

## ACCESSIBILITY MANIFESTO

The Toronto Fringe has made a commitment to establishing and prioritizing accessibility in all areas of our organization.

We are grateful to the Metcalf Foundation for supporting our organization-wide initiative with a three-year Creative Strategies Incubator grant, which we began in 2017. The grant is allowing us to invest meaningful resources into providing, increasing, and improving accessibility at our major events including the summer favourite, Toronto Fringe Festival, and our bespoke winter series, the Next Stage Theatre Festival. We are a little over a year and a half into our journey, we have learned a lot and understand that we still have a lot to learn.

We decided to create an **Accessibility Manifesto** so that people can discover what we have done, what we are doing, and what we are planning.

The Accessibility Manifesto serves as a roadmap for us and a commitment to you that we want to be held accountable. This document will aid us in being transparent about where we are at in the process and allow you to give us feedback, if you wish. It won't show every detail but will outline the main aspects of our plans. It is a working document that will be updated.

We appreciate your patience as we do this work and strive to be accessible in every sense of the word, as per our mandate.

This includes but is not limited to;

Our Staff  
Our Artists  
Our Patrons  
Our Volunteers  
Our Donors  
Our Sponsors  
Our Partners  
Our Venues  
Our Spaces  
Our Attitude

### **What we have done:**

#### Year 1

- Created the new position of Access Coordinator for our organization, hired an Access Coordinator, and engaged an Access Consultant, forging the fundamental structure of this department.
- Created a short-term and long-term work plan (for the next 2 years and beyond)
- Created a comprehensive accessibility handbook for our festival participants.

- Created a program to educate and encourage participants to offer assisted measures (ASL Interpretation, Audio Description, Relaxed performances) at their shows.
- Supported artists who opted-in to providing assisted measures for some or all of their performances at the 2018 Fringe Festival.
- Mandated that all site-specific venues be physically accessible.
- Included more information about accessibility on our website and in our program guide.
- Began to overhaul training practices for the departments that engage with patrons and contribute to their Festival experience, including Front of House Managers, Volunteers, and Box Office Reps.
- Met with consultants from various sectors to discuss ideas and best practices.

## Year 2

- Shifted our accessibility messaging to better reflect our commitment to independence and dignity for patrons with accessibility needs.
- Worked with professional consultants and community members to complete a thorough audit of our main venues to assess and address barriers to access. Currently, the Toronto Fringe uses 16 Main venues for our summer festival and one venue, the Factory Theatre, for our winter festival, Next Stage.
- Met with consultants - we discussed learnings, things that worked, and things that definitely need to improve.
- Implemented updates to our website to make it more navigable and to offer more access-related content.
- Overhauled the box office experience to significantly improve the accessibility measures we offer our ticket-buying patrons
- Made modifications to the Fringe Patio, Postscript, to improve physical accessibility and to make it more welcoming to the Deaf community, and more appealing to folks with neurodiversity and diverse abilities.
- Worked with Deaf Spectrum to create ASL videos with key information about attending and participating in our festivals as artists, patrons, and volunteers
- Continued to expand and enhance our relationships with service providers (ASL, Audio Describers, etc.) and community consultants who can be sought out and engaged by Fringe Festival participants
- Supported artists providing assisted measures for their performances at Next Stage.
- Created the new position of Assistant Access Coordinator to help with the expanding access services offered by the Fringe.
- More than doubled our Assisted Performance offering at the 2019 Fringe Festival.
- Created a text-reader friendly downloadable Assisted Performances Supplement for our Fringe Program Guide to better enable patrons to choose performances that meet their needs.

## What we are doing (ongoing):

- Using the data gathered in the venue audits, we are creating two online documents for each of our main venues to provide more accurate and

comprehensive information about accessibility to anyone that wishes: Visual Venue Guides and Venue Accessibility Information.

- Creating Visual Venue Guide and Venue Accessibility Information templates for our site-specific participants to use to provide patrons with more comprehensive information.
- Partnering with Tangled Arts + Disability to present the work of Mad, Deaf and Disability identified artists on our patio.
- Engaging in outreach to disability support organizations throughout Ontario to foster awareness of the accessible offerings at the 2019 Fringe.
- Working with like-minded organizations to improve the distribution of information about accessible performances and opportunities for artists who are Deaf, Mad, and those with disabilities throughout Ontario.
- Sharing our learnings with organizations just beginning the journey to better accessibility.
- Tracking and reviewing our initiatives to assess impact.
- Moving our offices to a new, physically accessible workspace (as of September 2019)
- Refining the use of our language around what an 'accessible' venue means, recognising we have been talking more specifically about patrons, rather than artists and technicians where there are still many barriers in many theatres.

#### **What we are planning on next:**

- Creating even more opportunities for people with disabilities, Deaf and Mad individuals to get involved with our organization in all capacities.
- Forming a community-led Accessibility Advisory Committee that would operate year-round to help keep us on target and accountable.
- Creating a set of functional illustrated ASL cards with a local Deaf artist to better enable our non-signing staff to communicate with Deaf patrons.
- Work with professional consultants and past Fringe participants to complete a thorough audit of the backstage areas of our main venues to assess and address barriers to access for Fringe participants and technicians.
- Compile a list of universally accessible venues for potential site-specific participants to use when applying to the Toronto Fringe Festival.
- Incorporate LSQ performances in addition to ASL in our Festivals.
- Improving accessibility for our participants.
- Sourcing new funding initiatives to be able to continue the work we are doing, and retain our staff member when the Metcalf Funding comes to a close at the end of 2020