

Accessible Customer Service

Handbook



The Zest family of companies is committed to excellence in serving all customers including people with disabilities. All goods, services and facilities will be provided in a manner that upholds the principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity.

Table of Contents

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT	3
ABOUT THE ACT	4
CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARD DEFINING DISABILITY	5 6 6 7
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH DISABILITIES VISION LOSSHEARING LOSSDEAFBLINDPHYSICAL AND MOBILITY DISABILITIESINTELLECTUAL, DEVELOPMENTAL OR LEARNING DISABILITIESSPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISABILITIESMENTAL HEALTH DISABILITIES	9 10 10 11
ASSISTIVE DEVICES EXAMPLES OF COMMON ASSISTIVE DEVICES	12
HOW TO INTERACT WITH A CUSTOMER ACCOMPANIED BY: A SERVICE ANIMALA SUPPORT PERSON	13
DISRUPTION TO SERVICE	14
FEEDBACK PROCESS	15
NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY AND FORMAT OF DOCUMENT	15
TRAINING	16
OUR VISION, OUR STANCE, OUR PLEDGE	18
REFERENCES	17
ACKNOWI FOGEMENT FORM	18

A Message from the President

The Zest partners are committed to providing exceptional customer service to all our customers including those with disabilities. We are passionate about offering goods and services that respect our customers' rights to:

- Dignity
- Independence
- Integration
- Equal Opportunity

This handbook has been prepared in accordance with Zest's Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy and to meet the operational and training requirements as outlined in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act [AODA]. The Zest family of companies is committed to ensuring that all employees, volunteers, students and third parties providing goods and services on our behalf have the necessary knowledge, skills and training to offer accessible services to customers with disabilities.

Providing our customers with quality goods and services at the highest standards is at the very core of what we do. By putting customers first, we can build a strong and sustainable future for our customers, our employees and our communities. Through the combined efforts of the Zest partners we will play our part in realizing a fully accessible Ontario for people with disabilities by the year 2025.

We encourage each of our staff and service contractors to review the contents of this handbook and, having done so, sign and return the Acknowledgement Form on page 20 to the Human Resources Department or Department Manager as soon as possible.

Tony DiFruscio

Thank you,

Revised: February 2019 3 | Page

About the act

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) became law in June 2005 and provides the foundation for identifying, removing and preventing barriers for people with disabilities. The goal is to achieve a fully accessible Ontario for people with disabilities by January 1st, 2025. Under the Act, five standards have been identified that will break down accessibility barriers for people with disabilities. These standards are contained in one regulation under the act referred to as the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR). They are:

- Customer Service
- Information and Communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- The Built Environment

Customer service standard

Customer Service was the first of the five standards to be introduced and applies to every business in Ontario that provides goods, services or facilities. The purpose of this standard is to identify and remove barriers to customer service and make sure that people with disabilities have equal opportunity to obtain and benefit from goods and services. The Customer Service Standard requires that all members of Zest Communities (employees, volunteers, students, or contractors) be trained on how to interact with people with different disabilities.

DEFINING DISABILITY

Under the AODA and Customer Service Standard "disability" refers to:

"Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;

A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;

A learning disability or dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;

A mental disorder; or

An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997."

The definition includes disabilities of different severity, visible as well as non-visible disabilities, and disabilities, the effects of which may come and go.

Revised: February 2019 4 | Page

Compliance Standards

The following are eleven standards that every organization must meet:

- Policies Practices and Procedures organizations must establish policies, practices and procedures about how they provide goods and services to people with disabilities. Do you know where to find these at your location? If not, ask someone to show you.
- 2. Ensure compliance with principles of independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity you can read more about these four principles on the following pages of this handbook.
- 3. **Assistive Devices** there are many devices that our customers have or can use. It is important when providing service to let clients/residents know what assistive devices we have available, as well as permit them to use their own where possible.
- 4. **Communication** organizations must communicate with people with disabilities in a way that takes into account their disability.
- 5. **Service Animals** organizations must let people with a disability bring their service animals onto the premises, except where another law prohibits this. If this is the case, there must be other measures available to provide service to that person.
- 6. **Support Person** organizations open to the public must allow people with disabilities to bring their support person onto the premises with them.
- 7. **Notice of Cost** if there is a charge for service, the customer must be told ahead of time about the cost and if their support person will be charged.
- 8. **Notice of Disruption** if there is a temporary disruption to regular service, the organization must inform the person as soon as possible.
- 9. **Training** organizations must train **all** employees, volunteers and third-party contractors about how to serve people with disabilities. This is why you must review this handbook and sign off that you have read it and understand your role in the provision of accessible customer service.
- 10. **Policy Developer** the organization must also train anyone who writes policies and procedures on how to serve customers with disabilities.
- 11. **Feedback** organizations must develop a way that customers with disabilities can provide feedback about how goods and services were provided. This includes providing them with a way of making a complaint and how it will be handled.

