

# Transcription of ArtsBuild Ontario's Learning Series Webinar: Invisible Disabilities and Creative Spaces

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>> Thea Kurdi: (Reference Slide 1) Hello everyone. Welcome to our invisible disabilities and creative spaces webinar. We very much appreciate you taking the time today to join us. This is the final webinar in the ArtsBuild Ontario's Learning Series on accessibility, a series of six webinars that have covered the design of public spaces standard, and the accessibility in creative spaces.

My name is Thea Kurdi, and I'm your lucky host for today's webinar. I'm also the Vice President of Designable Environments, one of Canada's

leading accessibility and universal design firms for the built environment.

We are currently working with ArtsBuild Ontario as consultants for both this fabulous webinar series, and the creation of a new soon to be published toolkit to support accessibility in creative spaces.

(Reference Slide 2) We are delighted to be joined today with our presenters Alex Bulmer, who is an accessibility consultant and actor, as well as Andrew Gurza, a disability awareness consultant. We will be hand go things over to them in just a minute, but at first a few housekeeping items before we get started. One, please be aware you can hear us, but we can't hear you. Your microphones have been disabled for the webinar, but we hope you can hear us through your speakers or headphones. You can adjust the sound for yourself by clicking on the speaker icon at the top of this meeting window.

No. 2, we are offering closed captioning throughout the webinar today. The closed caption appears at the bottom of your meeting room screen called caption stream pod where you, as a participant, can change the font type, size, and color to suit your needs. Would a participant please help us by confirming in the chat box at the bottom right of the screen by

typing that they can see the closed captioning and hear us clearly.

Fantastic. Thank you very much.

A record of the closed captioning will be sent to participants following the webinar and will also be made available on our website. Also, we have a video camera that will be being displayed later on in the presentation, and it will be turned on at that time. If you are having trouble seeing it, please let us know again in the chat window.

Last three things before we get started. One, we will be recording this session and a link will be E-mailed to everyone who is participating today following the webinar. Also, very important, two, we will be emailing a quick survey after the webinar. We ask that you complete this survey so ArtsBuild Ontario can continue to improve their Learning Series for creative spaces. And, three, lastly, we have approximately ten minutes at the end to answer your questions. Please use the chat box in the bottom right to type in your questions, and we will get to as many as possible. Please note that unfortunately the chat box function at the bottom right of the screen is not accessible using a screen reader, so if that chat box is not working for your needs, and if you do have questions, we don't want to miss out on them.

Please email them instead to [erin@artsbuildontario.ca](mailto:erin@artsbuildontario.ca) and we will ask them during the question and answer period.

(Reference Slide 3) Our agenda today includes three items. We're going to do a quick recap about the AODA and things that we covered in our last amazing webinar called "Safety, fire codes and accessibility for creative spaces," then we will go on to have the two presentations today on today's topic called "Invisible disabilities and creative spaces," and finally we will have our question and answer period.

(Reference Slide 4) So, quick recap of the AODA and the design of public spaces. In the very first seminar of the series we talked about this in much more detail, so please check that out if you didn't see it, or if you want more information. We discussed what exactly is a disability. We considered the fact that people with disabilities are really the minority of everyone. Everyone either currently has a disability, knows someone who has a disability, or through illness, accident or aging have a disability at some point in their life. So, the number of people this helps is tremendous.

(Reference Slide 5) We also considered understanding the law. So, what does AODA stand for? It stands for Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The goal of the act is to make Ontario accessible by 2025. It

is based on three important details, equality, dignity, and respect. There are also five other requirements related to the law under the integrated accessibility standard. The first is customer service, the second is information and communication, the third is employment, the fourth is transportation, and the fifth is design of public spaces.

(Reference Slide 6) The design of public spaces part of the AODA deals mostly with buildings, and for most buildings that means the exterior path of your travel, your outdoor public eating spaces, the outdoor play spaces – sorry. Technical problems here. Accessible parking, which includes type A size parking for vans, type B size parking for cars, and there are three elements that have it inside the building. The first is service counters, the second is fixed cueing guides, and the third are waiting areas. With a minimum of 3% seating available for people using mobility devices.

(Reference Slide 7) So, when we look at the Ontario Building Code one thing most people aren't aware of it has accessibility requirements as part of the regulations. You can build a building that is fully compliant with building code but the question is would it be fully inclusive? Because it mostly focuses on individuals who use wheelchairs, the answer is probably

no. And, it doesn't solve for the full range of abilities people have. This means we provided extra resources.

(Reference Slide 8) We also talked about the hierarchy of the laws.

