

'The Human Library is an idea for bringing together people who may not usually get the chance to have a conversation: it increases understanding between people and challenges prejudice and stereotypes. On 16th March at UEA we are staging a Human Library and we are looking for volunteers to be human 'Books'. This would mean you would be available to be 'loaned' to someone else for short conversations. If you feel that there is anything about you (your culture, faith, sexuality, gender, disability or anything else!) that might help others understand certain issues better and would like to be involved, please get in touch. We make sure that all conversations take place in a pleasant and safe environment and you would be contributing to a wonderful and innovative project which now runs in more than 50 countries around the world. Examples of human Books from previous events include 'Transgender', 'Psychosis', 'Refugee', 'Self Harm', 'Lesbian', 'Graffiti Artist', 'Learning Disability', 'Bi-Polar', 'Service Personnel', 'Recovering Alcoholic' and 'Young Asylum Seeker'. For more information about the concept, visit [www.humanlibrary.org](http://www.humanlibrary.org)

The next step is to contact local newspapers, radio and TV broadcasters and let them know about your event. Having Books interviewed has proven a good way to publicise events as it provides a very good human interest angle.

When promoting your Human Library, you should always try to give a clear indication of what the concept is about and why it is important to your community to challenge

prejudice and encourage greater understanding of difference.

The second stage of promoting your event is to ensure that as many people as possible come and borrow your Books. There are many ways to do this and, as discussed in the first stage of promoting your Human Library, you may have specific communications staff who can assist you with this. Some of the most effective ways to promote your event are:

- Sending information to local media (newspapers, radio and TV stations) and making your organising team and Books available to be interviewed
- Putting up posters and distributing fliers ahead of the day
- Put information of your website and email a link to it to all relevant contacts
- Advertising your Human Library on Facebook, Twitter and other social networking websites
- Produce e-fliers, send to all of your relevant contacts, asking them to do the same
- Advertising your event in the venue it will take place in the days before it takes place

Good Luck!

If you follow these guides you will make a great start, however, you will need to be flexible and adapt your project to suit your needs and circumstances. However, I'm sure you will find that wherever you are the Human Library will work.

Written by Nick Little  
Human Library Organiser  
September 2010

### Useful Resources for Human Library Organisers:

- [www.humanlibrary.org](http://www.humanlibrary.org)
- <http://eycb.coe.int/LivingLibrary/WebForms>
- <http://eycb.coe.int/LivingLibrary/WebForms/OrganisersGuide.aspx> (The Human Library organiser's guide)

Don't judge a book by its cover!!!

### The Human Library Organisation

The *Human Library Organisation* was founded in Copenhagen, Denmark by the creators of the Human Library, with financial birth aid from the *Nordic Council of Ministers Youth Committee*, a global supporter of the Human Library. The *Human Library Organisation* aims to unite active organisers from all parts of the world and to promote the use of the Human Library in efforts to create more social cohesion and respect for diversity and human rights. Through the global organisers forum and activities in countries around the world, the network works to recruit and train new organisers, share experiences and further develop the methodology. The network is an international non-profit organisation and has ties to local organisations. Part of the mission is to try and encourage volunteer regional Human Library co-ordinators, to feed in the information, experiences and developments in their region. The organisation will also serve as a marker for the principles of this methodology and an entry point for new organisers.

[www.humanlibrary.org](http://www.humanlibrary.org)

**HUMAN LIBRARY.ORG**

# UNITED INFORMATION LEAFLET 29

Human Library - Don't judge a book by its cover

## Human Library Don't judge a book by its cover!



### UNITED for intercultural action

UNITED for Intercultural Action is the European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees. More than 560 organisations from a wide variety of backgrounds, from all European countries, work together in common activities, such as European-wide campaigns. Like-minded organisations have the opportunity to meet each other at conferences

and elaborate specific projects. UNITED is and will remain independent from all political parties, organisations and states, but seeks an active co-operation with other anti-racist initiatives in Europe. Information is received from more than 2000 organisations and mailings go out to about 2200 groups in Europe. Let us know if you want to get involved! And add UNITED to your mailing list!



