

# How to host a human Library

Overview and samples from the Nelson Public Library  
Anne DeGrace, Adult Services, September 2018

## **Preamble:**

In a Human Library, the “books” are people—real people with a story to tell. And not just any story: the Human Library is a unique collection of books whose stories create new understandings between book and borrower. The Human Library project began in Copenhagen by a youth organization called Stop the Violence that wanted to create a safe place for conversation in order to combat prejudice and create bridges of understanding and empathy. The project has spread, and is now worldwide.

To host an official “Human Library” and use the name established by this group is to honour the intent: human library books are people who have experienced stigma or prejudice or felt misunderstood, and who have a story to tell that may have the power to create understanding and compassion between people. Some libraries choose to host “living libraries”, in which the books may reflect an occupation, unique experience, or adventure—which is great, too, but different from a Human Library.

Info and free registration for the Human Library, based in Denmark, can be found at <http://humanlibrary.org/>

## **The Nelson Public Library’s Human Library:**

Our Library held Human Libraries in 2017 and 2018. It’s a work-in-progress: we’ve made changes as we go based on feedback from our books and our borrowers. Here are the basics, followed by some examples of handouts and forms you can adapt to suit. We found that one of the biggest pieces in the process was (and still is) public education, both when it came to a call for books, and explaining the event to the public.

Over our two programs our collection of books has included titles such as Non-Binary Gender Queer, Alcoholic in Recovery, Living with Schizophrenia, Dyslexia in the Real World, Disabled Rights Advocate, Quaker Peace Activist, Living Organ Donor, From Riches to Rags, and Politician, among others. It goes without saying that these books are real people, and so creating a climate of respect is essential.

## **What our event looks like:**

- A collection of human books is available for checkout at a specific event.
- Borrowers sign up to check out the books that interest them for a 25-minute one-on-one conversation
- Books will talk to 3—4 different borrowers over the course of the event
- Borrowers have the books’ descriptors, as well as 3 “ice-breaker” questions
- There is a debrief for books after the event
- We also took some of our books to a grade 11 class at which groups of 3-4 students checked out a book

## **To prepare:**

- A call for Human Books via local media, posters, and letters to social and advocacy organizations
- One-on-one interviews with prospective books to learn their story and assess suitability
- Publicity for the event itself
- Preparation of support materials
- Book orientation evening

We found it useful to create a one-pager to give to anyone who was interested and to use as a backgrounder for media.



# HUMAN LIBRARY

## Don't Judge a Book by its Cover

**The Human Library** returns on Thursday, April 26 at 7pm.

**Curious? Read on!**

### 1. What is a Human Library?

The Human Library was created in Denmark by a youth organization that aimed to establish a safe, respectful conversational space between individuals who have been exposed to discrimination, stigma, or prejudice (the “books”) and interested members of the community. It has since become worldwide.

### 2. How does it work?

The Library will have a collection of human “books”—often people who have felt dismissed or judged—for the event. “Books” may be checked out for a 25-minute, one-on-one conversation up to 4 times during the evening. There will be suggested questions to get the ball rolling, and a code of conduct to keep things respectful.

### 3. Why a Human Library in Nelson?

Like any other community, Nelson is not immune to issues of preconception and bias. Many residents of Nelson feel misunderstood, judged, or dismissed. The Human Library aims to foster understanding and create bridges.

### 4. What sorts of books are in a Human Library?

Last year's collection included *Living with Schizophrenia*, *From Riches to Rags*, *Bi-Racial in Nelson*, *Non-binary Gender Queer*, *Alcoholic in Recovery*, *Good Grief*, *Adoption from Both Sides*, *Compulsive Overeater Turned Vegan*, *I Call Myself a Feminist*, *Quaker Peace Activist*, and *Living Organ Donor*. Other Human Libraries have offered titles such as *Transgendered*, *Paraplegic*, *Wiccan*, *Refugee*, and *Down's Syndrome*, among many others.

### 5. How do I become a book, and what's expected of me?

**Deadline for expressions of interest from potential “books” is Monday, April 2.** Once selected, you'll attend an orientation evening, where you'll meet other “books” and get to ask questions. On April 26 at 7pm, you'll be “checked out” by some interested, respectful people. We'll make comfy seating arrangements and have tea and cookies available. **It'll be a few hours of your time—and an unforgettable experience.**

### 6. How can I find out more?

Contact Anne at 505-5684 or [adegrace@nelson.ca](mailto:adegrace@nelson.ca)

Or fill out the form on the back and drop it off at the front desk.



connect

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For interested books, we had an “expression of interest” on the back on that one-pager.



