

Strong Start® Charitable Organization Accessibility Plan

Contents

Message from the Chief Executive Officer.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Section One: Past Achievements to Remove and Prevent Barriers.....	5
Customer Service.....	5
Information and Communications	5
Employment.....	6
Procurement.....	6
Self-service kiosks.....	6
Training	6
Design of Public Spaces	7
Other	8
Section Two: Strategies and Actions	8
Customer Service.....	8
Policy.....	9
Assistive devices	10
Communication	10
Service Animals.....	10
Support Persons	10
Notice of Temporary Disruption.....	10
Training.....	11
Feedback Process.....	11
Modifications to the Customer Service Plan.....	11
Information and Communications	12

Employment.....	13
Recruitment and Hiring.....	13
Procurement	15
Self-service kiosks	15
Training	15
Who needs to be trained?	15
Records Management	15
Training requirements	16
An outline for training requirements follows:	16
Additional Training Resources:.....	18
Design of Public Spaces	18
For More Information.....	19

Message from the Chief Executive Officer

Strong Start® Charitable Organization (Strong Start) is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible environment for persons with disabilities in a way that maintains and respects their dignity and independence. We will do so by preventing and removing barriers to accessibility and meeting our accessibility requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and Ontario's accessibility laws.

The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requires Strong Start to develop a multi-year plan every five years to prevent and remove barriers for persons with disabilities. Strong Start through its multiyear accessibility plans, aims to become barrier free by 2025.

We have taken our role seriously in creating an inclusive environment that is barrier free. Over the last few years, we have engaged the support of internal and external resources to create processes and develop our policies and multi-year plan. We are proud of all our learning and actions to develop our plan. Here are a few highlights of our work:

- Supported employees, volunteers, and program participants with accommodations such as service dogs, personal support workers, and modified tasks and processes due to disabilities, exceptionalities and injuries
- Supported the addition of braille to program materials for a school partner running our *Letters, Sounds and Words*™ program
- Supported translation services to help families in our *Get Ready for School*™ program
- Supported translation enabling tools embedded in our Parent Resources.
- Implemented Behaviour Management System training for staff to support physical needs of other employees, volunteers and program participants
- Engaged students in the Human Resources (HR) program at Conestoga College to review our AODA practices and recommend solutions
- Implemented AODA training for our staff and volunteers
- Formed an AODA committee to lead and manage the work related to our commitment

Strong Start is committed to its core values of Relationships, Excellence, Accountability and Dynamic. Our support and work of the IASR under the AODA is truly reflective of how we strive to maintain authentic **relationships** rooted in respect and mutual benefit, embody **excellence** in all facets of our organization and our programs, operate with

integrity and hold ourselves **accountable** to work hard and deliver results, and being **dynamic**, continuously evolving and building capacity in order to achieve greater impact.

We look forward to working with our stakeholders to deliver on the promises of our multiyear accessibility plan and ensure Strong Start is an inclusive and accessible environment for persons with disabilities in a way that maintains and respects their dignity and independence.



Machelle Denison

Introduction

Strong Start strives to meet the needs of its employees and customers with disabilities and is working hard to remove and prevent barriers to accessibility.

Our organization/business is committed to fulfilling our requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This accessibility plan outlines the steps Strong Start is taking to meet those requirements and to improve opportunities for people with disabilities.

Our plan shows how Strong Start will play its role in making Ontario an accessible province for all Ontarians.

Important: Strong Start operates from its Provincial Office in Waterloo, Ontario, however, the majority of our programming takes place at our program partners' locations including schools and community centres, where they have their own accessibility plans and protocols. Our employees and volunteers will be trained to understand the accessibility options at the program partners' facility and develop individualized plans as required. In our *Letters, Sounds and Words™* program, volunteers are the responsibility of the school and will be required to make arrangements with the school for any accessibility related supports.

Section One: Past Achievements to Remove and Prevent Barriers

This document includes a summary of the accessibility initiatives Strong Start has completed.

Customer Service

These are the past initiatives and the approximate dates when they were implemented:

Year	Area of Focus
May 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed Accessible Customer Service Policy.

Information and Communications

We will communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability. When asked, we will provide information about our organization and its services, including public safety information, in accessible formats or with communication supports.

We will also meet internationally-recognized Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA website requirements in accordance with Ontario's accessibility laws.

