

LIBRARY ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING NOTES

September 4, 2019

Present: Debbie Brown (Sligo Creek Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind); Jane Carona (National Capitol Area Chapter of the American Council of the Blind); by phone Jonina Duker (Community Representative/AAC Member); Amy Fier (EveryMind); Francie Gilman (Independence Now and retired librarian Montgomery County Public Libraries); Barbara King (Community Representative/AAC Member, Member American Council of the Blind); Elizabeth Lang (Assistant Facilities and Accessibility Program Manager Montgomery County Public Libraries); Dennis Pillsbury (Montgomery County ADA Title II Compliance Office Architect); Betty Thompson (Consultant); Jane Williams (Library Board Liaison)

Library Update

Facilities

Elizabeth Lang announced that the Wheaton library will reopen on Sunday, September 8. Dennis found punch list problems with Wheaton, but they appear to be easily fixable. The Wheaton library shares meeting rooms with the community center. It was suggested that we hold an event there.

The Energy Savings Program work is going on at all branches, resulting in lighting improvements at Germantown and HVAC improvements at Rockville and Germantown.

Praisner is nearing the end of its construction,-projected to be completed by September 17. We do not have an opening date but believe it possibly might be in November.

Three branches are in the design stage: Long Branch, Germantown, and Noyes. Work at Long Branch will probably be the latest to start, possibly in spring of 2020. Its many interior and exterior ADA issues will require a lot of work. The projected start date for Germantown construction is March 2020, according to Dennis. The Noyes design is underway but the Noyes Foundation has not yet

reached its funding goal. Noyes may submit plans before upcoming changes in the County building code; a building permit can remain open for three years.

The Friends of the Library bookstore at the old Silver Spring Library closes as of September 7 (print books, audiobooks and CDs are 1/3 off). The new store will open September 8 at the Wheaton Library.

Jonina Duker noted that Fran Kaplan is now at Wheaton as head of Children's Services. She was at the old Special Needs branch and is fairly fluent in sign language. She commended Caitlin McCarthy, who is at Wheaton and has been helpful in carrying books for her.

Staff Training Modules

Elizabeth said the drafts of all the tip sheets are completed and there is a tip sheet for every disability we submitted. We are calling them service guidelines. There have been formatting problems that have delayed editing. For each service guideline there is an introduction that talks about the topic, sections with tips on working with people with the disability, commonly used assistive technologies, and resources. Kate Tavakolian, who is in charge of training, says she needs the whole package to be completed before she can do anything with them. Kate wants an assignment for the trainees to complete ahead of time—something to read, watch or listen to as homework. Elizabeth will send lists of what is needed to Jill.

The Autism trainings and the Sensory storytime trainings used different approaches. The Autism trainings involved a presentation at a staff meeting for every branch, and took nine months. It was difficult to find times when all appropriate staff could attend. The Sensory storytime training was done at one branch, Germantown, and people from each library came, but only selected children's librarians came. Elizabeth doesn't want to take either of those training approaches again. Instead, she will propose to Kate Tavakolian having training for all staff on multiple days in Rockville.

Discussion of training

Francie offered to help Elizabeth with the tip sheets. She also offered to assist AAC members in finding podcasts, articles, videos, etc. for the Resources sections of the tip sheets.

Francie asked about doing a disability training program at staff day 2019, or even just a short presentation to make the staff aware of the AAC's existence. Elizabeth believes we probably cannot do that because the County executive is speaking and things are already scheduled. Jill Lewis could discuss this with Anita for staff day 2020 after further discussion at our Dec. 4 meeting.

Our original AAC desire had been for disability awareness and experiences for all staff, more than rote detailed training. To get busy people's awareness for even 10 minutes, could we use self-paced interactive only scenarios, and make it more like a game so that they win something when they do the training, which they may do whenever they have time?

Another idea is a resource fair, maybe at staff day, with tables staffed by AAC people and library staff, make it fun, use games with rewards, exercises. We can give something away. We can have them go to each table and have each table stamp a card for them. Elizabeth said she has some ideas and will talk with Kate Tavakolian. She hopes to have some response before the December 4 AAC meeting.

Perhaps high school students can help produce documents, or design video games as part of their SSL volunteer work.

Library Visits

Jonina went to see the Kensington Park Library garden a month ago. The accessibility is not perfect, but it is generally accessible. Francie has been to Bethesda and Davis, and she said the lighting and parking lots are very good.

Francie handed out a checklist that members can use as they visit libraries. There is an item for the branch manager but that's for our original visit. We should document library branch strengths and weaknesses and notify Jill and Elizabeth if there are any significant barriers or issues.

Jonina said that at White Oak the book drop is close to the ramp, and people sometimes park in front of the ramp to use the book drop and block the ramp.

At Silver Spring there was supposed to be a "tech bar" in the open center near the entrance, but it has never been used for that. Elizabeth said there was a book display there.

