

Montgomery County Public Libraries

Accessibility Advisory Committee

June 15, 2023

Meeting Minutes

ATTENDEES

Francie Gilman, Chair (individual)

Jane Carona, Vice Chair (American Council of the Blind local chapter)

Debbie Brown, Secretary (National Federation of the Blind local chapter)

Nadia Abouraya (individual)

Matt Barkley (Montgomery County ADA Compliance)

Cindy Buddington (Independence Now)

Jonina Duker (individual)

Wendalyn Hovendick (individual)

Richard Bell-Irving (Learning Disabilities Association of Maryland)

Barbara King (individual)

Tim Lighter (Library Board)

Joyce Plaxen (individual)

Yasmin Reyazuddin (individual)

Monica Martinez (xMinds)

Betty Thompson (consultant)

Elizabeth Lang (Assistant Facilities and Accessibility Program Manager) will be here later in the meeting.

Jill Lewis and Betty Thompson are now our consultants rather than members, reflecting their close involvement since the inception of the AAC. Jill was coordinator of the AAC for seven years.

Joyce Plaxen, a new member, introduced herself. She has a daughter who has intellectual disabilities. She switched careers to learn to help her daughter. She has been a parent educator and worked in senior care. She now works for WeAchieve, formerly CHI Centers. She will work to find someone with autism. She volunteers with Special Olympics.

AAC GOALS AND PRIORITIES: Francie Gilman and Betty Thompson

Because we did not have time for a discussion of goals and priorities at the March meeting it is on the agenda again. We have had action items before, but never goals. This is a way to think of them more broadly. Our goals should align with the strategic plan. Betty used the March meeting discussions to draft these goals.

1. Develop and improve our connections and credibility in the county.
2. Outreach. Get more people with disabilities to use the library.
3. Develop and promote MCPL programs that have value for people with disabilities.
4. Improve digital accessibility. Work with MCPL Digital Strategies staff to address digital accessibility throughout the Library.

Francie asked if these four categories are a good summary of what we'd like to accomplish, and members agreed that it is.

Discussion:

Joyce suggested making libraries more accessible to people with disabilities during the work day. Also the possibility of a cartoon book club, or graphic book discussion. These fit under goal 3.

We talked about the accessibility of programs—where does physical accessibility belong?

Accessibility of physical facilities is a separate goal, to be added.

Jonina suggested the SMART approach: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely.

Nadia suggested an outreach program at the Rockville library to help people learn about library programs and how to use the library.

Betty asked if we could have a one-page document about libraries, as a simple way to introduce the library to individuals, families and organizations. Betty will work on that document.

Yasmin asked about programming for National Disability Employment Awareness Month, in October. Can we have a program for every week in October? Then Jonina added that we could focus on public awareness twice a year, perhaps in the fall as Yasmin suggested, and in May to recognize mental health awareness month. She mentioned partnering with local chapters of NAMI or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Francie said we have been invited to have a table at a branch in their lobby as a way to let people know about us and library services available to people with disabilities.

We should invite the new HR director to a meeting.

MEMBERSHIP: Jane Carona, Vice Chair

As vice-chair, Jane keeps members' email addresses and phone numbers, they are not shared with Library Administration.

We need a broader group of people with different characteristics. We have 3 vacancies. We should keep a countywide and disability wide focus.

Blindness is well covered; we have Debbie, Jane, Yasmin, and Barbara. We do not have anyone deaf/hard of hearing; people with psychiatric or emotional disabilities; or someone of school age.

Discussion:

Monica is working with people with autism and with the Down Syndrome network. She is also working with a parents group.

Francie has some contacts to help recruit deaf and hard of hearing people, and Nadia has a deaf contact. Could someone with MAT (Maryland Accessible Telephones) help us?

We should include more people with mental illness. We should check Easter Seals or NAMI.

LIBRARY STAFF QUESTIONS -- Francie Gilman

In May Francie went to a meeting of the Learning Organization. It is a library organization that consists of representatives from each branch. They meet monthly. They gather information from the administration and give it back to the branch. Anita invited Francie. They had two questions:

Question 1. Each branch has an assistive technology workstations except Noyes and the library in the Detention Center. Each has a PC with magnification software and NVDA. All public PCs have NVDA and Windows 10. The workstations also have an Optelec scanner that magnifies. Elizabeth mentioned that the Optelec reads aloud as well. Because there's no awareness that they're available they don't get used very much, so staff would like a tip sheet. Francie and Jane went to a library to try out the workstation and they sent their notes to Elizabeth.

Discussion

Jane suggested that the public tip sheet should be on the website. There should be something in the library near the computer. You would need a sighted person to show you where the computer is and your library number. You need a sighted person to help you log in.