These are the past initiatives and the approximate dates when they were implemented:

Year	Area of Focus
February 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New website launched meeting existing WCAG standards.
May 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job and volunteer positions posted on our website advertise that Strong Start welcomes and encourages applications from people with disabilities, and those accommodations are available upon request.
April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained <i>Get Ready for School @ Home™</i> employees on Video Relay System (VRS) and Zoom platform closed captioning communication supports.
June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Header formatting improved to meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards. Google Translate plug-in added to website.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Resources updated to include text version that can be used for translation and screen readers. • WCAG 2.0 Level AA compliance reviewed by third-party web developer and compliance confirmed.
--	---

Employment

These are the past initiatives and the approximate dates when they were implemented:

Year	Area of Focus
January 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility training embedded in <i>Get Ready for School</i> employee training program
May 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AODA Policy introduced to employees and volunteers. • Training introduced for employees. • Postings advertise that Strong Start welcomes and encourages applications from people with disabilities, and that accommodations are available upon request.
June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer of employment updated with AODA section providing statement of commitment and encouraging employees to request accommodations if required.

Procurement

This section does not apply to Strong Start at this time.

Self-service kiosks

This section does not apply to Strong Start at this time.

Training

These are the past initiatives and the approximate dates when they were implemented:

Year	Area of Focus
May 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility Committee has taken the AODA online certificate training (AODA Online Training) • All full-time and part-time permanent employees have taken the Free AODA Online Training.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every new employee completes their AODA training in the first week of their onboarding and this training is built into the onboarding checklists and HR system.
April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility Committee completed refresher training.

Design of Public Spaces

The Design of Public Spaces Standard describes ways to make communal spaces more accessible. These are the past initiatives and the approximate dates when they were implemented:

Year	Area of Focus
July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible washroom installed during renovation of new location. • Automatic doors installed during renovation of new location. • Wellness room to offer a private space for employees, volunteers and visitors who may require a quiet space without interruption. Examples of use include quiet time, meditation, prayer, phone call, nursing, etc.
November 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researched accessible parking requirements for our new location. • Formal request made to landlord to identify and paint two accessible parking spaces. • Landlord committed to painting spaces in Spring of 2021
April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landlord coordinated the painting/marking of two accessible spaces including a do not park space to create an access aisle. • Parking spaces are well situated to a ramp and very close to the front entrance of the building which is also accessible with automatics doors.

Other

These are other past initiatives and the approximate dates when they were implemented:

Year	Area of Focus
January 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Start partnered with Conestoga College's HR program to enlist the support of a Capstone project. • Four students completed an assessment of Strong Start's Accessibility policies and procedures to evaluate compliance. • The students provided the assessment, recommendations and implementation plan. This work was critical to the development and implementation of this Accessibility Plan.
April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Start formed an Accessibility committee. • The committee includes one senior leadership representative and two staff member representatives. It is planned to include a board member in the fall of 2021.

Section Two: Strategies and Actions

The following outlines projects and programs Strong Start plans between now and 2025 to meet the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and to remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities.

Customer Service

Strong Start is committed to working towards developing all aspects of accessible customer service throughout our organization. The purpose of this section is to outline the plan and procedures we will be implementing to ensure compliance by 2023, in all areas of Customer Service.

Strong Start is committed to excellence in serving all customers, including people with disabilities. These are the current initiatives we are planning:

Year	Area of Focus
------	---------------

June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible Customer Service Policy approved by Senior Leadership Team and posted to Strong Start's website, Board approval pending.
October 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible Customer Service Policy approved by the Board.
August 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training plan developed for employees and volunteers.
On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Program Co-ordinators will work with their program partners to ensure any disruption of service is communicated with employees and/or volunteers who are working at their site.
On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Customer Service Plan for ongoing compliance, review and revisions as required.
Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Customer Service training sessions for employees and volunteers, making revisions as required.
Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Start will review with our program partners, their accessibility plan and policy related to Service Animals.
Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Program Co-ordinators will review requirements for Support Persons, based on the program, role and needs of the program. (e.g. site orientation)

Policy

Strong Start® Charitable organization is committed to excellence while serving our customers; complying with all applicable national and regional laws pertaining to non-discrimination and equal opportunity.

Strong Start understands that obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) and its accessibility standards do not substitute or limit its obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code or obligations to people with disabilities under any other law.

Strong Start is committed to complying with both the Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA.

To view our complete [Accessible Customer Service Policy, click here.](#)

Assistive devices

We will ensure that our employees and applicable volunteers are trained and familiar with any assistive devices we have at the Provincial Office.

Where applicable to the employee or volunteer's role, we will provide training which may be used by customers with disabilities while accessing our goods or services.

Communication

We will communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability.

If a person with a disability has difficulty communicating due to the disability and perhaps competing noise or commotion, the person may request a quiet and secure area to continue the communication.

When communicating with a person with a disability, our employees and volunteers are instructed to do so in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.

Service Animals

We welcome people with disabilities and their service animals. Service animals are allowed on the parts of our Provincial Office premises that are open to the public.

Support Persons

A person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to have that person accompany them on our premises. Fees will not be charged for support persons.

Notice of Temporary Disruption

In the event of a planned or unexpected disruption to services or facilities at the Provincial Office, Strong Start will notify customers promptly.