# HUMAN LIBRARY

## At the Nelson Public Library

Thursday, April 26 at 7pm

I’m interested in becoming a **Human Book**. I understand that the aim of the Human Library is to change perceptions, bust myths, and increase understanding.

If I were a book, my title might be:

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---

I would describe my story this way (in a nutshell; you can expand on it later!):

---

---

---

---

---

Things I want people to know about me:

---

---

---

Assumptions I most want to correct:

---

---

Contact information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/email: \_\_\_\_\_

If selected to be a Human Book, I understand that:

- My name will be kept confidential
- I will have control over my book title and description
- I expect to converse with my borrowers, be respectful, and be treated with respect
- I may politely refuse to answer any question that makes me uncomfortable
- I will be expected to attend an orientation session one week prior to the event
- I will be a “Human Book” on Thursday, April 26, 7—9pm during “Human Library hours”, and will stay for a short debriefing session afterwards.

Questions! Contact Anne at 505-5684 or [adegrace@nelson.ca](mailto:adegrace@nelson.ca)

People who were selected to be books filled out and signed an agreement.



## Human Book Agreement

**Thank you for agreeing to be a human book! Please return this document by Friday, April 6.**

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ phone \_\_\_\_\_

Book title \_\_\_\_\_

**This document is to confirm that you are:**

- Available for an orientation session on Thursday, April 19 at 6:30pm at the Library yes\_\_ no\_\_
- Available to be a Human Book on Thursday, April 26 from 6:30 – 9:30pm Yes \_\_ No \_\_

**And that you understand the following:**

- I expect to converse with my borrowers about my topic
- I understand that I am not participating to convince, but to foster understanding
- I will participate in developing my book description and icebreaker questions
- I will respect borrower's questions and viewpoints
- I expect my story and viewpoints to be respected
- I am free to politely refuse to answer any question
- I am free to politely break off the loan at any time
- I am free to politely refuse to be "renewed" after the initial loan period is up
- I will be asked to complete an evaluation after my session
- I may be asked for permission to be photographed (and I am free to accept or refuse)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

### **Nelson Public Library**

602 Stanley Street

Nelson, BC

V1L 1N4

t. 250.352.6333

f. 250.354.1799

[www.nelsonlibrary.ca](http://www.nelsonlibrary.ca)

Once we had met with all of the prospective books and decided which were suitable we created a poster, press release, and PSA for the event. We also had a “book club book” (Street Outreach Practicum Student) who chatted with several people at once about her experiences. This was popular with people waiting for their checkout appointment.



# HUMAN LIBRARY

**Don't judge a book by its cover.**

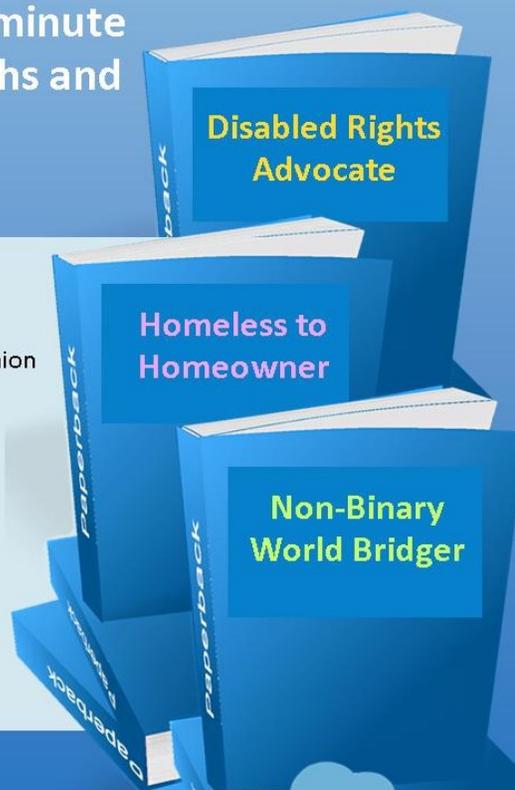
**Thursday, April 26 7 - 9pm**

at the Nelson Public Library

Check out a human “book” who has a story to tell for an illuminating 25-minute conversation aimed at busting myths and dispelling assumptions.