Many people aren't aware that the Ontario human rights code has primacy or supersedes both the Ontario Building Code known as the OBC, and the AODA. As a part of the planning act, the Ontario Building Code act and the accessibilities for Disabilities Act, these all must comply with the intent of the code, and the code is – tries to ensure that we never create spaces that discriminate against people with disabilities. There is a clause about undue hardship for organizations. I encourage you to look for further information on the Ontario human rights code website.

(Reference Slide 9) So, finally we provided great resources for you that will be available to you through the website. The first is the AODA customer service information that you need to be applying in new training for your staff, the second is the AODA information and communication standard, what things to be considered about how to make information accessible to people and things about your website, the AODA employment standard, and making sure your hiring practices are inclusive for people with disabilities, and then finally, of course, the design of public spaces, and

we provided a link to the illustrative technical guide for the design of public spaces to make it all very simple for you.

(Reference Slide 10) If you have any questions about the AODA or the design of public spaces standard, you are welcome to contact the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility. On this slide we have given you a variety of different ways to contact them through their website, through their telephone numbers, through their Twitter account, through their Facebook account, through their YouTube channel, and through their email address.

(Reference Slide 11) So, we just wanted to do a quick recap of what was covered in webinar No. 5. This is the safety fire codes and accessibility in creative spaces webinar. Our first presenter was Martin Day of Safety Media Inc. Martin was a dynamic speaker who spoke to us about the fire code companion to the Ontario Building Code, a separate document that talks about what needs to happen to keep people safe. The idea of promoting fire safety attitude in a building from a facilities management all the way to an operational. That the fire safety plans, the best ones follow approach that is called four P's that happens under Part 2 and 6. He explained what the four P's were, he talked about what the table of contents was, and how to make your plans accessible. He also reviewed

with us how his company is working on accessible signage requirements with things like braille on safety exit signage, as well as QR codes so things can be displayed in multiple languages.

(Reference Slide 12) We then were tremendously lucky to also have speaking with us Marnie Peters from Accessibility Simplified. Marnie mentioned her work the work she had done to make the Ottawa Art Gallery and the Museum of Nature Tau accessible among many others. The importance of being able to get out of a building on an accessible route with directional signage to an accessible exit. That is something that is not required by the building code. How the OBC was updated in 2015, and what those requirements were related to safety both visual alarms and that we need to probably do more than the minimum required.

Audible and visible visual announcements during emergencies are critical if you're providing an audible message, how are you also providing that visually for people who can't hear? How to use the Request for Proposal in your planning as a tool to set higher standards for your buildings, your renovations as a part of the design contract. She reviewed areas of refuge or rescue assistance, emergency evacuation chairs and evacuation maps. Thinking about providing accessible information for your



staff and your visitors is critical and she mentioned as one of the great resources presently available is from the Canadian Labour code. So, if you didn't get a chance to see it, you certainly should go back and have a look at it.

(Reference Slide 13) Now I want to do a quick introduction to our two amazing presenters today from our final webinar, starting with Alex Bulmer. Alex is an award winning writer, director, performer, accessibility designer and educator. Alex has worked as an arts professional since 1992 with companies including CBC, the Royal Court Theater, Buddies in Bad Times, the National Arts Centre, the Boy Choir of Lisbon, London 2012 Olympic, ABC radio, Common boots theater, and Channel Four series "Cast Offs". She has been nominated and won many awards. Alex was a UK ARIA prize final list for her song driven radio features "Sounds Like She".

A society of Canadian musicians, award recipient and the writer of stage play smudge, which earned two best new play nominations in Canada and was time out magazine's critic choice during the UK premier. She was literary manager with gray, the UK leading disability led theater company and has been access demurer of several outdoor performances and surface parts projects in Canada and the UK. She has offered training and

consultation in consultation performing arts education, marketing, customer service, and disability conference training for numerous venues and institutions across the UK and Ontario. In 2014, Alex was named one of the most influential disabled artists in UK's power magazine.

Our second amazing presenter today is Andrew Gurza. Andrew is a disability awareness consultant and consultant creator whose written work has been featured on CBC, Daily Extra, Day Times UK, Huffington Post, The Advocate, Everyday Feminism, Mashable, Outdoor.Com and several anthologies. He was guest on a number of pod casts, including Dan Savage's "Savage Love" and Cameron "Esposito's Query." He has spoken all over North America on sex and disability and what it means to be a queer cripple. He is also the host of Disability After Dark, a podcast shining a bright light on sex and disability available on all podcast platforms. You can follow the podcast at [disaftdarkpod](http://disaftdarkpod). That is [disaftdarkpod](http://disaftdarkpod). He is also the creator of the viral hashtag [#disabledpeoplearehot](https://twitter.com/disabledpeoplearehot). You can find out more about Andrew by going to his website [www.andrewgurza.com](http://www.andrewgurza.com) and connecting with him on social media at the Andrew Gurza.