**UNITED IS SUPPORTED BY:** more than 550 organisations from 48 European countries, many prominent individuals, private supporters and long-term volunteers from Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste, the European Voluntary Service Programme and Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service.

Since 1992 financial support was received from various sponsors such as: European Commission (General Budget/Socrates/Grundtvig/Youth in Action Programme/DG Employment Social Affairs/ TACIS IBPP), Council of Europe (European Youth Foundation/European Youth Centres), OSCE-ODIHR, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, World Council of Churches, Olof Palmes MinnesFond, Cultural Council Sweden, Ministry of Education Slovenia, Green Group-, Socialist Group-, and GUE/NGL Group in the European Parliament, European Cultural Foundation, Stiftung West-Ostliche Begegnung, Aktionsbündnis Gegen Gewalt, Rechtstextremismus und Fremdenfeindlichkeit Brandenburg, Home Office UK, Ministry of Interior-BZK NL, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs CH, the Matra Programme of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vuurwerk Internet, Instituto Português da Juventude, National Integration Office Sweden, Service Nationale de la Jeunesse Luxembourg, LNU - Norwegian Youth Council, Europees Platform Grundtvig, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Federal Social Insurance Office (Dep. for Youth Affairs) CH, Swiss Coordination Office of Youth for Europe, Federal Service for Combating Racism (Fund for Projects Against Racism) CH, Migros Kulturprozent CH, Comunidad de Madrid, Ministry of Youth and Sport of Azerbaijan, The Swedish National Board of Youth Affairs, Rothschild Foundation, Local Municipality of Budapest, Open Society Institute, Youth Board of Cyprus, Foundation Remembrance Responsibility and Future, Final Frontiers Internet, Dijkman Offset and others.

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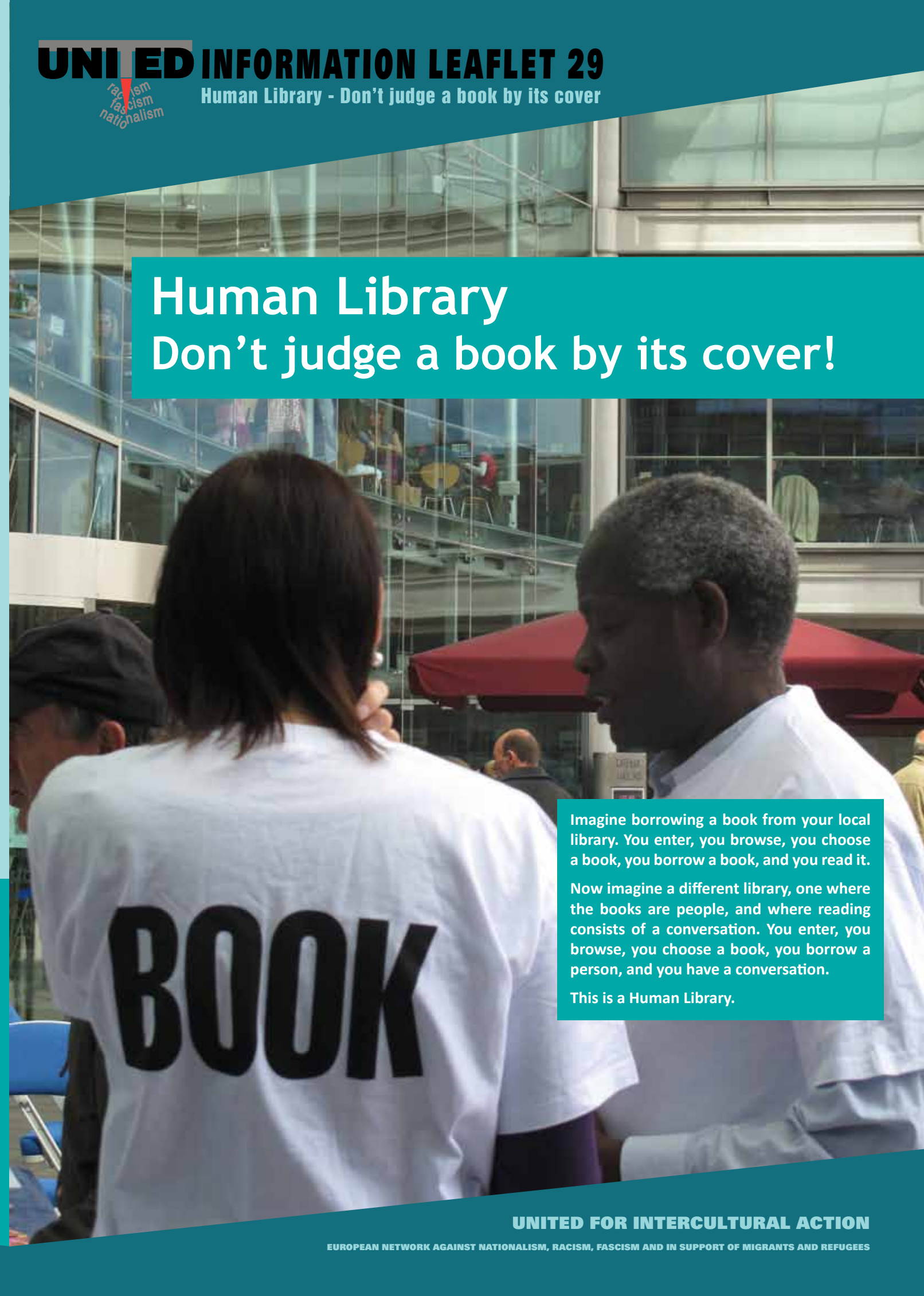


