

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING NOTES

March 16, 2023

ZOOM ETIQUETTE

Francie gave Zoom etiquette rules.

INTRODUCTIONS

Members: Nadia Aboureyah, works for Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Aging and Disability Services; Jane Carona, AAC co-chair, treasurer of American Council of the Blind of Maryland Silver Spring chapter, Braille Revival League, on the board of Library Users of America; Jonina Duker, a volunteer tutor at the Special Needs Library and was on the LAC there, and then on the Disability Resource Center LAC, where she started the DRC Comes to you initiative, and is co-chair of Davis LAC; Cindy Buddington, electric wheelchair user, represents Independence Now; Tim Lighter, Library Board chair and Board liaison to the AAC; Betty Thompson, her sister had impaired vision and was instrumental in beginning the AAC; Monica Martinez, representing Partnership for Extraordinary Minds, which advocates for improved educational experiences for students with autism, and serves on the board of DC Peers, works on helping autistic kids develop social skills; Yasmin Reyazuddin, is blind, and feels there's a need for books in other languages for children; Matt Barkley, ADA Compliance Manager for Montgomery County, worked on accessibility with libraries in Fairfax County; Elizabeth Lang, Assistant Facilities and Accessibility Program Manager; Debbie Brown, secretary for the AAC and president of the Sligo Creek Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland; Barbara King, was a volunteer at the Special Needs Library and on the LAC there, and then the Disability Resource Center and is a member of the ACB; Francie Gilman, new chair of the AAC, she announced a recent diagnosis of ADD.

Wendalyn Hovendick, our newest member, lives in Silver Spring and has low vision. She is a member of the National Capital Area Chapter of the ACB and uses

a guide dog. She learned about wheelchair-related issues because her mother used a wheelchair for the last 20 years of her life as a result of polio. Her mother also gave her a love of reading.

Guest: Jaime Flores, assistant director of Outreach and Marketing;

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Nadia announced that her mother, Karen Leggett, is a volunteer for transitioning youth services. There is a transitioning youth fair on Sunday, March 26. She will send out a flyer.

Jane announced that there had been a presentation on accessible appliances at the ACB convention which was so popular that the local chapter will have a virtual discussion on accessible appliances tonight at 7:00.

Monica said that in a webinar on neurodiversity affirming care, many autistic adults said they preferred disability first language, rather than the more usual “person first” phrases. She also said she would like to have an autistic adult on the AAC to represent autistic people, since she is not autistic.

Debbie announced that the Sligo Creek Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland will be having a booth at the Gaithersburg Book Festival, May 20.

MCPL MARKETING AND OUTREACH

We heard from Jaime Flores, the assistant director of programs and outreach for MCPL. The position was vacant for a couple of years, and the Library wanted someone with a marketing, community, and programming background for this job. He said his local library saved his life, he grew up in Springfield, MA, where the libraries were a refuge for him because it was safe and provided programming.

He has been involved in doing cultural programming in libraries and museums, and advocating for black, Latino and Asian American people. His goal in life is to be a voice for people who need voices. He works with the older adult programming manager and the children's manager. He has 4 outreach staff.

Jaime mentioned the importance of the four priorities of the new Strategic Plan, and that regular core library services will continue. He wants to encourage

diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, and to make sure that data is collected to make sure we're meeting the goals of the Strategic Plan. Jaime wants to increase programming collaboration among branches. Sometimes one branch gets a speaker without checking if another branch has the same speaker, who may charge different rates to different branches. There will be workgroups to get feedback and plan programming months ahead of time. They want to make sure that there's a minimum number of storytimes, including a sensory storytime and an ESL storytime at each library, or at least rotate them among branches. He has a small outreach team, and budgetary constraints. He'd like to update policies and procedures for programming.

The local group TransCen, which places people with disabilities in jobs, would like to work with MCPL, so they are checking out possibilities with the County attorney. Also, MCPL is trying to bring back sensory storytimes in larger numbers. There are three scheduled at this time.

Questions and discussion:

Jonina said TransCen have the contract with the local Mid-Atlantic ADA Center, they are very helpful. Also, she would like to see more explicit language in the Strategic Plan to include people with disabilities. She pointed out the fourth area, ("Residents with limited access to technology and/or the internet can navigate a digital world to get what they need") has scope to address people with disabilities. Jaime agreed, and said that including people with disabilities is of interest to the Director, as well as to his programming staff.