I'm just going to check to see if we have everybody online ready to go for the presentations. Is Alex with us?

>> ALEX BULMER: Hello.

>> THEA KURDI: Hi, is that Alex?

>> ERIN BORCH: It is Erin, and I'm here with Alex. Can everyone see us okay? >> THEA KURDI: Perfect. I'm going to turn things over to Alex to get us started, and we'll be with her until 12:35. Thank you, Alex. Go ahead.

>> ALEX BULMER: Thank you. Can I ask for a time check. What time is it now?

>> ERIN BORCH: 12:16.

>> ALEX BULMER: (Reference Slide 14) Thank you very much for inviting me to participate with you in this webinar entitled invisible disabilities and creative spaces. Just before I begin, I just want to do a little bit of a language disclosure. I identify as always blind, but not always disabled. And, I recognize that the term visible disabilities may be preferred and used by some people whereas others may prefer to use invisibly disabled or other terminology to self identify, and I hope that I use a range of language so that so we respect all those differences.

(Reference Slide 15 and 16) To begin, invisible disabilities and creative spaces. What we're going to talk through is essentially going to try to equip

our viewers and listeners to have tools to work together to make a more accessible artistic Ontario. What we're going to talk through is I want to define who and what we are referring to when we use the term invisible disabilities. I want to talk - I want to identify some of the key threats to inclusion for this community, and I would like to identify some key solutions and have a look at a case study of a performing arts project.

(Reference Slide 17 and 18) So, let's begin by just identifying who we are referring to. The term invisible disabilities is often used I think – is understood to be referring to people who have access requirements or disabilities that are not apparent to the eye. They are not seen and therefore assumed to not exist. This is a real problem and I think it is a lesson for everyone working with people who have any access requirement or disability, because no one's access requirements should be assumed to be understood simply by what is seen.

(Reference Slide 19) One of the key threats to inclusion for this community is a result of that assumption which essentially leads to silence. A kind of atmosphere where nobody asks, so nobody tells. And, environments where people aren't encouraged to communicate do

promote that sense of fear that any disclosure needs may lead to a negative stigma. So, one of the key solutions is, therefore, communication.

(Reference Slide 20) Proactive communication to break that silence.

And, I'm just going to talk through three examples of how you can communicate proactively as an arts organization. So, one of the, or as an artist or anybody serving artists. So, proactive communication, if you are an organization or if you have a venue or if you are leading a project, make that bold, clear statement on all of your material, on all of your outgoing public messages. Be it websites, phone lines, on walls in your spaces, in braille, make it as absolutely known as possible that you champion diversity of access requirements and disability to promote best help for your organization, best accessibility for the communities you serve, and enabling most people to participate fully and meaningfully.

One thing I should also just say, because I meant to say it earlier, is that some specific examples of people within this community would include those with neurological diversity, cognitive diversity, people with digestive sensitivities, those who identify as having mental health needs, those with chronic pain or chronic fatigue, those are just a few examples of who would identify within this community of those who are in visibly disabled.

(Reference Slide 21) So, just getting back to solutions. Another key solution is to move beyond what you assume is seen or not seen and move towards asking. Ask. A S K. It's the simplest message I could give. Ask people what their access requirements are. And, I really promote the idea of asking about access requirements as the highest priority in terms of the conversation rather than starting off with asking what medical diagnosis may be. Many people don't need to discuss their medical diagnosis in order to have their access needs met. So, ask about access needs.

Have that conversation, and then access needs could be something like I will require a quiet room when I attend your venue. I will need flexible working hours. I will need a rehearsal space that is ensured not to have flickering, fluorescent lights. Or acoustically creates an echo chamber that could trigger anxiety. So, ask people for their access requirements. For those who wish to disclose medical diagnosis or medical condition, for whatever reason, likely it could be they need to ensure there is first aid available in the building, give people that option. And, I'm talking about employers, I'm talking about artists, and even visitors to your space.

Ensure that there is someone in your space who does have some specialized training in first aid, and know who that person is, but for most

people, it's more about delivering good customer service that is accessible.

And, remember, you hold the knowledge of your space. Others hold the knowledge of their needs. Work together.