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UNITED FOR INTERCULTURAL ACTION

EUROPEAN NETWORK AGAINST NATIONALISM, RACISM, FASCISM AND IN SUPPORT OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



Imagine borrowing a book from your local library. You enter, you browse, you choose a book, you borrow a book, and you read it.

Now imagine a different library, one where the books are people, and where reading consists of a conversation. You enter, you browse, you choose a book, you borrow a person, and you have a conversation.

This is a Human Library.

## The Human Library

The simplicity of the Human Library concept generates instant appeal to would-be organisers. However, there is much more to consider if you wish to become a Human Library organiser. You need to know exactly what the Human Library is, and perhaps more importantly what it is not, in order to deliver a successful event or project. Most important of all, you must fully understand the methodology of the Human Library: **‘Don’t judge a book by its cover’.**

### Prejudice:

*When you form an opinion about a person, without knowing him, on the basis of assumed characteristics of the group you think he belongs to, then you are prejudiced. Prejudices are complex ideas that are preformed and presumed without being proven right [...].<sup>1</sup>*

Whether we like it or not, we all have prejudices. We cannot be expected to have an informed knowledge of everyone and everything around us, so it should not be assumed that we won’t make assumptions about people and things. Obviously it is very difficult to own up to a prejudice, and even more difficult to expect someone who holds a strong prejudice to confront it publicly. In reality, one of the biggest barriers we face when trying to challenge prejudice is the word itself - Prejudice. It is such a dirty word nowadays. No one wants to be seen as prejudiced. No one wants to own up to a prejudice. No one wants to know anyone who is prejudiced. We prefer to ignore it, to pretend that we do not have any prejudices, and we would not associate ourselves with anyone who does. We are afraid of the word and all of its connotations. We are afraid that we might be racist, homophobic, sexist, bigoted.

The Human Library is a novel way of addressing the broad issue of prejudice while navigating around some of the associated sensitivities. At a Human Library, prejudice, stereotype and stigma are at the heart of the methodology and therefore ‘out in the open’. It is ok to have prejudices, in fact it is encouraged.

Once you have agreed to take part the next step is to borrow a Human Book who will *challenge* your prejudice. But how does the Human Library achieve this aim? Let’s return to that simple idea once again: You walk into the library, borrow a Human Book, and sit down for a conversation. Aside from the fact that Books are people, the Human Library is very similar to regular libraries – a place where you can learn, improve and interact with others, where you can discover new worlds, people and ideas. The difference is that the Human Library is set up for a specific purpose: to facilitate conversation that will lead to a change in behaviour. Put simply, you are encouraged to sit face-to-face with your prejudice and talk.

