Access Music City: Tourism Accessibility for Individuals with Visual Impairments

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Abstract

The program, Access Music City, is an information resource for empowered Nashville consumers who seek quality accessible entertainment and services, as well as an education resource for businesses that seek to maximize profitability through accessibility (Empower TN, n.d.). The purpose of this residency project was to advocate for accommodations and services to improve the accessibility of Nashville restaurants and tourism venues for individuals with visual impairments. Advocacy was demonstrated through the rebranding and program development of Access Music City (AMC), and by participating in community engagement events throughout Nashville. Twenty-one volunteers were trained to perform accessibility assessments of local restaurants during a formal training day. Twenty-six Nashville restaurants were surveyed to assess their "accessibility friendliness" for individuals with disabilities. Of those restaurants, 27% had outstanding accessibility, 8% had good, 58% had limited, and 7% declined to be surveyed. The results of the surveys will be reported to consumers through a web-based database. Of the 26 restaurants surveyed, only one restaurant offered Braille menus. Restaurants will be given the opportunity to improve their accessibility through education and resources provided by Empower TN.

Learning Objectives

- To evaluate the accessibility of Nashville businesses for individuals with disabilities
- To critically analyze the restaurant and tourism activities of individuals with visual impairments to understand their lived experience and advocate for appropriate accessibility services
- To demonstrate advocacy by participating in and exploring leadership roles at Empower TN, promoting equal consumer access and services within the Nashville community

Dining in restaurants is an important social and leisure activity for individuals with visual impairments (VI) (De Faria, da Silva, & Ferreira, 2012; Blyth, Barr, Chapman, Mamer & Sontrup, 2009). Unfortunately, they are often marginalized in restaurants and tourism venues. Access to information is essential for individuals with VI to fully participate in the restaurant experience. Two ways to provide access to that information is through server/staff assistance and menus that are in accessible formats (Blyth et al., 2009). Poor communication and attitudes of service providers often makes individuals with visual impairment feel misunderstood, disregarded and ignored (De Faria et al., 2012; Richards, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010; Small, Darcy, & Packer, 2012). Empathetic and well-trained staff makes restaurant experiences more accessible for individuals with visual impairment (De Faria et al., 2012).

The physical environment also contributes to the accessibility of restaurants and tourism venues. Environmental barriers to consider are insufficient tactile ground surface indicators, poor lighting, poor spatial design, low color contrast, and physical barriers (Kirchner, Gerber, & Smith, 2008; Richards et al., 2010; Small et al., 2012). Increased accessibility and improved service provision greatly enhances meaningful restaurant and tourism participation for individuals with visual impairment.

Community Engagement Events

1-10-16 Insure TN Rally at Legislative Plaza
1-26-16 Disability Day on the Hill Legislative Reception
1-27-16 Disability Day on the Hill
1-30-16 Frist Volunteer Training & Panel Discussion
2-4-16 Frist Media Preview Day (Braille services)
2-17-16 Nashville Chili Festival
2-27-16 Access Music City Volunteer Training Day
2-29-33-3-16 TN Conference for Volunteerism and Service Learning
3-1-16 Nashville Convention and Visitors Corp. Sensitivity Training
3-10-16 Frist Media Preview Day (Braille services)
3-14-16 Taxi Pro Sensitivity Training
3-14-16 Community Conversation on Faith & Disability
3-17-16 Transition Fair at Tennessee School for the Blind
3-18-16 Shaping the Healthy Community: Diagnosing the built environment for healthy living
4-8-16 Vanderbilt University Map-a-thon

Literature Review

The following activities were completed to understand the lived experience and service needs of individuals with visual impairments:

- Assisted with iPhone/iPad technology classes
- Co-taught low vision iPhone classes
- Assessed the accessibility of the “Ziosk” pay kiosks at Chili’s
- Counter-service restaurant observations
- Sit-down restaurant observations
- Transition Fair at Tennessee School for the Blind
- Completed AMC restaurant survey with a client who is blind
- Transportation: AccessRide, MTA Buses, Uber, Taxis
- Created VI accessible teaching materials for Access Music City
- Interviewed individuals with blindness and low vision about restaurant service preferences

Results

Survey Items for Visual Impairment Accessibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Items for Visual Impairment Accessibility</th>
<th>Number of Restaurants (total=26)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offers Braille Menus</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Accessibility</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers Braille Menus</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding Accessibility</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Timeline

Phase I: Education and Planning
January 6, 2016 – February 3, 2016
- Orientation to Empower TN
- Assembled Access Music City Advisory Council
- Advisory Council Meeting
- Explored technology for visual impairment
- Practiced “sighted guide”

Phase II: Implementation
February 4, 2016 – March 1, 2016
- Volunteer recruitment
- Volunteer Training Day
- TN Conference for Volunteerism and Service Learning
- Completed a restaurant survey with a visually impaired client

Phase III: Project Completion
March 2, 2016 – April 20, 2016
- Assessed restaurant surveys
- Reviewed survey
- Solicited volunteer feedback about AMC program
- Created AMC program handbook

Access Music City

Visual Impairment Activities

References