

MacLaren Access Art

Table of Contents

- MacLaren Access Art1**
- About the MacLaren.....1**
- MacLaren Access Art2**
 - What is MacLaren Access Art? 3*
 - Guiding Principles 4*
- Program Partners4**
 - About Program Partners..... 4*
 - Partners.....4*
 - MacLaren Access Art Team..... 8*
- Reducing Barriers to Access9**
 - Survey Findings..... 9*
 - Consultations with Partners 16*
 - Reducing barriers to access for guests living with vision, hearing, intellectual or physical disabilities in exhibition spaces and the art classroom..... 17*
 - Before guests enter exhibition spaces: 17*
 - Within exhibition spaces: 18*
 - Within Classroom Spaces 20*
 - Recommendations Based on Proposed Accessibility Programming..... 21*
 - Key Takeaways: 22*
- Commitment.....22**
- Next Steps22**
- Resources and References23**
- Special thanks24**

About the MacLaren

The MacLaren Art Centre is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabek, which include the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Pottawatomi Nations, collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. The local bands consist of the Chippewa Tri-Council, who are made up of Beausoleil First Nation, Georgina Island First Nation and Rama First Nation.

We would also like to acknowledge the Wendat Nation (Huron) who occupied these lands prior to the middle of the 17th century.

The MacLaren is the major public art gallery in central Ontario serving the residents of Barrie, the County of Simcoe and the surrounding area. Prior to 2020, the Gallery engaged over 58,000 people each year in its activities at the gallery, in the schools and in the community, including 21,000 children and youth. We house a significant permanent collection of over 4,300 works of contemporary Canadian art and present a year-round program of exhibitions, workshops and special events that nurture artistic talent, inspire creativity, and stimulate intellectual curiosity.

As a registered charity, the MacLaren Art Centre relies on public and private support for its operations and programs. The MacLaren Art Centre gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of its Members, Patrons, Donors, Sponsors, Partners, the City of Barrie, the Ontario Arts Council, the Government of Ontario, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Canada Council for the Arts and Canadian Heritage.

Location and contact information

37 Mulcaster Street
Barrie, Ontario, L4M 3M2
705-721-9696
www.maclarenart.com
maclaren@maclarenart.com

MacLaren Access Art

Accessibility is key to inclusivity and engagement. In 2019, The MacLaren Art Centre launched a new five-year strategic plan, called Enhanced Engagement, which outlines ways to share our stories, engage with new and diverse communities, foster greater physical and intellectual access to the Gallery's collection and exhibitions, and build new partnerships to extend our programming into the community. Our hope is to enhance visitor experiences, engagement and accessibility with programs and exhibitions that will attract and inspire audiences.

MacLaren Access Art is an important part of that plan. The Gallery enjoys a small but skilled artistic team, with an excellent record of building enjoyable, intellectually stimulating and high-quality programs. Dedicated efforts to increase access to our building have been made: the Gallery is centrally located downtown, has dedicated accessible parking and admission is free year-round; many washrooms are single-use, equipped with handrails, and include automatic sinks and hand dryers that are at lowered heights; we provide subsidized programming for all age groups, including free studio workshops at the Gallery led by practicing art therapists for clients living with disabilities and their caregivers; flexible booking hours for group tours and activities; and staff regularly engage in diversity and inclusivity training. However, we recognize that

more can be done to meaningfully engage visitors from our region who are living with disabilities in our exhibitions.

What is MacLaren Access Art?

MacLaren Access Art is the name of a pilot project, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation through a Seed Grant, which began in September 2020 and concluded in December 2021. It focused on enhancing access to exhibitions and arts-based learning opportunities for those living with disabilities, building on the MacLaren's commitment to inclusivity.

The program included:

- Researching what other galleries are doing to reduce barriers to access in their exhibition spaces.
- Making partnerships with local organizations that work with, care for, and provide services to people living with disabilities and their families.
- Conduct a series of consultations with local partner organizations, where a research and planning feedback loop was initiated to determine best practices for accessible exhibitions, interpretive tools, and related art programs in the Gallery; Input, feedback, and recommendations for positive change from disability experts were sought regularly after each component of the project was completed.
- Learning about some of the physical, intellectual, emotional, and environmental barriers to access at the MacLaren. Specific attention was placed on addressing barriers to access for guests who are deaf or have reduced hearing, guests who are blind or have limited vision, and guests with physical and intellectual disabilities.
- Learning about the impact these new programs could have for visitors.
- Hiring accessibility professionals to work with curators and artists, to collaboratively provide alternative ways to access exhibitions, individual artworks, or to complete visual arts programs.
- Developing exhibition-specific technologies that provide alternative ways to engage with the artwork on view.
- Building a list of arts-related accessibility resources from trusted sources
- Implementing accessible exhibition and program recommendations into a major MacLaren exhibition and devising ways to continually implement accessible features into future exhibition seasons.

According to the 2019 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act annual report, it was estimated that one in four Ontarians are living with a disability.¹ Through these newly acquired skills, we hope to meaningfully engage more regional residents who are living with disabilities as new audiences for the MacLaren.

¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontarians-disabilities-act-annual-report-2019>

Guiding Principles

- **Reducing Barriers to Access:** offer alternative ways of experiencing art exhibitions and related programming that respond to the needs of people living with disabilities.
- **Community Focus:** engage with and learn from our regional communities of people living with disabilities to better understand what barriers to access exist and what supports would be most helpful.
- **Flexibility and Growth:** these documents, recommendations, and the programs they inspire, should be living things – able to shift to accommodate differing individual needs, conflicting needs and new standards for accessibility.