By facilitating this interaction the Human Library can make a positive contribution to addressing all three forms of prejudice:

<sup>1</sup> UNITED Info Leaflet No. 13 – ‘The Danger of Words: Definitions of concepts most used in antiracist work’

cognitive, affective and behavioural. For example, cognitive prejudice (what people believe to be true) can be addressed

by Books representing stereotypes that are supported by popular media or urban myth such as ‘Asylum Seeker’ or ‘Muslim’. Affective prejudice (what people like and dislike) can be addressed by Books representing people who are subject to widespread discrimination, such as ‘Transgender’, or ‘Roma/Traveller’. Behavioural prejudice (people’s attitudes and behaviours) can be addressed by Books such as ‘On Social Benefits’, ‘Bi-Polar’, or ‘Learning Difficulties’. As I am sure you are realising, the list of Books and prejudices is almost endless.

Human Books are people willing to share their personal life-experience in the hope that our opinions, attitudes and behaviours will change as a result. They do not become Human Books in order to tell a story, they become Books in the hope that their story will lead to a more inclusive and cohesive community. Crucially, Human Books have given their permission for readers to ask questions that they may feel uncomfortable asking in everyday life, or to ask the questions they do not ask for fear of being labelled ‘prejudiced’ such as: ‘Why can’t you get a job?’ ‘Did you always plan to claim asylum in Britain?’ ‘How can you be transgender and a lesbian?’ ‘If you are gay how can you also be Catholic?’ ‘Is your wife also disabled?’. It offers individuals, whether Books or readers, the chance to question themselves about why they might hold certain opinions or behave in a certain way. And in a wider context, the Human Library helps individuals gain a better understanding of the diversity of their community.

Readers may come forward who are open about their prejudice, but as we have discussed, this may be uncommon. It is much more likely that people attending a Human Library will either not own up to their prejudices or not realise that they have them. These are people whose opinions and behaviours you are likely to change. Subconscious prejudice is no less damaging than more obvious discrimination, and changing attitudes and behaviours of people who hold subconscious prejudices is a realistic achievement for your Human Library.

### So what is not a Human Library?

The simple answer is that any event which uses the same format of people as Books but has been organised without the aim of challenging prejudice, stigma, stereotype, or discrimination is not a Human Library. The Human Library is not a story-telling session, it is not therapy, it is not counselling, it is not a coffee and conversation morning. There may be great value in organising events such as these but they should not be called Human Library. Organisers should always be conscious of the methodology when planning and delivering their project and the methodology should not be compromised. The most important thing to remember is that you have chosen to organise a Human Library and therefore you must act in the best interests of the global project.

So hopefully you can see that the Human Library has the potential to affect the attitudes and values of a huge number of people. It is a brilliantly simple but highly effective way of tackling a difficult issue. It has the

potential to change our feelings, perceptions and opinions about ourselves and others. Through Human Library the cultural diversity of our communities is celebrated and a positive contribution to the health and well being of the participants is made. Above all, Human Library is a positive experience for everyone involved, a unique opportunity to explore another character and to be inspired by real life experiences.

*Don’t judge a book by its cover.*



## A brief history of the Human Library

Following a knife attack on a friend in 1993, five young Danish people created *Stop The Violence*. Through this organisation they attempted to challenge negative stereotypes that appeared in the media following the incident. Seven years later the director of Roskilde Festival challenged *Stop The Violence* to organise activities that would encourage dialogue and mutual understanding between visitors at the 2000 Roskilde Music Festival.

Their response was the Human Library, which over three days facilitated hundreds of conversations between people who would not normally have come into contact with each other. This developed greater

understanding between people attending the festival by challenging negative stereotypes and prejudice. At that point it would have been difficult to believe that within 10 years Human Library is being used to strengthen and connect communities in more than 50 countries around the world.

