry the message to all Alcoholics and that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. Yet, simply attending a meeting can be a challenge for a member with a disability. Not all disabilities are visible. Here is how you can help provide a safe and welcoming meeting for all.

Virtual/Online meetings.

1. **Always enable closed captioning for all Zoom meetings.** This helps members with hearing, language and intellectual processing disabilities. State that captioning is enabled in your meeting script. You can find detailed instructions at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/8158289360141-Enabling-automated-captions and https://www.chicagoaa.org/committees/committee-accessibilities/
2. Provide the dial in phone number in your zoom invitation. Not everyone has a computer or internet.
3. Notify the CASO office at groupservices@chicagoaa.org that your meeting is closed captioned so your meeting listing can be updated with the universal symbol **"CC".**
4. **Remind members who must walk around during the meeting to turn off their camera and put this in your meeting script.** Members who are walking, traveling, etc. provide a major distraction for individuals with certain sensory disabilities. State this in your meeting script.
5. **For Deaf Members. If a deaf member is sharing/speaking spotlight them, not the interpreter.** Be sure that the ASL interpreter is identified and pinned. All ASL interpreters who meet State of Illinois requirements to interpret at AA meetings (Intermediate or above Certification) hold to a code of conduct which includes complete confidentiality and are welcome at both open and closed meetings even if they are not Alcoholics.

Newsletters/Handouts/Emails.
Members with visual disabilities may make use of screen readers; Individuals with certain learning and intellectual processing disabilities may need accommodations in order to read smoothly. These member' ability to read is greatly affected by how documents and visual aids are prepared and written.

1. Use a white background for written materials like emails, slides and documents and flyers.
2. Always select a "Sans Serif" (without tails) Font like Calibri or Arial. Avoid Serif fonts like Times New Roman and novelty fonts.
3. Try to avoid using colored fonts.
4. If you do a lot of document preparation, consider enabling the accessibility tools under Document Review in Microsoft Word. This tool offers suggestions for font colors and styles and layouts that are accessible just as it does for spelling and grammar.

In Person Meeting Layout, Environment and Welcome for the Member with a Disability.

1. **Designate an area for members with disabilities.** Place them in the line of sight of and close to the speaker. Be sure that other members will not be passing in front of them or climbing over them.
2. **Appoint someone at your meeting to greet members with disabilities.** This person can direct them to a seating area near the speaker, and show them the location of the restroom, coffee or other amenities at the meeting.
3. **A meeting is considered fully wheelchair accessible if it has BOTH a ramp and accessible restroom.** If a restroom is unavailable, the meeting should be noted as partially accessible. Please report your wheelchair accessibility to the CASO office so your meeting listing can be updated with universal symbols.
4. **Language and Inclusion.** We refer to "members with disabilities" not disabled members, handicapped members or special needs members. Treat a member as you would like to be treated, not as a child. If you are not sure what they need, ***ask them*** instead of telling them what you have provided.

If you don't make your meeting accessible you will not have a member with a disability attend. It is too common to hear "but we don't have any disabled members at our meeting". Who is *NOT* in the room and why?

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