(Reference Slide 22) The last thing I would say is be proactive with provisions. There are things you can do before someone walks into your space, before someone shows up ten minutes before a show starts or the gallery opens. There are provisions you can put in place by imagining beyond the assumed, again get back to this idea of assumptions. Imagine people will come who have never been in your building before or simply imagine all the things you can do that can exist already before anyone visits. And, these things can include visual stories on your website, a written description about your venue and what to expect when you get there. I'm going to talk through some more specifics about proactive provisions as I move on to my final topic.

(Reference Slide 23) My final topic is to use Crip Shorts as a case study. Crip shorts was an event I was a co producer and director of last January that was co produced by Harbourfront Centre Disability, the British Council Creative Users and Ryerson Disability Studies. This was a disabled led

performance night that featured five brilliant acts that were all performed by disabled artists and their experience of disability.

So, what we did in order to be proactively prepared, we engaged in access audits. And, by that I mean investigating the space for potential access barriers in order to prepare solutions and when I say the space that included backstage, the stage itself, and the audience space, plus the entrance into the building, washrooms, all aspects of the environment that people would be traveling through. Looking for again, those things that could cause barriers or safety issue. Access audits are best done with someone from within the community who understands what to look for in terms of auditing spaces.

We also audited the marketing and ticket system and box office system. Again, some of these things can be really inaccessible. Those online ticket purchasing sites so often time out before people really have had an opportunity to take the time to decide what they want to purchase. It may be due to screen readers slowing down or making the process in need of more time. It may be other concerns, such as anxiety in terms of decision making. Slow those websites down. Give people time to buy their ticket and to understand what the event is about.



The other access audit we did was on the artist participants themselves, because all had access requirements, so we did a really thorough audit well in advance of the event.

Other things we implemented in terms of the environment. We implemented something called official story board, which is photographic. It's a photographic story that tells people what to expect upon arrival. It shows the front of the building. It shows what the building looks like when you get into the space. The audience space. The stage. It gives people preparation through visual story to know what to expect when they arrive.

We also did a written description of the story. What was that?

>> THEA KURDI: I'm sorry. We're just about out of time. Would you be able to do a quick wrap up?

>> ALEX BULMER: (Reference Slide 24) Okay. Maybe Andrew can talk about this a little bit more, relaxed performances, training your staff and volunteers. I'll let Andrew speak more about the specifics, but to wrap up, I think the three key messages I would offer is remember that you are the – you have the knowledge of your space, others have the knowledge of their needs. Reach out to your potential audiences and visitors. Reversing exclusion takes time. Don't expect it to happen instantly, and just

remember, work together to create a more accessible Ontario. And I'll hand it over to Andrew.

>> THEA KURDI: Thank you very much Alex. That was a wonderful presentation full of amazing ideas. I wanted to quickly recap things that I thought listed out the most. One, the danger of assuming needs for people who have invisible disabilities. Two, that the key threat is nobody asks and nobody tells. We avoid the sense avoiding it creates sometimes a sense of fear and a negative stigma, so it's really important to be very proactive with our communication. We move forward by assuming to ask what requirements are and make sure not to focus on medical diagnosis. They don't have to reveal their medical diagnosis. We want to be proactive with provisions imagined beyond what is assumed, so as the performance approaches, and then the amazing crip shorts case study that you mentioned will be an invaluable resource I'm sure.

Now I'm going to be turning things over to Andrew, and Andrew, we're going to ask you to try to wrap things up by 12:50 or so that we have time for questions. Please go ahead.

>> ANDREW GURZA: (Reference Slide 25) Hello everybody. Thank you for having me today. I'm excited to be here. My name is Andrew Gurza, as

you heard, I'm a disability awareness consultant and triple content creator and this is invisible spaces – waiting for the slide to come up because you want to make sure I get it right. Thank you. So this is invisible disabilities and Creative Spaces: How do we incorporate invisible disabilities.

(Reference Slide 26) So, let's get started. So I want to make clear that I don't come into the arts with a predominant lived experience of invisible disability. You can see that I'm sitting in my own big power chair right now, so have a visible disability and I use a wheelchair, so the way that I'm read in society is that immediately I'm understood through my mobility device because as a wheelchair users I have a template for how I'm treated. I'm treated as a wheelchair user.

So, people don't know necessarily that I live with anxiety and depression. That is something that I live with every day. It is something that impacts both my physical health and my mental health, and the way that I navigate the world. So, I have trouble talking about that with people and disclosing that I have invisible disabilities and mental health issues because of the stigma around all that. And it's really been tough to say: “yeah, I'm a physically disabled person but I also have an invisible disability, so because of that I'm going to have more access needs”.

We can move ahead. Thanks.

(Reference Slide 27) So, I wanted today I want to talk predominantly about how invisible disabilities and the arts work with something I'm doing. In 2015 I started working on a piece of theater with three queer men with disabilities, Ken, Frank and myself came together to create a piece around queerness and disability and sexuality for the three of us really. We wanted to create a piece of this theater that showcased queerness in disability.

