

**Accessibility & Disability Working Group
of Shambhala**

**Minutes of the meeting of Saturday 14th June 2008
Conference Call**

Members of the Accessibility Working Group present at the meeting:

Hamish Maclaren	Boulder, Colorado
Jeff Rubin	New York
Larry Seidl	Denver, Colorado
Sarah Littlefeather	St Johnsbury, Vermont
Sopa Pamo	Gampo Abbey, Nova Scotia
William Dintzis	Towson, Maryland.

Members of the Accessibility Working Group not able to attend the meeting:

Fabrice Champion	Paris & Mas Marvent, France
Fionna Bright	Ft Collins, Colorado
Friederike Schlegel	Frankfurt, Germany
Susan Noel	Gold Hill, Colorado
Ted Spearin	Toronto
Thomas Golz	Chicago, Illinois

We started the meeting by looking at accessibility issues that could be helped by the proposed approx \$1,500 from the proposed Accessibility Endowment Fund. A number of possibilities came up, including:

- Different ways to make the funds available
- Information about Center's accessibility in the Shambhala Database.
- Large font chants and practice literature for those with impaired vision.
- Better accommodation of people with hearing impairments.
 - General sound amplification in shrine room/s
 - Assistive listen devices/systems
- Telephone conferencing equipment for those unable to go to or get into their center.
- Chairs ergonomically suitable for practice and higher puja tables for those who use chairs and wheelchairs for practice, events and feasts.
- Further ADA compliance
- Education
- Video on accessibility in Shambhala
- Disseminating accessibility needs and resources information to the whole community.

Other issues discussed included:

- Reminding center directors about the booklet "That All May Worship".
- Raising accessibility at Center Directors meetings
- Defining some of the very specific accessibility needs - getting input from the whole sangha

- Shambhala News Service Announcement
- Shambhala “Disability & Accessibility” web page

Different Ways to Make The Funds Available

We discussed the options of offering matching grants to centers for accessibility initiatives, including equipment. We looked at possibly providing a center with funds to help start a fundraising campaign for a more expensive accessibility need. In addition the suggestion came up of the possibility for using it for initiatives proposed by the Working Group. Some of the specifics within those ideas are listed below. As you can see these relate to individual center initiatives and initiatives that relate to the whole of Shambhala, or in some case they cover both.

At the meeting, and later, it was pointed out that given the number of Shambhala Centers world wide, and the sum involved, by necessity it would probably be something the equivalent of a “Pilot Project”, although this sum would be available each year. A lot will depend on what kind of response it gets. However it serves several additional very important purposes. It should encourage centers to find out what needs their members already have. The chair will suggest that some request about this be added to any announcement about the proposed endowment, if that is the right form for that. Or we, the Working Group, could do it ourselves. The news of an endowment fund could lead to further donations and or to individual centers finding their own funding for accessibility initiatives/projects, as some centers have done in the past. It will also brings more awareness to centers about the accessibility issue in general and further that this is now a priority in Shambhala.

Shambhala Database

We discussed the possibility of listing on Shambhala Database the accessibility details of centers. Larry Seidl & William Dintzis are going to look into the possibilities here. What can be or ought to be included might be an issue.

It wasn't clear if there would be a cost to this.

Note: This was not discussed on the call, but there are a lot of different ideas about what “accessible” means. Also the needs of centers will vary, depending of their size, stage of development, needs and resources of their particular sangha, etc. The more usual basic criteria of “accessible” means only wheelchair accessibility and handicapped accessibility restrooms, but we are interested in more general accessibility, for example clearly visual and hearing impairments are more widespread. What would be the most meaningful here, and practical in terms of the database? To be fully handicapped accessible could include such things as those listed below:

- Wheelchair accessible
- Large font chants and practice literature.
- Better accommodation of people with hearing impairments.
 - General sound amplification in shrine room
 - Assistive listen devices/systems
 - Mobile sound system for classrooms.
- Audio conferencing option
- Handicapped accessible restrooms

- Sometimes having a sign language translator available, perhaps for some Open House talks. This would involve getting to word out to the deaf community in the area.
- Ted Spearin was not able to make the call, but he had previously suggested some “Considerations for Blind Mobility Around Facilities” (previously sent to Working Group members) We could recommend these as the Shambhala Accessibility Working Group, possibly the Sakyong’s Council, to centers and possibly list on the database if a center has met the “Considerations for Blind...” This is now posted on “Diversity and Accessibility - Best Practices” page on the Shambhala web site at www.shambhala.org/members/share/bpmain.php?catid=4

Large Font Chants and Practice Literature.

