

## **Nothing About Us Without Us: Enabling a Great CNE Experience for Everyone**

### **Executive Summary**

The Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) is Canada's largest community event and one of the top five agricultural fairs in North America. It is one of Ontario's great annual traditions and affectionately embraced as an end-of-summer ritual by more than 1.5 million visitors every year. These visitors represent the rich diversity of Toronto and Canada and offer a wonderful opportunity to showcase our inclusive society.

In 2016, the CNE convened an independent, multi-discipline, and arms-length Advisory Council to review practices related to persons with disabilities and recommend how the CNE can evolve to become increasingly inclusive of persons with disabilities. This report outlines those recommendations for consideration based on market research, input from experts, discussion and debate.

### **The Council recommends that the CNE:**

1. Create a strong governance structure with representation from persons with disabilities at the Board of the CNEA to champion an annual review of policies and plans for becoming increasingly inclusive of persons with disabilities in addition to ensuring the broad scale implementation of formal awareness training throughout all levels of the CNE organization on the importance and value of greater accessibility and inclusion.
2. Assign a senior executive or their designate with accountability for leading the evolution of the CNE to become a more inclusive environment for persons with disabilities. Create an aspirational accessibility policy and a multi-year plan for the evolution of the organization including suppliers and partners with feedback mechanisms developed to ensure informed evolution.
3. Hire permanent and temporary staff to include persons with disabilities at proportional levels to the community served (currently 16% -20% and rising over time). Conduct focused training for all staff which ensures high awareness of appropriate sensitivities, language and specific accommodation needs for persons with disabilities.
4. Give strong consideration to establishing a destination for persons with disabilities through an exhibition experience such as an Innovation Showcase of technology developments which address barriers that persons with disabilities identify as significant. Motivate and encourage participants to highlight this important area of innovation, with a focus on values identified by persons with disabilities.
5. Modernize admissions policies from a holistic perspective including all customer segments. Separate consideration for persons with disabilities from the question of ability to pay or poverty and address each separately. Introduce the Access2 Entertainment Program provided by Easter Seals as the generally accepted admissions approach for persons with disabilities in the entertainment business. Consider poverty in the context of other discounted admission policies and implement the broad admissions policy changes in an integrated manner that does not single out persons with disabilities.
6. Focus on improvements to the operations of the CNE which will enable a better experience for those attending. Use the learnings from the public consultation and research to build a strong plan for communications, operations and service enhancements to improve the comfort and access of the experience for persons with disabilities and their family and friends.

The Council believes the CNE has an opportunity to exploit the diversity of the GTA, Ontario and Canada and create a world class experience for persons with disabilities building on what was accomplished and learned at the Parapan Am Games in 2015. The CNE is in a unique position to educate, showcase and promote a modern world of inclusion for all.

### **About the Advisory Council on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities**

The CNE convened an independent, multi-discipline, and arms-length Advisory Council to review practices related to persons with disabilities at the governance, leadership and operations levels including admissions and programming partnerships. The Council was asked to obtain appropriate input to assist in its discussions.

The CNE is a recognized leader in entertainment and is a point of pride for the GTA, Ontario and Canada. It is fitting that it be a leader and showcase for inclusion of persons with disabilities. The desire of the CNE is that the Advisory Council recommend approaches which will ensure the CNE is a leader in inclusion of persons with disabilities and is able to sustain this leadership over time.

Council Members (see Appendix for detailed bios):

- Bob Stark, Council Chairman
- Kayla Amaladas
- David Bednar
- Kathleen Forestell
- Uzma Khan
- Lauree Vallery
- Steven Viera
- Kathryn Woodcock

### **Role of the Advisory Council on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities**

An independent body to provide advice to CNE leadership on options to ensure that its culture is inclusive for persons with disabilities and that policies evolve to meet societal expectations over time to:

- Help the CNE continue to evolve in providing an inclusive entertainment experience for everybody which does not differentiate or discriminate
- Explore unique opportunities for the CNE to become an advocate for modern practices and innovations that will benefit persons with different abilities

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations which follow are intended to be broad in nature to create an evolving, inclusive culture at the CNE.

