Human Library Toolkit

What is a Human Library?
A Human Library is a way for people to reach out and connect with individuals in their community that they might not normally engage with. Visitors to a library have an opportunity during a planned event to borrow Human Books and to engage in conversation with the books. Human Libraries promote tolerance, celebrate differences and encourage understanding of people who come from varied cultural or lifestyle backgrounds.

What is a Human Book?
Human Books are volunteers who are willing to share their stories with others in a safe environment.

What is a Reader?
Readers check out Human Books. By doing so, they have the opportunity, during a planned event, to participate in one-on-one or small-group conversations with Human Books to ask questions and to learn about other’s life experiences or special interests.

About Us
Ontario Library Association first embraced the concept of a Human Library when OLA member Sophie Gorski submitted it as a project idea for the First Annual Larry Moore Challenge Award in early 2010. The concept itself was not new but was not widespread amongst OLA member libraries.

Libraries in our society are under a constant challenge to present programs and information in a way that is “new” and innovative, and in a manner that will attract the interest of the public. The Human Library program endeavours to do this by fostering meaningful dialogue between people who would normally not have the occasion to speak to each other.

The Check out a Human Book @ Your Library committee developed a toolkit for public, post-secondary and school libraries in Ontario by gathering best practices and encouraging libraries to participate in similar events. It is hoped that such projects will increase the visibility of libraries and strengthen community partnerships.
Libraries are excellent venues for holding such events as they are considered to be trusted and nonpartisan environments.

The purpose of this toolkit is to assist organizers in planning their own events. It is intended to give encouragement, support and advice to those wishing to take on the rewarding task of organizing a Human Library. As each event is unique organizers may need to adapt our suggestions to meet the demands of their individual event. Please keep in mind that this toolkit is a work in progress.

Committee Members
The volunteer members of the committee include the following individuals:

Sophie Gorski – Chair – Hamilton Public Library
Janet Kaufman – Co-Chair – University of Guelph
Marcia Aronson – Ottawa Public Library
Chantale Boileau – Orillia Public Library
Jan Dawson – Knowledge Ontario
Nancy Duncan – Richmond Hill Public Library
Krista Jorgensen – Georgina Public Libraries
Beckie MacDonald – Ontario Library Association
Greg Marshall – Thames Valley District School Board
Shelagh Paterson – Ontario Library Association
Sandra Quan – York Region District School Board
Ayoola Silvera – Toronto Public Library
Jackie Thompson – Woodstock Public Library
Andrea Tufts – Toronto District School Board
Merley Wheaton – St. Marys Public Library

Acknowledgements
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Thank you to Amanda Braun for creating our Logo and Brand.