Chants or practice materials in large fonts, for people with visual impairments, are currently not provided by The Nalanda Translation Committee. Up to now the recommendation has been to copy the chants using the enlarge feature on the copier. At least in some cases, this has proved ineffective because the text is then blurred.

Two possible solutions could be either for the Nalanda Translation Committee to provide materials in a larger font, or to give permission for some centers or individuals to use retyped versions with large fonts.

There is also the question about Vajradhatu Publications providing materials in large font.

We are also looking into if some ways of scanning might work better, than photocopy enlargements. But probably will still not be as clear as large font originals.

Sopa Pamo has got the contact information on CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind) and the printers in Halifax. We can collect information about the issues involved from them, and elsewhere, then present our recommendations to the Sakyong’s Council. This may well involve some cost.

Better Accommodation of People with Hearing Impairments

- General sound amplification in shrine room/s
- Assistive listen devices/systems
- **Assistive Listening Devices** such as
 - Mobile sound system for classroom/s.-Portable PA systems (e.g., the Fender Passport Deluxe PD 250, which costs about \$300, although it is somewhat bulky).
 - Induction Loop Amplification. For larger shrine rooms. Installed to operate with existing sound system. These work with any hearing aid and cochlear implants that has a “T” coil, which is now in many hearing aids (50%) in the US and most in Europe. Induction Loop also works with personal receivers. Cost about \$600-\$900 depending on shrine room size. See “Accessibility Guidelines for Shambhala Centers” page 6 for more details. Downloadable at www.shambhala.org/members/share/bpmain.php?catid=4

Telephone Conferencing Equipment, to include those unable to go to or get into their center.

Telephone conferencing equipment. A meeting can have a speaker and microphone that is attached to a phone line so that a participant unable to get into the building or leave home can participate.

Sarah Littlefeather has used this option with the St Johnsbury Shambhala Center, Vermont, which her wheelchair can not get into. Hamish will contact people there, David Wilde, to get more information of what system they have use, and the costs involved. Follow-up: David Wilde has sent Hamish that information and it will be included in the “Additional Resources for Accessibility...” and general information to the “Accessibility Guidelines for Shambhala Centers”.

Chairs and Puja Tables

Many have noticed that often providing chairs for events, at feasts, and even regular practice sessions is often left to the last minute. There are often several or many who need them. Plus the chairs and tables provided are usually inappropriate for long practice. Puja tables with longer legs would generally be far more practical and take up less space than most folding tables. The Boulder Center once had four of these made, but they seem to have disappeared. Ergonomic chairs for offices are very popular now, looking at the options here would be good and probably not cost more than a gomden and zabuton, about \$125 (at retail). We generally consider it worth spending that money for the more able-bodied. Obviously the less able-bodied need to be equally well accommodated.

Further ADA compliance

Another possibility, not discussed at the meeting, might be helping towards the cost of widening bathroom doors and making door handles, facets/taps, light switches etc. ADA compliant (including “usable with a closed fist”). This would probably only be relevant in centers that were already wheelchair accessible. It seems likely that the cost of installing wheelchair ramps or lifts, would be beyond the scope of the endowment, at this point.

Education

We discussed ways to educate the community about accessibility needs. Education is clearly a very critical element. Fortunately most people never have to deal with the issues of accessibility, until later in life. So they largely have no idea about the experience of those who are disabled or what the needs are. However so many of our sangha members are baby boomers and older individuals. They are now moving into their 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s, so accessibility, in all its forms, already much needed, is rapidly getting even more urgent. So we very much need to explore ways to educate the whole community about this. This is a challenging task, as it is in society at large, and there are all kinds of issues involved. However there are many organizations that have been working on this for decades, so we have a lot of resources at our disposal. Some of the possibilities for education are discussed in the categories that follow, but we are very interested in receiving other suggestions.

Video on accessibility in Shambhala.

President Richard Reoch requested that we produce a video about accessibility in Shambhala that could be sent to all the centers. We are looking for ideas for that video. In addition Hamish has contacted his local Center for People With Disabilities to find out what is already available like this, and to start getting ideas about possible types of content. He is also looking into people with video/film making skills in the sangha who might be willing to produce this. Any suggestions will be much appreciated. This will probably require an additional funding source.

