

Eleven Fairfield County Attractions Partner to Accommodate Visitors With Special Needs

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Categories : [Healthy Living](#), [Maritime Aquarium](#), [Parents & Kids](#)

Tagged as : [Accessibility for All](#), [Adults With Special Needs](#), [Adults With Special Needs 2019](#), [Children With Special Needs 2019](#)

Date : March 27, 2019

Eleven Fairfield County attractions are working to reduce the stresses of planning — and accomplishing — visits for guests with special needs through a new partnership called “Accessibility for All.”

Beginning April 2, anyone who wants to know how the 11 attractions accommodate guests with special needs will be able to find the information all on one website —[AccessibilityForAllCT.Org](#).

— an announcement from the [Maritime Aquarium](#)

Previously, potential guests had to dig through each attraction’s website, in some cases only to end up finding little or no information at all.

The 11 organizations participating in “Accessibility for All” are:

- **Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk**, which organized the effort, and **Stepping Stones Museum for Children** in Norwalk
- **Earthplace**, the nature center in Westport
- **Connecticut Audubon Society** in Fairfield
- **Connecticut’s Beardsley Zoo and Discovery Museum** in Bridgeport
- **Stamford Museum & Nature Center** in Stamford
- **Audubon Greenwich** and the **Bruce Museum** in Greenwich
- **Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum** in Ridgefield
- **EverWonder Children’s Museum** in Newtown

The new “Accessibility for All” website also will be updated as the attractions present special events geared for this important customer group.

Fairfield County attractions have never teamed in such an exceptional way before, said Tom Naiman, director of Education for The Maritime Aquarium.

“‘Accessibility for All’ springs from a realization that, by working together, all of our institutions can do a better job of welcoming guests with special needs,” Naiman said.

“By some measures, people with special needs represent 18 percent of our community. We want to do everything we can to ensure that we are welcoming and hospitable places, where every guest can have a transformative experience. This is an issue that all of our 11 institutions feel strongly about and it is so exciting to see the results of our work come to fruition.”

The launch on April 2 is timed for World Autism Awareness Day. However, Naiman noted, “Accessibility for All” information will be useful for any guests with sensory, intellectual or physical disabilities.

“Accessibility for All” was organized by The Maritime Aquarium following a grant of \$25,000 from Fairfield County’s Community Foundation. Besides creating the new website, the Aquarium recently hosted trainings for staffs of the other attractions, who shared and discussed challenges, solutions and best practices.

Cooperative Education Services (CES) provided expert guidance for the “Accessibility for All” project. The

Maritime Aquarium previously partnered with CES to create its “sensory-friendly mornings,” which are special days when the Aquarium opens early and reduces stressors for guests with sensory-processing differences.

“We could not have done this without the expertise of CES and the support from Fairfield County’s Community Foundation,” Naiman said. “This is a county-wide effort that will provide real benefits to residents and visitors.”

'Sensory-Friendly Morning' on April 7

The Maritime Aquarium’s next “Sensory-Friendly Morning” is on Sun., April 7 from 8 a.m. to noon. Lights in the Aquarium will be lower, and music and other sounds will be turned down or off. By opening two hours earlier than usual – at 8 a.m. – guests with sensory-processing differences who are averse to crowds will be less likely to encounter them. And admission prices between 8 and 9:30 a.m. will be discounted.

On April 7 in The Maritime Aquarium’s IMAX Theater, the movies “Born to Be Wild” (at 9 a.m.) and “Oceans: Our Blue Planet” (at 10 a.m.) will be shown with the volume lowered and the theater lights only partially dimmed. (An IMAX movie is included with Aquarium admission.)

In addition, a special low-volume seal-training demonstration is planned for 8:30 a.m. And the regular 11:45 a.m. seal-training demonstration will be delayed until noon.

A “quiet room” will be available for guests who need a place to calm. For families that need to leave within the first 30 minutes of arrival, passes will be available to try again another day.

The discounted admission prices at the door between 8 and 9:30 a.m. on April 7 are \$21 for adults; \$20 for seniors (65+); and \$16 for children (3-12).

Normal admission prices resume after 9:30 a.m.: \$24.95 for adults; \$22.95 for seniors; and \$17.95 for children. Kids under 3 are free.

For more details about The Maritime Aquarium’s exhibits, IMAX movies and programs this spring, call (203) 852-0700 or go to MaritimeAquarium.Org.