

Accessibility Advisory Committee
Montgomery County Public Libraries
Meeting Notes
December 2, 2020

Attendees:

Jill Lewis (retired Director Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled, former MCPL Library Board Chair, AAC board member); Francie Gilman (retired Montgomery County librarian, Independence Now, AAC board member); Betty Thompson (AAC consultant); Elizabeth Lang (MCPL Assistant Facilities and Accessibility Program Manager); Debbie Brown (President, Sligo Creek Chapter, National Federation of the Blind of Maryland, AAC board member); Cindy Buddington (Independence Now, Equipment for Children, AAC board member); Jonina Duker (Library Advisory Committee Special Needs Library and Disability Resource Center, AAC board member); Amy Fier (Director, Representative Payee EveryMind, AAC Board member); Matt Barkley (Montgomery County ADA Compliance Manager); Jane Carona (American Council of the Blind of Maryland National Capitol Area Chapter, Treasurer American Council of the Blind of Maryland and Braille Revival League, AAC board member)

Jane Carona hosted the Zoom meeting, Cindy Buddington chaired the meeting, and Debbie Brown took notes.

Library Report

Elizabeth Lang presented the following report.

Braille Collection

Circulation: Before the library system shutdown the turnover rate for the library system's 380 braille books was .06. Since March the rate moved to .08. In March there were 8 checkouts; in July there was one; in August there were 4 checkouts; in September, 7; in October, 15; in November, 21. Elizabeth said that she has not discussed the status of the children's braille collection with Director Vassallo but the collection will be left in place, and circulation monitored.

Marketing: Until recently Elizabeth has managed the Outreach team. She now is training Kathy Meisner, a branch manager who is managing outreach temporarily.

Outreach team members are working in branch libraries and assigned to other County functions in order to respond to priority pandemic needs. Normally, the team attends many kinds of community events. Debbie asked whether the team is aware of the braille collection and if the team members promote the collection through flyers while at events. Elizabeth will check to see whether the library's outreach flyers mention braille; team members know that the braille collection exists. Elizabeth will emphasize to the team that every community event may include people with disabilities. Jonina noted that programs such as outreach often get cut when budgets are under pressure and she underscored the importance of outreach in making libraries known and thus increasing usage numbers, which directly affect County Council budget decisions.

Elizabeth asked for AAC help in marketing the braille collection. The following strategies were proposed to begin now or in more normal future times:

- include braille books on bookmobiles (Elizabeth said the county does not have bookmobiles);
- mention braille books in children's programming;
- include flyers about the braille collection on the racks of flyers at the entrances to many branches;
- review existing flyers to see if they mention the braille collection (Elizabeth will do this);
- invite Kathy Meisner to a future AAC meeting to discuss outreach.

Debbie will chair the braille marketing subcommittee, and Jill will ask for other AAC volunteers for the committee. The committee can involve people outside of the AAC.

The Books at Home Program

The program began again in the early summer. There are now 100 customers, and approximately two customers will be added each month through word of mouth. The limited budget for the mailing bags and the postage prevents recruitment for the program.

Staff Training

The tip sheets have been completed, and the next step is for AAC members to review them. Kate Tavakolian, staff training coordinator, has said that the tip sheets are key to next steps in staff training about customers with disabilities, and

Elizabeth requested that AAC members take a final look at the sheets to make sure they are ready for use. She said that Kate may have ideas about how to use a panel in remote training, but first she needs the tip sheet comments. Jill will send the tip sheets again to AAC members and will send AAC comments to Elizabeth. Elizabeth reiterated that the tip sheets are “living documents,” and changes can be made if necessary, in the future. (After this discussion, Jonina sent an email requesting a change in language from “invisible” disabilities to “hidden” disabilities so that Elizabeth has documentation to make this agreed change).

Elizabeth did an online training with Adult Librarians with a focus on serving customers with autism. She and Kate plan to use this training module (created with AAC member Monica Martinez) as a model for the future training sessions. Kate’s progress has been slowed by having to reorient all training modules to be 100% online.

The County is now doing mandatory training on racial justice for all staff. The library staff is overwhelmed with meetings and remote trainings because this appears to be the ideal time to conduct them.

Virtual events

1,635 virtual programs have been offered from March 16 to November 1. The total number of attendees is higher since the programs went to almost 61,000 devices. Lectures/discussions, story time, and health/wellness were the most popular programs. Anita may have information about how virtual programs in Montgomery County compare to public library virtual programs in other parts of the country.