Test Your Knowledge #1

How many compliance standards are there, and can you name them?

Revised: February 2019 5 | Page

Core Principles of Accessible Customer Service

The four core principles that guide accessible customer service are:

- 1. **Dignity** providing service in a way that maintains the person's self-respect and the respect of other people.
- 2. **Independence** ensuring people are able to do things on their own without unnecessary help or interference from others.
- 3. **Integration** providing service in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same service, in the same place and in the same way or similar way as other customers.
- 4. **Equal Opportunity** having the same chances, options, benefits and results as others.

Who Is Your Customer?

The Customer Service Standard applies to all organizations that provide goods, services and facilities to the public or to third parties. Sometimes we refer to our customer as our client or our resident. Under the Customer Service Standard anyone using our goods or services is known as our customer.



Test Your Knowledge #2

Can you name the four principles of accessible customer service?

Revised: February 2019 6 | Page

Types of Disabilities

The Zest partners collectively serve a wide range of customers including those with disabilities. The following are some common types of disabilities:

- Physical Medical Visual Hearing
- Intellectual Learning Mental Illness
- Chronic Disease Speech/Language

Approximately 1.8 million Ontarians live with a disability and this is increasing as our population gets older and lives longer. It is predicted by the year 2026, 16% of people in Canada will have a disability.

Barriers

A barrier is anything that keeps someone from fully participating in all aspects of daily living. Barriers can be visible or non-visible. Common barriers may include:

- **Attitude** such as assumptions, beliefs, thoughts or fears. Attitudes significantly impact how we view, interact and treat people with disabilities.
- Architectural or Structural barriers such as stairs, doorways and room layouts can often limit how people with
 disabilities can access or use a room or location. How we store boxes and obstruct hallways can also act as
 barriers for people with disabilities.
- **Information and Communication** barriers such as failing to provide information or communicate in a way that can be understood by the person with a disability. For example; only providing written communication in small text that cannot be read by someone with vision loss creates a barrier.
- **Technology**, or the lack of technology, can act as a barrier. Common tools such as computers and telephones can be helpful in assisting people with disabilities but only if they are designed and set up to accommodate the disability.
- **Systemic** barriers arise when application of our policies or procedures do not always accommodate the needs of a person with a disability. For example; if our policy requires that a potential resident/client complete a form prior to intake and it is only provided in paper format, this procedure causes a barrier to someone who uses a computer to write. We must be able to adapt our processes and practices in order to accommodate the unique needs of our customers with disabilities.

Communication Tips

When communicating with a person with a disability it is important to always *put the person first*. For example, use language that focuses on the person rather than the disability:

- Person with a physical disability NOT a disabled person
- Person with a hearing loss NOT a deaf person
- Person with a vision loss NOT a blind person
- Person with a mental illness NOT a mental person

Revised: February 2019 7 | Page

Only refer to a person's disability when it is related to what you are talking about. Use the word "accessible" rather than "disabled" when talking about parking or washrooms. Avoid using limiting terms such as "confined to a wheelchair" instead use "wheelchair user".

If you are unsure what your customer wants, ask: "How may I help you?"

Speak directly to the customer, not to their support person or companion. This is important to remember whether it is a support person who has accompanied the customer or a friend or family member.

Avoid stereotypes and make no assumptions about what type of disability the customer has. Some disabilities are not visible, and customers may not be required to give you information about their disability.

Take the time to get to know your customer's needs and focus on meeting those needs in an exemplary manner.

Be patient. People with some types of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and/or respond. A good start is to listen carefully and not speak for the customer.