General ideas about promoting accessibility in Shambhala

This includes disseminating accessibility needs and resources information to the whole community.

This is also in part covered by the categories below.

Some beginning suggestions about this for centers are in the “Accessibility Guidelines for Shambhala Centers” available at the shambhala.org Best Practices section, at <http://www.shambhala.org/members/share/bpmain.php?catid=4>

The many of forms of disability and the different issues, equipment, training, etc. involved in each one is quite daunting. Plus of course there are specific individuals needs within the broad categories. Given this it seemed that, in addition to the Accessibility Guidelines, it might be helpful to provide more extensive resources and information on each area. Then when a particular issue comes up, those involved could refer to that particular section for guidelines. Hamish forgot to mention at the Working Group meeting that he prepared last year some more extensive “Additional Resources for Accessibility Guidelines for Shambhala Centers by Phases” Hamish will up date those and send them to the Working Group for their review. Members can look at areas of interest to them and add suggestions, resources, criticisms, etc as they choose.

Reminder about “That All May Worship” booklet

Need to remind centers about having received it, and encourage that they, and their boards or councils, try to find time to look at it.

Note: **That All May Worship**. This has information on accommodating a wide range of disabilities. Richard Reoch gave a copy of this to all the center directors he met with in his tour of centers in the Fall of 2006. This is published by National Organization on Disability, web site www.nod.org. A single copy is \$15. You can download an order form at www.nod.org/resources/PDFs/rel_ordfrm.pdf

Center Directors Meetings

We discussed looking into if it would be possible to add accessibility to the agenda of one of their meetings. Depending on what sort of form and frequency these take. The A&DWG could come up with some possible areas for discussion.

Defining some of the very specific accessibility needs - getting input from the whole sangha

Getting input from the whole sangha on ideas and needs. Looking at ways to do this.

Sangha announce being one option.

Requesting centers to find out about existing accessibility needs in their sanghas, perhaps requesting that with the announcement about endowment funds. This is an update on the request a year ago for centers to ask members about accessibility needs they, their family or friends have and barriers/obstacles they have encountered to fully participating in the programs and activities of their center.

Discussed the possibility of looking at the “General Guidelines and Ideas of what might need to be considered” prepared primarily by Friederike Schlegel for consideration at the next meeting of the Shambhala Europe Council. Then we can look at what might be the best approach in North America and elsewhere to how to get centers to consider these.

Shambhala News Service Announcement

If there is a Shambhala News Service Announcement related to the proposed Accessibility Endowment, then included in that could be a request that centers contact their members to find out what needs already exist. It could also include info on Accessibility Working Group.

Shambhala “Disability & Accessibility” Page

The “Disability & Accessibility” page is at <http://www.shambhala.org/community/da.php> On shambhala.org page under Governance section (under Community), in the “Working Groups and Commissions” section of that page. Hamish mentioned he was looking into how that can improved and updated. Perhaps somewhat along the lines of the pages “Diversity in Shambhala” at www.shambhala.org/diversity/ and “Diversity Resources” at www.shambhala.org/diversity/resources.php Perhaps also including a photograph. He also mentioned it would be great to hear more suggestions, ideas, relevant links, etc. for that page, from all of the working group. Hamish will be working with Michael Duerr the SI Webmaster on this.

Note: Susan Noel, a professional editor and writer, is now working a statement about Disability & Accessibility in Shambhala, perhaps somewhat along the lines of statement on the “Diversity in Shambhala” page.

Note: Diversity and Accessibility Best Practices page, under “Share Best Practices” at www.shambhala.org/members/share/bpmain.php?catid=4

In addition to Ted Spearin’s “Considerations so that the blind and visually impaired can get around in facilities”, there is also “Meditation Instruction for the Deaf-Blind” and “Accommodating Practitioners with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities”.

Recommended reading

In addition to the “Shambhala Accessibility Statement”: (Note; the "Accessibility review Group" does not function at this point) and a quick look at “Accessibility Guidelines for Shambhala Centers”: at the “Diversity and Accessibility - Best Practices” page at www.shambhala.org/members/share/bpmain.php?catid=4

At the Diversity Resources page at www.shambhala.org/diversity/resources.php

Under Diversity Documents & Reports

[Shambhala Aspirations on Diversity, Accessibility and Compassionate Conduct](#)

A statement of our aspiration to create a society that is open, inclusive and welcoming of diversity. In [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).