So, during our workshopping of this production, during the workshopping of all the stuff, we were asked to really talk about our personal lives and share stories about our sexuality and we were asked to undress on stage and all these things. We were asked of us to make the piece powerful. In doing that, we got really emotional really fast. We discovered that we didn't necessarily like talking about our emotions and talking about some of us, our invisible disabilities, some of us, our physical disabilities, and some of us haven't hadn't ever really talked about that to a group before or to other disabled men in a room to make a piece. So none of us really knew how to do that.

So we started fighting and getting really annoyed with each other because we didn't know how to manage my depression or manage Ken's or

Frank's thing. None of us knew how to manage all that. We knew how to be physically disabled, sure, but to have invisible disabilities in the work place was hard for us. So, at one point during one of our sessions two years ago we got in a fight and walked out and said "no, we do not want to do this anymore and the show is going to stop, we're done, this is finished".

Because we were having such trouble talking about our mental health and talking about the issues around that, the show was suffering, and we were having – we were suffering emotionally, so we all stopped the show. Which would have been a shame, because the show is going to be amazing and when it is ready you should all come. So, we stopped the show because we didn't know how to handle that. We can move to the next thing.

(Reference Slide 28) So, we had a big talk that day, we went off to our separate ways and said the show is done, we're finished, and then we came back the next day. We all sat in a circle and said we need to talk about this, but we don't know how to do that. So our production manager, Jonathan Zenan said let's have a check in every day where we talk about our mental health and how that affects us and this is a new thing for me. I had never talked about mental health in an arts space. I had talked about the fact that I need a wheelchair and I need elevators and I need a button, but I

never said "I am a person with an invisible disability and I want to talk about it." I had no idea how to bring that into an art space.

So, each and every day before we started doing any work about the play, we sat down with each other and said how was your night last night, did you sleep okay, are you getting enough water, what are your access needs for the day. And, that was a huge – I was thankful for that because I had never been asked by another group of people what are your access needs for today in a space where I felt safe.

Usually I'm the one who would say, hey, I'm a presenter – so I go around the world and say here is what my needs are, please do this for me so I can come and do your talk. I have never been asked by another group of disabled men who have very similar experiences to me, what can we do to make you okay?, and then to allow me the space as an artist to also ask the same question of them and say what can I do to make your space more accessible.

What we learned is that we all needed time away. We needed to do - we needed to do games and to do like stuff that wasn't about the play. We needed to ask, hey, what are you watching on TV last night? Do you like this show? They all seemed trivial but really we needed time to be taken away

from the toughness of the work and some of our mental health stuff so we could center. It also really fostered a great sense of communication between the performers who were disabled, also the production staff to see that this is an important thing we should be doing and we should be talking about and I think it was really very much needed and I'm thankful we could do that. We can move ahead.

(Reference Slide 29) So in figuring out of how to do this, the creative team of Boys in Chairs has made a commitment to hire a mental health professional in our next workshops in Toronto in 2019 and 2020, so that our invisible disabilities can be properly tended to and talked about.

This is so important and I'm so excited because we get to sit and say you know what, this thing is really bugging me today, with a professional, I want to talk about this and I'm not sure how this is going to affect my work and we get to see firsthand how having those discussions with somebody in the room will inform our performances as performers. It was a huge step forward in validating that invisible disabilities deserve to be understood in the creative space.

Also because we have first hand knowledge as creators with invisible disabilities and physical disabilities, we can apply this knowledge to the

spaces we hold the productions in to say okay, this is what worked physically also for my emotional health or mental health or invisible disabilities, this won't work. This kind of communication and this willingness to talk about these things around invisible disabilities is a great way to understand things from a production side but communication is also vital in spaces for individuals who are entering creative spaces as patrons. So, go ahead with that.

>> ERIN BORCH: You have about five minutes.

>> ANDREW GURZA: (Reference Slide 30) Okay. I'm going to just be super fast about this. So, how to support patrons with invisible disabilities. We should have signage in all programs that highlight, if you have invisible disability, the theatre space or organization should do whatever they can to support you. Signage on the walls, website, on your answering machine, all those things should be available. If you're booking or come into the space we know what you're doing.

When you buy tickets online or in person, there should be an option or box you can check that says "Do you identify as having an invisible disability, or disability generally?" I think this would be super helpful for front of house if you said yes, they can say okay, you want to come on this



day, great, let's make sure we have a physical space for you and let's make sure we also can figure out what your invisible needs are. So, if you need a relaxed performance, if you need this and this, let us figure this out for you so we can set it up. And, if five people with disabilities that day come and by tickets and they know Wednesday at 2 o'clock this production has to be altered some way to accommodate this.