Betty said that at the Silver Spring Library's book hold lockers the top row is over 5 feet above the sidewalk, making it difficult or impossible for some people, including Betty and children, to retrieve their reserved materials. There needs to be a procedure for requesting an accessible locker at branches that use this type of hold lockers.

Jill, Betty and Francie will come up with a list of refreshed libraries and the reports we have done. They will send out the list of branches we have visited; if we are going to a library, we can check with Jill for a copy of the original report and use the checklist and send our evaluations to Jill.

New Members

Francie said Al Sonnenstrahl, who has been active in the deaf and hard-of-hearing community for many years, has agreed to be a member and will attend the Dec. 4 meeting. She is still trying to find someone who can represent the low vision community.

Brooke Levey from the Down's Syndrome Network of Montgomery County is interested and plans to attend our December 4 meeting.

Monica is talking with someone from the autism community. They have come up with good suggestions (e.g., forgiving fines if returning books on time is a problem, which already is best practice).

Programs

Jonina mentioned that Twinbrook is starting a project lending musical instruments. She will write up a program idea related to this new service. It would be good for AAC to be a part of it.

Francie said she and Cindy Buddington have arranged for a program on accessible and affordable housing on Wednesday, November 6 at Gaithersburg from 3:30 to 5:00. Susan Smith from HOC and staff from Independence Now will be on the agenda.

Francie said that Susan Cohen of the Germantown Library had responded to questions about the Deaf Cultural Digital Library, and she will send them to the members so they can inform their consumers.

Elizabeth said that sensory storytimes are rolling out in a dozen libraries on Saturday afternoons and Thursday evenings. Word has gone out for organizations that serve people with autism and to libraries. It is on the Library Calendar of events. There is a sensory stay-and-play at Quince Orchard. There is a sensory movie time at Silver Spring that is for adults.

Projects

Human libraries: Debbie, Jane Carona and Francie talked about this novel idea in a conference call, weighing whether it would be worthwhile to suggest that MCPL use this approach to allow people to "check out" volunteers who have disabilities, in order to learn about their lives, skills, and abilities in a short discussion, 15-30 minutes. The term "Human Library" is copyrighted and there is an application process in order to participate. The website is <https://humanlibrary.org/>. Individuals have to register on the site as a book. Francie said she heard some concern about the terminology, regarding people as objects. Jane, Debbie and Francie would like this to be discussed in future meetings. It seemed like an interesting way to broaden awareness about people with disabilities and perhaps dispel fear and uneasiness, particularly in children.

Board report

Jane Williams said the board will welcome four new members next week.

She talked about Councilmember Will Jawando's conversations at various libraries. Will Jawando is the Council's lead for libraries. He has committed to holding conversations in all of the libraries about libraries and any other topics that people want to bring up. The conversations are co-sponsored with Friends of the Libraries. There has been a lot of discussion about staff shortages and high turnover in staff. He would like to see more outreach to teens and young adults, early childhood funding for several libraries, and improved furnishings and appearance. People have expressed concerns about safety (Long Branch, Potomac), Purple Line (Long Branch), staffing, branch manager transfers, living wage for part-time librarians. At Potomac they talked about the flood of the Library basement that had delayed the opening after the refresh. He is very engaged; it is an opportunity for people to attend and make their views known. Councilmember Jawando opens the floor for questions other than library issues. No disability-related concerns have been expressed at the conversations Jane attended. Jane will let us know as soon as she hears about another one. They are publicized with very short notice. You can check

on the Friends of the Library website. They are on the MCPL Calendar. Jane Carona said that the general calendar is hard to access, that a plain text version would be easier for searching, and Elizabeth said she would look into improvements.

It was brought up that blind people have no way of accessing a public access computer without staff assistance to connecting to a screen reader.

Action items:

1. Add resources to tip sheets, per Elizabeth (add a list of resources and something to read, watch or listen to ahead of time for each disability) – AAC members.
2. Send list of refreshed libraries with reports — Jill, Betty and Francie.
3. Report on proposal for a program on musical instrument lending at Dec. 4 meeting -- Jonina.
4. Publicize the accessible/affordable housing program at Gaithersburg on Wednesday, Nov. 6, 3:30-5 – all AAC members. Francie will provide text and flyer.
5. Send link to human library project—Francie. Here is the link:
<https://humanlibrary.org/>.
6. Touch base with Kate Tavakolian about options for disability awareness activities for Staff Day in 2020 for December meeting — Elizabeth.
7. Find an accessible option for people who can't reach the top row of hold lockers at Silver Spring — Dennis/Elizabeth
8. Send to AAC members the responses to questions about the Deaf Cultural Digital Library from Susan Cohen – Francie.
9. Consider a future event or meeting at Wheaton — discuss at Dec. 4 meeting.

Our next meeting will be Wednesday, December 4, in the Board Room on the 3rd floor of the Rockville memorial Library. Our thanks to Debbie Brown for taking notes and to Betty Thompson for editing.