Program Partners

About Program Partners

For *MacLaren Access Art*, we reached out to several regional organizations who provide services to people living with disabilities and their families. In late 2020, the MacLaren reached out to 10 partner organizations with an introductory survey. This focused on gathering information about their experiences with accessibility tools and programs at the MacLaren Art Centre in the past, their experiences at other galleries, and determining which accessibility tools would be beneficial to introduce to the galleries and education centre. The feedback we received was wide ranging. To read about the survey findings, please scroll down to the [Reducing Barriers to Access Section](#).

In early 2021, we reconnected with each organization and their clients to familiarize everyone with the MacLaren Art Centre and the *MacLaren Access Art Team*. The bulk to the presentation was dedicated to sharing a proposed accessibility plan for Erika DeFreitas' exhibition, entitled *everything she inspires remains, belongs to light*, which was crafted using feedback from the accessibility survey in mind. We also presented a series of related art-making programs which incorporated accessible ways of making and engaging with the exhibition on view. After each presentation, time was set aside for additional feedback on the proposed changes to the exhibition space and for the classroom. We are indebted to these organizations for fostering a safe space for open dialogue about accessibility, donating their time and expertise and for their work in the community. To read about the outcomes of these consultations, please scroll down to the [Reducing Barriers to Access Section](#).

Partners

Alzheimer Society of Simcoe County

The Alzheimer Society of Simcoe County provides help for people living with dementia, and their care partners. They offer programs and services in communities across Simcoe County.

Location and contact information

20 Anne Street South, P.O. Box 1414
Barrie, ON L4M 5R4
705-722-1066
<https://alzheimer.ca/simcoecounty/en>
simcoecounty@alzheimersociety.ca

Autism Ontario – Simcoe County Chapter

Autism Ontario is a reliable source of information and support for all Simcoe County citizens who have a connection to autism, including families, children, adults on the spectrum, caregivers, support workers and teachers. They provide services to families, and special speaker and training workshops that cover topics like advocacy, support and the latest news in Autistic Spectrum Disorder research.

Location and contact information

80 Bradford Street, Unit 317
Barrie, ON L4N 6S7
1-800-472-7789
autismontario.com/simcoe
simcoe@autismontario.com

Bob Rumball Home for the Deaf

The Bob Rumball Home for the Deaf is the only long-term care facility in Canada which is specifically designed to meet the needs of Deaf seniors. Emphasis is placed on communication and eliminating the isolation many Deaf seniors experience, while also offering services to hearing seniors.

Location and contact information

1 Royal Parkside Drive
Barrie, ON L4M 0C4
705-719-6700
Bobrumball.org
info@bobrumball.org

Brain Injury Services – Simcoe

Brain Injury Services is a community-based support to individuals and their families who are living with the ongoing effects of an acquired brain injury (ABI). They offer programs on a variety of topics, including brain injury education, family support and education, cognitive rehabilitation and community integration. Rehabilitation services are based on each person's specific needs as identified by the individual and their support network.

Location and contact information

21 Essa Road, Unit 1
Barrie, ON L4N 3K4
705-734-2178
Braininjuryservices.ca
bis@braininjuryservices.ca

Camphill Communities Ontario

Camphill is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating unique and inspiring residential, vocational and learning opportunities for people with cognitive and developmental disabilities in both rural and urban settings in Simcoe County.

Location and contact information

4 Checkley Street, Suite 304
Barrie, ON L4N 1W1
705-424-5363
Camphill.on.ca
info@camphill.on.ca

CNIB Simcoe Muskoka

Founded in 1918, the CNIB Foundation is a non-profit organization driven to change what it is to be blind today. They deliver innovative programs and powerful advocacy that empower people impacted by blindness to live their dreams and tear down barriers to inclusion. Their work as a blind foundation is powered by a network of volunteers, donors and partners from coast to coast to coast.

Location and contact information

90 Collier St, Unit 5
Barrie ON L4M 0J3
705-728-3352
cnib.ca
info@cnib.ca

COPE Service Dogs

COPE Service Dogs delivers education programs that engage communities and empower people in the training of service dogs that transform the lives of people with disabilities. They provide highly skilled service dog partners to people with disabilities, and enhance the lives of youth experiencing challenges by involving them in the dog training process.

Location and contact information

80 Bradford Street, Suite 223
Barrie, ON L4N 6S7
705-734-2673
Copedogs.org
info@copedogs.org

DeafAccess

Deaf Access Simcoe Muskoka is a charitable, non-profit organization that works alongside culturally deaf, oral deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people of all ages, their families, and the community throughout the region. They work to increase access to local recreational, educational, employment, developmental, habilitational and social opportunities through direct service provision, advocacy, support and sharing of information.

Location and contact information

11 Victoria St
Barrie, ON L4N 6T3
705-728-3577
Deafaccess.ca
info@deafaccess.ca

DeafBlind Ontario

DeafBlind Ontario Services provides an array of services to people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, non-verbal and deafblind that are customized to everyone's unique needs, method of communication, and goals to enrich their life. As a leader in the field, their reach extends into remote communities and urban centres across the province with accessible supported living homes and customized community services.

Location and contact information

7665 Leslie St
Newmarket, ON L3Y 3E3
905-853-2862
Deafblindontario.com
info@deafblindontario.com

Empower Simcoe

Empower Simcoe, formerly known as Simcoe Community Services, is a charitable, non-profit organization that supports children, teens and adults who have an intellectual disability through the belief that everyone can contribute to their community. They offer programs and services about housing resources, community support and volunteer activities, employment support services, family home and relief programs, retirement living resources and more.