Jane said outreach to any targeted communities is very good. Blind people may not be aware that there is anything at the library for them because they do not use print books. What can Jaime do to reach out to visually impaired communities especially that the website that is clunky, hard to use? Jaime said this is a big issue, even people who don't have disabilities don't know that there are a lot of audio books and other services available. We have no dedicated marketing department, he is trying to see how to work within the budget to do that. He's looking to our group and others to provide guidance on how to reach the communities. It would be ideal to bring the message to the communities and not wait for them to come to us.

Monica is partnering with TransCen on Project Search. They do some training, they have an arrangement with Montgomery County. Jaime said to send him the information, and that MCPL should be aware and align resources to the disabled communities.

Yasmin would like to read braille books for a storytime. Children need to know that blind people can read. Jaime suggested that we talk to Cassandra Malik, who does children's programming. She is busy but wants to meet the strategic goal for children under 5.

Francie thanked Jaime for coming and asked how we can help him reach out to the disability communities, and how he could help us to reach out on the behalf of MCPL. Jaime replied he would like suggestions on what type of programs branches could be offering, along with people with expertise to lead them. Also what community resources should be on his radar. Examples of what people don't know that the Library offers, including workforce development. We need to focus on programming and outreach. Jaime said that it would be good to start with the Strategic Plan, and make sure suggestions are practical and feasible, because of a limited budget and a small staff. Francie noted that the Friends of the Library raises money to support Library programs, so that is a possibility.

Betty and Jane wonder how we can best access Library programs, there are some events that are useful and fun, and they don't get enough attention. We need to find a different way to present the programs that are available. Jaime said they don't do radio ads or flyers. They are redesigning the website, so reach out to the Digital Strategies, contact their manager Matty.

Cindy mentioned people who don't have technologies, where to go to go to get them. Jaime said the Library will have an outreach van in the fall. It will go to people who cannot reach libraries, and they can use Library resources there.

LIBRARY UPDATE

Elizabeth Lang announced that about 45 people were at the Louis Braille birthday event at Rockville.

The Potomac Library is scheduled to re-open on April 15. The Damascus Library design is expected soon. The Brigadier General has just had a facility evaluation.

There have been sensory storytimes at a few locations, now that Jaime is on board.

The language for an interpreter request has been changed to "a visual communication request" so that people are aware that it is ASL and does not refer to spoken language interpretation.

The Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library is in the process of hiring a new program specialist. An offer has been made.

Elizabeth attended library services trainings. She attended one presented by Kathy McMillan, who is a librarian and an ASL interpreter. She wanted to learn from the trainings but also to think about offering some trainings to staff. She is discussing with the new Staff Development Coordinator, Liz Bowen, about offering this training to staff.

Liz Bowen has made disability trainings available to staff systemwide. There was a inclusive story time training, a welcoming deaf patrons to the library by Kathy McMillan. There will be more trainings in the future.

MCPL has been bringing on new staff. Elizabeth does a brief introduction to new staff about services to people with disabilities, so people to know they can come to her with questions.

Questions and discussion:

Jonina asked about a way to direct people to services to people with disabilities and also raise money for Friends groups, for example selling a bobblehead doll or T shirts or something sensory, or use an icon, to identify accessibility services and Elizabeth. Elizabeth replied that to her knowledge everything put out on a systemwide level is accessible, but each branch does their own thing, so it will take time. They can't get all 400 staff to take a training all at once. Jonina asked whether the staff training video with AAC participants has been used. Elizabeth said she didn't know, but that she will contact Liz Bowen to ask. Francie mentioned that it might be good to invite Liz Bowen to a future meeting.

Betty said there is a different and valuable dimension in learning when people learn directly from people with disabilities. Also, what interests the new staff in Elizabeth's staff training sessions? Elizabeth responded that it depends on what

position they're moving into, so they tend to ask about what's relevant to them. For example, where is information for the public on what is available for people with disabilities? Management staff were more interested in the technology that's available. Outreach staff were interested in past and current programming.

BOARD UPDATE

Tim Lighter said he appreciated that we brought up our concern that the Strategic Plan doesn't mention people with disabilities with Jaime, and that there are other constituencies that are reaching out to the library about this as well.

The Board had a joint meeting with the Friends of the Library and wrote a position paper and sent it to Mr. Elrich. Some of the board members testified at Mr. Elrich's budget forums, which seemed to go well. Mr. Elrich sent the budget to the Council, and Tim and the FOL will meet with County Council and testify in front of the Council. He said if we are interested in testifying before the Council to let him know.

They had 9 interviews for board positions. They had a lot of good applications.

Tim wants to hold off on having us present at a Board meeting until Board positions are filled and they have met a few times with the new members.