**Our collection includes:**

**Disabled Rights Advocate** (the wheelchair is secondary)  
**Dyslexia in the Real World:** living outside the box  
**Full Circle:** a journey through adoption, surrender, and reunion  
**Homeless to Homeowner** (and everything in between)  
**How Death has Changed My Life**  
**Intuitive** (and so are you)  
**Non-Binary World Bridger:** crossing social and gender lines  
**Politician:** your neighbor, not your enemy  
**Pornography Scholar Bares All:** pornography, feminism,  
And adult sex education  
**Queer Anara-Feminist**  
**Eyes Opened:** Street Outreach practicum student



**For more information contact:**

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**Here are sample press releases. Feel free to lift any verbiage you find useful.**

**Nelson Library's "Human Library" calls for books** (*note: this went out nearly 2 months prior to the event*)

In a Human Library, the "books" are people—real people with a story to tell. And not just any story: The Human Library is a unique collection of books whose stories create new understandings between book and borrower. The Nelson Public Library is looking for people interested in being "books" for the next Human Library on Thursday, April 28 at 7pm. The deadline for expressions of interest is Monday, April 2.

In a Human Library, borrowers check out Human Books for a 25-minute conversation. Folks who agree to be books get to choose their title and description, create some "ice-breaker" questions, and attend an orientation session with other books to ensure the experience is as comfortable as it is memorable.

"Human Books are people who have experienced stigma, felt dismissed, or been victims of prejudice," explains Library staffer Anne DeGrace. "Books could be from anywhere across the spectrum, because we all make judgments about people without really knowing their stories."

The Human Library began in Copenhagen by a youth organization that wanted to create a safe place for conversation in order to dispel myths and create bridges. The project has spread, and is now worldwide.

"Like any other community, Nelson is not immune to issues of preconception and bias," says DeGrace.

Last year's Human Library's collection of books for loan included titles such as *Living with Schizophrenia*, *From Riches to Rags*, *Bi-Racial in Nelson*, *Non-binary Gender Queer*, *Alcoholic in Recovery*, *Good Grief*, *Adoption from Both Sides*, *Compulsive Overeater Turned Vegan*, *I Call Myself a Feminist*, *Quaker Peace Activist*, and *Living Organ Donor*. The response from everyone involved was overwhelmingly positive.

Other Human Libraries have offered "books" with titles such as *Trans-gendered*, *Paraplegic*, *Wiccan*, *Refugee*, and *Down's Syndrome*, all with the aim of creating understanding.

The Library hopes to have a 12-book collection available for check-out the evening of April 28; each book may be checked out four times. There will also be a "book club" option where borrowers waiting for a book reservation can "drop in" to chat with a student from Selkirk College's Human Services program over tea and cookies.

People who think they would like to be a "book" or who simply have questions should call or email DeGrace at 505-5684 or [adegrace@nelson.ca](mailto:adegrace@nelson.ca). More information about the Human Library organization can be found at [humanlibrary.org](http://humanlibrary.org).

**Nelson Library's 2<sup>nd</sup> annual "Human Library" books chosen** (*went out 3 weeks prior to the event*)

Our community is made up of all sorts of people with all sorts of stories. At our best we are welcoming, compassionate, and understanding—and yet some of our neighbours have felt misunderstood, stigmatized, or judged.

The Nelson Public Library aims to bring everyone a little closer with its second "Human Library" on Thursday, April 26 from 7 to 9pm. The theme of the Human Library is "Don't judge a book by its cover."

"Readers" are invited to check out a "Human Book"—a living person with a story—for a one-on-one 25-minute conversation.

"Books" available for check-out include titles that address intolerance, discrimination, and misassumptions, such as "Disabled Rights Advocate (The Wheelchair is Secondary)"; "Dyslexia in the Real World"; "Homeless to Homeowner (and everything in between)"; "Non-binary World Bridger: Crossing Social and Gender lines", "Politician: Your Neighbour, Not Your Enemy"; and "Queer Anara-Feminist."

Folks who check out "Pornography Scholar Bares All" might discover a different perspective on a maligned subject; borrowing human books such as "Eyes Opened: Street Outreach Practicum Student" offers an opportunity to discover how front-line experience can change perceptions.

Some titles offer subjects we may want to know more about, such as "Intuitive (And So Are You)"; "Full Circle: A Journey Through Adoption, Surrender, and Reunion"; and "How Death Has Changed My Life".

The Human Library began in Copenhagen with a youth organization called Stop the Violence. The group wanted to create a safe place for conversation between individuals in order to dispel assumptions and create understanding. The project has spread, and is now worldwide.

"I've been so impressed inspired by the stories and the courage of the people who have come forward to be human books," says staff member and project coordinator Anne DeGrace. "Building on last year's Human Library, I'm certain it will be an unforgettable experience for everyone."