Location and contact info

39 Fraser Ct,
Barrie, ON L4N 5J5
705-726-9082
empowersimcoe.ca
inquiries@empowersimcoe.ca

MacLaren Access Art Team**J.J. Hunt – Audio Describer**

J.J. Hunt is an innovative Audio Describer and a natural-born storyteller. In the past he has created audio descriptions, written descriptions and live describing work for the Andy Warhol Museum, CBC, the National Film Board of Canada, and the Smithsonian Museum in Washington among other noteworthy contracts. He also hosts the podcast *Talk Description to Me*, with cohost Christine Malec, where the pair engage in the visuals of current events, and the world around us gets hashed out in description-rich conversations.

For this pilot program, J.J. created descriptive audio versions of every artwork on display within *everything she inspires remains, belongs to light* in ways that accurately capture the visuals of the artwork, but also the nuanced implications and emotional quality of the work. With guidance from artist Erika DeFreitas and curator Emily McKibbin, Hunt created new avenues for guests who are blind, living with reduced vision, and those who engage best through sound, to experience this exhibition.

Lisa Nackan – Registered Art Therapist

Lisa Nackan is a compassionate, intuitive, and insightful clinician who specializes in Psychotherapy and Art Therapy for children and adults. Her approach is uniquely gentle, and grounded in a strength-based, trauma-informed framework. She understands the significance of developing a strong, safe, and supportive therapeutic relationship that allows her clients to gain insight, find relief from emotional distress, and live their lives with intention and meaning. Her work focuses on anxiety, grief, trauma, selective mutism, Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), development disabilities, Alzheimer's disease, dementia and more.

Her training includes Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, attachment-based interventions, Narrative Therapy, trauma, writing as therapy and more. Her professional affiliations include the College of Registered Psychotherapists and Canadian Art Therapy Association.

For *MacLaren Access Art*, Lisa created visual arts programs related to Erika DeFreitas' exhibition that centre the needs of participants who are deaf or have reduced hearing, guests who are blind or have limited vision, and guests with physical and intellectual disabilities. Because of her past work experience, Lisa also advised on changes to the

Education Centre environment – such as lighting, disruptive sounds caused by environmental factors in the Education Centre and more - that would help reduce barriers to access for some MacLaren art class participants.

Tyler Durbano – MacLaren Accessibility Coordinator

The funding provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation for *MacLaren Access Art*, in part, allowed the MacLaren to hire an Accessibility Coordinator to oversee the necessary consultations with partner organizations, exhibition requirements and accessible programs that are responsive to the needs and feedback of our community.

Tyler Durbano (he/they) is a queer visual artist and cultural worker, who has over a decade of experience working with galleries and museums, universities and charitable organizations. Immediately before being hired into the Accessibility Coordinator position, he was Acting Education Officer (2019-2020) at the MacLaren Art Centre.

Reducing Barriers to Access

Survey Findings

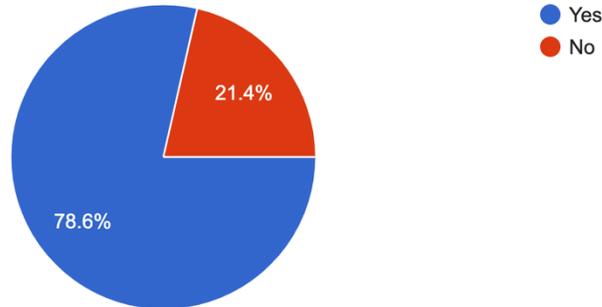
In late 2020, the MacLaren reached out to 10 partner organizations with an introductory survey focused on gathering information about their experiences with accessibility tools and programs at the MacLaren Art Centre in the past, their experiences at other galleries, and determining which accessibility tools would be beneficial to introduce to the galleries and education centre. This stage of the project initiated the research and planning feedback loop by gathering initial data for the project. The 10 partner organizations were encouraged to distribute the survey to their clients and staff to collect as much valuable data from our community as possible. This section contains the findings from that survey. The names of the forty-two respondents have been kept anonymous for privacy reasons.

The survey was divided into five sections:

Section 1 asked questions about the respondent, including which partner organization they were affiliated with or accessed services from, and if they have lived experience with a disability or cared for someone with a disability. The survey found that almost 79% of people who responded identified as having a disability or cared for someone with a disability.

Do you identify as having lived experience with a disability, or do you care for someone with a disability?

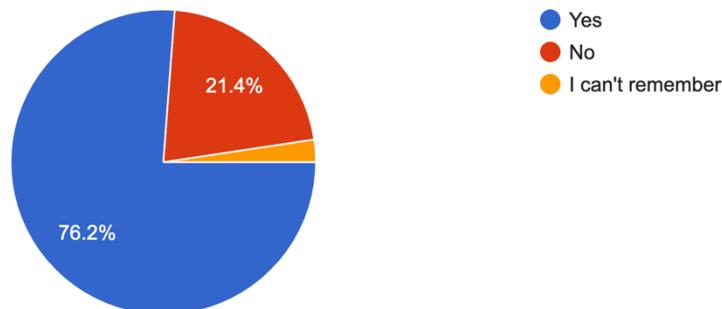
42 responses



Section 2 asked four questions about the respondents' past experiences with the MacLaren Art Centre. The survey found that over 75% of people had visited the MacLaren before, but just over half of the respondents were able to easily engage with the artwork on display. Of the forty-two respondents, about 55% had not taken part in an art-making program at the Gallery.

