

# LIBRARY ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

## MEETING NOTES

December 4, 2019

Present: Debbie Brown (Sligo Creek Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind); Cindy Buddington (Independence Now board member); Jane Carona (American Council of the Blind of MD, National Capitol Area Chapter); Larry Cohen (Leisure World Lions and Low Vision Group); Amy Fier (EveryMind); Francie Gilman (Independence Now board member and retired Montgomery County librarian); Dennis Pillsbury (Montgomery County ADA Title II Compliance Office Architect); Betty Thompson (Consultant); Jane Williams (MCPL Library Board Liaison).

### Board report

Jane Williams said there had been a joint meeting of the Board and the Library Advisory Committees in November at the new Wheaton Library; the last regular Board meeting was in October (since she had already sent notes from those meetings to AAC members she did not repeat them here). There will be another joint meeting on January 9 to focus on library advocacy efforts for the upcoming budget process.

Jane went to the “Community Conversation” with Councilman Will Jawando at the White Oak Library on Nov. 23. Jawando is the lead Council member for Public Libraries and is holding question and answer sessions at all MCPL branches. Debbie and Francie were also there. In answer to a question about staff vacancies in the branches Director Anita Vassallo said she and the Library human resources manager are working to streamline the hiring process to speed up filling positions. One person had questions about how to get local information and was told about the county's email subscription lists. Francie asked Jawando if people had asked questions about accessibility and disability services, and he said there had been none. He mentioned that people wanted bus stops to be closer to library branches and will take that to the Council. Debbie thanked the library for the braille book collection and invited Jawando to the Louis Braille birthday party (to be held at the Wheaton Library on Jan. 12. from 2 to 4 PM). Jawando’s next “Community Conversation” will be at the Aspen Hill Library on January 11 at 1:00 PM.

Francie said she was impressed with the speaker at the Wheaton joint meeting, who emphasized the developmental importance of reading to children from birth on. Cindy asked Debbie about braille literacy rates among children, and Debbie said that there is unfortunately a very low literacy rate, although it may be coming back. She said that someone who is blind could use braille instructions to find out how to get audio working on a device. Also, children with low vision who may lose their vision later in life should learn braille. Dennis said that the [Mid-Atlantic ADA Center](#) (part of a federally funded network that provides information, resources and training on all aspects of the ADA) has a new push to reinforce the importance of teaching people braille.

### Facilities

Dennis provided some library facilities updates in the absence of Elizabeth Lang. Assessments of Long Branch and Chevy Chase have been completed, and he does not have specifics yet but it may be that both buildings have significant work to be done. Germantown and Long Branch are up next for refresh. They are already doing some exterior work on Long Branch. Betty asked what if the costs for a refresh turned out to be much higher than projected, and Dennis said funds were pulled from various departments as appropriate to get the work done. They want to do as much necessary work as possible in the short time that the library branch is closed.

### Staff training

We discussed the tip sheets. We expressed frustration at the length of time this is taking. We originally started out two years ago writing tip sheets, and it has expanded into Elizabeth creating training modules. We had several questions: What else is needed at this time from the AAC to complete the modules? Can we talk to Kate Tavakolian directly? Is it possible to hire someone to help this along? Debbie said that we should be involved in the training so that staff can interact with people with disabilities, to show real life scenarios and get beyond stereotypes. Members will check to see if they have completed the information requested by Elizabeth (local organizations, video, blog, etc.). Francie mentioned that the Disability Network Directory, compiled by Betsy Luecking of HHS Aging and Disability, is an excellent resource with listings of many local disability organizations. We have no tip sheet on low vision; we can ask Elizabeth if it would be better to wait until the modules are developed as a model for Larry Cohen to follow.

## Library tours

Betty has visited Connie Morella (Bethesda) and will write up her observations after the refresh. She found it helpful to review the pre-refresh AAC recommendations and Francie's checklist of what we've recommended repeatedly during our visits. She will write up the visit and send to Jill. Francie offered to do return library visits with AAC members if anyone is interested.

## Programs

Francie and Cindy reported that the "Accessible and Affordable Housing for People with Disabilities" program held at Gaithersburg was well attended and the speakers addressed many questions about eligibility, finances, and organizations that can assist in the complicated process.

Debbie talked about the Louis Braille birthday party as a fun way to educate people about disabilities, with activities to show people what braille is, including games that pit children against adults.

