# **Day 1 Transcript: Julie Sawchuk and Megan Deal**

**Alison Whiting:** Our next speakers are Julie Sawchuk and Megan Deal.

Julie is a bestselling author, accessibility strategist and educator with years of experience conducting accessibility assessments and ratings for commercial and institutional buildings. She is the new chair of the Standards Development Committee for the review of the design of public spaces under the AODA in Ontario. She is presenting with her summer intern Megan, who is passionate, passionate about making public spaces more accessible through functional architecture.

Welcome, Julie and Megan.

**Julie Sawchuk:** Hi and thank you so very much. Excuse me, I am presenting in my great outdoors as far enough as I dare to be from my Internet hub. So I hope I maintain connection throughout the presentation. My name is Julie Sawchuk. I am in Blyth ON southwestern Ontario. I have medium-length blondish hair and I'm wearing black glasses with a little bit of bling on the corners, some shiny sparkles in the sunshine, and I'm going to introduce it to Megan, in a minute.

The title of the presentation that we're giving to you today is called if you can't pee you can't stay. Yes, we're going to talk about those things that happen behind the closed door of the bathroom like sitting on the toilet which is the image that is presented on this first slide, me sitting on the toilet with my wheelchair. Next slide, please.

**Megan Deal:** Hi everyone I'm Megan Deal and I’m from Moosejaw, Saskatchewan and I’m a summer student at Sawchuk Accessible Solutions working for Julie we're talking about today we talked about the accessibility of the space or activity. It is based on the three pillars on the PowerPoint here today: Is it safe? Can it be navigated with as much independence as people are able to have? Does the person's dignity remain intact throughout? Next slide please.

**Julie Sawchuk:** A little bit about myself. This is Julie. I sustained a spinal cord injury in 2015 and have been since then navigating the world using a manual wheelchair. On the slides here I just wanted to show you some of the examples of the outdoor experiences that I have had since my accident. Prior to I was a very active outdoor person hiking, skiing, biking, everything. And now here are some of the ways that I get around and do things outdoors from right here on the Huron County.

The photo on the left where I am, what do I call this? Ski pole rolling on the Goderich to Guelph for rail trail and the photo on the right. I am in the gravels, like literally in the gravel in Newfoundland on the West Coast, on a path I could not navigate this path by myself. I did need some help but it was pretty fabulous to be out and in this outdoor space. Next slide please.

Cross country skiing was what I used to do as my sport and as a coach and so I have ventured to do some sit skiing. This is an example of a super flat trail in Orillia, Ontario on also a super cold day. Next slide please.

My new way of hiking independently is in a kayak on a lake, and that's what I'm doing here. In this photo I don't need anything special to kayak itself, but I do need a lot of assistance getting in and out of the kayak and back into my wheelchair. Next slide please.

And biking on long trails with the G2G on the the right hand picture there. That's me. At one of the outposts near Walton and then on sort of more uneven surfaces. I use a different set of wheels called a mountain trike and it allows me to get over uneven surfaces and through mud and stuff like that and keep my hands clean at the same time. So with all of these different types of mobility devices, you know, I could stay out for as long as I wanted, but it all comes down to the capacity of my bladder. Next slide please.

And that's why I'm here to talk about toilets. Because it all comes down to are the washrooms actually accessible and if you are in charge of a park space uhm, or a trail and you think, Oh yeah, we have accessible bathrooms. I'd like you to just park that for a minute and listen to what Megan and I have to share with you about what makes a washroom actually accessible? Next slide, please.

As was mentioned, I am an author and the information that I'm going to be sharing with you is from my third book, building better bathrooms that you can see here on the right and it is available from my website. You can find it there and I don't want you to like madly, furiously take notes about what makes the bathroom accessible because I'm going to tell you how to get the checklist of all the things that we are going to talk about today. Next slide please.

So I want to start with the basics of an accessible washroom and in the image you see a drawing of a bathroom door that has signage, blade signage above and a sign beside that is tactile and color contrasting you can see through the door a little bit the toilet that's tall and has grab bars. Behind that door there's also a great hand washing facilities. It's large enough to have an adult sized change table and it hasn't also has an emergency call system. Next slide please. Go ahead, Megan.

**Megan Deal:** It was you know, with washroom facilities we have the tremendous opportunity to create a space that is also inclusive. We can eliminate the use of gender specific washrooms. Provide spaces big enough for families and also adult-sized change tables because many older children and adults live with incontinence and need spaces to lay down. Next slide.

**Julie Sawchuk:** All right, so let's look at the most important aspect of the bathroom, and that is the toilet and the accessories. And you can get this toilet checklist from my website, [juliesawchuck.ca](https://www.juliesawchuk.ca/). Just click on free resources and you'll find it there.

Looking at the diagram that we've got drawn here, you see the tall toilet with a U-shaped toilet seat and a toilet seat lid that provides a backrest. I was stopping at a roadside rest stop just this past week and the toilet did not have a backrest. It was basically just the seat of the outhouse and therefore I would have nothing to lean against. And because of my lack of core, that would probably put me on the floor, which you don't ,you don't want to go there.

Then there's also grab bars provided 3 actually the full down grab bar on the transfer side the rear grab bar and the L shaped bar on the wall beside the toilet. Everything is within reach of being seated. The sanitary disposal, the toilet paper holder, and even the emergency call system if there's power. If there's power in the bathroom, it's a very important aspect.