Also Jane couldn't get to the files on her thumb drive. That is a computer setup issue. This is something everyone can't do. You can't open a text file.

Elizabeth will work with Jane on the tip sheet. Elizabeth agrees that information needs to be at the workstation.

Question 2. A staff person at the meeting said she was concerned about what to do when people seem to be overwhelmed, possibly a mental health issue. Some staff can deal with it; others can't. How should they handle such a situation? Francie reached out to Monica and other members for suggestions. Monica sent information about fidgets and contacts for staff training; it can go to the HR manager.

Fidget toys seem to wander when staff use them at the sensory storytime.

We will check what to do if fidget toys get broken and how to disinfect them. People who need fidgets often bring their own.

[LIBRARY REPORT: Elizabeth Lang, Assistant Facilities and Accessibility Program Manager](#)

Elizabeth is our committee staff liaison. We should remember that our committee is advisory. We have membership gaps are in deaf and hard of hearing people. They must be from Montgomery County.

There are no plans to make other libraries like Wheaton, which is a building shared with the Montgomery Recreation Department.

We discussed lobby areas for socialization. The older buildings do not have the seating areas and would be hard to change. As renovations are done, new spaces will be put in.

Summer reading kickoff: The theme this year is "All Together Now." Monty the service dog is an illustration; he is brown and white. The service animals tip sheet was sent out. Sensory storytimes are coming back this month. Germantown has one each month; others are planned at other branches.

They are working on teen programming.

The hiring of training staff has been going on for a year. Dr. Weadon is in the office of human relations. The library seems to be doing well dealing with the process of hiring.

Anita has had no spending constraints put on her. She appreciates the advocacy.

Training: Liz Bowen is the training staff specialist. Liz sent out tip sheets on Sharepoint to everyone. All staff can access the tip sheets. Elizabeth will talk to her about what she will do with them. The position open now is the human services manager. Dr. Weadon has left MCPL to work at the County Health and Human Services Department.

Elizabeth is sending information about training. Four disability-focused trainings have been made available to staff. They were attended by multiple staff members.

In early April there was an announcement to request staff to view the recorded video about disabilities. It was about an hour long. The training was done a couple of years ago with AAC members as speakers at a meeting of the adult services staff.

Discussion:

We recommended that it get to be available to everyone. It had been viewed 22 times; after the announcement it had been viewed 200 times. How can we get it viewed as part of the new hiring requirements? Does this include any pre-assignments and post-assignments? Elizabeth would like to get it required for new hires. Elizabeth will let us know about that.

In March Elizabeth attended Universal Design Training. They do usability training. Elizabeth is working on the design of the library card to make it more readable. It now contains tiny print, so they are working on the size of print and contrast.

Elizabeth set up summer visits by ARC groups. They have a garden at Kensington Park that is attractive and useful for groups.

Elizabeth is administrator for the Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library. She has hired a new coordinator.

BOARD REPORT: Tim Lighter

There is a full board now, 14-members.

Every library has a Library Advisory Committee, they provide input and feedback to the Board. Each Board member is assigned a branch. The Library Board meets the second Wednesday of every month.

The second Wednesday of July is available for us to meet with the Board, and Tim extended an invitation to AAC members to attend.

Tim has sent out the Director's report to AAC members.

ADA REPORT: Matt Barkley, ADA Compliance Officer, Montgomery County

The office of ADA Compliance is not taking the lead on library refreshes but is playing an advisory role. ADA compliance deals with accessibility issues when they come up. They have a lot to do with the Avery Road Treatment Center.

There is a lot of discussion about digital accessibility. Francie asked about accessing documents such as the County budget, which was inaccessible. It would be good to know who to contact in TEBS, at the County level. Matt would be involved with physical accessibility.

New Business

Francie will be meeting with Maddie Hines, manager of the Digital Strategies staff, about moving the AAC webpage from the Board webpage with LACs to a different location on the MCPL website. She will also ask about resolving accessibility issues with the Library events calendar.

We discussed special months and dates for programs related to disability. July 26 is the 33rd anniversary of the ADA.

Action items

1. A list of goals, including accessibility.
2. One-page library document (Betty)
3. Disability-related programs, including Disability Employment Awareness Month.
4. Programs on how to use the library.
5. Invite new training director to LAAC meeting (Francie)
6. Present at LAAC Board meeting (done).
7. Recruit members in unfilled categories (deaf/hard of hearing, autism, psychiatric disabilities).
8. Tip sheet for computer workstation (Elizabeth and Jane)
9. Question about summer reading (Monica, Nadia, and Joyce)
10. Encourage requiring using LAAC training video and tip sheets for new hires and that we receive reports about how many staff are receiving disability training.

Adjourned.