This can be a great opportunity for the venue to show they considered things and widen our idea of a creative space and it means that all of us can engage. Also I think a lot of these things should be streamed, much like today. Many of you are all over Canada, I guess Canada, so all of you around everywhere, so all of these things, plays and productions should also find a way to have them streamed, because for me leaving the house today to get here was a whole thing. So, it can be really important to look at accessibility that way, too. Okay. And, we can go ahead and move ahead.

(Reference Slide 31) Very briefly I wanted to show some resources and things that happened. Okay. We can move ahead.

(Reference Slide 32) Relaxed performances. Come From Away is doing a relaxed performance, so that is great. And, the fact that we have relaxed performances and big things like that. Also sent free spaces.

(Reference Slide 33) This is things that I'm learning more and more as I do disability work. A lot of my colleagues are saying I have a scent issue and I noticed that I have scent issue, so not having scents at all is key, and there is a fragrance free toolkit. And, okay. Now questions.

>> Thea Kurdi: Thank you so much. That was amazing. Going to do a quick recap to try to capture some of those amazing ideas. I think one of the important things you mentioned was how often people assume that if you're a wheelchair user that you don't have any other disability issues, and certainly they're not considering the idea of invisible disabilities. I love the description you were saying about the show you're putting together, Boys in Chairs, and then thinking of not only about the theater showcase, but also what you're experienced in putting that show together was and the vulnerability that you felt in that experience.

I thought it was important you talked about the idea of creating safe space where people can ask for what they need. I love that you got shows coming up not only in 2019 but also going ahead in 2020. I really hope to

get a chance to get out and I'm sure a lot of the people attending today will be looking to come out, too.

The idea of first hand knowledge on giving feedback to venues for what the physical and mental health or other invisible disabilities needs are, sort of creating a much better awareness, and repeating some of the things we heard from Alex about signage on the walls, the importance of making sure information is available on websites, and through the phone lines.

I like the idea on the websites of having options when you're buying the tickets to identify as having accessibility needs to help the people at front of house consider what is going to be needed and when, and then perhaps even thinking effecting what they're their standard set up is to be inclusive to more people without having to ask. Also appreciated your idea about streaming events so that people who can't leave the house and physically be there in person can participate, benefit, and share in the beauty.

Relaxed performances is something we've been hearing more about but great to hear you talking and providing resources for that, and the

important of scent free spaces. People with chemical sensitivities, nobody is talking about this and it is a huge problem.

(Reference Slide 34) We have a question for questions for both of our presenters. If you have a question for a particular presenter or both presenter please type it in the chat box or sends it to email in seed to erin@artsbuildontario.ca.

So, Maria has already written in saying I would like both of to you speak to the department of Canadian heritage. That is really cool. I'm sure we'll figure out a way for Maria for you to get this touch with them. Natalie says she has a scent issue. It is very hard to find or to get scent space. Do you have any suggestions about that?

>> ALEX BULMER: Do you want to start?

>> ANDREW GURZA: Sure. Scent free space is a new thing I'm learning about so I don't want to pretend that I'm an expert about this. I would say to be honest about what your needs are. It doesn't matters if people get upset about you policing it. That is on them. You need to say what your needs are and go from there. I hope that answers your question.

>> ALEX BULMER: I guess the word policing almost sounds as if it is sort of a negative or an oppressive thing to do or authoritarian thing to. So,

again, I would reiterate that being pre-emptive as well as reactive. So, make it clear that you have a scent free policy on all of your communications and I would say don't be afraid to if you detect there is a scent, don't be afraid to just emphasize that you are a scent free environment. It should not cause offense and if it does, that's really unfortunate for that person, but you know really ultimately you want to put actions behind your policies to be scent free.

>> THEA KURDI: Yeah, that is a very big point. It is a struggle sometimes, particularly as Canadians, we feel we have to apologize for the things we ask for, but a scent is a barrier, and if someone is violating the scent or the scent free zone.

I was at an event for the consultations on the Accessible Canada Act where the hotel had done so many great things to make the event very accessible, but they had forgotten to remove the scented soap in the bathrooms. So, there was a problem that came up there and the hotel was great, they apologized, they immediately removed that, so and the rest of the event went off very well.

We have another question here about the idea of online ticketing and customer service training and the question's for Michelle asking is there a

suggested or preferred language when asking patrons over the phone, or in person, about any invisible disability requests they may have.

>>ALEX BULMER: I should start?