Disposal, we've talked about already that sanitary disposal is there right beside the toilet. Next slide please.

And washing hands is the second most important thing in the bathroom, right? Especially since what we've just been through. We all know the importance of washing hands and being able to do that while seated if you are a wheelchair user without having to touch anything while you have soapy hands or wet hands.So you can roll right under the sink. You can reach the soap. And you can reach. The paper towel, all without having to move.

And then the bonus is, if there's a mirror, you can actually see your face in it because everybody wants to check that they don't have spinach in their teeth, for example. Then you can drop the paper towel into the garbage and hopefully hit the automatic door opener with your elbow and get yourself out of the bathroom and voila, your hands are still clean. Make sure that garbage is not foot activated, that's how you make it inclusive. Next slide.

**Megan Deal:** Most public bathrooms have a baby size change table. They are low cost and easy to install and everyone can relate to needing to change the diaper of a baby or toddler. What most people cannot relate to is that it’s not just babies that need diapers. Children with disabilities become adults and if incontinence is a part of their life, it does not just go away. For example, in my photo on the right side here it shows that there was one toilet in that bathroom that had the adult-sized change table, which was very safe. Having access to an adult-size change table means that adults who need it do not have to get changed in the back of a van, or the floor of the washroom or not leave home at all. We fall for that very reason. Don’t you truly want everyone to be able to visit your park or trail? Next slide

**Julie Sawchuk:** We couldn't possibly cover everything that we need to talk about in terms of making a bathroom truly accessible, welcoming, safe, ability to be independent and maintain your dignity all at the same time. You know, like what Maayan said right at the beginning, is if you can go into a space and not even have to think about it that is true inclusion. So we can't. We can't cover everything, but know that there are other things that we haven't spent a lot of time about. Change rooms, showers, emergency call systems. There's there's a lot to think about, but don't let yourself be overwhelmed. Start with one thing and make that part of your bathroom better. Next, slide please.

And the last thing that I want to talk about is a project that Megan and I are currently working on. The Goderich to Guelph Rail Trail is obviously a rail trail that runs from Goderich to Guelph and runs right across the field in front of my house here as so, it's very near and dear to my heart and we are building an accessible outhouse and Megan's going to tell us a little bit about that right on the trail side. Go ahead, Megan, next slide, please.

**Megan Deal:** The goal is to make sure that it works for everyone who is using a handbike so it has been designed to be large, also with two doors to allow for roll-through access and have door opening that is accessible from the recumbent position of a hand-cyclist. So that you don’t have to turn around and go through all the same doors you can slide right through it. Next slide.

**Julie Sawchuk:** So, this is a work in progress and it hasn't yet started to be built, but the plans are working where they're happening. We have a team, we have funding, so please follow this project and I'm really hoping that it becomes a model for future projects that will happen across the country. In your own parks and on your trails, so stay tuned for more about that next slide, please. So once we get past the uncomfortable conversations of what happens in a bathroom. We all start to realize that we all do it. Why not just talk about it? Make it a little bit more comfortable and therefore it's more likely to be possible everywhere that you go. So and it doesn't have to be complicated. It's not, doesn't have to be as complicated as you might think. So next slide please.

When we build better bathrooms in parks and trails, we will do the following things here. We reduce the burden of work right when you go, when I go anywhere, it's the very first thing that I think about. Where am I going to pee? We have the opportunity to prevent injuries, falls, slips, people pulling grab bars off the walls. Been there, done that. When you create an accessible bathroom in your space, in your park, on your trail, it creates a reputation for you as a leader that you care about accessibility, and it will bring people back. I go back where I feel welcome and where I feel included and where I feel safe. And that's what you want. You want people coming back, and we all know we're here because we understand the importance of getting out, being outside, enjoying the outdoors, being with our family and our friends, nature, fresh air crickets, being on the beach, which is where I am here in Goderich, on the mobimat at the beach because I can roll on it on my own enjoying outdoor spaces. Next slide please.

So we've given you a lot to think about. Please feel free to reach out to me if you want some more details. You want some help? There are loads of accessibility consultants across the country that you can call upon for help. People like Megan and myself and we are always ready to help. Send me an e-mail at julie@juliesawchuck.ca or visit my website same address [juliesawchuck.ca](https://www.juliesawchuk.ca/). Just make sure you spell my name right. Everybody always wants to add in an extra C. Sawchuk. Thank you so much. It has been a pleasure. Next slide, please.

Please [pick up your free toilet checklist](https://juliesawchuk.info/toilet-check). If we were in person, I would be handing these out to you for free, so please go on my website. Grab your toilet checklist. Find me on Instagram. I just posted about the accessible quote on quote accessible outhouse that I experienced last week. Find me at the Julie Sawchuk also on everywhere else. YouTube. Facebook. And that one is Linked In. Thank you so very much. My goodness, we're wrapping it up with eight seconds to spare, I think we have time for questions.

**Alison Whiting:** Thank you, Julie, I think just given our timing, we will not have time for questions, I think what we will do is we'll take in all the questions and then we'll submit them to you. If you're able and willing, you can type up a response we can then post those questions and answers on our slack channel and hopefully that'll just give people a chance to get to know you there. I'll just take a few seconds to swap out our interpreters if they need to.

**Julie Sawchuk:** Thanks, Alison. Thanks, Megan.

**Megan Deal:** Thank you.

**Alison Whiting:** Thank you so much.