

## Drag Queen Story Time a success for Library



By Brock Weir

The Aurora Public Library kicked off Pride Month on Saturday with its first-ever Drag Queen Story Time, hosted by Eva Lasting and, judging by the success of this inaugural event, it will definitely not be the last.

Over 50 members of the public – kids, parents, grandparents – came out to dress up, dance, and hear Eva Lasting read a handful of specially chosen children's books, each with the message that it is okay to be yourself.

"I wanted them to be exposed to the idea of being different and being who you are," said mom Jeanan Al-Haddad, who brought her daughters Meryam and Maysa to the Story Hour. "I feel in this day and age, everyone is pushing for a cookie-cutter image. I just want them to learn, especially as girls, to be who they are, to be okay with that."

The same sentiment was shared by Darren and Barry Pamaya who brought their two sons to the event.

"We're a same-sex couple, we have two kids and we wanted them to see diversity," said Darren. "We think it is important [to have something like this in York Region]. We are both teachers and librarians and we thought it was perfect."

Added Barry: "We just like exposing our children to as many different things as possible. Diversity is important and it is important for them to see there are different types of families and different types of people out there."

The dads agree that here in York Region there is plenty of room to grow when it comes to events like these.

"We do a lot of things in Downtown Toronto, but we know there are a lot of same-sex families [in the area] and lots of diversity, so we're really happy with the community," said Darren. "Our sons really enjoyed the stories and I don't think it seemed different to them – it was just part of life."

These perspectives are just three examples of feedback offered after the event, which was spearheaded by Polly Ross-Tyrrell, Children's Librarian at the Aurora Public Library (APL), and York Region teacher Allison Beattie.

Ms. Beattie brought the idea for Drag Queen Story Time to APL's attention following an In Conversation event held at the Library last year on issues facing the LGBTQ community in York Region.

"I was so incredibly proud of all the parents and grandparents who were out here today, who are raising a new generation of loving and accepting children and I think our world is in a better place for it," said Reccia Mandelcorn of the APL.

This was also the takeaway for Eva Lasting.

"I think it was fantastically positive," she said. "As expected, kids sort of were just kids and they asked questions. Things like: Is that a boy? What is that? And just being able to comment on what they saw. I think that is a natural and healthy way to go through life, so I was happy to be part of it and to encourage it. Sometimes kids can be stifled about asking questions and sometimes it is not considered polite, but in this situation I think it was fantastic just to talk to those kids and be honest and open with them – and just connect with them over stories they love and be able to sing and dance with them."

Such was the success that not only are future Drag Queen Story Times for kids in the offing, but the APL might kick things up a

notch when Pride Month 2019 rolls around.

?I think this is going to be an annual event,? said Ms. Mandelcorn. ?It was a lot of fun and when you have a good thing you build upon it. I think adults need to have a Drag Queen Story Time too because adulting is hard and we need all the help we can get!?