



Information for human books

A human library is “a proven, safe, and low-cost tool for communities to address controversial issues/polarised situations, local and national, by giving them a human face.” Sabina Baltruweit, instigator of the first Australian Human Library.

The Hobart Human Library is a library just like any other – except the books are real, living people! Human libraries are used around the world as a simple way for people to build empathy and face their prejudices.

They do this by providing a comfortable space for people to speak informally with a 'book' who has encountered prejudice or stereotyping because of their culture, religion, refugee background, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability.

The goal of a human library is always to promote and increase the understanding and acceptance of difference between members of a community. Human libraries are about two-way listening and learning.

Who can be a book?

Human books can come from any walk of life and from any background; though it should be kept in mind that the purpose of a human library is to promote an acceptance of the differences which may exist between members of a community. A human book is often someone who has experienced some form of discrimination in their life and who now feels able and comfortable sharing through conversation the story of what that feels like to them.

Your role as a human book

As a book you will be able to share your story through conversation with the people who come to 'read' you. You do not need to be an expert or feel as if you have to represent anyone else or an entire group of people. We only ask that you be yourself, and share your story in a respectful and appropriate manner. It is not about lecturing, but about having a conversation with another person. That means listening to the questions being asked of you and answering them honestly and with integrity. Reading is based on mutual respect: all books must be returned in the same condition in which they were borrowed.

At any human library event there will be librarians whose job it is to set-up and organise the running of the event, and to supervise conversations. You will be provided with a space to sit down and have a conversation with another person, and we will supply refreshments.

Human library events can be booked by schools and workplaces, and are run like a 90 minute 'speed dating' forum, with groups of 3-5 people reading a book for 12 minutes then moving on to another book. Sometimes we run public events, inviting readers to choose from our catalogue and 'borrow' (sit and talk with) a book for 10 to 30 minutes. You will be able to nominate which events you take part in and which you choose not to. We ask that you attend the events you have agreed to attend, arrive on time, and be ready to start at least 15 minutes before readings begin. We may be able to assist with transport if needed. An honorarium of \$50 per session is standard.

Most importantly, remember we want it to be an enjoyable experience and we encourage you to have fun in your role as a human book. It is a chance for you to tell people who you are, in your own words, and to challenge stereotypes. It can be an inspiring and exciting experience.

Training and support

Before you begin your time as a human book with Hobart Human Library we will provide you with training (minimum 4 hours) to help you prepare for your role as a human book. The aim of the training will be to inform you about the role and purpose of a human library in the community, as well as review which aspects of yourself you are comfortable sharing with other people, and develop the stories you will tell as a book. It is important to remember that you will never be asked to talk about anything you do not feel ready to talk about or share with another person.

Hobart Human Library will provide ongoing support to you as a human book. There will always be librarians at an event to support you; it is the most important part of their job.

Guidelines for readings

- Be yourself, be honest and listen carefully.
- Be ready to share your reflected personal experience. If questions become too difficult or you do not wish to respond then you can say so.
- Remember that your reader has borrowed your 'title'; it is that aspect of yourself they are interested in. While it may feel limiting, this is normal in the context of the human library.
- Readers will be interested in your title for a variety of reasons. A good question to start the conversation is, 'Why did you choose my book?'
- You may have to repeat yourself to different readers; try to remember for each new reader it will be the first time they have spoken with you.
- If a reader becomes rude or you feel uncomfortable, let a librarian know. Rude and/or aggressive readers will not be tolerated.
- If you ever feel uneasy and would like to end a conversation with a particular reader you are free to end discussion.

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