

Seniors and the Disabled Are People Too...

If you are well and fully functional, it's hard to really know what it's like not to be. There are lots of rules, regulation and guidelines to help organization help the physically challenged and certainly they are all well intentioned. The problem is that most of the people providing the special needs are not disabled and don't fully realize the impact of what they provide or don't provide. Some uneducated event organizers may say that they are not catering to this type of person or that it costs too much or is too much trouble. Not only is this wrong thinking, it eliminates a very lucrative market. Many of the physically challenged are seniors and many have a lot of disposable income. Not only that, they like to spend it on others, like grandchildren! The whole idea of holding an event is to attract people, lots of them, so why limit yourselves on "who". The more you do to make your event disabled/senior friendly, the more your event will attract them. People like to go where they feel welcomed! You will be surprised at how the word will spread. Most seniors and disabled are members of networks and they like to talk about their experiences (positive and negative). So let's suppose that you agree with me and want to include this group of potential visitors in your marketing plans. Great, but don't just provide the minimum requirements, go the whole way! You will be glad you did and everyone (abled and disabled, seniors and youths) will applaud your efforts. Once you have finished your plans, make sure you let everyone know about them (media, website, advertising, program guide, etc.).

Here are a few ideas to help you provide the best physically challenged program possible:

- Train your volunteers on how to assist seniors and the disabled
- Make sure you have plenty of disabled parking (if you do this right, you will need it!)
- Have plenty of wheel chairs on hand
- Have convenient drop off areas
- Provided clean well marked disabled washroom facilities
- If you have a large outdoor event site, install several conveniently located shaded rest stops
- Provide a "Wheel-Trans" type service to your event
- Again, if you have a large venue, provide a disabled accessible people mover
- Make sure food areas have lots of shaded table and chairs. Picnic tables are very hard for the physically challenged to use
- Ask your food vendors to have menus that can be seen and read by people in wheelchairs
- If you have vendors selling products, provide a delivery service either to the purchaser's vehicle or to his/her home
- Provide a rest tent with cots and other services that would appeal to seniors and the disabled
- Provide a "large print" event guide for those who need it
- Place your washroom facilities in various locations rather than just one location. This is especially true if you have a larger site
- Ask the seniors and disabled in your community what they would like
- Try to provide clear walkways that allow wheelchairs and walkers to pass easily

Finally, ask members of the physically challenged community to become members of your organizing committee

Remember, you never know when you might need these services yourself.