



Becoming a “Bestseller” of the Human Library

Ever hear the saying “You are like an open book?” Well that is what we ask the people on our bookshelf to be for the Human Library. To be an open book on a difficult and often challenging topic. To be prepared to provide answers that will help challenge the stereotypes and stigma that often are related to our topics and to help build a greater understanding for diversity.

What is the Human Library?

We have built a safe space for dialogue through personal conversation. A library of people ready to talk and share what they know and believe. We publish people for open and honest conversations. Where “people” are books and have been prepared to be read like an open book (published). They are ready to answer often difficult questions relating to issues that are often taboo or challenging to talk about, but necessary for people to get answers in order for them to better understand.

We typically and foremost publish people that represent a group in the community that have been exposed to stigma, stereotyping or prejudices. These are typically based on occupation, ethnicity, religious belief, gender, cultural background, health, social status, lifestyle or disability.

We also publish topics with heavy taboo including victims of incest, sexual abuse, domestic violence or parents that lost a child and other grief related topics.

In our library of human beings every book is unique and can chose their own title based on their experiences. Often books can even share topics or strongly connect with related issues they may have in common with other books but they are different in content, expression and even cover presentation. However one thing that all books have in common is what is expected of them in their role as a book of the Human Library.

To serve as a representative of your group, so that others may learn about life as/with/from... We do not give lectures or speeches. We do not have a presentation. We serve as an open book and it is up to the readers to ask us about our content. Naturally all books are encouraged to initiate the “reading” with a table of contents and a blurb. To give their readers an insight to the different chapters available and this always gets the conversation going.

What if I do not want to answer a question?

As with any good publication they have their limitations and typically we prepare and encourage our books to answer unwanted or off-topic questions with a polite: “Unfortunately those pages have not been published yet”. However it is the right of the book to end any session at any time for any reason and without giving reason to the reader, but simply saying I have to end the loan. Our team of librarians are in always in place to supervise the loans and it is extremely rare that



loans are not completed by the readers and returned to us in the same condition as it was given.

Where do we do it?

Human Library events take place at many different locations and in different formats. The classic setup is an event in a public library or similar where books are waiting in a book depot for readers to join the front desk and request a loan. Sometimes there is a little waiting time and this allows for the members of the book depot to get to know each other. Some topics may be in hot demand at one event and then at the next event there is less request. You can never tell at these events, how busy your topic will be. Typically the duration of loans/readings at up to thirty minutes.

We also host conference events organized as "Reading Hall" session with groups of readers sitting at tables. Every 25-30 minutes the books will end their conversation and move on to the next designated table to meet a new group of readers. The great part about this format is the dynamics where each book is guaranteed to meet two or three groups of readers during a session. And often the dynamics of the group conversations can be a little different than the one-on-one or when two share a publication.

Finally we visit High Schools, Colleges, Universities, Festivals and workplaces. Often books will stay in one room and then interested groups of readers will circulate to a new reading session every 40th minute.

In any and all matters it is the task of the librarians to be the caretakers of the books.

How do we do it?

In our classic setting we facilitate the loan through our librarian. They explain the rules of the HL and present the different topics we carry on our bookshelf to the readers. They then help readers find the topic they will gain most from meeting and setup the loan. When the book arrives at the counter/frontdesk, the librarian will introduce the parties and send you on your way.

Who are the readers?

Readers can be anyone above the age of 15 (may differ from country to country). We see people of all ages and backgrounds coming to the Human Library, but what they seem to have in common is that they have questions that they would like some answers too. Issues they want to better understand and they are prepared to come down and spend their time with you to learn about it. What you share is up to you, but it is your experiences on the topic that should form the foundation under your content.



Deciding on your content?

Now before being published it is important that each book has decided on the boundaries of the publication. No book is endless and there are always chapters that should be kept private and meet with a polite "I am sorry but that chapter has not been published yet in my book"..and thus avoiding to answer beyond the topic.

What are the rights of the book in the Human Library?

Well to start you always have the right to refuse a loan or interrupt a loan if the reader is not behaving in an appropriate manner or you do not feel comfortable with the situation. If you are a member of a Human Library Book Depot you may get invitations to events at a more regular interval and naturally, then you have the right not to be published and to turn down those invitations.

What are some of your responsibilities as a book?

Our books are there to provide readers with insight, experience and opinion. To answer their questions that will enable them to better understand not only your story but also the conditions for the group in society that you represent on the Human Library Book Shelf.

Getting ready for publication

It is our responsibility as your "publisher" that your content has been vetted and prepared for publication. Meaning we vet our books and help train and prepare them to become a resource to readers (editing). Once your content is in place and we have your cover and blurb in place and you feel ready to meet readers. Then we will begin inviting you to join the bookshelf at different events. If you become a member of an operational local Human Library Book Depot, then you will be invited to be published again and again.

Human Librarians: Caretakers and loan facilitators

Nothing happens without our amazing librarians to help facilitate the loans and more importantly to care for our "books". We prepare all of our librarians on the different aspects of being the cog in the middle of our library and this includes matching techniques, safety procedures and taking great care of our books collection and ensuring that everyone has the needed conditions for an optimal participation. If at any time you need something, talk to one of the librarians and they will always help you.

Thank you for your contribution.