

## **Notes for Docent Orientation Session**

### **Outline**

- 1. General comments about tours for disabled people**
- 2. Comments about tours for low-vision visitors**

### **Overall theme**

**The disability community is diverse, and it's important to recognize both the differences among them and their similarities, including their similarity with non-disabled people.**

**For example, disabled people come to the museum for the same reason as people without disabilities. They will be excited and eager to learn about the same things.**

### **General Comments about tours for disabled visitors**

#### **I. Show Understanding and Empathy**

**A. Disabilities are common. Most of us have relatives, friends, or co-workers with disabilities, or we have one ourselves. Or we know seniors who do not consider themselves to be disabled but have vision, hearing, mobility, or other issues and thus have the same needs as disabled people.**

**B. Recognize how the diversity of the tour group's disabilities will affect the tour.**

**1. People using walkers and canes will have to sit down periodically.**

**2. A person with a vision issue will need to be closer to the work of art and need more description of it.**

**3. A hard-of-hearing person will have to be closer to the docent.**

#### **C. Recognize the similarities**

**1. People with low vision and in wheelchairs will both need to be close to the work of art.**

**2. Speak louder than usual, not only for hard of hearing visitors but because with wheelchairs and walkers, the group may be spread out more. In addition, low-vision people rely on what you say to fill in the gaps in what they are seeing, and so, hearing**

**what you say is critical.**

**D. Assess the disabilities of the group at the beginning of the tour. For invisible disabilities, this may require asking questions, e. g., please tell me if you need to stand closer to me or the work of art, or if I need to speak louder.**

## **II. Plan and Manage the Tour More than Usual**

**A. Rehearse the route so you know where chairs and benches are, both as obstacles for low-vision people and places to sit for people with stamina issues.**

**B. Are pathways wide enough? If there are several wheelchairs as well as people with walkers, will the pathways work?**

**C. Tell the group where you are going to a greater degree than usual and watch for stragglers. If a tour has people with a variety of disabilities, they will move at different speeds.**

**D. Small tours can mitigate these challenges.**

**E. Another mitigating factor is to conduct the tour in a more deliberate way; it will be a longer tour.**

### **Comments for Tours for Low-Vision Visitors**

**I. The lower the level of vision, the more important are the docent's words:**

**A. Expand on what you usually do in a tour:**

**1. Describe what is happening in a painting.**

**2. Point out details in the art.**

**3. Put the art into historical context.**

**4. Discuss the artist.**

**B. Describing Art**

**1. The description can have a great emotional impact on the low vision person, like being read a great poem or hearing a piece of music.**

**2. The less contrast within a picture, the harder it is to tell what is going on, and the greater the amount of description needed. If a painting contains an object having contrast (an article of clothing or a face) this can be used as an orientation point to guide low-vision visitors around the picture.**

**3. Color is hard to describe to a totally blind person who has always been blind, but describe the colors as hot or cold or relate the color to object the person knows. Ask visitor what works best for them.**

## **II. Plan and Manage the Tour**

**A. Much of what was said earlier applies here.**

**B. Alert visitors to benches and other objects below eye level.**

**C. Conduct tour in more deliberate way because low vision people cannot take in a work of art visually as fast as fully sighted person.**

**D. Ask visitors if they need to get closer.**