Have you ever visited the MacLaren Art Centre?

42 responses



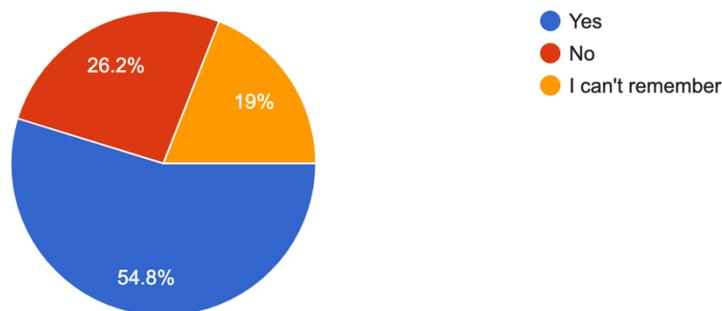
Have you ever taken part in a program at the MacLaren Art Centre?

42 responses



While at the MacLaren, were you able to easily engage with all parts of the exhibitions you saw?

42 responses



The final question in this section asked, “what would make the MacLaren Art Centre more accessible to you or the people you support?” and provided an open field to record individualized answers. Responses are divided into those that pose suggestions for exhibitions and programing, and those for common areas of the building.

Exhibition and programing suggestions:

- Provide designated times specifically for people living with dementia and their care partners to visit the gallery.
- Designate sensory-friendly times at the gallery - including smaller crowds, dimmed lights, lower volume on music or announcements – which would help reduce anxiety or over-stimulation for some guests.

- Provide art programs that follow dementia-friendly practices in safe spaces: art activities that can be done at a calm pace and while seated to accommodate for participants with decreased balance; work to create a learning environment that is low-pressure; encourage artmaking outcomes that are all unique, experimental, and scalable in terms of complexity of technique so that participants may set their own achievable goals; and if possible, adapt to participants' abilities.²
- Provide clear wayfinding signs throughout the Gallery.
- Find ways to reduce excess noise that may travel from common areas to galleries or classrooms.
- Ensure adequate lighting in gallery spaces, and ensure that floor transitions or changes in height are well-marked.
- Add additional seating areas in exhibition spaces.
- Allow timed-entry or reduced capacity bookings to view exhibitions.
- Provide physical copies of exhibition texts that guests can take away, printed in large font sizes in English and French.
- Contract American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for tours.
- Ensure videos with sound are captioned, and implement a loop system for hearing aid users.
- Implement more exhibitions with tactile or olfactory components.
- Include more artwork from artists who identify as disabled.
- Train docents to work and communicate with guests living with aphasia and other communication disorders.
- Digital screens in and around exhibition areas for announcements.

Answers related to common areas of the MacLaren building:

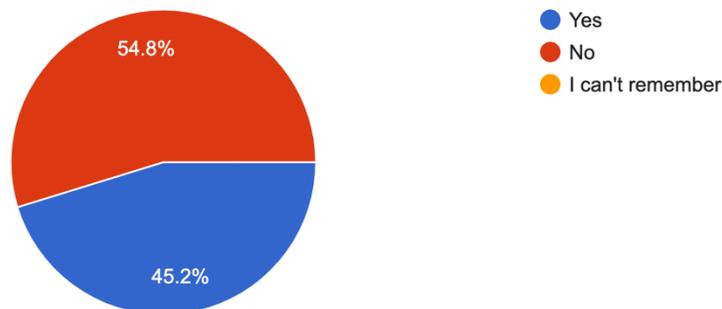
- More accessible parking on Mulcaster Street, as it is limited. Relatedly, the grade/slope of Mulcaster Street can be difficult for guests with disabilities related to mobility to navigate, especially in winter months.
- Install larger, adult-capacity change tables in washrooms.
- Provide communication devices at reception, like an Ubi Duo, to facilitate easier communication between staff/volunteers and guests.
- Easier access to Framing Services, on the lower level of the building.
- Increase lighting in bathrooms and elevator.

Section 3 asked questions related to respondents' experiences at other galleries and museums. The survey found that almost half had visited a similar institution within the last three years, though only one third had participated in a program or event that was fully accessible to them.

² Further information and resources on making a safe environment for people living with dementia: "Making Your Environment Safe," Alzheimer Society, accessed 1, 2021, <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-caring-person-living-dementia/ensuring-safety-security/making-your-environment-safe>.

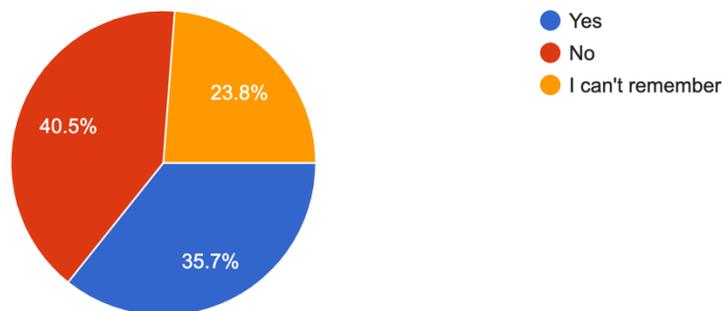
Have you visited other art galleries within the last three years?

42 responses



While at that gallery, did you participate in a program or event, or view an exhibition, without experiencing barriers to access?

