



PHI's mission is to enhance the lives and independence of polio survivors and home mechanical ventilator users through education, advocacy, research and networking.

Post-Polio Health Spring 2011, Vol. 27, No. 2

ISSN 1066-5331

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PHI sends PHI Membership Memos via email. Be sure to set your spam filter to receive emails from info@post-polio.org.

Moving? Change of address?

Notify PHI before you move by calling 314-534-0475 or email info@post-polio.org, and tell us your old and new addresses.

Away Temporarily? Send us your "second" address and dates you will be there, and we'll do our best to send your newsletter.

WE'RE STILL HERE!, AND ...

As Post-Polio Health International embarks on its fifth WE'RE STILL HERE! week, October 9-15, 2011, I considered adding "AND" to the tag line. A survivor, who didn't like WE'RE STILL HERE!, expressed the opinion that it is asking for pity. That certainly is not our intent. PHI's aim is to counter the misconception that no one who had polio is still alive. (See Sue McAlexander's letter on page 9.)

AND, our aim is to spread the word that people with disabilities are quite capable. Even as we age, we can help ourselves and others. That is why each year we pick a focus that encourages action: write a letter to your local newspaper, encourage accessibility in one business or facility, visit a Rotary Club luncheon and tell the polio story. All of these activities help us educate the public, find other polio survivors and make the world a better place for all people with disabilities.

2011 Focus – Accessibility in Places of Worship

The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Spiritual well-being encompasses our exploration and discovery of the things that are important in life and our personal connection to them. Spiritual well-being can be associated with a specific religion but does not have to be. It is however, part of post-polio health.

Exempt from Title III (Accommodations) of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), places of worship are typically not required to be accessible. However, if they allow outside group use of any of their facilities, those areas need to be accessible. Religious entities all over the world have stepped up and made changes so people with disabilities are welcomed. (Links to many sites are found on post-polio.org.)

Is this true for your place of worship? Has it been more and more difficult for you to attend activities in your church, synagogue or place of worship?

PHI encourages its Members to let their places of worship know that WE'RE STILL HERE! AND that we can help make more facilities accessible for all people with disabilities.

Are you unsure of the attributes of an accessible facility? Start with the "Congregational Accessibility Network Quick Checklist" on pages 4 and 5.

Joan L. Headley, Executive Director, PHI

WE'RE STILL HERE! Improving Accessibility in Places of Worship

Joan L. Headley, Executive Director, PHI, director@post-polio.org

Polio survivors have advocated for years to assure that the world is more open to us. The effort was helped by the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), *but do we really know what makes a facility accessible – accessible in the broadest sense of the word?*

As polio survivors who are aging, we are experiencing hearing loss and problems with our eye sight just like the rest of the population, in addition to new physical and mobility problems. Post-polio health also includes our spiritual well-being, and the ability to attend and participate in activities to fulfill that need is important. Some may find that listening to a beautiful symphony or meditating in a quiet spot outside close to nature fulfills a spiritual need, while others may find attending and participating in a religious worship service spiritually satisfying. Because there are frequently more barriers to accessibility, our focus here is on the latter.

Where to start.

The Congregational Accessibility Network (CAN) recommends that congregations start with a quick checklist, parts of which we have included here. The complete checklist, a more extensive survey and other helpful ideas are located on CAN's website www.accessibilitynetwork.net/Home.

The site includes links to many faith groups, e.g. Christianity and Judaism,

which have developed excellent materials for their congregations. The CAN site also includes information about Islam, its customs and its perspective of disability. Links are also on PHI's homepage (post-polio.org).

CAN Quick Checklist

- Parking:** Accessible parking spaces clearly marked with an upright sign with the universal accessibility symbol.
- Van Accessible with 8-foot wide aisle – at least one for parking lots of 400 spaces or less.
- Car Accessible with 5-foot wide aisle – 1 for each 25 spaces up to 100, then for each 50 spaces up to 200, then each 100 spaces up to 400.
- An additional Van Accessible space is added above 400. Above 500 total spaces, calculate 2% with 1/8 of those Van Accessible rounded up to the next whole number and the rest Car Accessible.