More information on the Nelson Library's Human Library and its "Books" can be found at [nelsonlibrary.ca](http://nelsonlibrary.ca).

A week before the event we held a mandatory orientation session that included a chance for the books to practice by checking each other out for 10-minute trial sessions. Here's the tips for books handout.



# HUMAN LIBRARY

Don't judge a book by its cover.

## Tips for books:

1. Please come by 6:30 at the latest (6:15 would be great)
2. Be willing to tell your story/personal experiences (it's not about any affiliations you may have, although of course you can mention them in context!)
3. Be willing to answer questions you feel comfortable answering (and politely refuse any you are not).
4. Be open to having a conversation: leave space for your borrower to comment or ask a new question.
5. Please speak quietly (so the sound level in the room stays reasonable)
6. Know that you can terminate a loan, refuse a renewal, or take a break if you feel you need to. Ask for help from staff/volunteers!
7. If young people are present, be conscious of this when answering questions.
8. Pause in the conversation? Refused to answer a question and wonder what to say next? Try:
  - Why did you choose me as a book?
  - Have you ever met anyone like me before?
  - do you have any other questions?
9. If necessary, feel comfortable politely saying: I'm here to have a conversation about my experience.  
I'm not here to:
  - Argue
  - Receive or give advice
  - Convince you or be convinced
10. Safety tip: You're all free agents, but please be advised: the Library is not responsible for conversations continued off-site.



Please stay for a post-event debrief (30 mins)

Remember to fill out an evaluation form (you can take it home and email or drop it off later); we really need your feedback!

We worked with the Books to write their story in a paragraph (all books approved their stories). Then we created a handout so people could read all about the books in advance of the event. Below is front and back.



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Thursday, April 26 7 - 9pm  
at the Nelson Public Library

Check out a human "book" who has a story to tell for an illuminating 25-minute conversation aimed at busting myths and dispelling assumptions.

**Our collection includes:**

- Disabled Rights Advocate (the wheelchair is secondary)
- Dyslexia in the Real World: living outside the box
- Full Circle: a journey through adoption, surrender, and reunion
- Homeless to Homeowner (and everything in between)
- How Death has Changed My Life
- Intuitive (and so are you)
- Non-Binary World Bridger: crossing social and gender lines
- Politician: your neighbor, not your enemy
- Pornography Scholar Bares All: pornography, feminism, and adult sex education
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Don't judge a book by its cover.

Join us for the Nelson Public Library's Human Library on Thursday, April 26 from 7 - 9pm, where you can check out a living person for a 25 -minute one-on-one conversation.

**Here's how it works:**

1. Read about the books available for checkout
2. At the event, fill out a "Human Library Library card," and request up to two human "books" to check out for 25 minutes. The books come with titles, descriptions, and questions you might like to ask to get the conversation started.
3. Fill out the evaluation form (or take one home with you to drop off later).

The Human Library was created in Denmark in 2000 by a youth organization called Stop the Violence. It aims to establish a safe, respectful conversational space between individuals who have been exposed to discrimination, stigma, or prejudice (the "books") and interested members of the community. Human Libraries now happen worldwide. Our Human Library also includes books with stories that offer opportunities for discovery.

**Please see inside for our catalogue of "books."**

**By becoming a Human Library borrower, I agree to:**

- Be open-minded
- Be kind and respectful
- Do not argue with the book
- Respect the book's right not to answer a question
- Respect the 25-minute time slot

Children under 15 must be accompanied by an adult.



### 1. Disabled Rights Advocate (the wheelchair is secondary)

When George was diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy in his 20s, the doctor estimated he would walk six more months; he walked 20 more years. The wheelchair that gets him around now hasn't held him back: he's raised two kids as a single father while working in the trades, built his own house, and travelled. He survived leukemia, has the upper hand on his bipolar disorder, and experienced homelessness. George is an adventurer, an outdoorsman, and a passionate advocate for people with disabilities. He founded the Clare Organization Representing Disabilities, which operates under the umbrella of Nova Scotia's League of Equal Opportunity. With his brother Clarendon he created Digby County's *Transport de Clare*, a non-profit door-to-door transportation service for seniors, persons with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged persons. He has served on the board of directors of the Atlantic divisions of the Canadian Paraplegic Association and the Muscular Dystrophy Association. "People who have a disability want no more and no less than anyone else," he says. "I see everyone as equal."