42 responses



Section 4 contained two questions, focusing on accessibility tools and resources that would benefit respondents most at an art gallery. The first question asked respondents to describe a positive experience they had at a gallery or museum other than the MacLaren that they would consider fully accessible. While only 57% of those surveyed responded, the answers to this question fell within the following categories and helpful implements:

Technology

- Audio guided tours with headsets.
- Online components with accessible tools: apps, QR codes with extended information.
- Tactile exhibition features and learning implements.
- Screens that display announcements that are otherwise only audible.
- Subtitles, captions and transcripts on video and audio artwork.

Lots of Space

- Exclusive guided tours and smaller crowds in galleries.
- No tripping hazards.

People

- Translators and interpreters on site.
- Exhibits targeting different age groups.
- The ability to bring a support worker, free of charge.
- Pre-recorded exhibition texts by Deaf educators.

Sensory Needs

- Changeable lighting and sound environments (recognizing conflicting accommodations and needs).
- Creating dementia-friendly environments in galleries and classrooms.³

Well-planned Buildings and Spaces

- Physical accessibility: ramps, doorways, aisles and elevators that allow for ease of movement.
- Clear signage and barriers.
- Easy access to large washrooms.
- Large, high-contrast texts and graphics.

The final question in this section asked respondents to consider which of the following tools they would use during a trip to a museum, if provided. If a helpful tool was not included on the list, we encouraged them to add it. The following options made up the list.

The percentage of respondents who selected each accessibility tool directly follows each item on the list:

- Large text options for exhibition essays, wall text, labels and other forms of writing. (52.4%)
- Free audio summaries of exhibitions, audio tours or podcasts about the artwork in the Gallery. (47.6%)
- A Gallery Guide to accompany you and provide verbal descriptions artwork. (38.1%)
- Closed captioning on all video artwork, or video transcripts available on demand. (42.9%)
- 3D printed and tactile art objects, or tangible replicas of artwork. (42.9%)
- Artwork hung on the walls at lower heights / shorter pedestals for sculptural artwork. (38.1%)
- Tactile strips placed on the floor around sculptural artwork. (28.6%)
- Increased space between floor artwork and sculpture. (31%)
- Alt text for digital artwork viewed online. (31%)

³ Ibid.

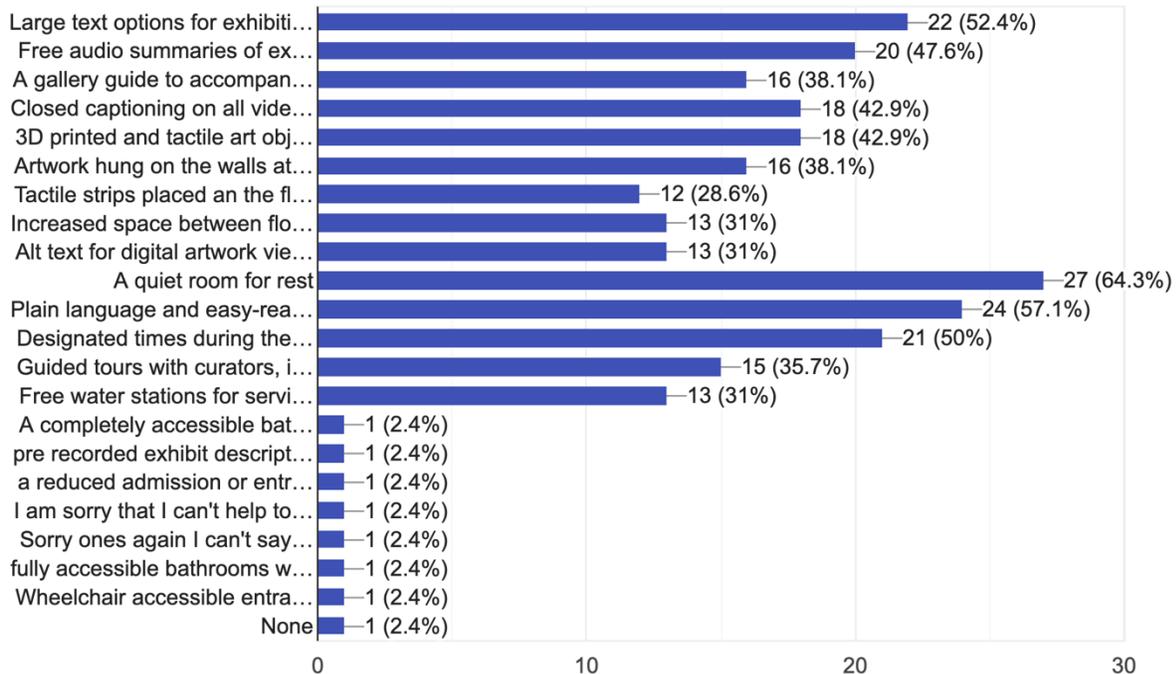
- A quiet room for rest. (64.3%)
- Plain language and easy-read versions of exhibition-related writing and gallery hand-outs. (57.1%)
- Designated times during the day with reduced lighting, sounds and other stimuli. (50%)
- Guided tours with curators, interpreted in American Sign Language. (35.7%)
- Water stations for service animals. (31%)

Further to these, respondents added the following as important to have within a gallery:

- Accessible, oversized washrooms with adult changing stations and lifts.
- Free admission
- Wheelchair-accessible entranceways

Which of the following tools would you use during your next trip to an art gallery? If you do not see a desired tool or resource, please select "other" and add it to the list.