#### **1. Governance**

Accountability for ensuring that the CNE evolves in a modern, inclusive manner and complies with legislation ultimately rests with the Board of Directors. A philosophy of 'nothing about us without us' encapsulates the spirit which can guide the Board as it considers extending membership to include persons with disabilities and ensuring accessibility training is undertaken. A formal review of management's accessibility policies and a multi-year plan should be conducted annually.

#### **2. Leadership**

A CNE executive or their designate needs to be assigned accessibility accountability and provide accessibility leadership for the organization. This individual would be responsible for ensuring that the operational elements noted below are acted upon appropriately and that accessibility policies and plans are kept current. This includes ensuring that there is adequate budget allocated and spent with a

feedback process in place to provide useful tracking of progress against targets and to inform future policies and plans.

All leaders and staff shall participate in accessibility training to be aware of the legislative requirements in Ontario but more importantly to understand how to create and promote an inclusive culture. All new employees shall be exposed to this training as part of their orientation to the CNE and all employees must go through a short annual refresher in accordance with new AODA requirements.

Based on an aspirational accessibility policy, CNE leadership is encouraged to facilitate advisory councils of suppliers and partners to plan for an inclusive customer experience and build accessibility criteria into sourcing processes, RFPs and contracts. Based on the experience of the Parapan Am Games, this may be a challenging undertaking, which could take years to evolve. There are many areas for consideration in the scope of these councils as outlined in the Operations section below.

On the journey to become increasingly inclusive, customers, suppliers and partners need to be solicited and encouraged for feedback. This feedback should be used to support reflection on current policy, and informed improvement.

### **3. Operations**

#### ***Customer Service***

With the large number of temporary staff and short duration of the fair, it is critical that staff are effectively trained in providing high quality inclusive service. The Pan Am and Parapan Am Toronto2015 Games provide an excellent example of how this can be accomplished and are incorporated into the following recommendations.

#### ***Communications***

Effective communications starts with appropriate language, both verbal and nonverbal, and all staff needs to be trained to practice consistency and adaptability. All communications must be accessible and take into account individual needs or preferences.

The website needs to be WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.0 level AA accessible at a minimum and preferably at a higher level depending on content.

Consideration should be given to assistive hearing and signing services at appropriate events and communicated in advance which accessibility features will be available.

#### ***Accessibility Guidebook***

Many people with disabilities will value a guidebook onsite, through smartphone apps and on the website to review in advance of and during their visit to the CNE to enable prudent planning. This could include (but not limited to) the following:

- Descriptions of special service locations such as quiet zones, water refill stations, accessible bathrooms, etc.
- Detailed locations of ramps, wide doors, handicap door openers and special parking areas
- Shortcuts to the best doors to enter buildings with multiple exits and entrances
- Ways to get from Point A to Point B in the quickest and easiest way
- Line-up procedures and ways to find and access priority seating for people with disabilities and their attendants/family at attractions and concerts
- Help stations for recharging batteries, renting equipment, meeting points for volunteers, etc.

- Admissions policy and discounting

### ***Public Spaces***

It is understood that the CNE does not control the physical environment at Exhibition Place; however, steps can be taken to maximize accessibility. Any remediation undertaken by the landlord will result in long term benefits for other tenants. The areas which should be reviewed include:

- Amenities – concession and merchandise areas
- Transportation – accessible parking, drop off locations, shuttles, Express Train, TTC/GO accessibility
- Entrance and Exit areas
- Seating areas and quiet areas
- Washrooms
- Service animal relief area and safe spaces
- Wayfinding and navigation
- Food Building and Food Vendors

Consideration should be given to sightlines at all events to ensure that there are areas where people with limited mobility can see the events without obstacles.

