



Information for Librarians

A human library differs from a conventional library because the ‘books’ are real people that ‘readers’ can engage with in conversation. Human libraries are similar to conventional libraries in that they offer people the chance to learn and actively engage with the stories and experiences being shared by another person.

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.

This leaflet for librarians is to be read in conjunction with the Hobart Human Library Background Information brochure and Human Books for Schools brochure.

Who can be a librarian?

Librarians can come from any walk of life and from any background; although 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. Librarians are required to engage respectfully and to communicate effectively with human books.

Your role as a librarian

All of the human books in our library have experienced some form of discrimination in their life – it could be as a result of their culture, religion, refugee background, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability. It takes a great deal of courage to tell share their story with others and for many it has also taken considerable time for them to be comfortable to share. A librarian’s primary role is to ensure the physical and emotional safety of the books.

Other tasks expected of a librarian might include:

- Helping to set-up and pack-down at events.
- Welcoming readers and explaining the process, as well as the goals and aims of a human library.

- Assessing and matching readers and books for suitability.
- Introducing readers to books and their subject matter.
- Watching to ensure books are happy and that conversations remain respectful.
- Being ready and prepared to intervene sensitively if books or readers show signs of distress.
- Ensuring the comfort of books including rest and refreshment.
- Monitoring times and notifying the books and readers gently when their time has finished.
- Ensuring that feedback forms are completed by all readers, books and librarians.
- Being reliable, punctual and well presented.

Training and support

Before beginning your time as a librarian with the Hobart Human Library you will be provided with training to help you prepare for the role. The aim of the training will be to provide information about the role of a librarian with a human library, as well as the purpose of a human library in the community.

The most important part of your role as a librarian will be to assist the human books. It is important to note that human books are people who are trained to share their stories and engage in conversation with strangers about their experiences. We do not expect you to be experts in counselling, just to be considerate and understanding.

Tips from past librarians

- Get to know the books prior to an event.
- Be strict, but not officious, in applying the library rules and ask the same from readers and books.
- Record loans accurately.
- Use downtime to collect feedback from readers and books.
- Do your best to assist the books and filter potentially difficult readers.
- You are not a counsellor.

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