42 responses



Section 5 included space for respondents to add comments or final thoughts that they were not able to include in previous sections of the survey. When asked generally how we can improve accessibility at the MacLaren, responses were divided into those that pose suggestions for exhibitions and programing, and those for common areas of the building:

Exhibition and programing suggestions:

- Increased clear directional signage
- Increased classes for people living with disabilities, including art therapy sessions.
- More seating in exhibition spaces
- Consider lighting that is appropriate for ASL interpretation
- Make requesting access easy: accessible tours or programs should be found quickly online and simple to book. Reception workers should be familiar with processing these requests.
- Incorporate loop systems for hearing aids in galleries.
- Create program options with low class numbers, less sensory stimuli and an available space to take a "break" outside of the program room.
- More ASL interpretation, and more programs led by artists with disabilities.

Answers related to common areas of the building:

- A ramp bridging the steps between the main lobby and café area.
- Consider reconfiguring the main entrance of the Gallery off of Mulcaster Street, to avoid the street's incline/slope.
- Add a second washroom on the main floor.
- Substitute the heavy front entrance door for a lighter, easier-to-open door.
- Add ramps into the interior courtyard.
- Add more accessible parking near the main entrance

Consultations with Partners

In early 2021, we reconnected with each organization and their clients to familiarize everyone with the MacLaren Art Centre and the *MacLaren Access Art Team*. This stage of the project continued the research and planning feedback loop by building on the data collected during our initial survey for the project, and asking for insight into the direction of the project thus far. Due to scheduling conflicts, unfortunately representatives from Brain Injury Services of Simcoe were unable to claim a presentation time; the findings of this section are based on contributions from the remaining nine partner organizations.

The bulk of these presentations were dedicated to sharing a proposed accessibility plan for Erika DeFreitas' exhibition, entitled *everything she inspires remains, belongs to light*. We also presented a series of related art-making programs which incorporated accessible ways of making and engaging with the exhibition on view.

After each meeting, time was set aside for additional feedback on the proposed changes to the exhibition space and for the classroom. This section contains an overview of the programming and interpretive tools suggested for Erika DeFreitas' exhibition and resulting recommendations from partner organizations. It is intended that the accessible spirit and lens through which this exhibition was created should be applied to future MacLaren exhibitions and programs.

The names of attendees have been kept anonymous for privacy reasons.

Reducing barriers to access for guests living with vision, hearing, intellectual or physical disabilities in exhibition spaces and the art classroom

Before guests enter exhibition spaces:

The presentation began by outlining what accessible features guests can anticipate when they arrive at the MacLaren

Entrance and Admission Accessibility

The MacLaren is proud to offer free admission to exhibitions for guests to the gallery every day; some art-making programs for all ages are available for free or subsidized rates. Guests who will never be made to pay admission for support workers to attend classes or programs with fees. Service dogs bearing official registration are also welcomed into the Gallery in all public spaces. Traditionally, the MacLaren also offers late operating hours one night during the week to allow for extended exhibition viewing times. Because of Covid-19, the Gallery is currently open at a with a reduced schedule of operating hours with a plan toward resuming regular operating hours when it is safe to do so. Classes are often scheduled after Gallery hours or during low-traffic times of the day.

Signage and Wayfinding

Directional and art-related didactic signage is available on every level of the building, using traditional printed formats and digital screens to indicate the location of gallery spaces, wheelchair lifts, exhibitions on view, emergency exits, washrooms, water stations, common spaces and more.

Washrooms

Washrooms are located on every floor of the MacLaren Art Centre. All are oversized to accommodate wheelchairs or guests with support workers, and while many were designated as single-use and gender neutral prior to 2020, all have been designated as single use due to Covid-19.

Washrooms on all levels feature paper towel dispensers instead of hand-dryers. Handrails are also installed in all washrooms. Those located on the main and upper levels of the MacLaren include sinks installed at lowered levels. Some washrooms can be accessed and locked/unlocked via activation switches.

Gallery staff

MacLaren staff and volunteers are available to assist guests as needed, including but not limited to:

- Operating inaccessible doors.
- Guiding guests towards washrooms, elevators and quiet areas for rest.

- Assisting with exhibition-related technology, like tablets, or technology in common areas, such as wheelchair lifts.
- Being compassionate, active listeners for guests to engage with. ask questions to, and to express any concerns they may have.

Gallery staff and volunteers have committed to working within a scent-free environment.

Within exhibition spaces:

Much of the presentation focused on Erika DeFreitas' exhibition within Gallery 3, on the upper level of the MacLaren. This section highlighted elements of the exhibition that could be installed differently to support guests with disabilities in experiencing the artwork, while also maintaining the integrity of the exhibition and vision of the artist. These changes included:

- Wall-mounted artwork hung at lower levels to accommodate close viewing.
- Physical or visual guides, like stanchions or highly visible and textured floor vinyl, that indicate proximity to artwork.
- Wide pathways between artworks, seating areas and other gallery implements.
- Dimmable lighting and reduced sounds in the gallery, where possible, or upon request. Relaxed hours for exhibitions, or sensory-reduced visiting hours are also available. It should be mentioned that for DeFreitas' exhibition, there were no artworks on display that included sound.
- High contrast text and graphics used for wall didactics, labels or essays in English, French and other languages applicable to the artwork on view. Sans serif fonts will be used, and for larger didactics the body text characters should be at least one inch in height, and headers at least two inches in height, to accommodate easy reading.
- Hardcopies of essays in plain language, family-friendly didactics and writing, and questions to trigger engagement with artwork on view.
- Clear directional signage within exhibition spaces – to indicate traffic flow, entrances, emergency exits, and areas for rest – and use of standardized access symbols within the gallery that indicate tactile artwork, audio descriptions, ASL and closed captioning.
- Extra seating within the gallery so guests can sit and rest, or simply take an extended look at artwork on view.