[Notes on Diversity and Accessibility](#) [by Dan Hessey]

A treatise on the Shambhala Buddhist view of diversity and accessibility

[Recommendations for Improving Diversity and Accessibility](#)

More than 70 recommendations for embedding diversity and accessibility into all aspects of Shambhala society.

And under Diversity Articles, Talks And Teachings

[Going Beyond Bias](#) [by Sangyum Agness Au]

A talk on diversity awareness and bias presented at the Joint Mandala Council and Sakyong's Council Meeting.

These and others should all soon also be on the "Accessibility & Disability" page at <http://www.shambhala.org/community/da.php>

For your information:

Accessibility Review Group

A question has come up about this. About two years or more ago Hamish was asked to form an Accessibility Review Group, which had the specific purpose of helping centers in going through the "Accessibility Guidelines for Shambhala Centers". The Accessibility Review Group (ARG) Charter, on the web site, was arrived at for that purpose. However it became apparent that the role originally intended for the A&DWG was more than the community could really work with at this point. So the Accessibility Review Group is not functioning at the moment.

Diversity Question/Deaf Community

Note: Hamish recently received a request about having captioning on the in "MP3 Teachings" and the "Video Teachings." in the Teachings Library at www.shambhala.org/teachings/ He is following up on that with those involved in that web page.

Additional correspondence on subjects discussed.

Email comments after the meeting.

This is quite a long document. However I feel it is very good that our first meeting covered so much and that the minutes reflect that. Clearly we can't achieve all of it right away, but as we progress and dig in more to the specific areas, it can be a good reminder of the bigger picture and help us keep in tune with our overall goals.

This is a big subject covering all the many different types of disabilities and the issues involved. Just for your reassurances, no one in the group is expected to be familiar with, or even necessarily be particularly interested in, or participate in the discussion of all the different areas involved. However you all have a lot of experience, and therefore expertise, in particular areas, and it is this the group very much needs. Plus you all

obviously have many other commitments and demands on your time, so it is assumed that your ability to participate will vary from time to time. So helping to whatever degree your expertise, schedule, health, etc. allow is very much appreciated.

“Accessibility and Disability” web page.

<http://www.shambhala.org/community/da.php>

Not discussed in the meeting but for further clarification.

Currently the links to “Shambhala Accessibility Statement”, “Accessibility Guidelines for Shambhala Centers”, “Accessibility Review Group (ARG) Charter” and “Find It” currently go nowhere, but most are on the “Diversity and Accessibility - Best Practices” page mentioned above. Hamish has now sent the SI Webmaster, Michael, a number of corrections and updates. If any on the Working Group is fluent in HTML and CSS style sheets, then they could offer to assist Michael with this.

When the new shambhala.org web site was being designed, the chairperson was asked to make a page for it. What he came up with is the web page “Disability and Accessibility” at www.shambhala.org/community/da.php. This has been reachable from the Governance section (under Community), it is in the “Working Groups and Commissions” section of that page, since the new Shambhala web site was launched. In any case, since this already exists we can add to and modify it as seems appropriate, unless members of the group have a better idea.

For now it might be best to wait until that updating is done, before reminding the wider sangha about the web site.

Letting People know.

Jeff Rubin pointed out in an email that, despite being disabled, he knew nothing about some of the disability resources, treatise, etc. that are on the Shambhala web page.

Putting those kinds of things on the web site is a good first step, but utterly useless if no one knows about them, as this illustrates. So, we need to think about ways to let people know what is there. Obvious possibilities is sangha announce and Karuna Talk, perhaps after a New Service announcement about the endowment, if that goes through. If it doesn't go through, we can obviously make announcements anyway.

Reminders

It is also very important to keep reminding people about accessibility, in all its forms. Which is part of the Education element we talked about. We need to determine the optimal rate for those reminders, every six months, once year?

Reminders could take the form of informing people about what is on the web page or about something we are doing, or some specific issue/s that has come up. In addition to sangha announce, Karuna Talk is an obvious place where this sort of information might be welcomed. Perhaps the occasional article or announcement in The Dot or the Shambhala Online News Magazine when that starts. But even those will miss some people. It will be good to keep open to what other options there might be to inform those most interested.

This is all a great start, but unless followed by action on the ground, it will be of limited value. Some of the things discussed at the meeting should help with that, but the challenge is to keep looking for more ways to improve things. Many in this working group must have been thinking about these issues for years, so now we have the chance to get things rolling.