### 2. Dyslexia in the Real World: Living Outside the Box

Kelly sees things differently: he closes his eyes to listen and experiences incoming information as though he's watching a movie reel. Long before he was diagnosed with a severe learning disability, Kelly was bullied and belittled at school; subsequently, he learned workarounds to hide his disability. A series of sports-related head injuries didn't help. But his ingenuity has served him well, leading him to jobs as a rental car sales manager, restaurant owner, and even bank manager. Through his work with RBC he's worked with Hockey Canada on the Royal Bank Cup and the 2010 Winter Olympics; if there was an event to coordinate, Kelly was there. Despite this success, Kelly has had to battle with his own feelings of somehow being a fraud, and fear of being "found out," all the while sticking up for anyone who feels bullied or dismissed for being differently-abled.

### 3. Full circle: A journey through adoption, surrender, and reunion

When Suzanne was 14 years old she gave her newborn baby up for adoption. For her, things had come full circle: she had been adopted as a baby herself. From the time she was very young, Suzanne's adoptive parents had always been honest with her: she grew up knowing she was "chosen". It wasn't until she was much older that she realized that it also meant that she was "given up". When she finally found her biological roots, her birth mother had passed away, and the questions she'd longed to ask—"Who is my father? Why did you give me up?"—were now impossible to answer. Suzanne was determined to make it easy for her own daughter to find her, and that's exactly what happened. Both reunions were full of surprises and unexpected outcomes. And both brought Suzanne's journey back around full circle.

### 4. Homeless to Homeowner (and everything in between)

Growing up in a commune, Jeremy saw lots of drug use. Parenting was free-range; parties would go on for days. For Jeremy, this was normal; he had no idea someone might have just one beer. By the time he was 15, Jeremy was on the streets of Vancouver selling drugs and doing heroin. Over the next few years he would witness violence, get arrested, sleep anywhere. That he dodged the bullets of AIDS and Hepatitis C was a miracle. At one low point, he lived in a garden shed with a convicted killer. "People like me don't get sober," he says. He entered treatment in his late 20s; one of a small statistic from that program, he has remained sober for 11 years. Now back in the Kootenays, Jeremy has a house, a growing family, and a job that fits like a glove: as a Nelson Street Outreach worker, he brings a unique perspective and informed compassion to his daily interactions.

### 5. How Death has Changed My Life

Eleven years ago, Nancy had no idea that death would play such a prominent role in her life. She didn't think about her own dying, let alone the inconceivable possibility that she would lose one child, let alone two. It has been a heart-wrenching process, but she has learned that despite the pain, there is beauty to be found in the journey. She is grateful for every day, keenly aware of the importance of family, and cognizant that the heartbreak will never go away. She also learned that the end of life does not have to be scary. Over time, Nancy discovered that she wanted to assist others going through the dying process, and to, in any way possible, remove the fear of death—which is how she became a Death Doula. She sees being able to do this, and working within a society she help to launch, as part of the gift she has received as a result of her own losses.



### 11. Eyes Opened: Street Outreach practicum student

Book Club Book: Several people may check this book out at the same time.

Born in the Kootenays, raised in Alberta, Dakota's single-parent childhood was relatively comfortable. People remark on her empathy, suggesting she has a high degree of emotional intelligence. They were right: when Dakota enrolled in Selkirk College's Social Service Worker program, she knew she was in the right place. Now, Dakota is a practicum student with Nelson Street Outreach, where she engages with people whose lives are very different than her own, many of whom are struggling. But what really brought it home for Dakota was the experience of learning how close we all are to living without housing and that no matter how stable we believe ourselves to be, we are all vulnerable. For all the books she's read about societal issues, it's those day-to-day encounters she finds so humanizing. Dakota regularly sees misconceptions on both sides—how street people see Nelson as a community and vice versa—which has helped her develop her perspectives on what street culture is, and where she sees her future in the social services. **Dakota joins the Human Library as herself; she does not represent or speak for The Nelson Street Outreach or Nelson Community Services.**

### 6. Intuitive (and so are you)

Intuition informs Sarah's practice as a Registered Massage Therapist and Reiki Master. But she's cautious around it because of the attitudes and perceptions of those who are quick to dismiss it. So she'll ask a few questions first to gauge openness, or be sure to mention her university degree and training (in addition to being an RMT, Sarah has a BA in Psychology and is a Master Practitioner in Neuro Linguistic Programming). She wants no association with people who promote themselves as a psychic or healer to capitalize on vulnerability in order to profit. Sarah views herself as simply a conduit for information, helping people to find their own way forward. Over time, Sarah's work has shifted to Soul Readings and Soul Guided Counselling, facilitating self-understanding and direction. "I can be a bigger skeptic than anyone when it comes to my intuition," she says. "Yet I firmly believe we are all intuitive—sometimes without realizing we are."