This clearly posted notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated length of time, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available.

For Strong Start programs occurring at alternate locations, our Program Co-ordinators will do their best to work with the program partners to ensure anyone attending our programs is notified promptly.

Training

Strong Start will provide training to employees, volunteers and others who deal with the public or other third parties on our behalf. Training will also be provided to people involved in the development of policies, plans, practices and procedures related to the provision of our goods and services.

For more details on Strong Start's training plan and procedures, please see [Training](#) section in this plan.

Feedback Process

Strong Start welcomes feedback from the public. Please refer to our [Accessible Customer Service Policy](#) for details on how to provide feedback.

Modifications to the Customer Service Plan

This Accessible Customer Service Plan will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised once per year. Any revisions will be communicated to our employees, volunteers and the community by way of email, postings and updates on the Strong Start website. This plan will also be available upon request in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.

For more specific details on Strong Start's Accessible Customer Service, please visit our website and review the [Accessible Customer Service Policy](#).

For more information about Ontario's Customer Service Standard, visit ontario.ca/accessibility.

Information and Communications

Strong Start is committed to making our information and communications accessible to people with disabilities. These are the current initiatives we are planning:

Year	Area of Focus
Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote web pages instead of PDF or Word on websites for better and easier WCAG compliance. • Scan websites for non-compliant accessibility issues and take corrective action. • Continuously support staff to create and maintain accessible documents with applications such as Office Documents, Adobe Acrobat. • Review the performance, availability, readability and ease of use of all website content/pages, and program communications. • Designate one team member to act as Accessibility Compliance Officer to follow up on feedback, requests, coordinating accessible formats and gathering approval to release.
2020-2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review who needs the training, communication and resources, list all requirements and how it will be provided and tracked. • Review accessibility features of all updates and purchases related to Strong Start website, SiTE SOURCE, Volunteer Portal, in anticipation of WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards (excluding live captions and audio descriptions) for 2021 deadline. • Review process for receiving/responding to feedback to ensure accessibility to persons with disabilities and readiness to provide accessible formats and communication that supports request. • Consult a graphic designer to determine if current colour schemes and images are AODA compliant.
June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all internet websites and web content conform with WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards by June 30, 2021.
2021-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide on-going maintenance to ensure new and existing website and web content meets the WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards.

2022-2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide on-going maintenance to ensure new and existing website and the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2021-2025 meets the WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards. • Review AODA regulations, compliance requirements and Strong Start infrastructure changes and list all updates required. • Make updates as required and communicate all changes as outlined in the communications plan.
------------------	---

Employment

Strong Start is committed to fair and accessible employment practices. These are the current initiatives we are planning:

Recruitment and Hiring

Year	Area of Focus
2021-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review recruitment hiring and practices and ensure the following recommendations are being met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Online job postings are compliant by ensuring that the company website complies with WCAG 2.0 web accessibility standards for layout and content. ○ Job postings list essential requirements separately from non-essential requirements. ○ Language is neutral and inclusive. ○ Applicants are offered different ways to contact the company about the required accommodations for an interview. ○ The space the interview is conducted in is accessible. ○ All materials and processes that will be used in the interview are presentable in accessible formats for the applicant.
2021-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Accesibility statement in Offer of Employment template: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure it provides multiple ways for contact (e.g. phone, email, in-person).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure Offer of Employment is available in accessible formats if requested.
2021-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a process for implementing individualized job accommodation plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure all managers are trained to support the individualized job accommodation plan. ○ Ensure all employees are aware of the individualized job accommodation plan process. ○ Create accommodation plan templates for employees and volunteers.
2021-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a process for supporting emergency response plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Posters and information in accessible formats posted in highly visible locations. ○ During training, employees must receive training in an accessible format, so they are fully trained in the event of an emergency. ○ Individualized workplace emergency response plan - a written document that details all assistance a worker needs during a workplace emergency.
2021-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a return-to-work process that supports developing individualized return to work plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure all managers are trained on the return-to-work process as it relates to the individualized job accommodation plans.
2021-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Add reminders to performance management processes (Quarterly Conversations, Coaching for Performance, Annual Performance Reviews) that ensure managers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide feedback, instructions and guidance in accessible formats. ○ Write down or record instructions using aids to accommodate the employee. ○ Use clear, simple language. ○ Review accommodations when an employee take on new tasks or a new position.

Procurement

Strong Start is committed to accessible procurement processes. These are the current initiatives we are planning:

Year	Area of Focus
2022-2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review procurement practices and update multi-year plan with any processes and action items.

Self-service kiosks

Strong Start is committed to incorporating accessibility features/ considering accessibility for people with disabilities when designing, procuring or acquiring self-service kiosks.