Accessibility: The library system uses a platform called Communico. Elizabeth checked it for accessibility using Narrator (Windows-based text-to-speech software). It did not function for her; she asked the MCPL IT staff to try it and to contact Communico. The problem appeared to be a combination of the browser and the computer operating system she was using. Communico said they had tested it, and other library staff said it worked, so results are inconsistent. Elizabeth would like to hear from Jane and others who can check it and report on their experiences, including information that will help Communico diagnose and fix problems, such as what software was being used (Jaws, Narrator, etc.), what operating system (Mac, PC, or Windows 7, 8, or 10), desktop or laptop or tablet or phone, and which browser (IE, Chrome, Safari, etc.).

All AAC members are encouraged to test the Virtual Events calendar as well as the overall website. Elizabeth noted that the extra information is very helpful but reporting only the problem is fine, too. Jane said that she is able to use the Events page link sent by Jill (from Elizabeth), but one sent by Francie didn't work at all, and she does not like using the Library's Main webpage. Elizabeth said a lot of work has been done to simplify and improve the Library's website, so she encouraged people to try getting to Events from the Main Page. Jill suggested that we could discuss this at a future meeting because it's easier for some people to use a link to go directly to a specific page rather than start from the home page. Jonina reminded us about calling Ask a Librarian, at 240-777-0001, because the staff members are very responsive in answering all types of questions.

Renovations

Long Branch: Construction is wrapping up, and the staff is back in the building. There is no firm date to re-open but staff will begin offering "holds to go" in January.

Germantown: Most of the refresh budget was cut, due to County funds being needed to provide COVID-related food and shelter. The ADA-required improvements will be implemented, and carpet and furniture will be replaced. However, painting and service desk replacement will not take place because of budget constraints. Work at this branch should be completed during this winter.

Maggie Nightingale Library in Poolesville: Work has begun at this branch. Since the library is a rental property, the building owner is responsible for any exterior ADA modifications. The interior ramp and restrooms are being renovated. Much of the furniture is only a year old; it has been replaced since the AAC toured the branch. The furniture has a 24 to 36 inch-height range designed to address different wheelchair heights.

After the renovation, Maggie Nightingale will be the first County library to enable library users with an account to access library services during times when the library is closed. Library users would enter with a library card and PIN. Open+ ("Open plus") is the platform that is used for this service which allows expanded use of a library beyond normal open hours. Elizabeth will send the AAC information about Open+. In response to discussion about the Maggie Nightingale renovation and about Open+, Elizabeth asked the AAC to send her a list of concerns. Concerns noted at the meeting include:

The self-service model may encourage the County to cut hours and staff in the future, which will have an impact on people with disabilities.

A person in a wheelchair entering the library alone needs attention to the heights not only of tables, but also to whatever lets people in and out, to placement of holds, to signs (location, size of print, etc.), and to accessible check-out.

Elizabeth asked AAC members to send Jill accessibility considerations for checkout locations.

The Deaf Culture Digital Library

Elizabeth will assume the duties formerly performed by Susan Cohen and manage the Deaf Culture Digital Library. She will supervise the individual chosen to replace Susan, the coordinator of this service.

Other Business

In response to Francie's question about Elizabeth's priorities for the AAC, Elizabeth said that tip sheets are the first priority because they are the key to moving forward on future training. Next would be testing the accessibility of the events calendar, and providing a list of concerns about Open Plus.

Matt Barkley said he would be glad to talk about the work of the ADA Compliance Office at an upcoming meeting.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, March 3 from 3:00 to 5:00 pm.

Jane was thanked for hosting the Zoom session using the ACB of Maryland's Zoom account. It was suggested that a reminder email sent the day before the meeting should include the Zoom link.

Action Items

Invite AAC members and others to take part in a braille Marketing Subcommittee. Jill will invite AAC members to the subcommittee that Debbie will coordinate.

Send information about the MCPL braille collection to appropriate organizations and listservs.

Think of ways to inform current and potential MCPL patrons about the braille collection. This will be done by the Braille Marketing Subcommittee.

Elizabeth will review existing library flyers to see if they mention the braille collection.

Elizabeth will discuss the braille collection with Kathy Meisner, temporary Outreach Manager. She will ensure that the Outreach Team is aware that all communities include individuals with disabilities.

Invite Kathy Meisner to a future AAC meeting.

AAC members will review tip sheets and send any comments to Jill. Jill will send a compiled document of tip sheets to Elizabeth.

Debbie and Jane will test the accessibility test of the Virtual Events page: they will send the link to individuals who use screen readers for testing accessibility on various devices and report back with what kind of device, operating system, browser and screen reader are used.

Elizabeth will send Jill web information about Open Plus which Jill will send to the AAC members.

AAC members will send Jill (to send to Elizabeth) a list of accessibility concerns related to the Maggie Nightingale renovation and Open Plus.

Jane will send a reminder email including the Zoom link the day before the next meeting.