**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 ICA 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’, ‘Grafting Artist’, ‘Learning Disability’, ‘Bi-Politician’, ‘Service Personnel’ ‘Recovering Alcoholic’ and ‘Young Asylum Seeker’. For more information about the concept, visit 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 organisation team and books available to be interviewed.
- Putting up posters and distributing fliers ahead of the day.
- Putting 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://eyb.co.ee/int/huglibibrary/WebForms/OrganisersGuide.aspx](http://eyb.co.ee/int/huglibibrary/WebForms/OrganisersGuide.aspx)
- [The Human Library organiser’s guide](http://eyb.co.ee/int/huglibibrary/WebForms/OrganisersGuide.aspx)

**Don’t judge a book by its cover!!**

**The Human Library Organisation**

The Human Library Organisation was founded in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2000 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 organisations 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 Organisation**

**aims**

to increase 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**
The Human Library

The simplicity of the Human Library concept generates instant appeal to would-be organisers. However, there is much more to consider before you wish to become a Human Library organiser. You need to know exactly what the Human Library is, and more importantly what it is not, in order to deliver a successful event. 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 to which he belongs, then you are prejudiced. Prejudices are complex ideas that are prepared and presumed without seeing right [...].

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 difficult to even up to a prejudice, and even prace the difficulty of the Human Library, a strong prejudice to confront it publicly. In one way or another, it is a human challenge when trying to change prejudice is the world itself - Prejudice. It is such a very 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, and unpopular.

The Human Library is a novel way of addressing the broad issue of prejudice while taking steps 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 to avoid prejudices, in fact it is venue and purpose.

Once you have agreed to take part the next step is to borrow a Human Book who will challenge you to think about the Human Library and how 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 you meet people, the Human Library is very similar to regular libraries - a place where you can read and borrow books 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. That is why 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:

- cognitive, affective and behavioural. For example, cognitive prejudice (what people think) can be addressed by Books representing stereotypes that are supported by popular media or urban myth such as 'Saracen' or 'Yorkie-Traveller'.
- Behavioural prejudice (people’s beliefs 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.

Prejudice:

Human Books are people willing to share their personal life-experiences 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 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, a chance to question themselves more closely 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 uncomfortable. 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 event. Subconscious prejudice may be great value in organising events suitable for such use but they should not be called Human Library. Organisers should always be aware of the resources available for planning and delivering their project and the methodology should not be compromised. It is also important 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.

Choosing a Venue

Your choice of venue can have a huge impact on the Human Library event that you deliver. Before you consider anything else, you need to decide the number of Books and Staff you will recruit, how much promotion and publicity you require, how long your event runs, and how many Readers you attract.

You must ensure that the venue you choose is appropriate for the aims of your Human Library. To do this is worth looking at the context in which your Human Library will be set. You need to decide if the Human Library is going to be a larger event, such as a festival or conference or are you planning to hold a stand-alone event? There are benefits and drawbacks to both approaches. As part of a larger event it becomes more challenging for Readers but your Human Library may get less attention than you would like. At a stand-alone event more attention can be focused on the Human Library so the impact may be greater, however attracting Readers may be 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 a stand-alone you will need to consider the best venue available to you. You will need to set the aims for your Human Library so the location will help you to achieve these aims. If you want to work with a specific community or in a certain area then you may need to carry out some preliminary research and consult with Books and potential Readers to a place that feels comfortable to all.

Space

The context and location decisions have to be balanced in terms of what is available to you. It is important to consider that you may have to compromise at this point: location may be crucial to achieving your aims but 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 do you need to bring your own? Does the venue have chair 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 important to consider how you will find Books and to make sure they are suitable for your event. It is also likely to be a positive experience for them. Other benefits of working with Books is that you think may not be suitable, training your Books, keeping them safe on the day and recruiting their services for the future if you decide to organise further events.

Recruiting Books

You should be clear understanding of the issues your Human Library hopes to address and the attitudes of visitors to your Human Library. It is important to promote the Library to readers, the chance to question themselves more closely 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.

How to promote the Library to readers

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 trend once you have chosen your date, time and venue.

Many organisations have a Communications Officer or someone with a responsibility for publicity. If this is the case, engage with them as they will have knowledge about the best approach to media. Give them clear information about your event. It may even be helpful to let them know what the Human Library want to achieve through this leaflet as it will help them understand the history and context of the event.

If you do not have access to a Communications Officer to help with promotion, it is a good idea to write a clear paragraph, outlining what you are trying to do. When promoting the event to potential books, a Roman like the one below is an example of what you might write. This was used by the National Library of Wales and attracted more than 30 responses from potential books in just a few days.