>> ANDREW GURZA: Yeah, go ahead.

>> ALEX BULMER: Okay. The language I would recommend and Andrew may have other recommendations, as well. I think always asking if a person has any access requirements and then give examples so that - because some people have never been asked that question.

>> ANDREW GURZA: Yes.

>> ALEX BULMER: So giving examples. Such as a quiet room in order to enable some quiet time while visiting your venue or being welcomed to leave a room regardless of whether a performance is continuing or not. The ability to get up and move around if one is experiencing any pain or discomfort or anxiety. Giving, I think giving examples is a great way to help people know how to answer that question, and also reinforce, like I can't say this enough, that you're talking about a negotiation between what you offer in your space and what services you offer and what their needs are rather than asking about private details of medical history. It is really

important that you keep the conversation rooted in your space, your service, and their requirements.

And just another tip. There is a center in the UK that actually has an access membership which basically invites people to join a membership and give the organization details of their access requirements so they remain as an access member and whenever they call up and book a ticket their name immediately brings up access requirements so conversations don't have to be repeated, and I'll turn it over to Andrew.

>> ANDREW GURZA: I think the language is important and keep the terminology access needs. Unfortunately when we say disability most people think wheelchair, paralysis, that is where their brain goes, so access opens it up for everyone, whatever it is, you can still fall so I think language is important.

I agree with you that just putting it clearly and giving examples really just being clear about we want to meet your needs, what can we do for you.

That's it. That's all I can say.

>> Thea Kurdi: One of the things I don't think a lot of people think about when putting together what your requirements are in renovating or creating new spaces is thinking about the interior quality, which is

something we talked about for green design a lot, but not something we think about for a scent free environment. So, the how much fresh air is being put into the environment, how do you manage fresh air to try to mitigate, one of the things people with multiple chemical sensitivities talk about is it's not just perfume, but it can be off gassing from equipment, assistive equipment that other people are using.

So, even if you ask people not to wear scents how can they – is there a place in the space where they can be getting access to more fresh air. And, that's like almost none of our clients have that on their radar, and because accessibility consultants often are not a part of the conversation early enough, that it's the kind of thing I wish more people were including when they were thinking about their planning for their spaces.

Okay. We have a couple of other amazing questions here. Unfortunately some time to do it. Is the UK access service confidential, and if I register there, would it be effective in Canada yet?

>> ALEX BULMER: Sorry. Is that a question. Sorry I didn't quite understand the question.



>>THEA KURDI: The UK registry you were talking about the UK access service, is that something that is used here in Canada yet or is that something restricted to just the UK?

>> ALEX BULMER: So it is actually something that is specific to a particular arts venue. I have not - I think it may be used by other arts venues. It's specifically to the arts venue and so that information is held by the arts venue and it is held confidentially within the arts venue. It's not a nationwide registry. It's something - it was an initiative by the center that has been really successful and another reason it is successful is it is given to people to say do you want any information about any additional accessibility provisions we may put in place for specific events. So, some events may need more audio description, for example for people with low vision. It's just a great way to also communicate with that community, with all communities with access needs.

I don't know of anyone doing it yet in Canada. I have been suggesting it to differing performing arts venues, but I don't know yet if anyone has taken it up.

>> THEA KURDI: I have a question from Amanda. Do you have suggestions for artist with invisible disabilities that might limit their energy

and capacity to participate in rehearsal or during creation time, how can they balance their access needs with the desire to create within an external timeline and budget constraints.

>> ALEX BULMER: That is a great question.

>> ANDREW GURXA: I don't know how to answer that. That is a great question. What we are doing is allowing us to work from home sometimes allowing to us do creation meetings and sitting around a table from Skype. The first year we did our workshop I wasn't there. I was home. But I participated three hours a day. Still, there with them. So, there are ways to say, hey, do you want to go home to your safe space and take this piece with you home and bring it back and we can pay you for - we'll pay you to be home to do that. That was great.

Also, if people have needs like that where they can't be in their space a long period of time, putting something in your budget is that like okay, do you need special cab fare to go home, do you need attendant care. We tried really hard this year in the workshops for this year, to try to get an attendant care worker to stay us with for two or three hours a day. It didn't pan out so I need to go back home so the fact that our production company is making sure there was room in the budget for all cabs you need,

whatever paratransit you need, putting those things in the budget, so if say you need this time to be away based on this, there is no questions asked and we'll figure out. As long as you're doing the work, it doesn't matter where you're doing it. As long as you're doing it, you can bring something back later, it shouldn't matter where you're doing it.

>> THEA KURDI: Thank you very much. I think that was really good.