### 7. Non-binary World Bridger: crossing social and gender lines

Colourful and multi-faceted, Nichola casts a wide web of artistic and professional interests. For much of their working life they have been self-employed, skilled in the craft of upholstery and marine canvas, which meant catering to a wealthy clientele. This made for a complex reality: in the workday, professional practice meant portraying one persona, while after hours their reality involved being a working-poor parent and involved community member. Personal expression through a love of hand made textiles is woven into Nichola's identification as non-binary: they do not identify as a particular gender, but embrace a more fluid understanding of what it is to be human. They also draw strength and compassion for others from their spiritual practice. Since moving to the Kootenays in 2012, Nichola has held many jobs, including the past three years working in front line social services, serving socially marginalized individuals and people with diverse abilities.

### 8. Politician: your neighbour, not your enemy

Over the nearly 19 years that Donna served on Nelson City Council she encountered lots of negative stereotypes about politicians. Those stereotypes exist everywhere, she says: a recent poll put politicians at the bottom of the "trusted" list (along with car salesmen and lawyers). "I find these stereotypes most disconcerting at the local level of government," says Donna. "Local politicians work a lot for little money, and they're our neighbours, just trying to make our community better." As frustrating as personal attacks on Baker Street and 2am phone calls about snow removal may have been, it's the negative assumptions that bother Donna: politicians are only in it for themselves; they don't keep their promises; you can't trust them; they just want to get re-elected. She says: "As a politician I worked hard to be open- and fair-minded, and it was hurtful to hear personal criticisms. You can disagree with me, but don't malign me. I'm human, like you."

### 9. Pornography Scholar Bares All: Pornography, Feminism, and Adult Sex Education.

Pornography can be viewed as a dirty little word, but UBC PhD candidate Ingrid's doctoral research considers the application of pornography via media technology as a kind of adult sex education. Her dissertation, she explains, "is a reading of the cumulative fan mail archive of legendary pornography star Nina Hartley. Personal letters can provide a window to the author's curiosities, desires, fantasies, knowledge, practices, and questions regarding sexuality. Selections from Hartley's fan archive articulate what adult sex education the viewers garnered from pornography regarding explicit representations of sexual practices, gender, and bodies." So how does a feminist square with such a topic? Is it high time pornography was viewed in a new, more informed light? And how has Ingrid's immersive course of study changed her own attitudes and assumptions?

### 10. Queer Anara-feminist

A small, rural, redneck town might not seem like the starting point for a self-proclaimed anarchist, but in a way it makes sense. "People should be empowered, even compelled, to change the rules", she says, which has an insurrectionary ring to it. When people are unburdened by state, economic, or any other forms of oppression, she explains, we are all the better for it. Gabrielle draws inspiration from Spanish anarchist organizations and the Zapatistas, the revolutionary Mexican civil resistance group that aims to lift the people—women and indigenous people in particular—from under the thumb of government. "My identity as a queer person and feminist informs and navigates my anarchist values," she says. In her day-to-day life, "I work for a world where everyone has the opportunity and resources to be free, safe and unexploited."

Borrowers were asked to fill out a “Human Library Card” that included a simple code of conduct and a place to record their reserved Books. These are from our first year, when checkouts were 20 minutes instead of 25 (25 is better). Borrowers could reserve just 2 books, but after that they could checkout out any that were available and that hadn’t been reserved by others.

**Nelson Public Library**  
**Human Library Project** 

**Human Library Library Card**

I agree to abide by the rules of the Nelson Public Library Human Library

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**By becoming a Human Library borrower, I agree to:** 

- Be open-minded
- Be kind and respectful
- Do not argue with the book
- Respect the book’s right not to answer a question
- Respect the 25-minute time slot

*Please fill out an evaluation form!*

**Nelson Public Library**  
**Human Library Project** 

**Maximum two checkouts per borrower:**

- 20 minute checkouts
- One renewal if there are no holds and the book agrees
- See reverse for code of conduct

**Book title:**

**Time:**

**Table:**

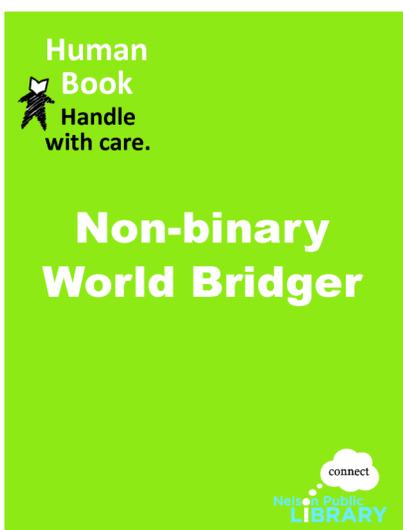
\_\_\_\_\_ 

**Book title:**

**Time:**

**Table:**

We created a map to help people find their books, which were located throughout the library, and signs in plexi stands for each table. We tried to make comfortable and friendly seating arrangements.