Thinking about future programs, Francie asked what we want the public to know about the people we represent. We need to help the public be aware of disabilities and to break down stereotypes. We need to find needs, as Monica has done ~~this~~ with the sensory story times for people with autism. We can attract people with programs like the housing program. We bring in experts for a complicated issue like housing. Debbie suggested something like a scavenger hunt to help people with specific disabilities learn what they can do at a library. Can we do a 5-week resource series for people with disabilities, or a resource fair? Possibly we should have a meeting with several disability groups.

Amy talked about mental health issues. We need to train staff, but we need different training for community members, to give them awareness and access to resources. For example, EveryMind could do an introduction to the services it provides as an entry point for the public

Larry noted the need for "a hook" to get people to come to a program. For example, baseball players could be invited to come and encourage reading. They could also encourage people to use libraries and use the resources and services of the organization we represent. Larry emphasized the importance of marketing, and that it takes work.

Cindy wondered what are the questions that most people are asking, so that we could create responsive programs.

Francie suggested that we ask ourselves what our groups are doing that are unique and that people may not know about and highlight that in a program.

#### New members

Francie said that Jill is sorry not to be here to welcome our new member, Larry Cohen, a low vision member. Larry briefly introduced himself; he is the leader of the Low Vision Group at Leisure World and is the Vice President of the Leisure Lions Club.

Francie said Al Sonnenstrahl, who is hard of hearing, is a new member. Steven Frank has resigned from the Committee. We discussed how to expand AAC membership so that we can serve a wider community of people with disabilities. We have strength in blindness and low vision, and could benefit from more members with other disabilities. Jane Carona asked about the senior community—those who are very old, such as in the late seventies or older, who may be reluctant to recognize new disabilities and unfamiliar with resources. Betty said that the original concept of the AAC had been to convene organizations that represented people with disabilities, and that Jill's initial email went to local organizations. Francie asked members to send Jill the names of organizations and contacts so she can email them.

#### New projects/business

Francie said that Jill wants to schedule a meeting with Anita Vassallo in January - February to start a conversation with her about AAC future directions. Anita attended an AAC meeting two years ago when she was acting director but it would be good to engage with her as the new director. Francie asked if members had suggestions for what to bring up at the meeting. Cindy suggested inviting Anita on one of our library tours so she can see what it's like to experience a branch from our perspective. Also Jill could invite her to another meeting. We should ask her what she would like us to do. We may discuss training issues with her, and let her know about our strong desire to take part in the training, and ask her what she might imagine in terms of staff training related to people with disabilities. We should have a resume of all the things we have done—e.g., library refresh tours, along with our checklist, the Silver Spring tour just before the opening, the autism sensory storytimes, other programs we have initiated, the tip sheets, and specific

impacts like the lowering of book drops after some refreshes which make book drops accessible to people in wheelchairs and others.

#### Other business

Dennis said that the County Department of Transportation would like comments from people with vision disabilities about how to enable them to navigate the temporary reconfiguration of the Silver Spring Transit Center that will occur during Purple Line construction. Some Ride-on and Metrobus stops will be relocated, and there will be new ways to reach some buses as well as Metro and MARC trains. They plan good signage but that won't help people with vision disabilities. Debbie recalled some good and less good experiences with the 2008 temporary relocations and then the establishment of new permanent bus stops, etc. Jane said that ACB members would be interested. Dennis will send information to Jane, Debbie, and Larry.

Our next meeting is Wednesday, March 4.

#### Action item

1. Dennis will email the status of library refreshes.
2. Questions for Elizabeth about staff training: What else is needed at this time from the AAC to complete the modules? Can we talk to Kate Tavakolian directly? Is it possible to hire someone to help this along? For a low vision module, would be better to wait until the modules are developed as a model for Larry Cohen to follow?
3. Members will continue thinking about programs that would increase public awareness of resources and services for people with disabilities, and that would respond to the needs of people with disabilities.
4. Members will contact Jill with any recommendations about possible AAC members and organizations representing a broader range of disabilities, so that Jill can email them.
5. Dennis will email Debbie, Jane, and Larry with information about how to give comments to the County Department of Transportation about accessibility for

people with vision disabilities during the temporary relocation of bus stops, etc., at the Silver Spring Transit Center.