LIBRARY ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Montgomery County Public Libraries

MEETING NOTES

March 4, 2020

Present: Jane Williams (MCPL Library Board Liaison); Dennis Pillsbury (Montgomery County ADA Title II Compliance Office Architect); Betty Thompson (Consultant); Debbie Brown (Sligo Creek Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind); Francie Gilman (Independence Now board member and retired Montgomery County librarian); Amy Fier (EveryMind); Larry Cohen (Leisure World Lions and Low Vision Group); Cindy Buddington (Independence Now board member); Elizabeth Lang (MCPL Assistant Facilities and Accessibility Program Manager); Barbara King (former Special Needs Library volunteer, member American Council of the Blind); Jane Carona (American Council of the Blind of MD, National Capitol Area Chapter); Monica Martinez (Partnership for Extraordinary Minds); Kate Tavakolian (MCPL Staff Development Coordinator).

The meeting was chaired by Cindy Buddington.

Library Report

Elizabeth Lang introduced Kate Tavakolian, who gave an update on staff training and on new technologies and approaches that may be useful in future disability-related staff training. Kate described a newly available platform called Blackboard that is a training management system, not only a method of delivering training. It has many interactive features, including a collaboration room for trainees. Elizabeth was trained and now is using Blackboard with staff. Elizabeth worked with Monica Martinez to develop a training on autism in adults. She was one of the presenters for a successful pilot using Blackboard with 25 librarians. This live presentation was 1 hour 12 minutes long, including comments and questions. It was recorded and now is available in Blackboard for new staff and for staff who want a refresher. Kate suggested following this model for future training using the AAC tip sheets about serving people with disabilities.

A sample of the training was shown. Participants have to do pre-work before the training. After they finish with the training, they have to do a post-assignment, which might include sharing the training with colleagues at their branches. It took two months to prepare the video and six weeks to train and prepare the presenters, who each had to produce slides and a script.

Kate said she is exploring the use of a series of "In Your Own Words," videos of people walking into the library and either getting or not getting service. These videos last 5-10 minutes each and staff could have access anytime. The videos, the AAC tip sheets, and AAC expertise can all be valuable in building future training. This would offer an opportunity for AAC members to create videos to illustrate service barriers and solutions.

Kate and Elizabeth believe that it's not feasible to do in-person training because of the difficulties in scheduling the training when all staff at branches can attend and traveling to all 21 branches. Online training is a good way to make sure everyone gets trained with the same information. If someone specifically requests, an AAC member could provide focused live training at a branch.

In discussion after the presentation, Cindy suggested doing a sketch that would be filmed, e.g., do's and don'ts showing how a librarian could help a person in a wheelchair to find and retrieve books. Monica agreed that this would be valuable in showing real-life scenarios of what it's like for a person with a disability to navigate a library and receive helpful assistance.

DC has a good video about people with disabilities, which is included in the county ADA training. This video could be a good ice-breaker in a training session.

Elizabeth said that some tip sheets are still missing information, and AAC members asked for specific feedback about what is missing on each of the tip sheets. Elizabeth can inform Jill which tip sheets are missing information in order to be consistent. Larry Cohen is the new committee member who can do a low-vision tip sheet. Kate and Elizabeth will use the tip sheets and narrow down the presentations, aiming for a relatively permanent training solution. All the training cannot happen at once but will come out gradually. All of our materials will go through Jill.

Kate added that there is another new technology called Cantasia where you can record and stop and ask questions. It may be a useful tool in the future.

Introduction of Matt Barkley

Matt Barkley took part in the meeting. Matt is the new ADA compliance officer for Montgomery County. Matt said that Dennis Pillsbury, on his staff, had given him background about the AAC and he looks forward to working with the committee. Matt is interested in understanding the barriers faced by people with disabilities

AAC Meeting with Director Anita Vassallo

Cindy reported on a meeting that she, Jill, and Betty had with Anita Vassallo on February 26. The meeting served to congratulate Anita after the County Executive appointed her the permanent director of MCPL. Jill had asked for the meeting to welcome Anita as the new Director and to begin a conversation about how the AAC can productively work with her. Cindy said that it was a very positive experience. Anita scheduled the meeting for 2 hours and was listening, asking questions, and taking notes throughout. She wants the committee's continuing input about collections and she wants people with disabilities to find materials that they want and can use. She was aware of the AAC meetings, work and programs. She had read the AAC tour reports and knew what the committee members had done with staff training. Anita asked if there are events that committee members could suggest to mark or celebrate disability communities.