Resources:

The Congregational Accessibility Network, a network of individuals, families, congregations, denominations and organizations to promote accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities in faith communities, is also available to assist congregations. Contact them at Congregational Accessibility Network, 1406 S. 14th Street, Goshen, Indiana 46526-4544 United States, Phone: 574-383-9398, Fax: 206-426-0258, info@accessibilitynetwork.net, www.accessibilitynetwork.net/Home.

Ginny Thornburgh is Director of the American Association of People with Disabilities Interfaith Initiative, whose mission is to support people with disabilities and their families as they seek spiritual and religious access. She welcomes your emails and phone calls. If you have questions, contact Thornburgh at gthornburgh@aapd.com or 202-521-4311.

Entrance: At least 36 inches wide via ground level, a ramp (maximum incline of 1:12), or an elevator or lift (certified) from a smooth, level accessible path from an accessible parking space.

- A covered drop off area to discharge passengers.
- Platform with at least a 5-foot level turning radius at the entrance.
- Handrails on ramps.
- Elevator or lift large enough to accommodate a power wheelchair along with a standing attendant.
- Automatic doors wherever possible and easy-to-open manual doors, e.g., with one hand without the need for tight grasping, pinching or twisting wrist.

Interior hallways: Level or have an incline of no more than 1:12 with a barrier-free width of at least 48 inches. At least one section of coat racks low enough to be accessible. Carpets and rugs 1/2-inch thick or less. Lever type door handles.

Restrooms: At least one restroom stall and sink accessible to users of wheelchairs within the standard facilities for each gender or a family/single user restroom (highly recommended). Accessible family/single user restrooms meet the following criteria among others:

- Clearly marked with the universal accessible sign.
- Entrance doors at least 32 inches wide that swing into the hallway and have lever door handles that do not require tight grasping, pinching or twisting wrist to operate.

- Have at least a 5-foot wide turning radius.
- Wall-mounted grab bars 33-36 inches high next to and at the back of the commode.
- The toilet seat 17-19 inches high.
- Sink counter no more than 34 inches high, with a knee clearance of at least 27 inches high, 30 inches wide and 19 inches deep, and hot and cold handles that do not require tight grasping, pinching or twisting wrist to operate.

Worship Area: Seating provided (preferably scattered site cutouts), so that a wheelchair user can sit beside family members. The platform and podium accessible to persons with mobility problems.

Classrooms: At least one classroom accessible to wheelchair users.

Fellowship/Gathering Area: Accessible to wheelchair users.

Don't forget other important accessibility accommodations.

The checklist includes reminders about the importance of accommodating for hearing loss by providing aids such as Assistive Listening Devices (ALD), a clear audible sound system and sign language interpretation.

Visual aids include adequate lighting, large print (at least 14-point type) written materials, descriptive verbal announcements, and Braille materials.

Congregations can support inclusion in mission statements by

addressing the intention to provide access to, and inclusion of, persons with disabilities.

A partial list of possibilities congregations can offer include:

- Awareness, education and training activities, such as disabilities or mental health awareness Sundays, sermons and events.
- Individual and Family Needs Questionnaire (available from CAN).
- Library resources.
- Special education services through classroom integration, special education classes and/or Individual Spiritual Formation Plans (ISFP).
- Referrals to counseling professionals and appropriate agencies in the community.
- Individual and family support, such as a benevolence fund, respite care and support groups.
- Special diets, (e.g. diabetic, gluten-free) considered when food is served.

WE'RE STILL HERE ... AND!

Polio survivors can continue to improve our world, by being the instigators in our local areas. Share the check list with a friend and together observe your place of worship. If it "passes," find out who should be complimented. If it doesn't, find more interested friends and begin.

PHI Members who do not have internet access may call PHI at 314-534-0475 to find the phone number for the accessibility contact of your denomination. ▲