Year	Area of Focus
2022-2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review self-serve kiosks and update multi-year plan with any processes and action items.

Training

Who needs to be trained?

The following must be trained:

- Anyone in the organizational policy development (Board of Directors and Senior Leadership Team).
- All full-time and part-time employees, independent contractors, and volunteers.
- Anyone who provides goods and services to the public.

Records Management

Training records are maintained in accordance with IASR under the AODA, the Ministry of Labour, Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), as well as Strong Start's best practices.

Training requirements

Organizations must train employees in Customer Service and work-related accessibility. The training must include the purpose of AODA, organization policies, and how to use accommodation equipment.

Strong Start's Accessibility Committee will investigate and decide on the required training program(s), based on each person's roles and responsibilities while working at the Strong Start Provincial office and/or in Strong Start programs.

All employees and volunteers who design, deliver and/or instruct Strong Start programs will undertake accessibility awareness training related to their responsibilities. It is expected that employees and volunteers will deliver instruction through a lens of accessibility awareness (ongoing).

Provide training in accessibility techniques for software applications including Adobe Acrobat 10 to employees responsible for program co-ordination, office administration and/or communications.

An outline for training requirements follows:

- Purpose and role of AODA and Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC), related to accessibility and disability.
- Requirements of the customer service standard:
 - Identify any barriers for people with disabilities.
 - Remove barriers or create an accommodation plan.
- Organization policy to provide accessible service:
 - How to interact with people of various types of disabilities.
 - How to interact with people with assistive devices, service animals, and support persons.
 - How to use any equipment or devices within the organization to help provide accommodation to people with disabilities.
 - What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing something.

Strong Start is committed to accessible training processes. These are the current initiatives we are planning:

Year	Area of Focus
Annually	Accessibility Committee members re-take AODA certificate training or a relevant training program to remain up-to-date on the latest requirements.
2021-2022	Ensure all employees and volunteers (Board Members, Trainers, Assessors) complete Free AODA Online Training and HR records are updated. Determine if additional Human Rights accessibility training is required: http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/working-together-code-and-aoda/certificate-version
2021-2022	Create a matrix that identifies training based on roles and responsibilities.
2021-2022	Continue tracking training records within HR management system and/or Office 365 and implement annual audit to ensure everyone who needs training, is trained.
2022-2023	Specialized training* for GRFS Instructing Staff, LSW Trainers and Program Co-ordinators developed and part of on-boarding and/or staff training sessions.
Annually	Review AODA and OHRC yearly for changes and revise/update training components as required.

Additional Training Resources:

The following is a list of additional training resources:

- [Tips for helping people with various disabilities.](#)
- [Policy requirements regarding accessibility](#)
- [Tips for AODA standards](#)
- [OHRC training videos](#)
- [Training on accessibility](#)
- [Free AODA Online Training](#)

Design of Public Spaces

Strong Start is committed to making its public spaces accessible. Strong Start will put procedures in place to prevent service disruptions to the accessible parts of our public spaces. These are the current initiatives we are planning:

Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review accessible parking spaces, sidewalks and ramps to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify any maintenance that is required by the landlord to ensure the visibility and integrity of the accessible parking spaces, sidewalks and ramps (e.g. paint refresh, asphalt resurfacing). This review will take place during the spring months. ○ Ensure we are still compliant with the parking space requirements based on the number of employees.
Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review service-related elements such as service counters and waiting areas to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure ongoing compliance with the accessibility requirements for fixed waiting areas.
2021-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service counter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify accessible service counter with a sign.

<p>Annually</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding public spaces of program partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review situations where employees and volunteers may encounter public space barriers at program partners' sites such as a Volunteer Coach Training Session or a <i>Get Ready for School</i> program in-class locations.* ○ Ensure procedures are in place to identify and record public space barriers at our program partner sites. ○ Train all employees on understanding the accessibility of program partners' sites this may include reading about the site or visiting the site.* ○ Update resources to ensure employees and volunteers understand that barriers may exist at program partners' sites that may be out of our control. <p>*Volunteer Coaches in the <i>Letters, Sounds and Words</i> program are trained by Strong Start but the responsibility of the school where they volunteer. Therefore, Strong Start will not review public space barriers related to its school partners in detail, but will recommend volunteers review AODA policies and procedures of the school at which they volunteer.</p>
------------------------	--

For More Information

For more information on this accessibility plan and/or if you require this document in a different format, please contact us:

- Telephone: 519-743-9578 ext. 100
- Email: aoda@strongstart.ca
- In-person by appointment: 1-565 Kumpf Drive, Waterloo, ON, N2V 1K3

To learn more about Strong Start, please visit our website: <https://www.strongstart.ca/>

© 2021 Strong Start® Charitable Organization

Approved by Chief Executive Officer, June 30, 2021.