Betty reported that the meeting with Anita included discussion of staff training. Anita liked Cindy's suggestion of training conducted through personal interaction between staff and people with disabilities, specifically the idea of small conversation groups with staff. Anita suggested that might be something to do as a pilot. Anita said that the annual MCPL staff day is heavily structured with speakers, and also she doesn't think training in large groups is a good way to work with staff regarding people with disabilities. She wants to consider having a break-out session on a future staff day that focuses on people with disabilities.

Anita brought up the Human Library idea that was discussed in AAC meetings as a way of training staff or offering a program for the public. Anita might prefer a term other than human library, a trademarked term, because there can be negative reaction to the idea of "checking out people." Anita wanted any human library effort to cover a whole range of topics. Dennis noted that Frederick Library is doing a human library project.

On library facilities, Anita wants early input from the AAC on the future Clarksburg branch. The design process will not start until 2026.

Anita is happy to come to an AAC meeting and feels strongly that library branch managers know about the AAC. Branch managers could be invited to regular meetings, or committee members could be involved in one of Anita's staff meetings with managers.

Anita had a specific question, a concern raised by staff in branches where groups of adults with cognitive disabilities are brought by aides or caregivers, who then leave or are on their phones for three or four hours. On some occasions the clients of these programs have torn up books, urinated in public, or become ill and unresponsive so that 911 had to be called. This needs to be addressed at a policy level. Caregivers are unwilling to tell library staff the names of their agencies. Anita wanted committee input and guidance.

Questions and discussion at the AAC meeting clarified several things. Not every aide does this, but it is a very widespread and longstanding problem in county libraries. Library staff have tried many times to engage pleasantly with caregivers to work on solutions (e.g., planning events to coincide with visits), with negative responses by caregivers. Library staff already call 911 when appropriate, e.g., an unresponsive person and no caregiver nearby. The sense of several members was that reporting to the County Adult Protective Services office isn't an effective route.

Elizabeth has drafted a proposed new policy to set standards for caregivers during group visits to libraries. She coordinated with Matt Barkley. A challenge is that the library is a public building, here for the entire community. Care-giving agencies are licensed and regulated at the State level, not County. Francie Gilman noted that the County HHS's Disability Network webpage shows 12 pages of agencies in its Central Maryland region.

Francie said when the Arc asked for a program, she arranged for the children's librarian at the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped to come to the Rockville Memorial Library to do a program that involved dancing and singing but with adult content. There are librarians who can do this.

There was discussion about possible actions.

If groups exceed a specified size, could caregiver(s) be required to check in at the desk and identify the agency? This might be unworkable, because both the libraries and the agencies are short staffed — a librarian could be away from the

desk helping someone, and there could be one caregiver for 7 -9 adults who might begin wandering away.

Could there be some programs generated through discussions with agencies and marketed to caregiving agencies, along the lines of book groups and "How can caregiving agencies use the libraries effectively?" The latter program could specifically deal with library concerns, how to request programs, etc. It could make clear that libraries are not social service agencies.

How could the library system get others involved in solving this problem? Is there a way to get help from the State Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) that licenses these agencies? For example, would DDA contact agencies licensed in this area to reinforce the coming new Montgomery County Libraries policy? There is a risk that the agency owner would get the letter but the letter might never reach the caregivers effectively. DDA definitely has the leverage to motivate agencies, but are they willing to use it for this?

The AAC will consult further with its members and provide ideas to Anita.

Other Topics

Francie encouraged members to continue to do follow-up tours of libraries that have completed their refresh programs.

The next AAC meeting is June 3.

Larry asked about marketing libraries to people with disabilities. He has experience at Leisure World in marketing the Lions and its Low Vision work. For example, can we bring in celebrity speakers for programs that would attract a large number of people, as DC libraries do by having Nationals baseball players do readings? DC has a foundation that pays players to do this. Members agreed this is a good approach to consider.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Work-with Kate and Elizabeth to produce trainings.

2. Elizabeth – Specify what is missing on each remaining tip sheet so committee members can fill the gaps.

3. AAC -- Do follow-up tours to branches. Send reports to Jill of what works well and what doesn't.

4. AAC -- Per Anita: Suggest programs that would mark or celebrate events or topics of interest to people with disabilities.

5. AAC -- Provide Anita with a response to her question about how to help librarians with caregivers who bring groups of people with disabilities to libraries. The AAC will consult with its members who serve cognitively and emotionally challenged adults in order to prepare suggestions.