Ask for clarification. If you cannot understand what your customer is saying, politely ask them to repeat themselves. If you still cannot understand ask the customer if it is permissible to have someone else who may know the customer assist.

Don't touch or speak to service animals. They are working and have to pay attention at all times. Do not do anything to distract the animal while performing its job.

Don't touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, without asking permission first.

Offer interactive resources and devices when it is obvious that the customer is having difficulty understanding or communicating with you.

Be flexible. Accommodate the customer.

Remember, it is important in all your interactions with a customer with a disability to deliver goods and services in a way that promotes dignity and independence and always provides the customer with a sense of integration and equality.

Test Your Knowledge #3 - Complete the sentence:

"When communicating with a person with a disability always p__t__p__f__."

Serving Customers with Disabilities

Many customers of Zest Communities have a disability. The next few pages of this handbook provide you with some basic tips on how to serve customers with disabilities. This information is provided to increase your general awareness. Many positions within the Zest family of companies require you to have additional knowledge, skills and qualifications in order to provide quality and effective services to your customers. Please speak with your supervisor or manager directly about additional training in which you are required to participate.

Revised: February 2019 8 | Page

Serving Customers with Vision Loss



Vision loss reduces a person's ability to see clearly. Few people with vision loss are totally blind. Many have limited vision such as tunnel vision or lack of central vision. Some people can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Customers with vision loss may not be able to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. Don't assume that you know what a person who is blind or who has vision loss looks like. Some may wear dark glasses, use a guide dog or white cane, but others may not. Many people who are blind or have vision loss use magnifying devices, screen reading software, audio and mini pocket recorders and electronic notebooks. Sometimes it may be difficult

to tell if a person has vision loss. Some clues that may indicate vision loss include squinting, reading at close range, getting close to people, asking someone to read a sign or document out loud, being unsure where to walk, bumping into things or looking around for signs and directions.

When serving a customer with vision loss:

- identify yourself and speak directly to them
- call him/her by name
- use a natural conversational tone and speed when speaking there is no need to shout
- offer larger print documents or increase font on the computer
- when providing printed word offer to summarize it for the customer
- offer to get a magnifier to view materials
- offer to guide the customer to a chair or sitting area
- ask the person what they need you to do if you are unsure
- walk slowly and offer your elbow to guide the person, ask for permission before proceeding
- offer to describe information and details of the environment
- if the person is accompanied by a service animal do not speak to or touch the animal
- do not leave the person unattended without saying goodbye
- do not feel you cannot use such words as "see", "read" or "look". People with vision loss also use these
 words.
- make sure floor spaces and passage ways are free of tripping hazards and ensure good lighting
- do not move items in the environment or in the customer's personal space without informing the customer

Test Your Knowledge #4

Name three things you should do when serving a customer with vision loss.

Serving Customers with Hearing Loss

People with hearing loss may be deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. The degree of hearing loss that a person may experience may range from mild to profound. A person with hearing loss may use a variety of resources and equipment such as - hearing aids, cochlear implants, a hearing support animal, sign language interpreter, personal amplification system, neck loop or induction loop system, phone amplifier, teletypewriter (TTY), relay service text and email messaging and captioning.

Revised: February 2019 9 | Page

When serving customers with hearing loss:

- Attract their attention before speaking. Generally, the best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of the hand.
- Look at and speak to the customer directly and not to their support person and keep your mouth visible. Speak at a normal pace, enunciating carefully but do not exaggerate.
- If the customer is wearing a hearing aid, give him/her time to adjust the device.
- Often it is helpful to ensure the surroundings are well lit and if not move to a better area.
- Do not assume that your customer can use sign language or read lips.
- If the customer's speech is difficult to understand ask him/her to repeat what they have said.
- If the person uses an interpreter, speak directly to the customer and not the interpreter.