>> ALEX BULMER: Sums it up, I think.

>> THEA KURDI: Go ahead, Alex.

>> ALEX BULMER: I was going to say, that really sums it up. I think, thinking about it from a budget stage of having support workers. As a blind person working in the performing arts I experience exhaustion on a level that I didn't experience when I was sighted, so having a support worker even if it means them buying my groceries to make sure there's good food in my house because I'm too tired to try and navigate a grocery store after navigating a rehearsal.

I will just give a quick example. I worked on a play in England and one of the performance had multiple sclerosis and had a lot of issues with chronic fatigue and so rather than asking her to perform every night we had a version of the show where she was recorded, her character's part was

recorded as a journalist so we got creative with let's give her the option to be live when she can be, and if not, her part is shown on the screen. So, I think being flexible and creative with these ideas to find solutions is also great.

>> ANDREW GURZA: Really cool. Yeah.

>> THEA KURDI: I think in the built environment we're constantly talking about flexible and adaptable design that allows people have their needs change and met in different ways. It actually works very well with the idea of green design.

There is a lot of overlap between the green design objectives we have and accessible design, because green design really wants to try to create a space that has a longevity to it and there are many smart green design choices as you're looking at green products that would also make the space much more accessible.

This is an article I wrote back in 2011 but it is a message that I still keep trying to get out. The importance of flexible and adaptable, but I think I would also add consistency and predictability is really useful, as well, and I think when people are coming up with solution, I love the ArtsBuild is involved with this in your community trying to share information so that

we're breaking down silos where people are problem solving in individual spaces but that they can be bringing that information and sharing that information so that other people don't have to A, work as hard, and B, that people attending events or performing in events are finding this consistency and predictability that makes it easier so you don't have to keep relearning everything.

Lighting is another thing that a lot of people don't talk about and consider. I'm glad you both mentioned signage. These are things that I think are really important.

We have a question here also from Michelle about dressing room areas. And, how often back of house in heritage buildings or older buildings or some new building because it is not in the building code about back of house not being accessible and very limiting. How you have dealt with that in your own experiences and are you aware of more resources or solutions for people who have older buildings to provide access?

>> ALEX BULMER: That is a great question. I'm glad you asked that. Yeah, I have been - I have worked in venues where for whatever reason there was no alternative space. I mean, ideally you want to find a space where the backstage is accessible for people who use wheelchairs, the

lighting is accessible in terms of it not causing visual fatigue or any kind of reaction to like I said I think fluorescent kind of jaggedly kind of lighting.

Also I would say acoustically it is important to check the acoustics of both front and back spaces because if you put a group of people in a room that is an echo chamber, no one can cope in those environments for so many different reasons. So, doing a good audit is important, and if you find yourself, as I have with actually a show I recently produced in the Harbourfront Centre Theater, where the dressing rooms are not accessible, we did, and I know that this happened a couple of years ago with a performer who also came who was a wheelchair user. The Center created a temporary dressing area, a dressing room on the main floor, you know, and that is not that hard to do. It's what is most important is that it maintains it's privacy so that the general public doesn't enter those spaces.

The other thing I have done is if people are able to go down a set of stairs that don't have - but have low vision, and the stairs aren't well marked, is to put down tactile and contrast marking on staircases to ensure that they're safer and insure that there is always a support work you available to also give verbal description going down the stairs. So, being, again, being flexible with your space to come up with solutions.

>> THEA KURDI: I'm sorry. I have to hold you there, given the time. I know we have lots more information to share. Thank you so much to everyone for participating. That is all the questions we have for questions. We have a few things to quickly wrap up before we end the session.

(Reference Slide 35) The webinars are all available online. So, you can watch the five previous webinars already on the on the ArtsBuild websites, and this one will be available very soon, as well. We have provided the recordings, the slides, and the transcriptions.

(Reference Slide 36) Please also be aware that we have the Accessibility and Creative Spaces: A toolkit for Ontario Arts Organizations that is soon to be released on Tuesday, May 28. You'll definitely want to check that out. The resources and all the resources from that series are in that book, plus many others.

(Reference Slide 37) And we wanted to take the time to recognize and thank the accessibility advisory committee from the ArtsBuild Ontario for informing the content in the webinars for this six part series.

(Reference Slide 38) Please remember that we are going to be sending you a link to some feedback in a survey so that you can tell us what was great about today's webinar, what we might improve for future webinars,

and would of course like to thank the Ontario Government for their support of this project.

Thank you again to Alex and Andrew for your wonderful presentations and your thoughtful answers and thank you to you, the par participants who joined us today. Hope that you found the webinar useful and wish that you have a great day.

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