After the first Human Library at Roskilde, there were many events throughout Europe, usually taking place at music festivals or in libraries.

## Choosing a Venue

Your choice of venue can have a huge impact on the Human Library event that you deliver. The venue that you use directly impacts upon the number of Books and Staff you recruit, how much promotion and publicity you require, how long your event runs, and how many Readers you attract.

### Context

You must ensure that the venue you choose is appropriate for the aims of your Human Library. To do this it is worth looking at the context in which your Human Library will be set: will your Human Library be part of a larger event, such as a festival or conference or are you planning to hold a stand-alone event? There are benefits and challenges to both approaches. As part of a larger event it becomes easier to attract Readers but your Human Library may get less attention than you would like. At a stand-alone event more attention is placed upon the Human Library so the impact may be greater, however attracting Readers may become more challenging and will require a considered approach to promotion.

### Location

If your Human Library forms part of a larger event the location may be out of your control. If your Human Library is stand-alone you will need to consider the best venue available to you. At the beginning of your planning you will have set the aims for your Human Library so try to select a venue that will help you achieve these aims. If you want to work with a specific community or in a certain area then you may wish to carry out some consultation with Books and potential Readers to a place that feels comfortable to all.

### Space

The context and location decisions have to be balanced with the physical space that you will require. You may have to compromise at this point: location may be crucial to achieving your aims so your plans may need to be adapted in order to make best use of the space you are using.

### Facilities

The last thing to consider is the facilities available at the venue. Is the building accessible to everyone you hope will take part? Can refreshments be provided by the venue or will you need to bring these with you? Does the venue have chairs and tables and the materials required to run the event or will these need to be transported there?

## Books

For new organisers recruiting Books can be one of the most demanding tasks. It is common to wonder where and how you will find Books and to make sure they are suitable for the Human Library and that it will be a positive experience for them. Other areas to think about include talking to people you think may not be suitable, training your Books, keeping them safe on the day and retaining their services for the future if you decide to organise further events.

### Recruiting Books

You should have a clear understanding of the issues your Human Library hopes to address and this will make finding Books much easier. You will be aware of the type of experiences they will need and you may already have in mind several people who

may be suitable. Although you may well have relevant knowledge and have some potential Books in mind, it can be really useful to utilise the experience of professionals who work with the kind of people you are looking for. For example if you want the views of young people represented you might contact a Youth Worker, who can help you advertise and is also likely to be in touch with people who have the right skills and experience.

Once you have identified potential Books it is essential that they complete a registration form and that one of your team meets with them to assess their suitability. If you are confident that they are suitable, you should invite them to a training day prior to your event. If, for any reason, you have doubts about the suitability of a Book you need to talk them to explain your decision. You may still wish to offer that person the chance to get involved in another way.

### Training Books

You must provide training for all Books taking part to ensure that they know how the Human Library works. Effective training will ensure that all books feel safe and valued and understand what your event is trying to achieve, and why they have been invited to share their experiences.

It is important to offer Books the chance to discuss their experiences with a member of the organising team on the day or subsequently, and to follow up with a formal thank you.

## How to promote the Library to readers

Promoting your Human Library begins as soon as you have undertaken the commitment to organise one. The first stage is to publicise your event in order to attract volunteers to be Books and staff. The second stage is to promote your event with a view to attracting readers.

You should begin the task of promoting your event as soon as possible but it is most effective to begin this in earnest once you have chosen your date, time and venue.

Many organisations have a Communications Officer or someone with a similar role and if this is the case, engage with them as they will have established contacts with local media. Give them clear information about your event. It may even be helpful to let them have a look through this leaflet as it will help them understand the history and context of the Human Library, and how it actually works.

If you do not have access to a Communications Officer to help with promotion, it is a good idea to start out by writing a clear paragraph, outlining what you are trying to do. When promoting the event to potential books, a paragraph like the one below is an example of what you might write. This was used by the *University of East Anglia* (Norwich, UK) and attracted more than 30 responses from potential Books in just a few days.