Serving Customers Who Are Deafblind

Deaf blindness is the combination of both hearing and vision loss to some degree. Most people who are deafblind will be accompanied by a support person who is professionally trained and can provide auditory and visual information to the customer. Do not assume what the customer can or cannot do. Some people who are deafblind have slight hearing or vision, while others have neither. Many of the tools used by people who are deafblind are the same as those used by people with vision or hearing loss. Some of the resources include:

- Large print
- Braille
- White cane
- Service animal
- Support person such as an interpreter
- Closed circuit television and other magnification equipment such as magnifier
- Braille TTY or TTY with large displays
- Hearing aid with built in FM system
- The Internet or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) linked to a braille display through Bluetooth

Serving Customers with Physical and Mobility Disabilities

Physical and mobility disabilities occur widely and may be visible or non-visible. Among the customers that we serve at Zest Communities are those with physical and mobility disabilities. Physical disabilities may restrict a person's movements or their ability to control balance or coordination. A person with a physical disability may not be able to perform tasks such as holding a pen, turning a key, typing on a keyboard or twisting a door knob. Not everyone with a physical disability requires your assistance so ask before you help. Many have found their own way of doing things. Always speak naturally and directly to the customer, not the support person or companion. Customers who use wheelchairs have varying degrees of mobility. Don't push or touch a person's wheelchair, scooter or other mobility device without asking permission.

Often reception desks are not at the proper height where you can provide a person in a wheelchair with eye contact, so consider moving around your desk. Do not lean over someone in a wheelchair, if you need to have a lengthy conversation, take a seat opposite him/her. Never move someone in a wheelchair without asking

Revised: February 2019 10 | Page

permission, informing him/her you are ready to proceed and move slowly (avoid uneven ground). Do not leave a person in a wheelchair in an awkward or undignified position e.g. facing a wall. People who use canes or walkers need arms to balance. Never grab them and always ask before touching. Customers with mobility disabilities use a variety of transportation services when travelling.

Make sure when arranging appointments, you allow time for scheduling of transportation at least 24 hours in advance. Offer access to the elevator, or if the building does not have an elevator, bring the services to the customer.

Test Your Knowledge #5

When serving a customer with hearing loss, what can you do to attract their attention?

Test Your Knowledge #6

If you are going to have a lengthy conversation with someone in a wheelchair what should you do?

Serving Customers with Intellectual, Developmental or Learning Disabilities

People with intellectual, developmental or learning disabilities may have difficulty doing things most people

take for granted. These disabilities can often mildly or profoundly limit the person's ability to learn, communicate, socialize and take care of their everyday needs. Often someone with an intellectual or developmental disability will be accompanied by a support person. Someone with a learning disability may have trouble completing forms correctly or may transpose numbers in the wrong place or wrong order. They may read information incorrectly or ask repeatedly to have the information clarified. Clearly identify yourself and ask how you might help. Treat your customer with respect. Don't talk down to your customer or use baby talk. Be patient and offer assistive technology for writing, communicating or calculating such as mini-tape recorders, pocket recorders or calculators.



Serving Customers with Speech or Language Disabilities

Some people have problems communicating because of their disability. If a customer is having difficulty speaking it does not mean They has an intellectual or developmental disability. If you are having difficulty understanding what the customer is saying, ask him/her to repeat the information. Many people with language disabilities may slur their speech. Do not make assumptions or discount what they have to say based on appearance.

Sometimes it may be helpful to rephrase what you think the customer wants into a question that can be answered with a simple "Yes" or "No". Do not interrupt or finish your customer's sentences, wait for them to finish.

Revised: February 2019 11 | Page

Customers with speech and language disabilities may use interpreters or communication devices such as communication books or boards, a talking word processor, smart phone or tablet.

Serving Customers with a Mental Health Disability

Mental health disabilities are not as visible as other types of disabilities. Examples of mental health disabilities include schizophrenia, depression, phobias, bipolar, anxiety and mood disorders. A person with a mental health disability may have difficulty thinking clearly, remembering or concentrating. They may hallucinate or lack motivation. Always treat your customer with the utmost respect. You must remain patient, calm, confident and reassuring. Listen carefully to what your customer wants and if someone is in crisis, ask how you might help.

Assistive Devices

An assistive device is any device that is used, designed, made or adapted to assist people in performing particular tasks. Assistive devices enable people with disabilities to do everyday tasks such as moving, communicating, reading or lifting. There are a wide range of assistive devices. Some assist with mobility, dexterity, speech, vision, hearing, communication and information. Other devices assist individuals in organizing or remembering.

Zest Communities has a variety of assistive devices available for customers with disabilities at each of our locations. Employees and volunteers are provided with regular orientation and training as to the correct use and maintenance of these devices. Employees and volunteers must ensure that they are aware of the assistive devices for their particular location and service area.