There were sticky labels for The books to wear, and for volunteers, all using the Human Library logo provided when we registered at [humanlibrary.org](http://humanlibrary.org).



Here are some samples of slips that borrowers got to bring with them when they checked out their book. It helped the conversation to have the description and questions to refer to.



### Disabled Rights Advocate (the wheelchair is secondary)

When George was diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy in his 20s, the doctor estimated he would walk six more months; he walked 20 more years. The wheelchair that gets him around now hasn't held him back: he's raised two kids as a single father while working in the trades, built his own house, and travelled. He survived leukemia, has the upper hand on his bipolar disorder, and experienced homelessness. George is an adventurer, an outdoorsman, and a passionate advocate for people with disabilities. He founded the Clare Organization Representing Disabilities, which operates under the umbrella of Nova Scotia's League of Equal Opportunity. With his brother Clarendon he created Digby County's Transport de Clare, a non-profit door-to-door transportation service for seniors, persons with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged persons. He has served on the board of directors of the Atlantic divisions of the Canadian Paraplegic Association and the Muscular Dystrophy Association. "People who have a disability want no more and no less than anyone else," says George. "I see everyone as equal."

#### 3 questions you may wish to ask:

1. How did you feel when you were first diagnosed with muscular dystrophy?
2. How was it raising kids with the challenges you faced?
3. How has your advocacy work changed the way you see things?

Thank you for borrowing a book in the Nelson Public Library's Human Library!

Please fill out an evaluation form before you leave.



### Dyslexia in the Real World: Living Outside the Box

Kelly sees things differently: he closes his eyes to listen and experiences incoming information as though he's watching a movie reel. Long before being diagnosed with a severe learning disability, Kelly was bullied and belittled at school; subsequently, he learned workarounds to hide his disability. A series of sports-related head injuries didn't help. But his ingenuity has served him well, leading him to jobs as a rental car sales manager, restaurant owner, and even bank manager. Through his work with RBC he's worked with Hockey Canada on the Royal Bank Cup and the 2010 Winter Olympics; if there was an event to coordinate, Kelly was there. Despite this success, Kelly has had to battle with his own feelings of somehow being a fraud and fear of being "found out," all the while sticking up for anyone who feels bullied or dismissed for being differently-abled.

#### 3 questions you may wish to ask:

1. How did you manage to hide your dyslexia for so long?
2. How have your head injuries affected you?
3. To what do you attribute your business success?

Thank you for borrowing a book in the Nelson Public Library's Human Library!

Please fill out an evaluation form before you leave.



### Full circle: A journey through adoption, surrender, and reunion

When Suzanne was 14 years old she gave her newborn baby up for adoption. For her, things had come full circle: she had been adopted as a baby herself. From the time she was very young, Suzanne's adoptive parents had always been honest with her: she grew up knowing she was "chosen". It wasn't until she was much older that she realized that it also meant that she was "given up". When she finally found her biological roots, her birth mother had passed away, and the questions she'd longed to ask—"Who is my father? Why did you give me up?"—were now impossible to answer. Suzanne was determined to make it easy for her own daughter to find her, and that's exactly what happened. Both reunions were full of surprises and unexpected outcomes. And both brought Suzanne's journey back around full circle.

#### 3 questions you may wish to ask:

1. How did the fact that you were adopted affect your decision to surrender your daughter for adoption?
2. In what ways is your life similar (or different) from those of your daughter and birth mother?
3. What did you get from the reunions with your daughter and your own birth family?

Thank you for borrowing a book in the Nelson Public Library's Human Library!