A set of Accessibility Guides were developed for the Parapan Games, many of which took place on the Exhibition Place grounds as well. These can serve as a preliminary guide for the detailed considerations, review and operational rigour that is required to upgrade accessibility in all public spaces used by the CNE.

### ***Lived Experience Audits and Roundtables***

To fully understand and appreciate the progress the CNE will make against the many recommendations of the Advisory Council, it is recommended that a small panel of paid persons with disabilities be organized to attend the fair and report on any special experiences or deficiencies that they may encounter. This feedback can be delivered in private or public forums for discussion and future action and be used to raise new possibilities for the future of the CNE's accessibility for all.

### ***Workforce***

Employment should mirror Canadian demographics with approximately 16-20% of employees being persons with disabilities. This will require specific outreach to organizations involved in supporting employment for persons with disabilities such as the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) and other organizations that support job seekers with disabilities. Special consideration should be given to youth with disabilities as this segment can benefit greatly from early career work experience.

### ***Innovation Showcase***

Technological advancements are constantly helping to remove or reduce the impacts or barriers for persons with disabilities. Consideration should be given to creating a showcase of technology developments which address barriers that persons with disabilities identify as significant. The CNE can become a destination for persons with disabilities along with their friends and families to experience new products and services. A competition judged by customers with disabilities or an expert panel would help attract inventors who would like practical feedback. The CNE is encouraged to collaborate and align with other innovation activities sponsored by governments, universities and private organizations to find best practice ideas. This technological focus is also in keeping with CNE's strategic plan to be an innovator in the entertainment industry.

## **4. Admissions**

The Council believes the CNE admissions policy needs to be inclusive in its foundation and should not differentiate based on ability. Arguing that there is a correlation of disability and poverty is an inappropriate foundation for policy. A discount for disability, as such, is patronizing and borders on being demeaning by assuming unequal potential of people with disabilities. It may be appropriate to consider poverty or ability to pay within the overall context of the admissions policy; however, disability is an inappropriate proxy for poverty. If the CNE wishes to discount admission based on ability to pay it should do so inclusively for all communities including those on Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Developmental Services Ontario, etc.

To adapt the admissions policy for persons with disabilities, the Council recommends the CNE adopts the Access2 Entertainment Program provided by Easter Seals. "Easter Seals Canada aims to enhance the quality of life, self-esteem and self-determination of Canadians living with disabilities. Easter Seals Canada and the 10 Easter Seals provincial organizations provide programs and services to over 146,000 Canadians and their families annually."

The Access2 Entertainment Program is implemented in the entertainment industry at hundreds of entertainment venues across Canada such as Cineplex Odeon and the Toronto Zoo and allows free admission for the attendant of a person with a permanent disability. The person with the disability who requires the support of an attendant makes an application independent of the CNE and within 4 weeks of the application receives their personalized Access2 Entertainment Program card. The card when presented at the CNE gate permits free admission for the attendant. This removes any uncertainty and inconsistent discretion at the gate. For more information about the Access2 program, go to [www.access2card.ca](http://www.access2card.ca).

The Council recommends that the CNE reviews its admissions policies and pricing overall and that Access2 Entertainment Program be used as a membership service for people with disabilities and their attendants entering the CNE. Further, the Council recommends that overall changes are introduced in an inclusive manner that does not single out persons with disabilities.

The Advisory Council recommends that the CNE enhance their current distribution program of free and discounted passes to those in need of financial support through various agencies which support low income families and individuals.

The Advisory Council also recommends that the many discounted admissions programs currently available be widely promoted as part of this policy change so that persons with disabilities can take advantage of lower rates for groups, weekday evenings, online advance tickets, etc.