Questions and discussion:

Jonina wanted to know if the Board would be comfortable with us, a subcommittee of the Board, inviting the new library Liaison on the County Council to one of our meetings. Tim said it would be fine, and later clarified that the AAC is not a subcommittee of the Board, that Director Vassallo has said the AAC is not an official LAC, so not an entity of the Board. Jonina suggested that the more that we invite people like the current county liaison, Kristin Mink, as well as the MCPL regional managers and other officials who will help us create relationships and makes us more visible. Yasmin said that Kristin Mink is taking Will Jawando's place as library lead. Jonina said Ms. Mink is an alum of the Blair magnet school she is involved with, so that is a connection. Francie agreed to add speakers to future agendas.

COUNTY ADA COMPLIANCE UPDATE

Matt Barkley said that ADA Compliance office is part of the Department of General Services (DGS). A lot of their work is based on physical accessibility. They are also responsible for training and making sure all programs are accessible to people with disabilities. They do not have any Library projects right now.

Most of his recent discussions with the Library have been about people who are not necessarily patrons, but who are loitering in the libraries. Many are people who are homeless, and may have disabilities. One question was whether libraries can lock bathrooms. The decision was yes, if it's locked for everyone, applied across the board.

The County information technology department (TEBS) will unroll a new plan to ensure that everything the County puts out is accessible for everyone (documents, meeting notifications, requests for accommodations, legal documents, social media, etc.). Captioning on Youtube is automatically generated, which sometimes is inaccurate. He suggested that someone from the IT department could come to the AAC to discuss this. Also, he is interested in the debate on people first vs. disability first language, referencing Monica's statement earlier.

The Department of Transportation is doing an accessibility survey focusing on the experiences of people with disabilities. Matt can forward that to Francie. This is on public transportation, not taxis, etc.

Questions and discussion:

Francie asked how the IT department is getting expertise on accessibility. Matt said they are looking at creating two positions, to ensure electronic communications are accessible, both in the future and looking back historically. They have a good understanding of standards about accessibility. They may need to reach out to the Commission at some point.

Yasmin noted that a company called TPGI will be doing training about Word accessibility in March, and could forward that information to Matt. She also mentioned the accessibility of the library room reservations online. Elizabeth said that as of the end of February the vendor is struggling to figure out what the problem is with the coding. It is now with their VP of product development. It is a

long process. When it comes back, Elizabeth will be back with us to test it. Elizabeth said that Matt has been referring to Technology and Enterprise Business Services (TEBS) is the department responsible for countywide technology. The library has no say in the layout or structure of the library website. This is decided at a county level. Jaime referred to what the the Library's own Digital Strategies group is doing, which is constrained by the County's overall design requirements. AAC members have given feedback but some problems is beyond the expertise of the Library and the TEBS

Debbie said that if the County (TEBS) can't fix it, then we need to know what the workaround is for those things. Calling Ask A Librarian is one way. Francie asked Debbie if she would be willing to send the group a list of the problems people are having so that workarounds can be found and problems can be resolved. Elizabeth said library staff are there to help, will always offer the assistance. The accommodation request number is on the website for Elizabeth or the hosting library for a program. Staff at a branch contacted Elizabeth because they had been working with a person who used a screenreader, and had done all they could. Francie suggested that the telephone number to get assistance for County meeting reservations system (CUPF) should be put on that website. Elizabeth clarified that the Library has not control over the CUPF. Jonina pointed out that people can use multiple email addresses to reserve a room in advance, putting people with disabilities who call in to make a reservation at a disadvantage. She asked if it would be possible to have high school students write a program to help with this. Betty asked if we could discuss having students work with us on our issues to complete their SSL hours. Can Jane call a staff person on a regular basis to get the event information she needs? Elizabeth suggested calling Ask a Librarian, 240-777-0001, to answer specific questions and help find events.

SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM GOALS

Francie said that while our discussions at this meeting had addressed many goals, they left no time for the actual goal discussion in the agenda, so we will find another way to address them. Cindy suggested another meeting before the next meeting to discuss goals. Betty agreed that another meeting would be good and she had listed a number of likely goals during the discussion. Betty will send out her list of goals. These are short-term and long-term goals. We can discuss and add on to the list of goals.

NEW BUSINESS

Francie said that Anita had asked questions about the committee's membership, and will send out a draft reply.

We have an updated member roster, which will be sent to the MCPL staff person. We decided against including our phone numbers in the version sent to the Library. Jane will keep the version that has the phone numbers, and if someone needs to call a member, Jane will check if it's OK to give out that person's phone number. We can also use email to ask for people's phone numbers if needed.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be Thursday, June 15, from 3:00 to 5:00 pm.