Customers with disabilities may be able to use their own assistive devices. In cases where the assistive device presents a safety concern or where accessibility might be an issue, other reasonable measures will be used to ensure access to the services; such as offering the service at a different location that meets the needs of the customer with disabilities.

Test Your Knowledge #7

Can you name an assistive device used where you work? Do you know how to use it properly?

The following are examples of some common assistive devices and adaptive technology you may encounter in the course of carrying out your duties and services to clients, residents, family members, visitors, guests and the general public. This list is by no means exhaustive:

Mobility Devices -Wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, canes, white canes, guide dogs, ceiling lifts, slings, orthotic devices, standing frames, dynamic positioning devices, crutches.

Vision Devices - Magnifiers, enlarging optical systems (CCTV), screen readers, audio book playback devices, braille's, specialized glasses and contact lenses, special mounted low vision and vision enhancement aids, reading aids such as talking books and reading pens.

Communication Devices - Amplified phones, large button phones, voice activated and picture phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), phone relay service, TTY, TTY with braille display, short message service (SMS texting), communication books and boards, electronic communicators and braille note-takers, speech generating devices, voice amplifiers.

Hearing Devices - Hearing aids, personal amplification systems, neck loops, cochlear implants.

Dexterity Devices -Specialized pens, grasping tools, door openers.

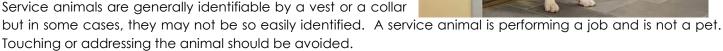
Revised: February 2019 12 | Page

How to Interact with a Customer Accompanied by:

A Service Animal

Service animals are used by people with many different kinds of disabilities. These may include, but are not limited to:

- People who are blind or have hearing loss
- People who experience seizures
- People with autism or other special needs



A customer with a disability that is accompanied by a guide dog, service animal or service dog will be allowed access to any area of Zest Communities that is open to the public unless otherwise excluded by law. The customer who is accompanied by a guide dog, service dog or service animal is responsible for maintaining care and control of the animal at all times, however, water must be provided to the animal upon request of the customer. In specific cases a service contract may include additional support with care for a service animal.

The Health Protection and Promotion Act (1990) does not allow animals in places where food is manufactured, prepared, processed, handled, served, displayed, stored, sold or offered for sale. However, the Act does contain specific exemptions for service dogs only. Service dogs are allowed to accompany their owners into areas where food is normally served, sold or offered for sale.

While the vast majority of service animals are dogs, other types of animals can be used. For example, small ponies or miniature horses, and monkeys are sometimes used as mobility or special skills service animals. Birds, such as parrots can be psychiatric support animals and cats can be used as hearing alert or seizure alert animals.

A Support Person

Customers with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person to access services. A support person is someone hired or chosen by the customer with disabilities to provide services or assist with:

- Communication
- Mobility
- Personal care
- Medical care
- Access to goods and services
- Participation in social or recreational activities



Revised: February 2019 13 | Page

A support person may be a personal care worker, volunteer, friend or family member and may be paid or unpaid. They do not need to have special training or qualifications. It is important to remember when dealing with a customer with disabilities who is accompanied by a support person that you speak to the customer and not to the support person. Often a customer with a disability may not introduce their support person. If you are not sure ask, "Is this your interpreter or support person?"

Where confidentiality is important due to the nature of the services you are providing, the support person may be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. If there is a fee payable by a person for the admission of services, activities, events, etc., the customer who is accompanied by the support person should be notified in advance of any fee to be charged to the support person. Always make sure you know if a fee will be charged for a support person, and how much it will be prior to the event. Where Zest **requires** that a support person accompany the customer, the admission fee or fare for the support person **must be waived**.



Test Your Knowledge #8

Can you allow a customer with a guide dog into the café or dining room? Can you let a customer with a cat into the café or dining room?

Test Your Knowledge #9

If you require that the support person accompany the customer for health and safety reasons – can you still, ask the support person to pay a fee?

Disruption to Service

From time to time service disruption may occur due to a variety of reasons. In the event of a temporary disruption to facilities or services that customers with disabilities rely on, reasonable effort will be made to provide advance notice of the disruption. In some circumstances, such as in the situation of unplanned temporary disruption, advance notice may not be possible. However, every effort must be made to inform the customer in advance.

