

Committee: London Public Library Board Trustee Position

Organization/Sector represented:

Name: **Melissa Middleton**

Occupation: **Support Worker**

Work experience: **For fifteen years, I have worked as a support worker for people with developmental disabilities. Throughout my career, I have assisted people in all aspects of their lives as needed. A large part of my work is fostering independence for people supported. Utilizing public libraries has been a key aspect of this independence as public libraries provide a free, accessible and welcoming environment for learning all kinds of skills; be it social, literacy, autonomy and more. I work closely with people supported and families to develop support plans, set processes and achieve goals. I assist people supported in networking with community members and organizations so they can live a full life in which they are included in the community.**

Education: **I completed first year at Brock University studying Philosophy. Though I enjoyed my time there, I decided to go down a different route and pursued my interest in supporting people with developmental disabilities. I volunteered for 6 months as a literacy assistant at Woodstock and District Developmental Services in which I helped people with developmental disabilities with their literacy skills. From there, I started my career as a support worker where I continue to learn through excellent training opportunities provided by my employers at VON and Alice Saddy Association. I have also recently become a peer support volunteer through Canadian Mental Health Association in which I provide support to people with mental health issues.**

Skills: **As a queer woman with physical disabilities who also supports people with developmental disabilities, I provide a unique perspective. I am an avid library user myself and with people I support. Public libraries have provided a crucial safer space for me growing up in a small town. Libraries provided me with so much comfort, knowledge, and empowerment to understand myself and find community. For people I support, I see libraries providing free access to learning and fostering independence in a non-judgemental atmosphere. I want to see libraries continue to become more diverse and accessible. As someone who has low income, I greatly value libraries as a free community space. Because of my background, I have a wealth of ideas in continuing to make public libraries accessible and inclusive. I have excellent communication skills and provide strong mentoring to people I support. I work closely with family members of people I support as well as community members and organizations to solve issues and provide the best care.**

Interest reason: **I am interested in serving the City of London on this body as I have lived here for over a decade and am invested in building safer communities. I have seen where the city is excelling in diversity and inclusion and where it needs improvement. Through my career and personal life, I see where people are having difficulty with inclusion at public libraries and I would like to continue building on accessibility and diversity goals so libraries can provide exceptionally welcoming public spaces.**

Contributions: **As someone who is queer and disabled, I can provide firsthand insight into diversity and accessibility issues at libraries. Being a support worker for people with developmental disabilities, I can also share challenges people with cognitive and physical disabilities face at libraries and ideas for improvements to accessibility.**

Past contributions: **In my role as a support worker, I regularly provide feedback to my employers on improving diversity and inclusion for people supported, employees and in the field of developmental services. I aim to amplify voices of marginalized people and have made suggestions to hire speakers who are people of colour at agency meetings. I have suggested specialized training to people supported and employers/employees on making organizations positive spaces for LGBTQ+ people supported and employees. I regularly talk about the challenges I face in the workplace as a worker who is disabled.**

Interpersonal: **My role as a support worker requires a great deal of communication and interaction with staff, people supported, their families, medical professionals, businesses and services in the community. It requires active listening and understanding what informs others' viewpoints in order to provide the best support and maintain great relationships with everyone involved. I respect the autonomy of people supported and want them to be able to choose the best life for themselves; this includes taking risks and learning for themselves as everyone should have the right to do. I encourage people supported to work**

on their goals and assure them that they have a right to accommodations as needed. Being disabled myself, I have learned so many alternatives to accommodate tasks, what I truly have to offer (a lot!) and how to excel in my own way.

Interview interest: **Yes**