

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chair and Members of Community and Corporate Affairs Committee

FROM: Douglas Davey, Manager of Children's and Youth Services

DATE: July 23, 2019

MEMORANDUM NO.: MEM-LIB-2019-0004

RE: Drag Queen Storytime

PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide Committee with a summary of the Drag Queen Storytime held on July 20, 2019 and to highlight feedback from the community.

BACKGROUND:

This Memorandum follows up on Memorandum MEM-LIB-2019-0002 regarding LGBTQ+¹ Library Services specifically in regards to Drag Queen Storytime, which ran on July 20, 2019 at 11:00am to a large and engaged crowd.²

COMMENTS:

INTRODUCTION

A Drag Queen Storytime takes traditional elements of professional performance for children (i.e. pantomime, clowning, costume, comedy, songs, storytelling, and so on) and adds to that an opportunity to promote inclusion and diversity. Many libraries and other community/cultural agencies that serve children have found Drag Queen Storytimes to be a successful way to offer LGBTQ+ positive family programming in a manner that helps people to better understand and appreciate gender roles and diversity. The Halton Hills Public Library is committed to supporting diversity and inclusion in this community, and so decided to book the biggest act in Ontario, Fay and Fluffy, for its first ever Drag Queen Storytime.

¹ See APPENDIX A - LGBTQ+ DEFINITIONS

² See APPENDIX B - PHOTOS

PUBLIC COMMENT PRIOR TO SHOW

Prior to the show on Saturday, July 20 public comment and support for the program was largely positive. Some community members were already familiar with Fay and Fluffy and/or Drag Queen Storytime and expressed excitement and appreciation for the program. Comments within the Library and on the Library's social media posts on the topic were very positive, as were comments on some public online forums such as a local parents' group.

Some negative feedback was received on social media, including comments from far outside of our community. Anything inappropriate was deleted. The Manager of Children's and Youth Services, Douglas Davey, became aware of three community members who contacted the library to express their concerns over the program. Each community member was spoken to in person or via telephone by either Douglas Davey or the Chief Librarian.

The Library has a formal mechanism for dealing with concerns over materials. That process begins with the complainant completing a "Request for Reconsideration of Materials" form. Following the concerns received, a modified version of that form was created in order to address program concerns in a similar manner. At least one such form was handed out, but none have been received back as of this writing.

THE PERFORMANCE

Due to the significant buzz that the program was generating, the central portion of the children's area in the Georgetown branch was cleared of moveable furniture and display units, creating a large storytelling area with soft mats and good visibility.

Fay and Fluffy performed for approximately 45 minutes, after which they took pictures and chatted with the attendees. The kids were very engaged, and there were even a few questions from the young attendees about the performers' clothes and gender, such as, "Are you a boy or a girl?" which the performers used as an opportunity to talk about gender in a comprehensible and helpful manner.

Their book choices were appropriate to both the audience and the topic. The reading list included the following titles, which are all available at the Library:

- *Mary Wears What She Wants* by Keith Negley
- *I Am Invited to a Party!* by Mo Willems
- *Not Quite Narwhal* by Jessie Sima

MEASURING SUCCESS

Anecdotal

Conversational feedback was very positive. One parent, who is a member of the LGBTQ+ community and also a lifelong Georgetown resident, expressed her great enthusiasm and appreciation for the program (as well as to the potential for a rainbow crosswalk) and stated that she has never felt safe enough in this community to even hold her wife's hand in public.

Attendance

Drag Queen Storytime ran in place of the usual program offered at this place and time: Family Storytime. In 2018, the summer season of Family Storytime received approximately 30 attendees per session. For Drag Queen Storytime, approximately 150 people attended, a 5x increase. In discussions with the attendees, staff learned that people had come from all over the area, including Hamilton, Burlington, Guelph, Waterloo, and Erin. The event was drop-in and non-ticketed.

Evaluations

Paper evaluation forms were handed out and 19 were returned. The results were informative and supportive. Half of the attendees heard about the event from social media, and another quarter from word of mouth. 100% of respondents stated that they would attend the same program again in the future. 18 out of 19 rated it Excellent, with the remaining 1 rating it Very Good.

When asked what they felt the benefit of such programs was to their child and/or their community, comments included:

- "Seeing something so fun and accepting and diverse and LGBTQ positive with my kids made me feel whole"
- "Love of reading, diversity, and acceptance"
- "It's a great way to teach our kids how to get along with everyone"
- "Promoting empathy, teaching about diversity"
- "Brings diversity to our community"
- "Creates a loving community and loving members"

Other comments included:

- "Thanks HHPL for being a LGBT+ safe space and promoting inclusivity. So proud to live in a place like Halton Hills because of programs like this <3"
- "Very sweet and entertaining. Good exposure in a not-so-diverse community"
- "So fun for my wife and I (same sex) to bring our grandson"
- "I loved this! thank you for bringing this to Georgetown"
- "Every year!"

Social Media

As of this writing, the first Facebook post following the performance had garnered over 90 loves or likes. One commenter stated, "Super loving our library even more today! Excellent programming and I'm thrilled I could attend. I could not be more proud of our inclusive community!"

CONCLUSION:

"The worst outcome to watching a drag queen tell a story is not influencing a child to worry and wonder if they are the "wrong gender" as many want us to believe. The outcome that can occur watching a drag queen telling a story is that it can save the lives of those children who are struggling with gender nonconformity and free them to explore and express themselves in ways they were meant to be."³

-Joe Kort, Drag Queen Storytime for Children, *Psychology Today*

Drag Queen Storytime was a success, with the large number of attendees reporting universal acclaim for the program. We hope to run similar programs in the future, as this type of program fulfills a number of functions, including: offering entertaining programming for our community, supporting literacy, promoting diversity and inclusion, satisfying elements of our strategic plan, and reaching out to our LGBTQ+ community members and those who support them.

Reviewed and approved by,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Geoff Cannon", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Geoff Cannon, Chief Librarian

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Brent Marshall", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Brent Marshall, Chief Administrative Officer

³ <https://bit.ly/2Z65RHv>