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### Homeless to Homeowner (and everything in between)

Growing up in a commune, Jeremy saw lots of drug use. Parenting was free-range; parties would go on for days. For Jeremy, this was normal; he had no idea someone might have just one beer. By the time he was 15, Jeremy was on the streets of Vancouver selling drugs and doing heroin. Over the next few years he would witness violence, get arrested, sleep anywhere. That he dodged the bullets of AIDS and Hepatitis C was a miracle. At one low point, he lived in a garden shed with a convicted killer. "People like me don't get sober. We don't survive," he says. He entered treatment in his late 20s; one of a small statistic from that program, he has remained sober for 11 years. Now back in the Kootenays, Jeremy has a house, a growing family, and a job that fits like a glove: as a Nelson Street Outreach worker, he brings a unique perspective and informed compassion to his daily interactions.

#### 3 questions you may wish to ask:

1. Was there a particular incident that made you decide to enter treatment?
2. Have you kept in touch with the kids you grew up with? Your cohorts in treatment? How have they fared?
3. When you encounter people in your work who are like you were, how do you feel?

Thank you for borrowing a book in the Nelson Public Library's Human Library!

Please fill out an evaluation form before you leave.



Borrowers and Books were asked to fill out an evaluation form. Future forms will include a question about how they heard about the event.



# HUMAN LIBRARY

Don't judge a book by its cover.

## “BORROWERS” EVALUATION

### Please tell us about you:

Why did you come to the Human Library?: \_\_\_\_\_

### Please tell us about your experience:

What book(s) did you borrow?: \_\_\_\_\_

Did you find the selection interesting? Please comment. \_\_\_\_\_

Were the librarians and volunteers helpful? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your most important experience in reading the books: \_\_\_\_\_

Did you learn something new? Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Did you find the Human Library a good way to challenges assumptions and prejudices? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

If no, why? \_\_\_\_\_

Has your experience today changed your views? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you return? \_\_\_\_\_ Recommend to others? \_\_\_\_\_

Feel free to elaborate and offer suggestions on the back of this form.

### Optional (but helpful!)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone and/or email \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU!**





# HUMAN LIBRARY

Don't judge a book by its cover.

## "BOOKS" EVALUATION

Name and book title: \_\_\_\_\_

Were your readers interested/respectful? Please describe any positive or negative experiences:

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How did you find the borrowers benefitted from reading you? \_\_\_\_\_

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How did you benefit from being read? \_\_\_\_\_

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How would you evaluate the support of the staff and volunteers?

Prior to the event? \_\_\_\_\_ At the event? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you recommend being a Human Book to others? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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What advice do you have for the next Human Library? \_\_\_\_\_

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Comments or feedback for organizers \_\_\_\_\_

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**THANK YOU!**

Feel free to elaborate on the back of this form.



In 2017 the event took place on a Saturday. Our books were in a dedicated room sitting at tables, and there was a morning session and then a new “collection” in the afternoon. We served a buffet lunch between the sessions for all the books.



In 2018 we held an evening event with more intimate seating throughout the library. We also took a selection of the Books to a local high school. There, 3—4 students each checked out one Book and then met with teachers afterwards to compare notes about what they had learned. Students were also asked to fill out an evaluation form tailored to that event. Here are some photos from the public event.



### **Some final notes:**

- The Human Library is a time-consuming endeavor, requiring, in our case, about 30—35 hours of staff time. Additionally, there were 4 volunteers at the actual event.
- Costs for the 2017 event included the catered buffet lunch and refreshments for borrowers and books to have during the sessions. We printed thank-you cards in-house.
- Costs for the 2018 event included gift cards to a local coffee shop, which were included in the thank-you cards. We also provided taxi transport for one of our books.
- In both cases we had a total of about 25 individuals checking out our books, with about 40 overall checkouts. At the school, 28 students were involved.

### **Here are some of the comments we received:**

#### **Books feedback:**

- Support of staff and volunteers: all said excellent
- The borrowers were very respectful and interested
- Borrowers benefitted by learning that no matter how dark things may become there is always a way out.
- Would recommend being a book because it gives you the opportunity to share an important aspect of your identity.
- Being “read” showed me how little I have really thought about my own gifts and abilities.
- Through my four “borrowers” I was at one time or another a shoulder, an interviewer (for the Star), and entertainer, and participant in a mutually enjoyable exchange.
- If it opens up the eyes of other people to see they can do what they want in life, that makes me feel good.

#### **Borrower feedback:**

- Expanded my thoughts
- The disabled person was a breath of fresh air
- The Books were well chosen because they knew their stories completely
- I was reminded to live my life with love and peace
- Learned about dyslexia; my book was incredibly honest
- Communication on a very personal level
- I learned that it is possible to transcend any tragedy
- I learned how dyslexia can create exceptional talents and skills
- I liked being able to engage with people I’d never otherwise meet