The next section highlighted interactive elements designed to enhance the experience and understand of artwork on view. These changes included:

Audio Descriptions of All Artworks on View

For visitors living with reduced vision, guests who are Blind, and for those that prefer to engage with artwork through auditory means, descriptive-rich audio recordings should be available. These can be accessed digitally by scanning a QR code in the gallery with a personal device, or a device on loan from the MacLaren.

Going beyond a stark audible description of artwork on display, these recordings also will introduce key contextual elements, such as the work's relationship to other pieces in the room, and description-rich elements that convey the spirit or emotion of the artwork.

Tactile Replicas of Some Artworks on View:

Photographs, drawings, paintings or other two-dimensional artworks can contain many fine details. Two-dimensional replicas or scans of artwork should be available for handling and close-up viewing in the gallery space, or upon request by guests. With specific reference to DeFreitas' exhibition, enlarged sections of photographs in her series *arriver avant moi, devant moi* were offered as examples, so guests may better view and understand the faded image of Jeanne Duval which is sometimes indiscernible to viewers.

Three-dimensional replicas of artwork can be made where possible to deepen engagement with artwork, where visitors would benefit from a tactile experience. With specific reference to DeFreitas' exhibition, the creation of a diorama was proposed based on a single photograph from her series *arriver avant moi, devant moi*. This series features the artists hands arranging cut-out photographs of Jeanne Duval and Maud Salter, a hand-sized circular mirror, books, and a handheld viewfinder, among other items, on a white surface. With participation and advice from DeFreitas, the diorama was planned as a three-dimensional representation of an otherwise flat image, including casts of the artists hands. Visitors could engage with the two-dimensional work on view by exploring the tabletop diorama tactilely, feeling the placement of objects and their textures associated, thereby getting a better sense of the arrangement of the photograph on display. Dioramas would be accompanied by written and audio instructions for use and understanding, created by a professional describer.

It was noted that each two- or three-dimensional artwork replica or accessibility tool that is made to help deepen engagement with the exhibition should be done under guidance from the artist and assessment from communities from whom the devices are intended.

Technology in the Gallery

Self-guided exhibition tours can offer a sense of self-determination in the gallery, and freedom to engage in ways that suit guests needs without asking for a docent-led tour. A virtual tour was proposed for *everything she inspired remains, belongs to light* using a customizable app interface, called STQRY. This application would be pre-loaded onto MacLaren tablets for free use at the gallery, and available to download on a visitor's personal device using free WIFI.

Within the application, users could find:

- Audio descriptions of artwork, complete with transcripts.
- Copies of all texts related to the exhibition, and more information on the artist and their practice.

- Video tours of the exhibition, led by a MacLaren staff member. These would include accessible interpretation like ASL overlays, captioning or video transcripts.
- Photographs of the artwork on view for close examination.
- A map of the room linked to gallery beacons that are installed within the exhibition space. This map not only identifies the location of select artwork in the space, but can trigger information about artworks to appear automatically in the application. These are designated as points of interest. As guests travel throughout the room activating points of interest, videos, text, sounds or images related to the artwork would appear in-app to facilitate independent engagement.
- A place for feedback where guests can comment on their experience, identify barriers to access that were overlooked or imperceptible, or simply suggest changes that would enhance their experience with the artwork.

STQRY was chosen because it naturally works with accessibility functions on cell phones that people living with disabilities use in their daily life. Any functions already installed on a guest's device - like zoom functions, screen-reading technology, functions that enhance image contrast or colours – should work well with STQRY.

Within Classroom Spaces

After the viewing the exhibition, participants would be invited to the Education Centre for artmaking. A tradition when designing MacLaren programming is to draw inspiration from our exhibitions and collections. Doing this enhances appreciation of the work on view, engages participants in deeper understanding and nurtures their creativity and self-confidence through artmaking. Based on recommendations identified in the initial accessibility survey completed by our ten partner organizations, Lisa Nackan and Tyler Durban designed courses that enhanced understanding of Erika DeFreitas' exhibition through artmaking, and also supported the artmaking needs of guests living with disabilities related to vision, hearing, mobility and cognition. In addition to creating programs with accessibility in mind, the classroom environment was modified to better serve every class participant. Modifications to programs and the classroom included:

- Identifying programs that align with the needs and interest of the class, and offering programs with varying levels of complexity that allow participants to find their area of comfort with materials. For example, simple monoprint courses can be scaled up or down in complexity by increasing detail, layering, introducing different printmaking tools and more.
- Ensuring classroom instructors are trained in accessibility practices, are familiar with their students specific needs to anticipate barriers to access before they occur.
- Offering alternatives to traditional artmaking tools, or different ways of using traditional tools.
- Centring some programs around the sense of touch rather than prioritizing sight.
- Ensuring a calmed environment, keeping class sizes small (under ten participants), and offer to dim lighting and silence devices that make disruptive sounds.

- Padding chair and table legs to reduce unpleasant environmental distractions.
- Offering options to stand or sit while artmaking, at tables and easels of different heights.

Recommendations Based on Proposed Accessibility Programming

Several recommendations were proposed by nine out of ten partner organizations based on the program presented. These included potential unforeseen barriers to access, questions about how to navigate the exhibitions and what held great potential to increase accessibility for their communities.