In the event that a notification needs to be posted, the following information will be included unless it is not readily available or known:

- The service that is disrupted or unavailable
- The reason for the disruption
- The anticipated duration of the disruption
- A description of alternate services or options (e.g. another meeting location)

Where disruptions occur notice will be provided to customers with disabilities by:

Revised: February 2019 14 | Page

- Posting notices in conspicuous places including at the point of disruption e.g. elevator, door, at the main entrance and the nearest accessible entrance to the service disruption
- Posting notice of disruption on the Zest Communities' web page(s)
- Contacting customers personally by telephone or email
- Verbally notifying customers when they are making appointments
- By any other method that may be reasonable under the circumstances that are suitable based on the customer's disability

Feedback Process

Zest Communities provides customers with the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the service provided to customers with disabilities. Information about the feedback process will be made readily available to all customers in an accessible format. Notice of the process is available from the Department Manager/Director or designate. Communication supports can be arranged upon request.

- Feedback can be provided using the following methods:
- In person
- By telephone
- By email
- On disk
- In writing
- In survey, or
- Any other means that accommodates the customer

Customers can submit feedback directly to the staff member providing the service, or to the Department Manager or Director. Customers that provide formal feedback will receive acknowledgement of their feedback from the staff member providing the service or the Director, along with any resulting actions based on concerns or complaints that were submitted.

All employees are required to review the customer feedback policy and practice that is specific to their service department and/or company. If you do not know where to find this information, ask your supervisor or manager.

Notice of Availability and Format of Documents

Zest Communities notify customers with disabilities that documents related to the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service can be made available to them upon request and in a format that will accommodate the customer's disability. Notification of the availability of these documents is posted in a conspicuous place at all locations and on the website, as well as by other reasonable methods.

Please note that each Zest partner may have specific practices, policies and procedures related to the above information. If you have questions or for further information, contact the Zest Human Resource Manager.

Test Your Knowledge #10

Do you know how to help your customer make a formal complaint? If not, please ask your supervisor or manager for information on how to do so.

Revised: February 2019 15 | Page

Training

Training will be provided to **all** members of Zest communities (employees, volunteers, students, contractors and other third parties).

The Customer Service Standard requires that this training includes:

- Review of the purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the requirements as laid out in the Customer Service Standard
- Instruction on how to interact and communicate with people with various disabilities
- Instruction on how to interact with people with disabilities who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a guide dog, service animal or support person
- Instruction on how to use equipment or devices available at any Zest Communities location
- Instruction on what to do if a customer with a disability is having difficulty accessing service

In addition to the basic instructions contained in this handbook, you may be required to attend additional inservice training programs specifically designed for your position and to address the unique needs of the customers you serve. These training programs have been developed to ensure you carry out your duties in a manner that promotes the optimum health and safety of your customers. Your supervisor or manager will provide you with more information about this position-specific training.

A record of the training you have taken will be retained by the Zest Human Resources Department.



Revised: February 2019 16 | Page

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Revised: February 2019 17 | Page

Acknowledgement Form

This handbook has been prepared for your information and understanding of Zest Communities' policies, procedures and practices as they relate to providing goods and service to customers with disabilities in accordance with the Customer Service Standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

You are required to review the contents of this handbook and sign the statement below to acknowledge that you understand your role as an employee, volunteer, student, contractor or third-party provider of service.

Please detach this page and return the signed statement below to your supervisor or manager.

This is to confirm that I have received and read a copy of the Zest Communities' Handbook on Accessible Customer Service which outlines the policies, processes and practices related to:

- The purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and requirements under the Customer Service Standard
- Interacting and communicating with people with various disabilities
- Providing service to people who use assistive devices
- Providing service to people accompanied by a support person
- Providing service to people accompanied by a service animal
- Training
- Disruption of service
- The feedback process
- Availability of alternate formats of documentation

Name	(please print)	
Signature	Date	
Name of Department or Company		
This is to confirm that the above person has received and reviewed the content of this handbook:		
Name of Supervisor/Manager	_Signature	

PLEASE RETURN THIS COMPLETED FORM TO THE HR DEPARTMENT

Revised: February 2019 18 | Page