## **Appendix**

### **Advisory Council Member Bios**

#### **Bob Stark, Council Chairman**

Bob Stark is a disability advocate and consultant specialized in business strategy. Bob retired from the Ontario Public Service in 2012 as Deputy Minister and CEO of ServiceOntario. Prior to this, he worked in the private sector as an executive at Scotiabank and Rogers Communications. Bob joined the Ontario Public Service as CEO, ServiceOntario, where he led innovative changes through the centralization and modernization of fast and friendly government services, using integrated in-person, contact centres and online service channels. Bob is a leader dedicated to effective customer service and establishing workplace cultures that embrace people with disabilities.

## **Kayla Amaladas**

Kayla Amaladas has recently moved to Toronto from Victoria, British Columbia. She has worked as a legal advocate for people with disabilities, and in community development with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Currently, she works as an apprentice chef with a Toronto based, flexitarian catering company. Kayla seeks to empower living in poverty to secure food, access, and justice through dynamic, complex, and human-centered solutions.

## **David Bednar**

David Bednar retired as General Manager of the Canadian National Exhibition in 2015, having served in that capacity since 1998, a time of significant growth and change. Before the CNE, Mr. Bednar worked in live theatre at Livent (Toronto and New York City) and at Shaw Festival (Niagara-on-the-Lake). Mr. Bednar moved to Canada, from Texas, in 1970 to attend Bishop's University. He became a Canadian citizen in a ceremony at the CNE in 2000. He is married to Alexandra and has four children, two step-children, way too many in-laws, and nine grandchildren. His contribution to the Advisory Council is from the point of view of someone outside the current administration who also has intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the fair.

## **Kathleen Forestell**

Kathleen Forestell is mental health professional and disability advocate. She recently graduated from University of Toronto with a Master's Degree in Counselling and Psychotherapy. She is passionate about working with people and is pursuing a career as a psychotherapist and disability advocate. Kathleen and her support dog, Tiffany, were valued members of the CNE Advisory Council team.

## **Uzma Khan**

Uzma Khan is currently working as a Senior Business Consultant at BMO. Uzma is visually impaired and has been a strong disability advocate and advisor within the disability community for almost 20 years. She was the Vice-Chair of the Accessibility Advisory Council of Ontario under the Ontarians with Disability Act 2001. Later she was a Council Member of the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council of Ontario under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005. Uzma is a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

## **Lauree Vallery**

Lauree Vallery is the Chief Experience Officer at Experience Renewal Solutions. For the past 8 years, she has worked closely with the CNE as an insights-based Experience Designer helping the CNE team to understand their various visitor groups and what they need to have for an exceptional experience each time they visit the CNE. Lauree and her team at ERS look forward to the CNE each year to meet all those that visit the fair and hear their stories. It has been an honour to work on this Council with the dedicated and amazing team of people who are so inspired to make the CNE better for all.

## **Steven Viera**

Steven Viera has a background in IT, Accounting and Education and is a keen advocate for the disabled community in the Region of Peel, participating in activities to invoke change for the advancement of access for all. Steven works tirelessly to make life better for people with disabilities who live in the GTHA and make the future brighter for those coming after. As a CNE Patron, Steven enjoyed the honour in 2016 of being part of CNE history by riding on the first accessible float in the Mardi Gras Parade. He is

proud of the CNE, its history and is excited by what it is doing now, its future plans and continued success. Steven lives in Mississauga with his cat Lucky.

### **Kathryn Woodcock**

Dr. Kathryn Woodcock is a Professor at Ryerson University in Toronto and director of the THRILL Lab, studying human factors applications particularly in the domain of amusement attractions, pertaining to guests, operators, and inspectors. Her projects include task demand modelling and participation eligibility, accident and error analysis, and interface design. Passionate about extracurricular training and knowledge mobilization and engaging the next generation of professionals, Dr. Woodcock serves on several attractions industry professional associations and committees. She is a registered Professional Engineer, Canadian Certified Professional Ergonomist, IAAPA Certified Attractions Executive and a Fellow of the Association of Canadian Ergonomists. She was the first Deaf President of The Canadian Hearing Society and a member of the Ontario Accessibility Standards Advisory Council.