In Favour of Keeping and Developing Further:

- All of the communities that were invited to take part in these programs stated that they enjoy using **tactile learning implements** in the galleries and that these devices would improve engagement with artwork on view and perhaps the exhibitions core themes and concepts. Many clients learn well through touch, rather than simply listening or reading text alone.
- Several partner organizations suggested that an **exhibition app** would be beneficial for their clients, as many are better at engaging with programs through technology rather than a traditional gallery tour. Some suggested including ASL interpretation inside the app.
- Many stated that **ASL interpretation in galleries and classrooms** would reduce barriers to accessing exhibitions and artmaking activities.
- **Applying sensory strategies in classrooms and galleries** – lowering or raising sounds, dimming or raising lighting, reducing harsh flashing lights, using directional signage to indicate immersive environments, and offering a quiet space for rest outside of the exhibition space.
- Many considered **extra wide pathways and additional seating in galleries** integral for communities with disabilities related to mobility.
-

Consider Revising:

- **Prioritize small or private class sized and sanitization of tactile devices**, technology loaned to guests, art materials in classrooms and common spaces frequently. Many partner organizations stressed that some of their communities are immunocompromised.
- **Consider working with the City of Barrie to ensure access to the building itself.** Snow removal from the main entrance of the MacLaren has been a barrier to access for some time, as is the steep grade of Mulcaster Street. Consider creating an accessible entrance on Collier Street, with additional dedicated parking.
- For guests who do not prefer ASL, offer **tours that feature live transcription technology**.
- **Consider working further with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)** to contract intervenors who can assist with clients who are hard of hearing and also have low vision.

- In art classes, **ensure contrast-friendly options are available**. Materials that are similar in colour (white on white, black on black, etc) are difficult for some to see.
- **Improve language around allowances for which types of guide animals are permitted in the Gallery.**
- **Consider different audiences when programming exhibitions, and different ways to convey conceptually dense themes.** While some alternative routes to accessing information may work for some guests, others cannot use ASL, braille, and other forms of interpretation.
- **Include more artists who identify as having a disability in exhibition programming.**

Key Takeaways:

- Above all, accessibility should be considered from the planning stages of the exhibition, with collaboration between gallery staff, exhibiting artists and with input from accessible communities.
- Partnerships are key: open and continued dialogue with partners that identify as disabled or serve disabled communities are the best ways to reduce barriers to access, and reveal barriers that may be otherwise imperceptible.
- Be aware of ableism and strive to provide alternative routes to access exhibitions, their concepts and related programming.
- Present content that can be experienced in multisensory ways.
- Regularly checking for barriers to access and addressing them makes spaces more accessible for everyone, not just guests who identify as having a disability.

Commitment

As a pilot program, this is just the beginning of our accessibility journey. We recognize that regular work must be done to provide meaningful exhibitions and programs that are accessible a wider audience. As such, we are committed to not only providing accessible exhibitions, implements and programs at Gallery, but also remaining attentive to new barriers to access and staying connected with the community to build lasting partnerships.

The accessibility needs and accommodations for some guests may be suitable for others, but for many people needs are individualized. We are committed to recognizing that some access needs may conflict with others, and we will strive to individualize accommodations. We invite guests with accessibility needs to reach out to MacLaren staff so we may help facilitate a positive experience.

Next Steps

- Implement the research gained through this pilot program into future seasons of exhibitions and programming.

- Continue to engage our partner organizations through programs like *MacLaren Access Art* and our longstanding Tuesday Morning Art Explorers. A new collaboration with the Alzheimer Society of Simcoe County, the Alzheimer Society of Muskoka and Muskoka Specialized Geriatric Services is also in development, which will see hundreds of art kits go to homes of people living with dementia. Each package contains simple paper instructions in large format text with pictures, video instructions, a Watercolour Card activity and a Clay Ornament activity with all materials needed to complete each project, provided free of charge to residents in the region.

Resources and References

Tangled Art + Disability

<https://tangledarts.org>

Accessibility Toolkit, created by Humber College in partnership with Tangled Art + Disability

The Diversity Style Guide

<https://www.diversitystyleguide.com>

Shape Arts UK – [Guides and resources](#) to make exhibitions, events and programs more accessible

www.shapearts.org.uk

Creative Users Projects

<https://creativeusers.net>

Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice by Carolyn Lazard

<https://promiseandpractice.art/>

Canada Council for the Arts – [Expanding the Arts Guidebook](#) (2015)

The Smithsonian Institute – [Access Resources](#) for Museum Professionals

Special thanks

We are indebted to our ten partner organizations who donated their time and knowledge to this project: Alzheimer Society of Simcoe County, Autism Ontario – Simcoe County Chapter, Bob Rumball Home for the Deaf, Brain Injury Services – Simcoe, Camphill Communities Ontario, CNIB Simcoe Muskoka, COPE Service Dogs, DeafAccess, DeafBlind Ontario, Empower Simcoe.

Special thanks to artist Erika DeFreitas and curator Emily McKibbon for generously donating their time and participating in this project.

Our sincere thanks to The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), which is an agency of the Government of Ontario, and one of Canada's leading granting foundations. Last year, nearly \$112M was invested into 1,384 community projects and partnerships to build healthy and vibrant communities and strengthen the impact of Ontario's non-profit sector. In 2020/21, OTF supported Ontario's economic recovery by helping non-profit organizations rebuild and recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

Ontario
Trillium Foundation



Fondation Trillium
de l'Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario