

The Power of One on One

Human Libraries and the challenges
of antiracism work

Tanja Dreher and
Jemima Mowbray

Centre for Social
Justice and Inclusion



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BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

This monograph is the first comprehensive and independent analysis of Human Libraries (formerly Living Libraries) in Australia. ‘Human Libraries’ refers to an innovative social inclusion community initiative developed in Europe that is increasingly being adopted by public libraries across Australia, and some community groups and government agencies. The report provides an overview of Human Library practices and identifies key challenges for policymakers and practitioners. It also contributes to scholarly debates on anti-racism work and on the benefits and limits of cross-cultural contact or dialogue within that work.

‘Human Libraries Australia’ is a national strategy for connecting and strengthening local communities through one-on-one conversation between Living Books (generally people facing prejudice within a community) and Readers (members of the general public). ‘Human Libraries Australia’ is funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and actively supported by the Australian Library and Information Association. In this monograph we document the aims, history and key practices of Human Libraries in Australia, and provide discussion points for people involved. The emergence and development of Human Libraries is analysed with reference to ‘contact theory’ and the aim of addressing prejudice. We also analyse the politics and ethics of comfort and safety negotiated in cross-cultural storytelling.

Despite the increasing popularity of the Human Library strategy, to date there has been relatively little scholarly research on Human Libraries in Australia. Important academic research has been published by a number of scholars themselves closely involved with specific Living Library projects (Garbutt 2008, Kudo et al 2011). A number of insightful reflections by Living Library practitioners have been published, and Human Libraries Australia collects and makes available evaluations of particular projects. The research presented here takes a step back to analyse not only the practicalities of organising and promoting Human Libraries, but also to reflect on the underlying aims and assumptions. We identify key challenges including the dilemmas raised by the ‘library’ metaphor, debates over community ownership of the project and the complex process of managing safety, risk and discomfort in the Human Library project. We also draw on the established literature on cross-cultural dialogue and ‘contact’ in order to assess the aims and the impact of Human Libraries. While our research finds a strong ‘buzz’ and widespread enthusiasm for the Human Libraries project, we also suggest a need for critical reflection on key questions about the strategy and its implementation.

Note on terminology:

Throughout this report we refer to both ‘Living Libraries’ and the more current term ‘Human Libraries’. In Australia those involved in ‘Living Libraries’ adopted the new terminology ‘Human Libraries’ for the initiative in late 2010. This followed the renaming of the international ‘Living Libraries’ organisation to ‘Human Libraries’ as a result of a legal challenge to the organisation’s right to use the original name under international copyright legislation (see Chapter One). In this report we have chosen to refer also to ‘Living Libraries’, as this was the preferred name used by practitioners and participants while we were conducting our research.

Methodology

This monograph is based on research conducted by Tanja Dreher and Jemima Mowbray and focused on two case studies of well-established, regular Living Libraries in Lismore (the first Living Library in Australia) and Auburn (a culturally diverse area in Western Sydney). Our research employed a range of qualitative research methods, including interviews, participant observations, vox pops, analysis of media coverage and relevant policy, online searching and engagement with scholarly literature. The research was funded by an Early Career Researcher Grant awarded by the University of Technology, Sydney, and took place in 2009–2010. A list of interviewees and events observed is included as an Appendix.

Interviews with organisers and participants in Living Libraries were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The transcripts were shared with interviewees for their feedback and approval. Interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, lasting between 90 minutes and two hours. A total of 15 interviews were recorded with Living Library organisers and with volunteer Living Books in both Lismore and Auburn. During the research process we also engaged in numerous informal conversations with people involved with the Living Libraries studied, recording our notes and observations in a research diary. We also conducted a small number (8) of ‘vox pop’ interviews with Readers at Auburn Living Library. These short interviews were conducted directly after a ‘reading’ and were also recorded and transcribed.

Participant observation involved attending regular events, launches, meetings and other activities associated with Living Libraries in Sydney and Lismore during 2009–2010. Members of the research team attended Living Library sessions at Ryde and Lismore, as well as several sessions at Auburn Living Library. We also attended the launch of Ryde Living Library, a celebration event for volunteers at Auburn Living Library, the Living Library held at the University of Technology Sydney, and a ‘travelling’ session during which Auburn Living Library visited the NSW country town of Oberon. At Ryde, Lismore and Auburn Living Libraries we also took on the role of Readers, borrowing Living Books in order to experience the Living Library process first-hand. Our observations of each event were recorded in a research diary for later analysis.

During 2009 and 2010 we maintained an ongoing relationship with organisers at Auburn Living Library which involved regular communications, a number of informal meetings and consultations, and a collaborative presentation to the Local Government Association of Australia annual conference in June 2010. This relationship enabled regular discussion and feedback on the research.

Background research into the history and development of Living Libraries was also conducted, focusing on the history of the strategy, the development of the first Living Library in Australia and the subsequent spread of the model. As there is very little scholarly research that analyses Human Libraries, this background research was conducted primarily via conventional internet searching, and relied heavily on materials available via the international Living Libraries (now Human Libraries) website, and the Australian Living Libraries website (now Human Libraries Australia).

Research Framework

This research analyses Human Libraries as an innovative new antiracism strategy. The first Living Libraries began as community-led responses to local experiences of racism in the context of wider politics of fear and prejudice during the ‘war on terror’ both internationally – at the Roskilde Music Festival in Denmark, and in Australia – at Lismore in northern NSW. While the aims and activities of Living Libraries have diversified as the concept has been widely applied, our research focuses on the original aims of addressing prejudice and racism. We analyse the achievements and limitations of Human Libraries as an antiracism strategy, and reflect on the pros and cons of the shifting aims of Living Library projects.

The framework for analysis was developed with reference to the scholarly literature on antiracism strategies, and on the possibilities and limitations of contact theory and storytelling techniques in particular. Here we focus on critiques of existing antiracism strategies in order to identify the key challenges for innovation.

Theoretical threads: contact and storytelling

A number of seemingly common-sense values underpin the operation of Living Libraries, including the belief that contact between groups and individuals will reduce prejudice and stereotyping, and a belief that social conflict or fear of difference can be addressed through techniques of storytelling, dialogue or conversation. These assumptions are often taken for granted in the organisation of Living Libraries, but also in a wide range of community relations strategies such as cultural awareness workshops, interfaith dialogues and reconciliation circles. In a survey of contemporary antiracism strategies in Australia, Pedersen, Walker and Wise (2005) found that individual and interpersonal strategies were most common, with many based on the assumed value of contact and/or conversation across differences. Despite the popularity of these strategies, there is conflicting evidence as to their effectiveness. While it may seem self-evident that dialogue and intergroup mixing will lesson prejudice and build trust, there is evidence within the scholarly research to suggest that this is not always the case. Indeed, critics of the politics of intercultural dialogue and cross-cultural contact argue that the very prevalence of these strategies can in fact divert attention and energies from more challenging and structural approaches to shifting inequality.

As discussed by Rob Garbutt (2008), contact theory or the ‘contact hypothesis’ is one of the ‘theoretical threads’ woven into the aims and organisation of Living Libraries as first developed in Australia and internationally. Kazuhiro Kudo and his colleagues also used intergroup contact theory in order to analyse the Dokkyo Human Library that they organised within their own university in Tokyo (2011). Contact theory was pioneered in the USA during the 1950s by Gordon Allport who argued that intergroup contact could reduce prejudice if four key conditions were met:

- Equal group status within the situation
- Common goals
- Intergroup cooperation

-
- The support of authorities, law or custom

These criteria were supported by early post-World War II studies which showed that 'whites with the most contact with blacks during their military service often experienced a reduction in their prejudices' (Niele 2008: 413) and the rapid acceptance of black players on formerly all-white teams following the integration, or de-segregation, of professional baseball in the US. The hypothesis has been the subject of considerable research since, with variable results.

Thomas Pettigrew (1998) has surveyed the scholarly 'contact' research and identified a number of key problems:

- Instead of optimal contact reducing prejudice, it may be that prejudiced people simply avoid contact with outgroups. Pederson and Barlow (2008) also remind us that participants in prejudice reduction workshops typically self-select, and people who are unwilling to have their attitudes challenged are unlikely to engage. Where short-term attitudinal change has been achieved, participants have usually self-selected, demonstrating a pre-existing openness to change (Rodenburg and Huynh: 34, Case 2007, Pederson and Barlow 2008).
- The hypothesis does not explain how or why change happens
- Individual change effects cannot be generalised:
 - The changes do not necessarily generalise across situations. For example, white attitudes towards black soldiers improved due to WWII contact, but whites continued to favour racially segregated stores (Pettigrew 1998: 74).
 - The changes do not necessarily generalise from an individual member of an outgroup to the entire outgroup. There is very little evidence that positive effects from getting to know an outgroup member (interpersonal effects) could affect attitudes about the outgroup (intergroup effects) (Pettigrew 1998: 75) Hill and Augoustinos (2001: 246) also find a problem of 'typicality' in antiracism interventions, as 'positive' role models' from outgroups are not recognised as typical of the group.
 - Changed perceptions of one outgroup do not necessarily generalise to perceptions of other outgroups not involved in the contact. For example, an interfaith dialogue might shift perceptions of Muslim Australians but would not necessarily change attitudes towards Indigenous Australians.
- Researchers keep developing further criteria for optimal contact, rendering the theory less and less workable
 - The StepOne website explains that Allport's original four criteria are not enough, they must be underpinned by learning about outgroups that corrects negative views; positively reinforced behaviour modification that leads to attitude changes; generating affective ties such as friendship; and ingroup reappraisal of their existing norms and customs to be more inclusive of out-group worldviews (Pettigrew 1998 in StepOne online).

Pettigrew's overview of 'contact' research thus finds that the evidence to support the assumption that contact will reduce prejudice is actually limited. If contact does change attitudes, this occurs in very specific contexts and produces changes which are largely limited to the individual. A range of studies confirm the limited effectiveness of intergroup or interpersonal contact with little evidence that short-term changes in attitude are maintained over time (Pederson, Walker and Wise 2005, Hill and Augoustinos 2001).

Despite the widespread, 'common-sense' assumption that intergroup contact can challenge racism and stereotyping, the research actually suggests that any change in attitudes is unlikely to generalise beyond the individual, nor does the change in attitude necessarily lead to changes in behaviour.

Communicative contact

Central to both the operation and the appeal of Living Libraries is the focus on storytelling and one-on-one communication. The value of storytelling and personal experience for prejudice reduction is also highlighted by researchers who find that opportunities to discuss issues can be effective, whereas presentations and lectures are not (Pederson, Walker and Wise 2005: 25). Successful antiracism interventions need to involve the audience and provide opportunities for frank and open discussions (*ibid*: 27). Srivastava and Francis find that antiracism workshops typically involve a combination of the 'contact hypothesis' and the 'personal-is-political' strategy deployed by new social movements and popular education (2008: 282). This combination – and the belief in personal experience as a basis for broader social change underlying it – is evident in the emphasis on storytelling typical of Living Libraries (Garbutt 2008). Living Libraries, and indeed many antiracism strategies which focus on interpersonal encounter, are based on a belief in communicative contact, or a combination of contact theory and 'the connections that have been made between conversation and successful cosmopolitan societies' (Garbutt 2008: 270). The emphasis on communicative contact stands in contrast to strategies which aim to foster contact between different groups via a shared activity, such as projects which bring diverse young people together through motor mechanic skills workshops, for example (see VicHealth 2003), or strategies to encourage participation of diverse communities in volunteering activities. Such 'contact' projects focus on common goals and shared interests, in contrast to the emphasis on dialogue and storytelling typical of communicative contact fostered by Living Libraries.

There are a number of scholarly critiques of the emphasis on dialogue and storytelling in antiracism strategies (see Boler 1997, 2003, Jones 1991, 2001, Ho 2006, Dreher 2007). These critiques argue that storytelling or conversation often focuses on a desire for knowledge or reassurance among the relatively privileged instead of addressing deeper structures of discrimination or inequality. In particular, critics highlight the 'differences in relations of power between "tellers" and "listeners"' (Srivastava and Francis 2006: 276) in anti-oppression storytelling and intercultural dialogue which means that the experience can be deeply painful for those asked to recount experiences of marginalisation and discrimination. In analysing antiracism and antihomophobia workshops in Canada, Srivastava and Francis write, the strategies 'have exacted a heavy

toll on the tellers, reinforced the exclusionary notions of identity that underlie a racist culture, and had only a limited effect in fostering organisational change' (2006: 275).

Emerging research on 'listening' provides a theoretical thread to broaden the analysis of Living Libraries (Garbutt 2008: 275) and address some of the concerns at the dilemmas of 'storytelling' for addressing racism. Previous research by Tanja Dreher into antiracism strategies after September 11, 2001, found a need for institutions and individuals beyond communities targeted by racism to 'develop an ethics of listening and a commitment to hearing uncomfortable truths' (2007: 35), what Alison Jones has previously described as developing 'ears that can hear' (1999). Crucially, this emphasis on 'listening' in strategies of dialogue and storytelling shifts attention and responsibility from those in marginalised positions (Garbutt 2008: 275) and on to those in more privileged positions (Dreher 2009, 2010). For this reason our research sought to analyse the dynamics and politics of 'listening' in Living Libraries, in order to determine the extent to which this innovative strategy did indeed facilitate a shift in the relations of responsibility, safety and risk that characterise much communicative contact.

The existing scholarly research thus identifies a number of challenges to the 'theoretical threads' underpinning Living Library strategies, identified here as the 'contact hypothesis' and a focus on 'storytelling' which combine in a belief in the effectiveness of communicative contact for challenging prejudice. While these strategies are widespread, there is also a concern that the impacts may in fact be limited and, some argue, may divert attention from more far-reaching strategies. This report analyses the development of Human Libraries in Australia through the framework of 'communicative contact', discussing the extent to which Living Library projects do serve to combat prejudice, to what extent the criticisms of contact theory and/or storytelling approaches might apply to Human Libraries, and whether a more explicit focus on 'listening' or the role of 'readers' might indeed address some of these critiques.

Living Libraries thus offered a unique and important case study to address the following questions in our research:

- How do Living Libraries work?
- To what extent do Living Libraries avoid some of the scholarly critiques of more conventional strategies to address racism and reduce prejudice?
- To what extent might those scholarly criticisms hold in the case of Living Libraries?
- What is the contribution of Living Libraries to contemporary antiracism work?

The monograph begins in Chapter One with an overview of the Living Library concept, its history and applications. Chapter Two examines the diverse aims of Human Library projects in Australia as the concept has been taken up in a range of settings and by a range of communities and organisations. In Chapter Three we focus on the organisation of Human Libraries, including difficult questions about the selection and training of 'Living Books'. Chapter Four discusses the ways in which the comfort and safety of participants are managed in Living Libraries so as to create a unique space in which Readers and Living Books are enabled to take risks and move 'out of their comfort zones'

within an overall structure designed to ensure safety. The final Chapter Five examines the impact of Human Libraries in relation to the established literature on ‘contact theory’ and cross-cultural dialogue. The existing scholarship suggests a need to be cautious and realistic in evaluating the impact of the Human Library strategy as a means to address prejudice or racism. The Conclusion highlights the key discussion questions for policymakers and practitioners that have emerged from this research.

'THERE'S A REAL BUZZ': WHAT ARE HUMAN LIBRARIES?

It's an opportunity for you to share with someone who is curious or has questions but wouldn't ever feel able to ask you. Or they don't know you and so therefore can't ask. And it's an opportunity for you to actually just share who you are in the service of understanding. In the hope that by meeting someone, through a conversation – it's about relationship building across lives of difference. (Shauna MacIntyre, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

The Australian Human Libraries' network website informs visitors that a Human Library is an innovative, community-based initiative, which aims to bring people together in one-to-one conversation, to encourage understanding, challenge negative stereotypes and reduce prejudice. (Human Libraries Australia n.d. A)

Originally developed overseas, the Living Library concept has emerged over the past few years in Australia as a popular strategy for challenging prejudice and promoting 'social inclusion'. A wide range of organisers including local and state public libraries and health services, universities, and community activists and organisations have adopted the idea.

At a Human Library event individuals are asked to act as a Living Book and enter into conversation with a Reader – presumed to be an ordinary member of the general public. Living Books are, in general, selected on the basis that they represent a group which frequently faces prejudice or discrimination within the community. The informal conversation between Book and Reader takes place in a safe, comfortable space, and within a limited period of time. Readers and Living Books are free to ask questions of each other, and share as much or as little as they like about themselves. Librarians (or organisers) are on hand to facilitate each Reading. They handle the logistics behind interactions, booking a time for the Reading and introducing Book to Reader. They also act as unobtrusive yet active observers of the encounter – ensuring that both Book and Reader are comfortable during their interaction. At every Human Library event there are a range of Living Books available for borrowing, representing a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, ages, genders, occupations, and life experiences.

To explain the concept of the Human Library to those who have never heard of it, organisers draw on people's familiarity with regular libraries. In promotional materials, media reportage, and at the events themselves, the Human Library is offered up as a 'twist' on the traditional concept of a library. It is just like a regular library, but 'the books are people', 'you borrow a person, not a book!' The metaphor of the 'library' is playfully engaged by organisers to translate to the wider public the project's more serious aims of challenging stereotypes and building social cohesion. Almost every Human Library, for example, employs the familiar maxim 'don't judge a book by its cover' as its tagline. Continuing the metaphor, Living Books are asked to write themselves a blurb and suggested title for the event catalogue.

Organisers stress that the Living Library concept is one that is concrete, simple and affordable. The Human Library website's description of the concept emphasises: 'it is a 'keep it simple', 'no-nonsense' contribution to social cohesion in multicultural societies'

(Human Library.Org n.d. A). Simplicity refers not only to the relatively straightforward logistics required to realise the concept, but also to the fact that the main principle underlying the concept is also simple – that is, that personal contact has the power to challenge prejudices and address discrimination. Human Libraries aim to create a transformative space of dialogue and interaction and offer an opportunity to bring together people who might never otherwise come into contact (Human Library.Org n.d. A). In providing a clear, formal structure for personal – and potentially intimate – conversations they hope to facilitate the broaching of ‘taboo’ or uncomfortable topics that people might not otherwise have the courage to raise and discuss. The main idea behind the concept is that personal contact helps individuals ‘breakdown barriers, see the human in the ‘other’, and realise that a stereotype never does justice to a person’ (Living Libraries Australia Resources Kit n.d., p.3).

Beginnings

International

The very first Living Library was held at a music festival in 2000, organised by a peer-led Danish youth organisation, ‘Stop the Violence’. ‘Stop the Violence’ was established in 1993 in Copenhagen to address issues of racism in the context of the widespread perception in Denmark that racist violence, especially among young people, was increasing (The Stop the Violence Movement in Denmark n.d.). Initially started by a group of 5 friends in direct response to the violent stabbing of a mutual friend, the group quickly expanded. By 1995 membership had grown to around 7,000 members across the country, and within another few years stood at 30,000 (The Stop the Violence Movement in Denmark n.d.). Their anti-violence and antiracism activism involved organising music concerts, delivering public lectures, running youth peer-group sessions in high schools, and producing materials to be distributed through schools.

The Living Library project was an extension of this activism. ‘Stop the Violence’ came up with the idea when invited by the Roskilde music festival organisers in 2000 to run activities at the festival. The Living Library idea aimed to involve young people in a way that would literally bring them face to face with their prejudices. Or as Roni Abergel, one of the original organisers, explained: ‘Instead of talking about it, [you] simply meet it.’ (Abergel et al. 2005, p.9)

At this first event there were some 75 Living Books available to be read by a potential Readership in the thousands. As with later events, the first-ever Living Library included a dedicated space for the library (built by the organisers themselves for the event), a catalogue of Books for people to choose from, and librarians (organisers) facilitating borrowing and ensuring the safety and comfort of Books and Readers. There was even a Dictionary (a translator) who accompanied Books to assist with interpretation. The response of festival-goers was overwhelmingly enthusiastic:

It was two hours into the festival before the first reader entered the Library; however once the readers started coming, the rush did not stop for four days, and the most popular Books were constantly out. (Abergel et al. 2005, p.17)

Following on from the success of the very first Living Library, another event was held the next year at the Sziget music festival in Hungary. Impressed by the concept and the success of these two early events, the Nordic Ministers Council invited organisers to hold a Living Library at the Council's 'Youth Summit' in Norway in 2002. Since then the Living Library concept has continued to develop and expand its reach. By 2010 Living Libraries were being held as one-off events or on a regular basis in over 31 countries (Human Library.Org n.d. B). The Human Libraries organisation website (<http://humanlibrary.org>) lists over 120 staged Living Libraries events between 2000 and the beginning of 2009 (Human Library.Org 2009).



Left: The very first Living Library held at the Roskilde Music Festival in 2000. Source: www.humanlibrary.org Right: Book and Reader meet for a friendly, informal 'reading', Roskilde Festival 2000. Source: www.humanlibrary.org

Australia

Publicity around the early international Living Libraries helped bring the concept to the attention of community activists as well as public librarians in Australia. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2005 reporting on a Living Library in the Netherlands was followed in 2006 by an interview segment with Books and Readers from the Malmo Living Library, Sweden on Andrew Denton's *Enough Rope*, which aired on ABC TV. The Denton interview is now frequently cited by the various organisers of Living Library projects in Australia as being their introduction to the concept.

The first Living Library event in Australia was held in Lismore. Sabina Baltruweit was a key activist involved in organising the Library after being inspired by the 2005 article in The *Sydney Morning Herald*. Organising initially through her own personal networks she set up a community committee to get the project off the ground. When approached, Lismore Council offered to provide institutional support – the Council Community Development Officer began organising alongside, a venue was provided (the local library), and a small amount of financial resources were committed to the project.

Lismore's first Living Library event was held in November 2006. Planned as a one-off event, the response from both Living Books and Readers was so positive that organisers

decided to run the Living Library regularly. Lismore Living Library became the first Living Library in the world to be established on a permanent basis (Human Library.Org n.d. C). The Library continues to host monthly Reading sessions. The original community advisory committee was involved in the organising of the Lismore Living Library until March 2008 when the committee officially handed the project on to the Lismore City Library to manage (Living Libraries Australia Resources Kit, n.d., p.4).

Living Libraries To Human Libraries

In October 2010, the name of the national project was changed from Living Libraries Australia to Human Libraries Australia in response to a name change by the international organisation. The name change at the international organisation was prompted by contact from a US-based company selling educational resources under the registered name, Living Libraries. The US company informed Living Library organisers in Denmark that they were contravening copyright and should stop using the name (Sword 2011). As most Living Library organisations internationally are community-based, they did not have the resources to mount a legal battle or to pay the US company for the use of the name. Living Library organisers in Australia have followed suit, despite some disappointment as 'Human Library doesn't quite have the same ring to it' (Sword 2011).

Formalising and institutionalising the concept

In Denmark and in Australia the Living Library started as a small-scale project that was driven by local community activists. In both instances, however, following on from the early success of the events, the Living Library concept received significant institutional support. This came in the form of formal endorsement, provision of non-financial resources, and funding from public bodies and organisations.



Left: Human Libraries Australia website. Source: www.humanlibrary.org Right: International Human Libraries Organisation website. Source: www.humanlibrary.org

International context

Following on from the success of the first Living Library events in Europe, the Council of Europe formally endorsed the concept in 2003. The Council of Europe's European Youth Centre in Budapest (EYCB) adopted the methodology as part of their human rights education program at the Centre, and were host to three of the four Living Libraries that took place at the Sziget Festival (a very popular music festival) in Hungary

from 2001 – 2004 (Human Library.Org n.d. D). ‘Living Libraries’ were included as a ‘primary instrument’ within The Council of Europe’s 2006 – 7 Youth Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation: the ‘All Different – All Equal’ campaign. This involved the training of European youth activists in how to organise and run a Living Library within antiracism campaigning. Funds were provided by the Council for hosting local projects to a number of youth organisations across Europe (Living Library Study Visit 2006, European Youth Foundation 2007). The European Commissions Directorate General for Freedom, Security and Justice also recommended the Living Libraries as a methodology to local policy makers and practitioners in their 2007 Handbook on Integration.

Ronni Abergel, one of the original Danish organisers, cites the support from the Nordic Ministers Council and the youth directorate of the Council of Europe as crucial in the development and spread of the concept. Without their support, he writes, ‘this idea might never have had the chance to reach a global audience’ (Human Library.Org n.d. C).

Funding received from the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Youth Committee supported the early work of the international Human Library organisation network (previously the Living Library organisation) and the development and launch of their website. In addition to the website, the international Human Library organisation now also runs an active Twitter account (@TheHumanLibrary), launched in December of 2008.

As the Living Library has developed and received broad institutional support and funding, the organisation and networking behind the concept, if not the concept itself, has become increasingly formalised. The Human Library website now asks all potential organisers to contact the international organisation:

We will then send you an Event Application Form to be filled out. When your event has been processed you will receive a letter confirming the terms for your use of the artwork, methodology and concept. This is to ensure quality in events, synergy in the brand and to avoid political or commercial abuse of the concept. (Human Library.Org n.d. E)



Left: Promotional poster for the first Human Library event at Limassol, Cypress, 29 April 2009. Source: www.humanlibrary.org. Centre: Promotional poster for the first Human Library event at Ljubljana, Slovenia, 26 May 2007. Source: www.humanlibrary.org. Right: Promotional poster for the Human Library event at the King’s Garden in Copenhagen. Source: www.humanlibrary.org.

Australian context

The Living Library concept in Australia, largely because of the early and continued success of the Lismore Living Library project, has received formal recognition, support and funding from local councils, and the State and Federal governments.

In 2007 Lismore's Living Library was presented with the Government Award at the National Multicultural Marketing Awards (Real lives become an open book 2007). In the same year the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) awarded Lismore Living Library organisers a major community grant through the Diverse Australia Program (<http://www.harmony.gov.au>) to develop their National Living Library Strategy over three years. Shauna McIntyre, Community Development Officer for Lismore City Council and a key organiser in the original Lismore Living Library project, was funded to nationally co-ordinate the project.

There have been two main outcomes from the funded National Living Library Strategy project. The first is the establishment of the Human Libraries Australia network (HLA) – a working partnership between the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and the Lismore City Council. The second outcome from the project is the development and launch of resources including an instructional DVD and the HLA website, which aims to create a forum for Human Library organisers across Australia to network and share information. The website, launched in September 2008, provides information to the public about the Human Library concept, shares news and updates about Human Library events across Australia, and offers downloadable resources for those wanting to set up their own Human Library (Human Libraries Australia n.d. B). A small number of targeted individual Living Library projects were funded through the project, including the City of Melville's Indigenous Living Library Book Project 2009 (City of Melville's Indigenous Living Library Evaluation Report 2009, p.5).

The institutionalising of the concept – its endorsement, promotion and ultimate adoption by national and international governmental bodies – has allowed the Living Library concept to reach a much broader audience than would have otherwise been possible. Some community activists and organisers, however, hold concerns that institutionalising the Living Library has entailed a general shift from being a community-owned to a primarily council-driven initiative which can lead to a 'watering' down of the overall projects' aims and ultimately its effectiveness. These concerns are discussed further in the 'Key Challenges' section below.

Organisers

A wide range of individuals, groups and institutional and governmental actors has now staged Living Library events in Australia. These have included:

- Community activists, writers and artists, and local community groups; Lismore Living Library began its life as a grass-roots community initiative. Driven initially by an individual community activist, she was quick to link in with other local activists and advocates to establish an organising committee for the project.

-
- NGOs and advocacy groups;
Alzheimers Australia WA runs a monthly dementia themed Living Library at their Library in Shenton Park, Western Australia as well as an annual event for Dementia Awareness Week.
 - Universities;
At the University of Western Sydney a Living Library event was organised and staged as part of a student project through the university's Social Justice and Social Change Research Program in 2008.
 - Health services and public hospitals;
Since 2008 Western Sydney Area Health Service and Auburn Hospital along with Auburn Council have jointly co-ordinated the monthly Auburn Living Library. Sessions have also been held at Auburn Hospital Library for staff and medical students.
 - Local councils;
Wollongong City Council ran a pilot Living Library project through 2008. As well as a launch event at the Central library, Living Library events were staged at Dapto Library and three high schools in the local area (Bulli and Woonona High School and Holy Spirit College, Bellambi). A number of Living Library events were held throughout 2009, and continue on a 'special events' basis.
 - State and federal government departments
The Western Australia Department of Health ran a mental health themed Living Library event at four venues during Mental Health week in October 2008. This was followed up again in 2009, with similar plans on track for 2010.

Groups and institutions can be involved in projects through partnership and/or sponsorship relationships. Human Libraries Australia, for example, has engaged a number of different peak body community and professional associations to play a consultative role to the network via its National Steering Committee. The committee is made up of representatives from the Federation of Ethnic Communities Australia, Local Government Managers Australia, Country Women's Association of Australia, as well as various community representatives. The Federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), though not directly involved in organising an individual Human Library project/s, has played an instrumental role in spreading the model, especially within the local government setting (i.e. at local council public libraries), through their substantial seed funding grant for HLA.

Key Challenges

Our research with Living Libraries in Australia has identified a number of key challenges around the concept and the sustainability of the Living Library methodology.

Sustainability

I am concerned that it will die and that would be a shame (John, Living Book, Lismore Living Library)

It's always a challenge to be able to sustain the program (Lucy, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Interviewees consistently listed sustainability as one of the most pressing challenges for Human Libraries. Living Books in Lismore expressed concern that 'the gloss wears off' and the project might be losing momentum or losing 'the buzz'. Books and organisers agree that Living Libraries are 'a great idea', yet the challenge is to 'keep it going'. An organiser at Auburn Living Library felt 'burnt out' and concerned that the project needed new energy.

Organisers involved in establishing Living Libraries had learned that 'it's harder work than I ever thought it would be', 'labour-intensive' and requires 'a lot of organisational work'. However organisers at Auburn and Lismore did feel that the workload became more manageable as the project became more established and routines were set in place, to the point that organisers could confidently claim that now at Lismore 'it just happens and it just keeps on rolling'. In general, Living Library organisers felt that Living Libraries required relatively few resources beyond staff time, yet better resourcing would contribute to the sustainability of Human Library projects. Some Living Books also described their participation as hard work, which can be stressful, tiring and tedious at times. Overall, people involved in Human Libraries described it as active, hard work that could be draining but also very fulfilling.

The widespread concern for the sustainability of Human Libraries and the amount of work required is influenced by the heavy reliance on volunteer labour. Reflecting on the success of the original Living Library in Lismore, organisers identified the need for 'committed doers' and considerable volunteer contribution. As such, organisers and Living Books argue that volunteer contributions must be recognised as a crucial contribution to the functioning and sustainability of Living Libraries. Living Books in Auburn described their participation as 'giving back to the community', 'contributing' to their local community, and providing education. Living Books need to fit their Human Library activities around paid work and other commitments.

In response, Living Library organisers at Auburn were highly conscious of the need to recognise volunteer contributions, 'we want to celebrate and acknowledge their involvement and their participation'. All Living Books at Auburn Living Library are formally registered through the Local Council's Volunteering Register, and their hours are recorded. In 2009 Auburn Library held an end-of-year event at which Living Books and others involved with the Living Library were issued with certificates of appreciation and invited to a light lunch to celebrate a successful year.

Even as volunteers the Council recognised the contribution made by Auburn Library, and they've even given us certificates. It's symbolic satisfaction. Because the various volunteers, they are involved in other activities, and this shows that the Living Library is accepted as one of the links of the community. (Sri Bhagavadas, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

Recognition of volunteers is one strategy for ensuring sustainability and for managing expectations in Living Library projects. These challenges are discussed in greater detail below.

Managing expectations

The combination of the excitement or ‘buzz’ generated by the Living Library concept, and ongoing concerns about the sustainability of actual Human Library projects means that many expectations are raised which require careful management. For some interviewees at Auburn Living Library, the project had not yet met expectations: it had ‘a long way to go yet’, ‘we still haven’t fully harnessed its potential’. Several Living Books felt that the events were sometimes disappointing. One in particular said that the Living Library was ‘still too slow’ and ‘there’s not enough [Readers], we need more’. A Reader had expected that there would be more young people involved; younger books and that overall the Living Library would be more interesting.

Desmond Dyer (Uncle Des) on the other hand said that Auburn Living Library had exceeded his expectations, and he was achieving his goal. Organisers involved with the Launch of Lismore Living Library also described the event as exceeding their expectations: ‘it was a surprise what a wonderful event it was, and how many people, it was just this buzz of excitement: ’

It’s hard to communicate what a buzz this was on the day. In twenty years in social work, I had never been involved in a project that was so extraordinary. (Shauna, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

People involved with Lismore Living Library were particularly focused on managing the expectations of Living Books, and the danger that volunteers might feel ‘left on the shelf’.

Human Library projects in Australia have generally generated more interest from potential Books than from potential Readers. Organisers have found it relatively easy to recruit volunteer Living Books, but attracting readers remains a constant challenge (discussed in Chapter Three). One possible strategy to address this challenge is to limit the number of Living Books invited to participate at any particular Human Library event. This then raises the subsequent challenge of managing disappointment among people who volunteer as Living Books:

The books feel they’re being neglected and we now come to the situation where we only invite certain groups of books. Because there were all these Books hanging around outside and we only had a few Readers in here and so it was very counterproductive. (John, Living Book, Lismore Living Library)

While most interviewees expressed some concern that Living Books might be easily disappointed at a lack of interest from Readers, a Living Book, who had recently joined Auburn Living Library, felt that the training has prepared her for this possibility and ‘it’s OK if you don’t get borrowed’. At some Living Libraries, Books are encouraged to borrow each other, particularly if there is a lack of Readers.

Nevertheless, managing expectations and the potential lack of Readers remains a focus of concern at all Living Libraries, including at the successful, ongoing projects in Auburn and Lismore. Living Books often say: ‘we need more people’ while organisers worry that: ‘it’s awkward when you don’t have enough readers’.

I'm always very aware that people are giving up their time to do this, and you don't want someone sitting around for four hours with nothing to do. People then feel like maybe their topic isn't good enough ...
(Mary, Organiser, Auburn Living Library)

While people involved with the Lismore Living Library Launch were surprised at the large turnout, organisers of subsequent Living Libraries in various suburbs of Sydney describe being a little disappointed that the numbers of Readers were smaller than they had at first envisaged. As Auburn Living Library has developed, Organiser Linda Boustani has come to believe that working at a small and relatively discrete scale is in fact appropriate to the conversational style of the Living Library. Despite the common desire to attract more Readers, several interviewees were wary about actively recruiting. A Reader at Auburn Living Library who had been actively recruited felt that the Book did not meet his expectations either in terms of relevance or interest, and an organiser said:

Sometimes I get a bit frustrated because it feels a bit forced, and the concept isn't about forcing people – like having to get the numbers in. But if only one or two people turn up, that's not satisfying for the book either. So you have to structure it a bit more. (Mary, Organiser, Auburn Living Library)

Explaining the Concept

Underlying some of the difficulties in recruiting for Human Libraries is the unexpected challenge of explaining or communicating the concept itself. Living Books often explain that they were at first unclear about what exactly the project entailed, or what would be expected of them. For most people involved in Living Libraries, it 'takes a while to get your head around it'.

Many organisers themselves struggled to fully understand the concept until they experienced a Living Library 'in action'. During our research we met with organisers of Ryde Living Library on a visit to Auburn Library in order to see first hand how it works. Similarly, Lismore Living Library received regular visits and requests for advice from others interested in establishing a Living Library. It is for this reason that organisers at Lismore saw a need to develop instructional materials for others:

Until I saw it in practice it was really hard to explain to people what the Living Library was about. Seeing it in practice really enabled me to speak much more confidently, using examples. Which is why I thought we need a video, a DVD. (Shauna, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Books and organisers also report that Readers are often unsure of what a Living Library is and what might be expected of them. Interviewees said that Readers can be 'unsure', 'not knowing what to expect' and 'feeling their way'.

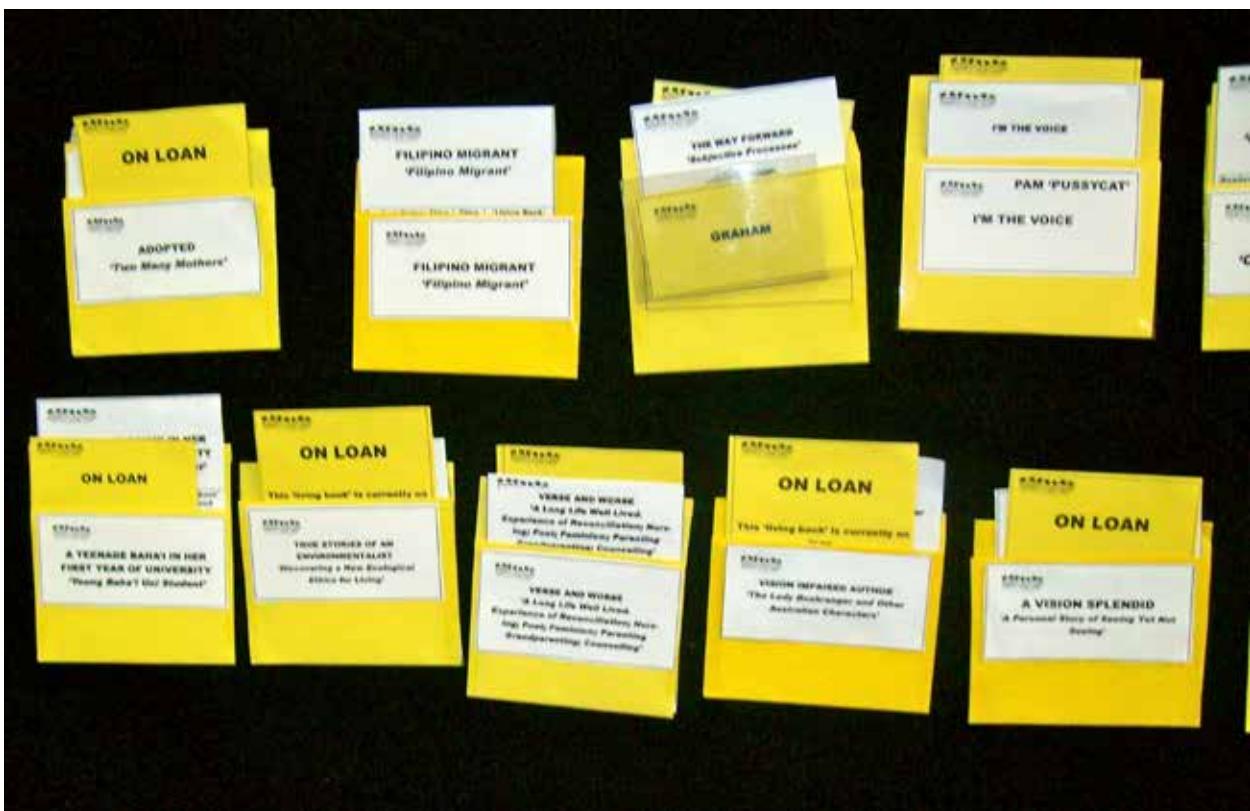
Implications of the 'library' analogy and format

There is no doubt that the metaphor of a 'library' is very useful in promoting Living Library projects and communicating some of the expectations and benefits. An organiser described the analogy of books as 'powerful', both to help people understand the project

and to give the Living Book a useful structure to manage interactions. It has also proved very useful for organisers trained in conventional library processes to develop procedures for organising Living Libraries:

I just had to stop thinking of them as people and set up a system as you would a new library. So we developed catalogue cards, loaning systems, dust jackets and from that the Living Books became a part of it but you just had to take a step back to think of the management of it, the organisational part of it. (Lucy, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

The rapid take up of the library metaphor has had several ramifications, not least due to the significant role of the Australian Library and Information Association in the spread of Human Libraries in Australia. The most common concern expressed by interviewees is that over-reliance on the trope of books, catalogues, libraries and readers can dehumanise participants. Some also see the metaphor as contributing to the institutionalisation of Living Libraries within public libraries, 'it's called a Library, but



The card catalogue for 'Books' at the Lismore Living Library event, 2 October 2009. Photo: Tanja Dreher

it's actually a people's project. It's not a library project. It's a people's project for people'.

Whilst the concept of Living Library and Living Books is great, it can be a bit of a trap letting yourself be taken over and run by a traditional library... It means that we're stuck with their ways of thinking. They catalogue us, they stamp us, they turn us into statistics. (Gordon, Living Book, Lismore Living Library)

Organisers at Auburn Living Library described the challenge of maintaining anonymity for Books without reducing people to numbers, and a reminder that ‘this project is entirely people-based, that means you’re dealing with people’s feelings, you’re dealing with people’s egos’.

The image of a ‘library’ also creates specific expectations on Books and Readers that can be difficult to manage. Chiu Poon, a Living Book at Auburn, explained that Readers might be confused and unsure of what they should do as ‘we’re labelled as books but we are unlike books because we are living people’. Others who volunteer as Living Books felt that there was some pressure or expectation to be authoritative, along the lines of a reference book. Living Books at Auburn described how they conducted research in order to prepare for the role:

There’s quite a bit of knowledge required here, especially if you want to give proper knowledge, not just hearsay. There’s a lot of hearsay out there as well, and I didn’t want to be in that category. I wanted to make sure that the knowledge that I was giving was straight-out-of-a-book knowledge. (Levent, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

Uncle Des on the other hand said that the Living Library was an opportunity to correct the misinformation in much published research on Indigenous Australians:

A lot of books in the library don’t tell you the truth, because they are written by the third person, whereas a Living Book you are getting the first person; first-hand experience.

Our Vox Pops with Living Library Readers suggest that some do expect a reliable authority: ‘I experienced somebody who has such a wide experience, and so respectable, reputable in this country’. The Living Library in Lismore has become something of a ‘reference tool’:

It’s seen as a reference tool for information. The local paper will ring up if something’s happened overseas. Do you have a Living Book from ... ? One schoolboy was doing a major project on the Vietnam War and one of our living books is a conscientious objector from the Vietnam War so he wanted to come in and talk to that person because it was a totally different view of what he was reading in books. (Lucy, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Community ownership and partnerships

The first Living Libraries in Europe and in Australia developed from grassroots community-led initiatives, and our research indicates that community ownership of Human Libraries remains vital to their effectiveness.

It was about timing and it was about Lismore, but what led to the success of it was community. It wasn’t an institution or an organisation saying we think this is a good idea for the community, it was actually the community saying that. (Shauna, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

The Living Library wouldn't work without the support of the community. We may do the background, the management type stuff, but we don't make it work. The community makes it work. (Lucy, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Community leadership can enable Human Library projects to match aims to local communities and to respond to specific needs. As a positive example of community ownership and leadership, a Living Library organiser told the story of the Living Library in Launceston, where the community organising committee had proposed an event to be held on Hiroshima Day. A high level of community ownership creates word of mouth and therefore generates participation by Books and Readers. According to Lucy Kinsley of Lismore Living Library, the success of the project is '50% word of mouth'.

Several interviewees involved with Lismore Living Library expressed concerns that the formalisation of the project over time and its location within the library had lead to a lessening of community control, 'I think we should have more involvement of the Books in running it'. Interviewees reflected on the challenges and constraints that come from working with institutions and the formalisation of Living Libraries. These concerns were most acute among some of the organisers and Living Books who were closely involved with the first Living Library event in Lismore.

I think it's good, if at all possible, to avoid too many ties to funding bodies because money comes with strings. ... Whilst the community owns it, it lives. But if it becomes institutionally owned I think it's at risk.
(Gordon, Living Book, Lismore Living Library)

While organisers at Auburn Living Library were more positive about the need for and the benefits of institutional support, they nevertheless described constraints, particularly when working in the hospital setting. In developing the Kiosk of Living Library stories, for example, there were different expectations between the hospital bureaucracy focused on health outcomes and the community workers who approached the Kiosk as an arts-based project. These conflicting expectations manifested in the choice and preparation of Living Books, some of whom were asked to explain their role as health-care professionals rather than share personal stories. Working with Council has proved highly productive for Auburn Living Library, yet Jenn Martin notes that at times it has been difficult to promote the Living Library to the community in terms that will interest the public, rather than in terms of council objectives such as social cohesion or community building.

Several interviewees at Auburn Living Library stressed the importance of ongoing institutional support for the project. One Living Book had become involved in the project through her volunteer role in the Friends of Auburn Library, and others said that the involvement of library staff is vital. For an organiser at Auburn it was important that the Living Library is embedded in council strategic plans, ensuring ongoing support. Lucy Kinsley said that council support for the original Living Library in Lismore was very important, as was the involvement of prominent local authorities.

The Local [Police] Commander, he was here at the launch. That gives it a bit of legitimacy too because those noticeable people within the community were involved and were happy to come again it gave it that tick of approval. (Lucy, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

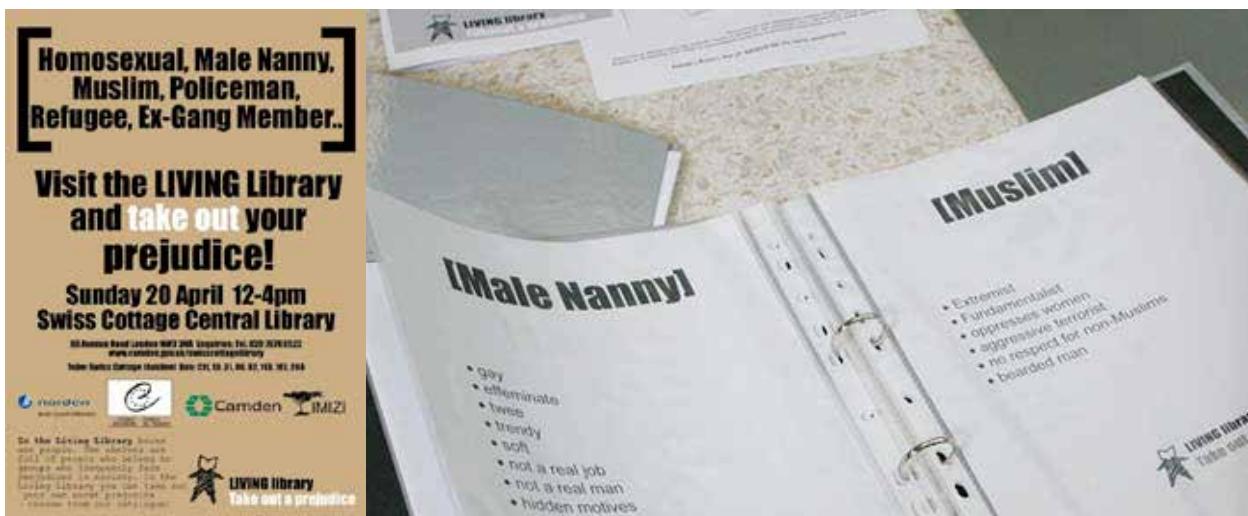
Indeed, partnerships and patrons are another important feature of successful Human Libraries. Organisers of the first Living Library in Lismore spent considerable time working with the local media to build an ongoing relationship such that the project continues to be promoted through local newspaper and radio. The project has also benefited from the support of a high-profile patron, the State Member of Parliament Thomas George, who attended the launch and sent personalised invitations on his letterhead. Auburn Living Library organisers relied on the expertise of Auburn Hospital contacts in developing the training modules and liaised with the Auburn Poets and Writers Group when recruiting books. When discussing ways to improve Living Libraries, Books often suggest working in partnership with NGOs, schools or community groups.

DIVERSE AIMS AND APPROACHES

Deciding on the aims of a Human Library is one of the first steps for organisers. ‘How to’ guides advise that being clear on the aims from the start increases the likelihood of a successful project. The flexibility of the Living Library concept means it can be adapted quite easily to suit different purposes. A wide range of motivations and approaches are apparent among the different Human Library projects held across Australia. Aims include: addressing prejudice and stereotypes; social inclusion and community building; awareness and advocacy; sharing history; sharing of information; and humanising institutions. An individual Human Library project will typically exhibit a combination or composite of a number of these, and in practice the boundary or distinction between the various categories can be blurred.

Addressing Prejudice And Stereotypes

The original and still most commonly stated aim of Living Library projects is that of challenging racism and discrimination within a community by directly addressing prejudice and stereotypes. The Living Library model, provided as an example for others to follow by Danish organisers through their Human Library organisation website, directly reflects this focus. They suggest, for example, that organisers think carefully during recruitment of Books about who to approach based on what categories of prejudice they most want to target. Living Books, in this model, are encouraged to use the relevant category of prejudice they represent as their title, and to present a list of commonly encountered stereotypes as the description of their ‘Book’ in the Human Library catalogue. In this context the Librarian is tasked with the special role of helping ‘the Reader identify his or her own prejudice through dialogue and a few leading questions’ (Human Library.org n.d. F)



Left: Promotional poster for the first Human Library event at Swiss Cottage Public Library, 20 April 2008. Source: www.humanlibrary.org Right: An example of Books' descriptions in the Human Library catalogue, Swiss Cottage Human Library, 20 April 2008. Source: www.humanlibrary.org

The Swiss Cottage Living Library held in 2008 was the very first Living Library event to be hosted in the United Kingdom. Organisers closely followed the advice of the original Danish organisers in setting up their event. Their Living Library was promoted to Readers with the pun, ‘Visit the Living Library and take out your prejudice.’ Books and organisers wore t-shirts that featured the tag, ‘What’s YOUR

prejudice?' in big, bold print. Book titles on offer to Readers on the day included 'Homosexual', 'Male Nanny', 'Muslim', 'Refugee' and 'Ex-Gang Member'. Their titles were displayed in the catalogue alongside a bullet-point list of commonly held assumptions (see two examples from the day below):

- **Male Nanny** – Gay, Effeminate, Twee, Trendy, Soft, Not a real job, Not a real man, Hidden motives
- **Muslim** – Extremist, Fundamentalist, Oppresses women, Aggressive terrorist, No respect for non-Muslims, Bearded man.

At Lismore, the project's primary focus on challenging prejudice was similarly reflected in the recruitment process the organisers undertook. Recruiting Living Books from marginalised or socially excluded groups within the community was a clear priority, 'those people who belong to groups that are disenfranchised and isolated, and put into little boxes with stereotypical labels'. Special efforts were made by organisers to recruit Books from particular groups, for example, the Bundjalung, Muslim, and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) communities in Lismore.

Lismore organisers described their initial motivation in initiating a Living Library with reference to the divisive atmosphere of a post September 11, 2001 local and global political context. Organisers of the Mount Barker Living Library in South Australia described holding their event 'against a global background of fear and division' (Hildebrand 2007). The Living Library concept presented as one strategy for addressing concerns that certain groups within their communities were facing an increase in racism, discrimination and harassment as a result. To counter this, organisers explained, Living Libraries offered:

people from very different backgrounds ... the opportunity to come together and talk, listen and learn and in so doing realise that we have actually got more in common with each other than our differences.
(Hildebrand 2007, p.19)

Thus the general aim of addressing racism and prejudice is often given focus and urgency as a targeted response to a specific context and local community dynamics.

Social inclusion and community building

In recent years the concept of social inclusion has become increasingly prominent as a frame for social policy at the local, state, and federal government level in Australia, largely replacing earlier explicit commitments to multiculturalism, access and equity. Social inclusion refers to the ability of all members within a community to 'feel valued' and able to meaningfully participate – economically, politically, and socially – within that community. The Australian Federal Government's online overview of their Social Inclusion Agenda explains that there are four key indicators that measure social inclusion in a community. These relate to whether individuals within the community have the adequate resources, opportunities and capability to:

- Learn, by participating in education and training

-
- Work, by participating in employment or voluntary work, including family and carer responsibilities
 - Engage, by connecting with people, using local services and participating in local civic, cultural and recreational activities and
 - Have a voice, in influencing decisions that affect them.
- (Commonwealth of Australia 2010)

Human Libraries initiatives are seen to directly address these last two. Projects organised via local council and state government often adopt a social-inclusion or community-building frame for their Living Library project, consistently describing the concept as 'a powerful strategy for building social cohesion'. This focus emphasises outcomes such as 'building relationships' and fostering a sense of 'shared community'. The project is promoted as 'a celebration of diversity'.

In many respects the social-inclusion approach to Living Libraries – in terms of the promotional materials produced, but also the format and structure of the model – is less explicitly confrontational than the original 'Addressing Prejudice' model described above. Conversations between Living Books and Readers are imagined as an exchange of stories of the everyday that highlight a shared commonality, rather than a space in which Readers are expected to raise negative assumptions or misunderstandings that Books seek to challenge. The social-inclusion framework does not explicitly name prejudice or racism as a problem, nor does it suggest that the 'mainstream' might need to be challenged or changed.

In the example of Auburn Living Library, organisers were working with one of the most culturally diverse communities in Australia. Just over half of all residents in the Auburn local government area are born overseas, and two thirds of Auburn residents speak a language other than English at home (Auburn Council 2010). Given the context of multicultural diversity, organisers saw the fostering of connections between peoples of very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds as a crucial aim of the project. Bringing people together in this way – effecting social cohesion – was described by one of the organisers as a valuable strategy to promote general community safety:

I believe that the safer a community is, the better crime prevention you're doing and to me if you're doing any activities that are bridging people, and showing people that they're not so different, and that even if they are different you can get on really, really well – it is a good thing and it's going to make our community safer. (Linda, Organiser, Auburn Living Library)

The concept and policy focus on social inclusion has come under criticism since its adoption as a key social policy framework by the Labor government in 2007. An overview prepared for the federal parliamentary library suggests 'that the concept of social inclusion lacks a clear definition' and is 'unlikely to provide a useful framework for driving social policy' (Buckmaster and Thomas 2009). The term is seen to be problematic as it limits itself to threshold concepts of inclusion and exclusion, but does not produce attention to the question 'inclusion into what'? That is, a focus on social

inclusion can treat the marginalised as passive objects of inclusion while ignoring the need for change in the status quo or the ‘mainstream’.

Awareness and advocacy

Many organisers see Living Libraries as playing a more generally educative role within a local community. The Living Library format offers a platform to advocates for the sharing of information around a broad range of issues that are rarely talked about openly. This includes ‘touchy subjects’ in areas related to health (including HIV/Aids and other STDs, Lupus, Mental Health), disability, sexuality and gender. Indeed, for many Living Books their involvement in a Human Library is one more activity in a concerted commitment to activism and advocacy. In the Auburn and Ryde initiatives volunteers included, for example, members of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), a transgender activist, a Sri Lankan human rights advocate and an experienced Indigenous cultural awareness trainer, all of whom volunteered as Living Books in order to further raise awareness around issues that are significant for them.

The feel and format of a Living Library event – personal, intimate, comfortable, safe – is thought to lend itself to the kind of non-judgemental atmosphere needed for creating a space for open conversations around taboo subjects in order to break down stigma and start to shift attitudes through a distribution of factual information about the issue (often advocates bring along information pamphlets, or ‘Useful links/contacts’ sheets to give out to Readers interested in finding out more).

A clear example of a Living Library planned as an exercise in ‘awareness’ building was the mental-health themed Living Library organised in 2008 by the Western Australia Department of Health (Mental Health Division). They ran the event as part of Mental Health Week under the headline: ‘Mental Health? Think about it, talk about it ... Now!’ Books on offer included people living with mental illness, their supporters, their friends, and health professionals. When launching the project, the then Western Australian Executive Director of Mental Health, Richard Menasse explained that the Living Library format was one that allowed for an open dialogue around the issues:

Almost one in two Western Australians experience one or more of the common mental disorders at some period in their lifetime. This is a great opportunity for the community to gain a better understanding about mental health and mental illness by talking to people about their personal and professional experiences. (City of Melville Living Library Catalogue 2009, p.2)

Sharing of history

A number of Living Libraries have embraced the project as an opportunity to share stories about a community and its past: a way of ‘sharing history’. As Ryde City Council Mayor Vig Tagg explained at the launch for the Ryde Living Library in 2009: ‘everyone has a story to tell. These stories are what make up the local history of a place and our history has to be remembered and celebrated’ (Jemima Mowbray 2010, fieldnotes). ‘Sharing history’ involves inviting local historians to volunteer as Books to share their knowledge of the area’s history. It can also mean an expansion of ‘local history’ by

including a diverse range of residents invited to act as Books on the basis that sharing their personal histories will enrich the understanding of local history (by valuing the different stories of the people that make up a community). The sharing of history is described by organisers as a means to promoting community inclusiveness and recognising the value of all members within a community.

Information/Skills sharing

Living Libraries also provide a space in which individuals within a community who hold expertise or a specific set of skills can share this with others. Deb, a Living Book in the Auburn Living Library, who talks to her Readers about being a mature- age student, described her motivation for getting involved:

If [sharing my experience] made somebody more confident of taking on the role of being a mature student, more convinced that they could do that then that would be very pleasing for me. I could help them with all that sort of administrative stuff that might otherwise block them from getting into university. (Deb, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

Though not often explicitly discussed as an aim in promotional or evaluative material, most, if not all, Living Libraries organised through a local council public library advertise Books sharing advice or information on very specific topics or skills. Some examples of the titles and descriptions of this type of Book include:

Writing for Children: What are the important elements in children's books? What language do you use? What is the place and function of illustrations? Do you trial it on an audience or rely on gut feeling? How and in what form to publish? (Ryde Living Library catalogue)

Where the Wild Things Grow: artist Amelia demonstrating the 'ancient art of Henna'. (Erina/Gosford Living Library catalogue)

A Road Well Travelled: working and volunteering overseas: I am a woman who has travelled around the world on her own, and in the company of others: South America, India, Africa, Europe, and Canada. I am full of stories to inspire you, and advice on how to make your dream of travelling, working or volunteering into a reality. (Newcastle University Living Library catalogue)

Humanising institutions

The aims that fall under the category of 'humanising institutions' include cultural awareness training for service providers, 'humanising' service providers and outreach.

The Living Library concept is seen as a creative model for providing cultural awareness training for service providers, especially those working within a multicultural context. The Living Library event held at Auburn Hospital in early 2009 sought to present medical staff and students with an opportunity to learn about the cultural beliefs and practices of patients for whom they were providing care. The organisers of the event felt the format might encourage a greater thoughtfulness in regards to patients' cultural difference and 'pack more punch'. They hoped that personal interaction would also serve to remind staff they were dealing with people:

It's another very good way to develop the whole relationship and get the Hospital to think more about the population that it's serving on a more human level. ... The system is under so much pressure that people sometimes forget that it's people that they're working with. (Mary, Organiser, Auburn Living Library)

In a similar way, service providers or representatives of certain professions are often invited to volunteer as Books to show the general public they are 'human'. The classic case in point is the inclusion in Human Library catalogues of a police officer as a Book. In the example above, Auburn organisers were keen to recruit hospital staff members to act as Books at general Auburn Living Library events and for the Hospital Kiosk 'offshoot' to give consumers of health services: 'a better understanding of how health services run, and why they may run in the way that they run' (Mary, Organiser, Auburn Living Library).

The organisational host (including an NGO, Council Library, Government Department) of a Human Library can sometimes see the project as a means to achieving outreach with the general public. That is, through Books and Readers' participation in a Human Library event the organisers hope to facilitate or generate further use of other offered services, such as fostering interest in the public library.

Key Challenge: Responding to locale and context

While the basic organisational format of a Human Library event is relatively straightforward, our research indicates that Human Libraries are most successful and sustainable when responding to the specific locale and context in which they operate. That is, successful Living Libraries adapt to local conditions and address issues that are of demonstrated community concern. Interviewees in Lismore shared many reasons why their town was the location for Australia's first Living Library, including what they saw as a strong sense of community and a history of inclusion.

In Auburn, people involved with the Living Library were very aware of the cultural diversity of the area. Deb, for example, considered what would be most useful for the community before deciding to target and encourage migrant women with her Living Book on how to manage the challenges of being a mature-age student. Auburn's highly multicultural population in some ways complicates the assumptions of the initial Living Library model, which is predicated on addressing the prejudices held by a relatively privileged 'mainstream' community against marginalised minorities. The cultural diversity of Auburn is such that the Living Library cannot assume a readership of mainstream or 'Anglo' Australians who will read Books representing communities experiencing racism, but rather addresses a diverse readership with the aim of building community and connection. It is for this reason that a Living Book on contemporary Islam was particularly pleased with the response when Auburn Living Library visited Oberon.

Aussie fellas, young people there, just lined up to know about spirituality, Islam, what it is. One gentleman just kept coming and coming and coming! He just didn't get enough. ... Sydney people aren't like that. They're more distracted. There's more tenseness. (Levent, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)



The Auburn Living Library key promotional poster captured well the local context of the library, showcasing local landmarks and the areas' cultural diversity. *Source: Auburn Living Library*

For organisers and Books involved with Lismore Living Library, the ability to respond to current events was a crucial part of the initial success of the project. Instigators of the first Living Library in Australia saw it as a strategy to 'address hotspots' and 'defuse tensions'. The 'timing was right' as the first event was 'a targeted intervention' and a community-driven response to the politics of fear and everyday racism in public debate during the Howard government.

While Living Libraries are most successful where they have responded to the local context, there are many challenges in doing so. For reasons of privacy and anonymity, some Living Books may be more comfortable participating in a Human Library outside their local neighbourhood. For example, a Living Book in Brisbane was prepared to share her story of male to female transition with Readers in other parts of the city, but not in her own suburb. Lucy Kinsley was also interested to recruit a sex worker as a Living Book in Lismore, but again felt that 'it would be very difficult for a local worker to be in the Living Library'.

Organisers and Books involved with the Living Library at Auburn Hospital were doubtful that the project could work well in that institutional setting. The time pressures and health focus of the clinical setting operate as a barrier to participation:

Staff just don't have half an hour to come off the ward and borrow a book. People don't tend to come to hospitals to wander around; they don't want to be distracted from their vaccination appointment or whatever.
(Mary, Organiser, Auburn Living Library)

While the Living Library format has been widely adopted and the diversity of aims and approaches has expanded well beyond the original model, the effectiveness of any given Human Library depends upon a consistent set of aims, derived from a clear understanding of local concerns and context. As the aims and approaches have diversified, the original aim of antiracism and challenging prejudice has also been diffused, overtaken in many cases by more general goals such as contributing to social cohesion and connection, or sharing information. Where this is the case, the wider aims reflect the policy context in Australia more broadly, in which cultural diversity is celebrated, but there is a pronounced reluctance or ‘squeamishness’ when it comes to explicitly acknowledging and tackling racism (Garbutt 2008, Dunn and Nelson 2011). Critics argue for a deeper multiculturalism that will squarely address racism (Dunn and Nelson 2011), shift inequalities and require change of the mainstream (Garbutt 2008).

'BUT THE BOOKS ARE PEOPLE': RUNNING HUMAN LIBRARIES

Human Libraries have been organised either as a one-off event or on an ongoing basis.

One-off events

One-off events can be run as part of a larger, broader event – at community festivals or other community events, for example the Blue Mountains' annual Harmony Day festival, or as one activity among many during Australian universities' now commonly staged annual 'diversity' week. Living Library events were run as part of general activities during the universities' annual Diversity weeks in 2009 at Macquarie University, University of Newcastle and University of Technology, Sydney. This provides an immediate audience for organisers to tap into, but also means they face the risk that the Living Library simply becomes an 'add-on' to the larger event with the potential consequence that the overall impact will be reduced.

Alternatively one-off Living Library events have been organised to stand alone. In this instance they are the 'main drawcard' and hold focus. On the other hand a stand-alone event requires more publicity to ensure an audience of Readers. Many stand-alone, one-off events have taken place in Australia. These have generally been run in connection with national awareness/themed weeks (for example Youth Week, Refugee Week, Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week, Mental Health Week).

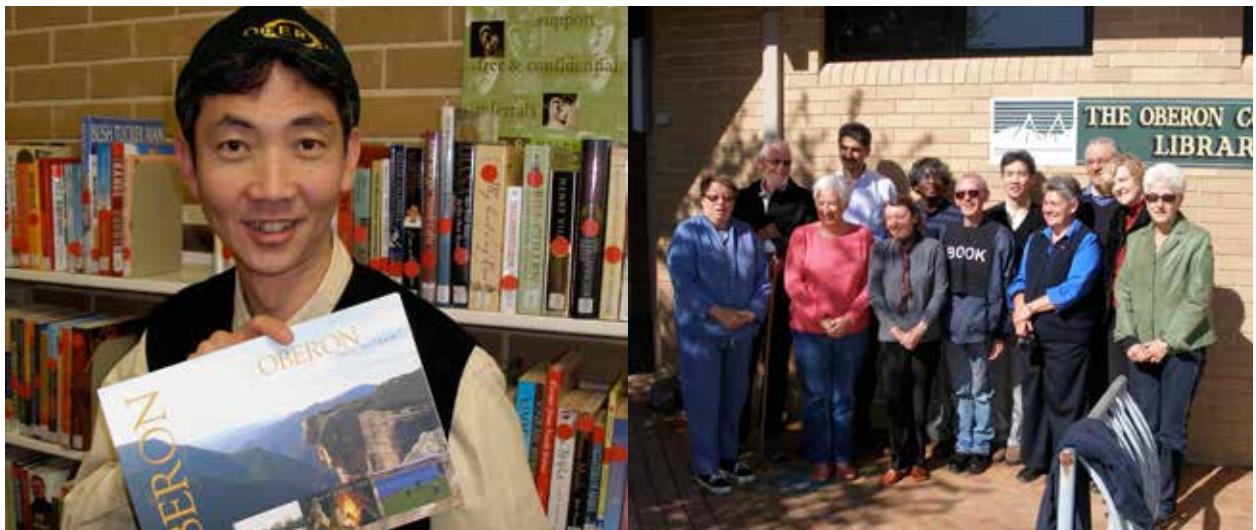
Regular sessions

An increasing number of Human Libraries in Australia are run on an ongoing basis. This involves regular reading sessions in an established location (very often a public library) and with a collection of Books rotated month to month depending on availability. Sessions are run generally on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. Organising an ongoing Human Library in this way requires substantially more long-term investment of resources – in terms of both the funds needed for set up and organisers and volunteers (i.e. Living Books) time. Those seeking to establish an ongoing Human Library need to consider what systems/strategies they will put in place to nurture Books, as well as ensure a constant new and return readership.

Travelling libraries

A 'travelling Human Library' (playfully described as an 'interlibrary loan' by one organiser) involves the catalogue of Books 'visiting' a new location, generally somewhere which otherwise would have no access to such an initiative. Examples of 'travelling libraries' have included Auburn Living Library visiting Oberon in Australia, and the Human Library Bus that toured rural areas in Norway and Denmark. Another example of this adaptation is where Books from a regularly organised Human Library are 'lent out' to speak to groups of Readers at schools, or aged-care facilities.

Auburn goes to Oberon In September 2009 the Auburn Living Library went on the road, taking five Living Books 'on exchange' to visit Auburn's sister-city of Oberon. Auburn Organisers and Living Books (and two UTS researchers) bundled into the Council mini-van for a day trip across the Blue Mountains. The Living Books included an Aboriginal elder, a Turkish Muslim, a Sri Lankan human-rights activist, a Carer for someone with Alzheimers, and a hospital staff member from Hong Kong. In the context of the existing local council relationship between Auburn and Oberon the



Left: Auburn Living Library Books and Organisers with Oberon Librarians and Friends of Oberon Library members, Auburn goes to Oberon visit, September 2009. Photo: Jemima Mowbray Right: Auburn 'Book' and 'ambassador' proudly displays the various gifts given by Friends of Oberon Library in appreciation of the visit. Photo: Jemima Mowbray

Living Books were acting as 'ambassadors' for 'multicultural Auburn' as much as they were playing the more usual role of representative for a particular community or group within Auburn.

The travelling Library was officially welcomed by one of Oberon's local Councillors and provided with a generous lunch organised by the local Friends of Oberon Library group. Even before the event itself kicked off there was lots of activity in the library, with organisers racing around setting up the space, and a crowd of eager Readers milling about, talking informally with Books and other visitors.

There was an overflow of Readers for the program, 'people were just lined up'. Readership on the day was made up of a mix of keen Oberon locals, groups of students from two local high schools, the Mayor, and even a couple who had driven in from out of town after hearing about the event. The Auburn Living Books involved in the trip mentioned Reader numbers as a real highlight: 'Oberon was just an amazing experience ... there were so many people wanting to borrow books ...it was a buzz (Lyn, Living Book, Auburn Living Library) Reader turn-out was so high that each Book ended up being read three times, with 4 – 8 Readers in each session.'

Readers' feedback suggested they really appreciated the opportunity to meet people from diverse backgrounds who they would not normally get to meet in country Australia. They reported they had 'learned a lot about Muslim society and life', 'enjoyed hearing about different lives', 'learned about cultural difference', and 'found it great to hear a different perspective on life'.

Books described the event as 'just really exciting', their 'best session so far'. They felt readers had left with 'positive motives and understanding'. Books felt that in Oberon they had been able to reach a more mainstream Anglo audience. They believed rural Australia was perhaps more 'insulated', that residents probably had 'less exposure' to people from diverse ethnic groups and so the exchange with Oberon gave Auburn Books the chance to 'get out there' and reach the people who 'are really asking for this information'.

Variations on the concept

More substantial ‘translations’ of the concept have also been made. One example of this being the creation of a Living Library Kiosk at Auburn Hospital in Sydney’s West. The Kiosk is a touch screen Living Library that allows Readers to choose and screen a pre-recorded story from one of the Books who take part in the Auburn Living Library. The Reader and Book cannot engage in a conversation as at a live Living Library event, but organisers explain the Living Library kiosk was inspired by the Living Library concept and can be used to complement it, providing another avenue for sharing stories and information within a community.



The Living Library ‘kiosk’ at Auburn Public Hospital. Visitors to the hospital are encouraged to engage with the touch screens and listen to the various recorded stories of a variety of ‘Books’ (health workers and patients from a variety of cultural backgrounds). *Photo: Jemima Mowbray*

There is considerable debate about what forms of adaption can appropriately be made to the Living Library model (see below for further discussion). The Living Libraries Australia Resources Kit, for example, advises caution when adapting the concept. Though stressing the flexibility of the model, the Resources Kit informs potential organisers that, ‘as much as possible, it is important to maintain the integrity of the Living Library and its aims by facilitating the “one to one” conversation between people’ (Living Libraries Australia Resources Kit, n.d., p.19).

The Organisational Framework

The organisation behind an event is key in creating the intended ‘structured, protected, yet completely free space’ that is required to prompt an engaged and constructive dialogue between Reader and Living Book (Abergel et al. 2005, p.10). The location and set up of the Human Library, the props and equipment, the registration process, and the part organisers play in registering Readers and facilitating conversations are all crucial features of this framework.

Location/Setting

The concept has proved adaptable to a variety of settings. Most Human Libraries are now organised and hosted within public libraries. The Local Council provides venue, limited funding, and a commitment of some paid staff organising time. Human Libraries are also often held at music and community festivals as one-off or annual events, with the benefit of a large crowd to tap in to as potential readers. Festivals also present an opportunity to capture more of a 'mainstream' audience, as those who attend a festival or community event might not otherwise be tempted to come into a public library for the Human Library. While the public library and the community festival are the most common settings, Living Library events have taken place at public schools, nursing homes, hospitals, universities, parliaments, and in a variety of workplaces.

As already noted, little is needed in the way of physical equipment or resources to host an event. Setting up the physical space does, however, contribute to the management of safety and risk at the Living Library, which is discussed in the following Chapter.



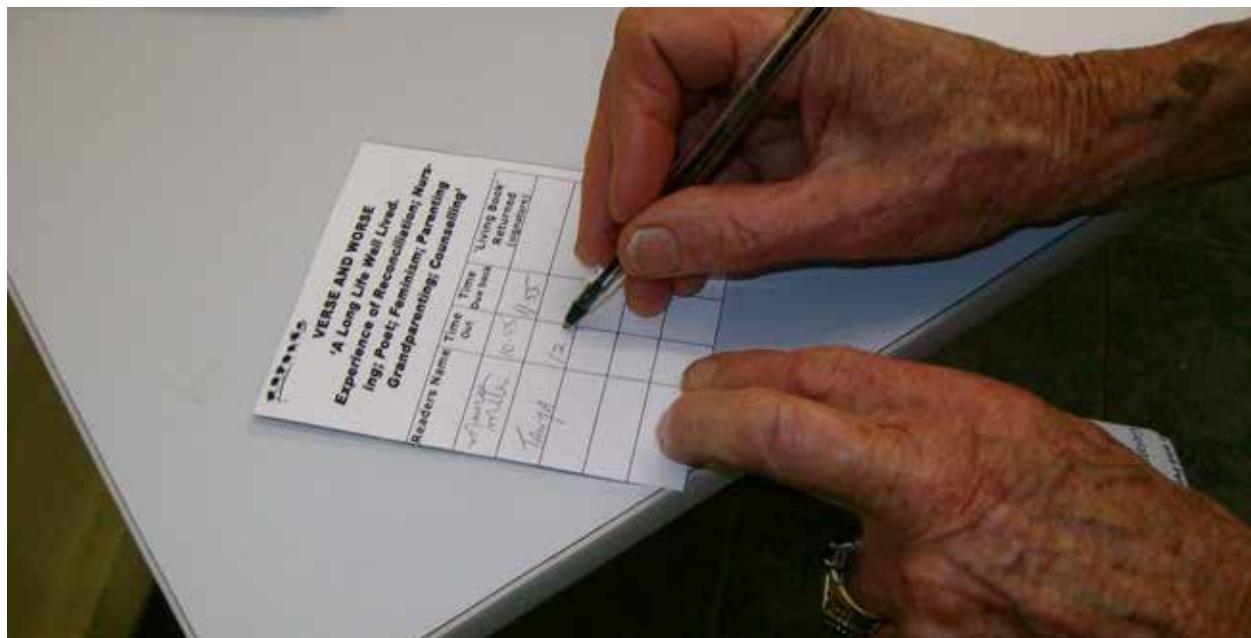
A Reader registers for a reading in the basic booking schedule at a Living Library event. Photo: Jemima Mowbray

Registration and rules

Before reading a Living Book a Reader must fill in all the appropriate registration forms and sign up to abide by the Living Library's Reader Rules. These are provided to them at registration. Auburn Living Library's Rules for Readers are standard issue:

- Only registered Readers who have accepted the Auburn Living Library rules can borrow a Book.
 - Only one Book can be borrowed at a time, it may not always be possible to reserve a Book.
 - A Book can be borrowed for 20 minutes, and must then be returned to the Living Library borrowing desk. It may be possible to extend the borrowing period to 40 minutes, after consulting with a librarian.
 - The Reader must return the Living Book in the same mental and physical condition as it is borrowed. Please do not cause damage to the Book, tear out or bend pages, spill food or drink over the Book or hurt his or her dignity in any other way. The Reader is responsible for taking care of and preserving the condition of the Book.
 - The Living Book has the option to end a discussion at any time, without giving a reason. (Such as if the book feels that they have been treated in an inappropriate manner or if they are overwhelmed by a question or the subject of a discussion.)
- (Auburn Council Library 2009, pp.2-3)

Readers, in a sense, sign a contract that sets out clearly their responsibility to enter into conversation with a Living Book in a way that demonstrates both a sincerity to engage, and a respect for the safety and comfort of the Book. This balancing of respect and curiosity is discussed further in Chapter Four.



Reader registering to read a Book at Lismore Living Library, October 2009. Filling out registration, accepting the 'rules', and getting your 'library card' is mandatory before being allowed to borrow. Photo: Tanja Dreher

The role of the librarian

As well as managing crucial administrative tasks, the Librarian can play a central role as facilitator of an initial connection between Living Book and Reader. They may, for example, suggest a particular Book for reading, and will always introduce a Reader to their chosen Living Book. Jenn Martin, an organiser of the Auburn Living Library, recognises the crucial affective aspect to the role librarians play within the Living Library by putting both Reader and Book at ease, ‘we play an important role in making people feel comfortable’ (Jenn, Organiser, Auburn Living Library).

Living Books are aware of this too. One Auburn Book described the way in which the registration and introduction process – undertaken in the familiar mode of small talk and polite ‘formality’ – helps to allay any apprehension or nerves for new Readers and nervous Books, ‘it takes away some of the stress’.

Perhaps most importantly Librarians have a responsibility to oversee the space throughout Reading sessions. Their monitoring presence helps to ensure the safety and comfort of Readers. Librarians mill about, keeping an eye on the various conversations. If for any reason a Librarian senses that there might be a problem they will intervene and wrap up a session early.

They [Books] know that they can come and debrief with us, or if they have had enough at one point they can come and say, “No, I need time out” and we’re always checking with them [during a session] that they’re OK. (Mary, Organiser, Auburn Living Library)

Part of the monitoring role they play involves keeping sessions to time. The Librarian flags to Reader and Book that a session is coming to a close, and will then let them know when time is up. As one Living Library organiser pointed out during her interview, this too is an important safeguard for Books.

Recruitment And Training Of Books

Are there aspects of your life that would be of interest to others? Would you be happy to share your experience openly? (Flyer for potential books, Ryde Library, 2009)

The process of recruiting potential Living Books begins with organisers making a decision on what Books to offer in the Human Library catalogue. One organiser described this as the ‘curatorial process’, one which must take into account the specific aims of the project and the targeted audience. Successful recruiting requires a combination of strategies, and may include any mix of the following:

- Targeted recruitment of individuals already known to organisers through personal, professional or relevant community and voluntary networks
- Word of mouth through already established community networks (such as public library organisers’ distribution of promotional recruitment materials to ‘Friends of Library’ groups and council volunteers)

-
- General advertising for volunteer Books at the Library, in other council buildings, and in the local media.
 - Reader to Book conversion (recruitment of Readers who are inspired or enthusiastic to act as a Book after taking part in a Reading session)

Potential Books are often interviewed informally or invited along to an introductory briefing session before attending training to make sure they – and organisers – are confident in their capacity to act as a Book. The skills and capacity required of Books is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Training

There needed to be some sort of preparation for people before they went into this borrowing project. It's open to a range of people who may have all sorts of things going on in their lives, and they may be talking about topics that people are hugely interested in, but they also may be asked questions by people that they may not have been prepared for. So how do we create an environment where they can explore all that, and then after that feel like, 'OK, I can do this. I can go and be borrowed by some readers'. (Mary, Living Library organiser)

Training gives potential Books a chance to talk through the Human Library project and its aims, to think through what story they want to tell and how best to do this in an engaging way, and to provide them with strategies for protecting themselves – and their Readers – during an actual Reading. Training for Living Books is now an established part of the model provided to potential organisers of a Human Library via the Human Libraries Australia website. Like the idea itself, the training process has been slowly formalised as the Living Library concept has increasingly been adopted within institutional settings.

Training provides a forum for potential Books to discuss the aims and purpose of the project. Books get to talk through the concept and will often do a practice run. For Books, just as much as for Readers, the concept can initially be quite confusing. As one organiser explains, 'in the absence of being able to see it in practice it's just an idea, it's just a concept' (Shauna, Organiser, Lismore Living Library). A practice run during training brings the concept to life. Training sessions allow Books to meet one another, get a sense that they are part of a group, and develop their ownership of the project.

Choosing a story to tell and engaging the Reader

Training provides a space for the volunteer Living Books to explore what they want to tell, and how they would like to tell it. Organisers have different ideas about what sort of preparation should occur. Some feel very strongly that orientation or training sessions should not be about helping people to shape or script their story. Lismore organiser, Shauna McIntyre, explains that being a Book is, 'about just being who you are, you know, in your daily life ... so it's not a script, it's not about having to entertain'. Too much scripting of a story, argue Lismore organisers, will make it difficult to set up the appropriate conversational dynamic.

Other organisers, however, see the planning and preparation of Books' stories as an important part of the training process: 'if you want to tell a story and get people engaged and interested, you don't necessarily do that off the cuff – you have to think about that and have to prepare for that.' They feel that key to the Living Library experience – what makes it different from just 'a chat in a coffee shop' – is that Books are engaged in an act of 'storytelling', though of course this is the telling of their personal stories. To make the most impact, they argue, the Book needs to prepare and craft their story, and be given the appropriate skills to make sure it will connect with their Readers.

All organisers agree, though, that Books need to be prepared to be flexible and fashion their story or conversation topic to suit each individual interaction. No matter how prepared a Book, they must always be ready to go 'off script'. In training this becomes about instilling confidence in the Book, and giving them practical tips on engaging their Reader. As one Living Book explained:

It was a really good part of that training, where we were trained to ask the borrower 'Why did you choose me? Why did you choose this title?' And to hear their reason. Because there's no point in telling a story that's got no relevance. (Lyn, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

The discussion of Books' stories also provides a forum for everyone involved to consider, and sometimes debate, what are appropriate – and perhaps more importantly inappropriate – stories to tell. The HLA's downloadable resource, The Youth Toolkit advises potential organisers to make Living Books aware during training of the need to set clear boundaries or limits when sharing personal experiences with Readers, and especially young Readers (Youth Toolkit n.d., p.18).

Debate around issues of appropriateness, however, primarily centres around the tension between advocacy as opposed to preaching or attempts at conversion. Books proposing to discuss religious or political subjects come in for particular scrutiny in relation to this. This is not necessarily, however, a question of appropriate or inappropriate topics for discussion, but the approach adopted by a Book in engaging a Reader in conversation around the subject:

In the training I said to everybody 'My passion is Bible stories. How would people feel about my telling a Bible story?' And then the whole issue [came up] of 'When does a story go over into advice-giving, or sermonising, or preaching?' and I think that [discussion] was quite relevant for everybody there. (Lyn, Living Library Book, Auburn)

In addition to selecting and preparing stories, a significant proportion of the training offered to prospective Living Books is focused on the 'protection' of Books and Readers and how best to manage safety and risk in the Living Library. These issues are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Key Challenges

Readers and audiences

Attracting readers is a key operational challenge for all Living Libraries. When asked about the hardest part of working with Living Libraries, Organisers and Books responded: 'It's mainly the recruitment. Getting Readers coming' and 'we need more Readers. The hardest one is getting to the Readers.'

In addition to the general concern about overall Reader numbers, an Auburn Living Library organiser felt the project had 'struggled to attract repeat readers'. Books and organisers also said that the Living Libraries did not necessarily reach the Readers that most needed it:

How do I get those people with prejudices? Because those few people who come into the library, they're supporters of the thing! They learn and that's good, but how to get people who would have an even longer way to shift attitudes? (Sabina, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)



Sharing stories: a reading session at a Living Library event. Photo: Jemima Mowbray

A number of Living Books involved with Auburn Living Library on the other hand felt that they were reaching an appropriate readership. Chiu and Levent were pleased that the event in the regional town of Oberon had attracted a primarily 'Anglo' readership, while Uncle Des felt that Auburn's diverse community provided an ideal audience for his story as an Aboriginal Elder and a member of the Stolen Generations. In general, Living Books were most satisfied with those events at which the Living Library format did generate opportunities for conversations across differences of culture, politics and community.

A common response to avoid Books being left ‘on the shelf’ is to encourage Living Books to read each other. At Ryde Living Library this operated informally, as Living Books chatted over tea and biscuits while gathered at the table set up in a ‘waiting area’. At Auburn Living Library, staff and Living Books were encouraged to borrow and ‘read’ Living Books who were not otherwise booked. An organiser of the Lismore Living Library Launch said, ‘If there aren’t any Readers the Books kind of sit around and chat to each other, which is all well and good except that it’s not what a Living Library is about’ (Sabina, Organiser, Lismore Living Library).

Most of the feedback on Books reading each other, however, was more positive:

It’s very good if the Living Books read each other, learn about each other, because it makes for greater cohesion. I believe I’ve read about three quarters of the other Living Books. (Gordon, Living Book, Lismore Living Library)

We’ve been encouraged to borrow one another, and that’s been great. It’s so fascinating to listen to Uncle Des, for example. An Aboriginal Elder. To hear some of his insights from his experience of storytelling in an Aboriginal setting. Just amazing. (Lyn, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

Organisers at Auburn Living Library also actively recruit readers. When conducting Vox Pops at the Auburn Living Library in October 2009, one reader had been referred to the Living Library by a teacher at TAFE while all others had been actively recruited by library staff.

Organisers of the inaugural Lismore Living Library event purposefully invited authority figures and representatives of key institutions to attend the Launch. The local State Member of Parliament, the Vice-Chancellor of Southern Cross University and the Chief of Police, were among the many prominent members of the community who accepted the invitation to attend and to read Living Books:

The [CEO of a large organisation] was matched up with one of our Living Books who was a victim of sexual abuse. It was a time when there were problems at the [organisation] with attacks happening. So he was able to be presented with – not his management view of it, but the personal view of how it would affect his [clients] if they had been involved in an attack. (Lucy, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Choosing and curating books

Organisers of Living Libraries rarely have difficulties recruiting enough Living Books, but do face a number of challenges in choosing and curating Books. While organisers may aim to reflect diversity, including religious diversity, in the recruitment, they also typically agreed that the Living Library is not a venue for proselytising.

There’s no preaching, there’s no conversion, there’s no asking for money for your group, or your church or whatever. It’s a one-on-one conversation about your personal story. (Lucy, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Auburn Living Library maintains a similar policy, which raised a dilemma when organisers were approached by a potential Book who was keen to tell Bible stories,

discussed above. This prompted much discussion in the training session and a decision that ‘it was OK because it was story-based, and the one she wanted to do was from the Old Testament, and that relates as well to Islam’ (Jenn, Organiser, Auburn Living Library).

The emphasis on one-on-one conversation and personal storytelling also has implications for Living Books who are motivated by an interest in advocacy and awareness-raising. Organisers and Books stress that the Living Library ‘is not a soap box’ and ‘there’s no expectation that you’d be asked for money, abused, yelled at or forced to change your view’. Rather than preparing a script or a presentation, Living Books are encouraged to ‘be themselves’. Books who are involved in a range of advocacy and education activities see the Living Library as a specific context with somewhat different expectations. Uncle Des, a Living Book at Auburn, said that he would routinely take students in a class room ‘out of their comfort zone’, but in the Living Library context he will negotiate to what extent a Reader is willing to listen to confronting aspects of Australia’s history: ‘if I can see that it’s going to upset them I won’t do it because it’s not fair on them’. Bhagavadas Srikanthadas (Sri) has a long involvement in human rights advocacy and felt that in the Living Library it was important to be ‘balanced’ and ‘objective’:

I have had a ringside view of a lot of things happening in Sri Lanka, so this topic gives me an opportunity to tell them what went on. But then, I also made sure that what I say is balanced too, because I come from a Tamil background, so I should be fair by my Readers. I should not conceal the Singhala majority side of the story ... I should be dispassionate and not carry too much emotion. (Sri, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

Rather than advocating a particular policy or political perspective, Uncle Des and Sri described their aim as raising awareness and providing background context – Uncle Des by telling ‘the history that’s not in the books’ and Sri by giving Readers context to understand contemporary debates about Sri Lankan asylum seekers.

One of the most difficult decisions in recruiting and curating Living Books is to decide to what extent the Human Library will adopt the principle of the original Living Libraries in providing a forum for the most marginalised people and groups. The aim of involving the most marginalised runs the risk of creating a ‘freak show’ or ‘exotic zoo’, so organisers at Lismore have been keen to involve others who are seen to be facing stigma or stereotyping. One of these books is a Police Officer, included with the rationale that despite the authority and coercive power of the Police Service, Police Officers are stereotyped, particularly by young people. As there are many, many individuals and groups in any community who are subjected to some form of stereotyping, this greatly expands the range of potential Living Library Books, and leads to some difficult decisions. Some people involved in establishing the first Lismore Living Library felt that over time the project had included too many ‘cosy’ or ‘easy’ Books and the original focus on the most marginalised had been lost. Others felt that it was vital to attract ‘mainstream’ Readers by expanding the range of Books available. To illustrate the point that you can’t always predict who would make a suitable Living Book, Lucy Kinsley gave the example of a former SS Officer who is now a Living Book in Wollongong, telling the

story of how his experiences of the bombing of Dresden changed his life and he became a peace activist.

These difficult decisions underscore the vital curatorial role required of Living Library organisers and the careful juggling of expectations and priorities involved. While people closely involved in organising the original Lismore Living Library expressed some concern at the subsequent shift of emphasis, most interviewees involved with ongoing projects suggested the need for more books and a wider variety. Jenn Martin suggested that Auburn Living Library might include more 'light Books' and more humorous Books, possibly developing a number of 'genres'. Living Books at Auburn wanted to recruit 'Elders' as Books, and also suggested various topics such as an expert on literature or history. A Living Book in Lismore suggested a range of contemporary issues that might make for effective themed Living Library events:

There are a lot of life complexities so I thought of themes, like women and body image, peaceful living, wisdom of elders, mental health, love and relationships. Anyone could come along – it could be a gay relationship, it could be husband and wife, it could be partners. (John, Living Book, Lismore Living Library)



Left: Explaining his story to the audience: an example of a Book in a group reading session (with a mix of school students and the general public). *Photo: Tanja Dreher* Right: 'Deep in conversation': an example of a 'one on one' reading session.
Source: www.humanlibrary.org

Format

People involved with successful Living Libraries shared a number of challenges and suggestions around the format, including the relative merits of face to face versus group 'readings', a desire to apply the format more widely, to shift the availability and timing and other adaptations to the standard format.

One on one or group?

People involved with Living Libraries usually place great value on the face to face and interpersonal nature of the interactions facilitated. The emphasis on face to face exchange is seen as making differences accessible and interactions intimate: 'seeing is believing', 'one on one is a very comfortable dynamic' and 'you turn the TV off, the radio off and get back to the basics of talking'. Several Living Books and organisers among interviewees felt strongly that one-on-one conversation sessions were essential to the Living Library format, and some were completely opposed to group 'readings'. A Living Book in Lismore explained that group sessions were the only time that he had felt that Readers weren't listening, instead, he explained, they expected entertainment. 'We're not here to deliver lectures on subjects, we are not here to present a talk. And that to me is what the group thing is'. A number of Living Books had made such objections known to organisers. Living Books in both Auburn and Lismore said that it was difficult to manage the different levels of interest and engagement in school groups:

Invariably in a group of say four schoolies, one doesn't want to be there, and so they distract. ... I think it's very important to maintain the one on one. Otherwise, it's not a Living Library, it's an amusement, entertainment, lecture, speech delivery service. It's not a Living Library.
(Gordon, Living Book, Lismore Living Library)

Nevertheless, group readings are not uncommon, particularly when school students are involved as Readers. At Dokkyo Living Library, organisers offered both 'dialogue sessions' of 1-3 readers, and also 'lecture sessions' for 1-50 readers, due to the number of readers at this one-off event (Kudo et al 2011: 3). Many Living Books can see some value in group sessions such as visits to nursing homes, although one-on-one conversation remains the preferred option:

I can go either way. You can have a better conversation talking one to one. ... [With nursing home visits] at least you make some sort of contact. They're not as good because they tend to just sit there and you tend to talk and you get one or two of them might ask questions but its too much like you're just talking to them. (John, Living Book, Lismore Living Library)

Only one Living Book preferred group sessions, which she felt were easier for young Readers, and for herself as a shy person.

In our own experiences as Living Library Readers, we noticed a difference between individual and group readings, where group readings were 'easier' in that the focus on the response of an individual Reader was dispersed, and it was easier to observe without directly engaging. The relative intimacy and the individualised focus of the one on-one-session, on the other hand, creates a greater sense of responsibility for the Reader. Given the underlying aims of the Living Library, increased 'ease' for the Reader should not immediately or necessarily be assumed to be a positive thing. Indeed, as Rob Garbutt explains, the power of Living Libraries lies in enabling Readers and Books to undertake a 'journey' that is 'risky and personal' (2008: 276). The complex negotiations between safety and risk, comfort and discomfort, are analysed further in the following chapter.

'OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE': MANAGING SAFETY, RISK AND DISCOMFORT

The environment is safe but the conversation might be challenging.
(Sabina, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

You can think of both the reader and the book as quite brave really.
Taking a lot of risk. (Shauna McIntyre, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

A key challenge for Human Libraries is to address inequalities of risk and discomfort involved in conversation across differences. In this chapter we discuss the ways in which safety, risk and discomfort are managed in Living Libraries in a complex balancing act which seeks to encourage participants 'out of their comfort zone' while avoiding the tendency to scare people off. As the originators of the concept explain, the aim is to create a 'structured, protected, yet completely free space' to prompt an engaged and constructive dialogue between Reader and Living Book (Abergel et al. 2005, p.10). Our research suggests that in comparison to conventional storytelling workshops, organisers and Books involved with Living Libraries pay greater attention to questions of safety and risk and seek to enable participants to negotiate risks and comfort within a safe environment.

Out Of The Comfort Zone?

Perhaps due to the common difficulties in explaining the concept of Living Libraries, many participants, and Readers in particular, are initially unsure about their role and the expectations of them. In our own research we also experienced a sense of uncertainty when first participating as a Living Library Reader – what would it be like? How should we choose a book? What should we do? What would be the right thing to do? This uncertainty manifests as both discomfort and excitement. Living Books at Lismore Living Library said that Readers are often uncomfortable at first, unsure how to get started. An organiser suggested that even among confident, capable people committed to social justice:

I have the sense that they feel they would be out of their comfort zone, and then they don't come. So not everybody who finds it a great project therefore finds it easy to actually come. (Sabina, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Not many Readers know what to expect before they participate in a session. Many only get involved because they happen to visit the Library on the day of the event and are drawn in by a Librarian or the busy hum of the event itself. Even those who had previously heard of the Living Library and had come along specifically for the event said they did not know – prior to actually doing a Reading – how the session would run.

Despite not knowing 'how things might work', or 'what they might talk about' most Readers found that once they sat down the sessions smoothly shifted into free-flowing conversation. Books play an important role in establishing this comfortable 'free flow', effectively taking responsibility as discussed below. Sessions are described by Readers as coming to an end sooner than they had expected – 'I needed more time', 'I didn't want it to end'. One Reader explained this as being because he had been given the opportunity to ask questions and even to share his own stories. Books also talk about sessions feeling almost 'too short'. At the end of 20 minutes the conversation has only just started, 'in

say the last five minutes it's (when) we've just warmed up' (Chiu, Living Book, Auburn Living Library).

Risks for Books

Risks of involvement in a Living Library for books include (but are not limited to):

- A feeling of not really being 'listened' to or understood by their Readers may reinforce a feeling of marginalisation rather than challenging it
- Re-traumatising the self through the narrating of painful past experiences and
- Opening oneself up to further negative reactions from others, including extreme situations of getting into an altercation with and/or being the recipient of abuse from a Reader

Living Books may be nervous or uncomfortable about the risk involved in telling one's story in the open-ended and potentially intimate format of the Living Library.

It is taking a risk, to go public with their story. It's a big step. (Sabina, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

For all the books it was an extraordinary risk that they took to just open themselves up to a complete stranger, so they were acknowledged for the courage that they took in doing that. (Shauna, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Despite the risks and discomforts of storytelling across differences, interviewees generally stressed the value of being heard. Disclosure and facing up to risks is seen as empowering. Organisers believe that the Living Library can offer an important process of recognition and an indication that there are members of the 'mainstream' who are interested in the experiences of those who are usually misrepresented or marginalised:

I remember one young woman who was interviewed for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. There's a great article about her and she makes this wonderful comment from her perspective. What she doesn't like is that when she goes into a shop in Lismore she feels like all eyes are on her from the staff and that she is perceived as a thief, because she's young and she's Aboriginal. She had an opportunity to share that with a white person and to actually have that listened to. I think it was extraordinary for her to have a white adult in our community listen to that experience. (Shauna, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

The significance of recognition is evident also in the disappointment that Books may feel if their story is not seen as important or interesting. Lucy gave the example of a Living Book who told his story of finding out that he was adopted, only to be disappointed that there was little reaction from a group of Lismore young people who were very familiar and comfortable with a wide diversity of family structures.

Despite the risks, Books and organisers talked about the benefits of being involved in a number of different ways – including through the successful tackling and overcoming of risk. The experience of being able to tell your story and connect with community was described as being 'healing', or 'therapeutic' for some:

They just love to talk and share. I think for some it's semi therapeutic like it puts things into order for them. The more they get to tell their story the more it clears it in their heads what they've been through. (Linda, Organiser, Auburn Living Library)

Participation in the Living Library is seen as building confidence in Books. This includes Books' personal confidence. One Book described how the experience brought her out of her shell, 'I come alive!'. It also involves building confidence in the stories they have to tell and their right to tell them. Living Books who are experienced in advocacy and storytelling work may not find the experience uncomfortable at all.

Books also talked about valuing the opportunity that Living Libraries provided them to 'set the record straight'. They expressed personal satisfaction in seeing first hand 'the shift' in people's thinking: 'you get a reaction straight away'. Uncle Des related how being a Book in Auburn Living Library 'opened the door' for him to address some of the common misconceptions people hold about Aboriginal people and culture – in relation to identity, the Stolen Generations, traditional and contemporary work practice, and spirituality. The most 'memorable moments' were those in which he witnessed change in his Reader:

When you see – 'hey, I never knew that!' And then I see the brightness in their eyes and that was a good session. It makes me feel comfortable and pleased that I have achieved my goal. (Uncle Des, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

Books also have an opportunity to meet someone from a different culture, 'a different walk of life'. The experience is described as one of 'give and take' on both sides: Readers learn from them, they learn from their Readers. One Book told enthusiastically of how the questions Readers ask of him during a session pushed him to learn more about his own topic:

It brings questions into your mind, what people ask you, and certain questions that are in your own mind, and you go and do more research and you learn more, and it's sort of a zig-zag situation. You go back and forth and you learn, and that's the beauty about that. (Levent, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

Other benefits include the opportunity to get to know other volunteer Books in the program – to socialise with them, but also to learn from them. The volunteer labour of Books is also often formally acknowledged through certificates, and when organised by local council or government agencies with some form of formal recognition of Books as volunteers.

Risks for Readers

Risks for Readers at Living Libraries include:

- being or feeling exposed as ignorant or prejudiced
- being traumatised by discussion of sensitive topics
- discomfort if beliefs are challenged or certainties unsettled and

-
- embarrassment of not knowing what to do or say.

While Readers may be unsure about their role or what to expect in Living Libraries, organisers felt it would be relatively rare that Readers would be 'out of their comfort zone': 'I could imagine that it would happen sometimes. I would say it would be a small amount – a smaller minority.'

The Human Library experience has the potential to be 'unsettling', 'disruptive' and risky for Readers, and yet Organisers felt that Readers were rarely uncomfortable. Lismore Organiser Shauna McIntyre, described a 'shift in position' for the 'high profile prominent people' invited to the Launch of Lismore Living Library, 'usually they're used to talking. And so here they were being invited to come along as a reader, so that was a bit different, a shift in their position'.

Living Books regularly reported that Readers can reveal a lot about themselves and that the Book typically learns a lot about the Reader. Overall, Living Libraries are seen as creating a uniquely safe and comfortable environment in which to take on the risks associated with storytelling for change.

That's one of the things about the comfort side of it, if you were to run into someone in the street you wouldn't even think of talking about some of these personal things. ... but with the Living Library the expectation is that you can ask questions. Sometimes people might want to ask you questions that are personally affronting that you don't want to answer.
(John, Living Book, Lismore)

Organisers Lucy and Shauna both talked about the older Reader who had borrowed a 'gay Book' at the Lismore Living Library Launch as an example of an interaction that had started uncomfortably and had unsettled assumptions with a positive result:

She had obviously borrowed someone from a group which she had such strong attitudes about. But within that safe environment she had taken advantage of the opportunity that was extended to her. (Shauna, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Key Challenge: A Safe Environment For Risk-Taking

Living Libraries emerge from this research as a format in which to enable Books and Readers to negotiate risk and comfort in conversations across difference within a structure that is both open-ended and yet focused on the safety of participants. Human Libraries can thus support participants to be courageous:

Just as Living Books are courageous in making themselves available to repeated conversations with strangers, Readers in Living Libraries often participate with courageous listening that expands how one listens: whether to views not normally encountered, to ideas one cannot agree with, to complexities that confound stereotypes, with empathy to someone against whom I hold prejudices, or to accents which require effort to understand. (Garbutt 2008: 276)

The challenge in creating a safe environment for risk-taking lies in balancing a number of competing demands – the aim to attract Readers as well as to facilitate potentially

difficult conversations, the desire to broach taboo topics and to address prejudices as well as to protect those who are sharing painful stories, the need to encourage participants 'out of the comfort zone' while also offering safety and support. We identify three key aspects of the management of Living Libraries which facilitate the development of a safe environment in which to take risks in cross-cultural contexts. The three key features of Living Libraries are the focus on privacy or anonymity, the explicit and implicit guidelines on safety and protection and the implications of permission and responsibility.

Privacy and anonymity

Privacy and anonymity are key considerations in managing risk and comfort at Living Libraries. Perhaps the most important feature in this regard is the explicit assumption that the Book must, in the final instance, remain 'in control'. In practice this refers to the right to refuse to answer questions, and/or to end the conversation without explanation.

At all times the Book is and must feel in control of the situation. The Book must feel perfectly OK about terminating the discussion. The Book must feel perfectly OK about skipping some questions that the Reader might ask. (Gordon, Living Book, Lismore Living Library)

If they are uncomfortable and they don't want to answer a question, they can just say 'I'm sorry, I need to finish this story now'. Or they can say, and some of our books do say this, 'I'm sorry that chapter is closed. I don't talk about that.' But worst possible scenario they know we can see everything that's going on because we set up the sessions – I have a silent alarm that I can push and security will be here. It's never happened. I've never even had to think about it, but it's there. (Lucy, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

At the venue 'conversation spaces' are set up for Book-Reader interactions. A 'conversation space' can be something as simple as two chairs arranged to face each other. There are two priorities to be considered when arranging these spaces for a Living Library. A degree of privacy is desired to facilitate the personal interaction between Book and Reader. Public Libraries often use their shelving or sometimes temporary screen partitions to create an alcove for the two chairs to help create this sense of privacy. Balancing this need for privacy is the second requirement that the space be observable in order to ensure the safety and comfort of both Book and Reader during a Reading session. As well as privacy and an 'escape hatch', Living Libraries also attempt to ensure anonymity, 'we say don't exchange phone numbers or your last name'. Living Libraries set limits on the intimacy of personal interaction by not sharing the personal names of Books and Readers with one another. A Book is often simply introduced by their 'title', or perhaps a number to the Reader. Living Libraries have also established clear policies regarding further contact between Books and Readers that Books are required to follow.

Safety and 'protection'

A good [Living] Library equals safety plus promotion – it's essential to have that sense of safety, it's a safe house of a different kind. (Gordon, Living Book, Lismore Living Library)



The paperwork and paraphernalia used for a Living Library event, including registration forms, rules for Readers, the Library catalogue, Book display ‘blurbs’, and Book ‘bibs’. *Photo: Tanja Dreher*

Safety in Living Libraries ‘is expressed in many ways’, from the physical environment to the guidelines for readers and books and the training. Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Books starts at the point of recruitment. This is a particular priority for Books offering to talk about intimate and/or traumatic personal experiences, as one organiser explains:

It is really, really important for us from the beginning to make sure that the Books are in a good place when they join the program because we are aware that a lot of sensitive issues might come out [during a reading].
(Mary, Organiser, Auburn Living Library)

Organisers flag issues around safety in their recruitment material. Books – especially those who are survivors of trauma and/or abuse – are asked to consider how confident they feel about speaking and being interviewed about their experiences. The potential discomfort or difficulties that can arise during a Reading session are also mentioned to give potential Books the opportunity to assess for themselves their capacity for dealing with these kinds of situations before they volunteer:

You must be comfortable enough with yourself – who you are and what you have lived through – to be able to answer questions about yourself and your life. ‘Readers’ may come with common misunderstandings about your experience, and you will need to respond calmly and with tolerance. (Interested in being a Living Book in the LL? Erina/Gosford information for potential Books)

A significant proportion of the training is given over to discussions of what to do if a difficult situation arises: what are the best ways a Book might protect her/himself? Books are first asked to think about all of the various things that could go wrong during a Reading. One organiser, heavily involved in the training of Books, listed the various kinds of questions – the ‘what-ifs’ – she puts to Books during training:

OK, you get someone who's Reading you, and you get a certain reaction, or you get a certain question. How are you going to handle that? What are you going to do about that? Do you want to answer that? Is that going to open up stuff that you don't want to deal with, or that you're happy to deal with? What if your Reader freaks out and just can't cope? So you won't cover every single situation, but just giving people the opportunity to think about that and explore that a little bit before they went into that environment. (Mary, Organiser, Auburn Living Library)

Books are given a number of practical tips, but also encouraged to come up with their own communicative or avoidance strategies for 'sticky situations':

Because it's interactive, if people ask questions that you're not comfortable with, you can always say: 'That page hasn't been written yet', or 'That's been torn out', or 'I've lost that page!' Make it a fun experience. (Lyn, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

If you get to a point where it is too personal or too upsetting for you as a Book, take it in another direction. In the training you are shown how to take it into another direction so it protects you as the Book. (Uncle Des, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

Similarly, 'Books need to know that there is someone they can debrief with afterwards'. Training also provides organisers the opportunity to explain to Books the structural or organisational safeguards built in that help to protect Books – especially the monitoring and observing presence of the Librarians, or the presence of a security guard. An important part of training is to inform Books of these various safeguards and make certain they are aware and confident that they are 'in control' and have the power, at any time, to say 'this is finished'.

The other side to this is reminding Books of their responsibility in relation to the emotional safety and comfort of the Reader. Readers may also have a strong emotional response to a particular subject, and Books are encouraged to be aware of this. Safety for Readers is of key concern where issues of abuse or trauma are being discussed. In these instances Living Books are informed of their formal responsibility to their Reader:

Books are asked to alert staff after the reading of any 'Readers' who have disclosed abuse or trauma. This is our protocol for all 'Readers', but is essential for young people under 16. It should be in the Code of Conduct or similar induction document. (Youth Toolkit)

Permission and responsibility

The Living Library gives you access to lots of different people, right across the spectrum and somehow it gives people the permission to talk openly about themselves. (John, Living Book, Lismore)

The setup and the guidelines (both spoken and unspoken) typical of Human Libraries are seen as granting permission for activities and interactions that might normally be uncomfortable. Readers are given permission to ask personal questions, Books are permitted to 'be themselves' and participants are given permission to talk openly – all within the limits discussed above.

An effective Human Library thus requires Readers, Books and organisers all to take significant responsibility not only for the smooth running of the project, but particularly for the careful balancing of safety and risk that underpins the format. Readers are asked to be respectful as well as curious, Books are asked to risk (limited) public exposure and organisers seek to ensure the safety and comfort of all participants. Yet while all participants take some risk and some responsibility, our research indicates that on the whole it is Living Books who take the greatest share. Books, Readers and organisers suggest that Books must be 'open', 'resilient', 'patient', 'not defensive', 'generous', prepared to 'disclose' and to 'listen'. Even where the interaction is described as a 'two way process', in practice Books will respond to the Readers' interests and needs, within limits. 'The book is willing and prepared to share, but its also very valid if this conversation turns out that the Reader does more of the talking' (Sabina, Organiser, Lismore Living Library). Just as Living Books are ultimately 'in control' in that they can refuse to answer questions, they usually also aim to put the Reader at ease and keep the conversation flowing. In the previous chapter, Uncle Des explained that he shies away from taking Readers 'outside the comfort zone', in contrast to his strategy in cultural awareness training. From the start Books describe their Living Library experience as one that is guided by the Reader:

You follow the Reader. If the Reader wants to know a particular part then that's the way you go. (Uncle Des, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

If they ask a question I feel that I want to, and I should give them an answer. (Chiu, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

Many Books describe their experience of a Reading as just as much about listening to their Reader as it is about telling their stories.

In recruiting and training Books with the 'skills to manage difficult conversations', Human Libraries ultimately require Living Books to take responsibility by being open to hearing and responding to the misconceptions and prejudices of Readers:

We needed people who were able to bear questions that could be experienced as being offensive or naive or discriminatory. So we needed people with capacities to foster a relationship particularly with people who are learning, who are wanting to learn but might have a whole lot of assumptions or stereotypes or attitudes that are just incorrect. We needed to assure that the books weren't going to get defensive. People that had the skills to be able to manage inappropriate questions. (Shauna, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Thus despite the 'shared responsibility' between Reader and Book in the Living Library (Garbutt 2008: 273), Living Books must be open to the uncertainties of conversation with strangers. Overall, however, the Living Library format does offer a range of safeguards and strategies which mitigate against some of the inequalities and risks identified in research on storytelling techniques in more conventional workshop formats. This shift in discomfort and exposure is an important outcome, and an aspect of the Human Library concept that might well be adapted in other formats such as workshops. In the following chapter we discuss the further impacts of Human Libraries.

'IT CHANGES LIVES': OUTCOMES, IMPACTS AND EVALUATIONS

Organisers, Books and some Readers feel strongly that Human Libraries have significant impacts, yet there is relatively little detailed research to support or refute this widely held view. This chapter presents an overview of observations about the outcomes and impacts of Living Library projects shared in interviews and in ongoing evaluations. The chapter also discusses evaluation processes and analyses the impacts of Living Libraries in regards to the original stated aims of addressing prejudice and discrimination. While there is evidence that Living Libraries can facilitate greater social connection through conversations across difference that might not otherwise happen, the existing research on antiracism strategies suggests that cross-cultural contact has limited impact on entrenched discriminations and can in fact divert energies and attention from vital structural change.

Outcomes And Impacts

For Readers

Evaluations and verbal feedback from Living Library Readers suggest that the experience of being a Reader is an overwhelmingly positive one. People enjoy the experience – often more than they thought they would – describing it as ‘rewarding’, ‘enriching’, ‘emotional’, ‘interesting’. This is explained commonly in terms of the Living Library presenting an opportunity to learn new things and ‘expand horizons’. Readers often talk about the sessions as provocative, in the sense of providing new ideas from a fresh viewpoint: ‘it really has made me think about it’; ‘it has changed my idea about that’.

Certainly a key hoped-for benefit is that involvement might meaningfully transform Reader attitudes and beliefs. Anecdotes abound in relation to this, but attitudinal change is harder to document. The following comments, for example, were received from young high-school kids involved in a Living Library in Wollongong:

It allowed me to ask my own questions in a calm environment. I was able to link similarities between myself and the Islamic girls. (Reader, Wollongong Living Library)

Tattooing in traditional New Guinea is a part of the culture. Tattoos – I often think rough punk people get lots of tattoos but now I see it is part of some people’s cultures. (Reader, Wollongong Living Library)

It helped me to understand that blind people are quite normal. (Reader, Wollongong Living Library)

Readers also report finding the experience ‘inspiring’. Books are sometimes described as ‘everyday’ role models – ‘if they can do it, so can I’ – in their sharing of their own stories of successfully getting over the difficulties or challenges in their lives.

Organisers, and Readers themselves, talk about the Living Library as providing an alternate learning environment or format. It offers Readers another avenue for finding out information or gaining knowledge on a subject. As a Reader at Auburn Living Library explained: ‘I hate reading. So I’d rather talk to someone!’ Many also talk about the social aspect of the Living Library. As another Reader in Auburn explained when asked what she gained from participation: ‘Well, I met a new friend!'

For the wider community

The social aspect of the Living Library is felt to be a clear benefit for the wider community also. The feeling of belonging created for participants during the interaction is thought to have longer-term consequences for how they interact generally within the community, ‘instead of people passing each other in the street as strangers, it’s bringing a community together’.

Some organisers are able to share examples where isolation within a community has broken down as a result of a Living Library exchange and friendships established. In Lismore organisers point to an example of two Books who were actually neighbours but never knew each other – ‘didn’t feel inclined or able to say G’Day’ – until getting involved with the Living Library.

Now they have developed a connection as neighbours in the community but only through the experience of the Living Library because it gave them a space to come together. (Shauna, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Here we can see that many Human Library projects fit well within a ‘social inclusion’ framework, which increasingly underpins social policy. Human Libraries are understood to increase participation and social connection among diverse communities. It is also worth remembering the critiques of social inclusion flagged earlier, and the arguments that an emphasis on ‘inclusion’ can also shift attention from wider processes of change or transformation in the ‘mainstream’ or the status quo and on to minimum standards of inclusion for the marginalised.

The Human Library is seen as a welcome chance for people to interact face-to-face, for unmediated, engaged personal interaction. Those involved often mention that they feel the Library has effects that cannot be documented through their own evaluation processes, and that are difficult to track and to measure. One of the organisers at Auburn Living Library uses a metaphor of planting seeds and ripple effects to describe the way that stories and ideas might travel out and through the community:

Who knows what seeds our Books have planted with other people who have then gone and planted. I love that ripple idea. (Linda, Organiser, Auburn Living Library)

One way in which such ripple effects are amplified is through the publicity and media generated by the Living Library. Though the stories travel out in a different way they are able to reach a much wider audience as a result. Lismore organiser, Sabina Baltruweit, sees this as a clear benefit, one that will work towards the project’s ultimate aim: ‘[the media] is all little spin-offs, really positive spin-offs from the project, [which help] to break down barriers’.

Evaluating Human Libraries

At the end of a Human Library project an evaluation is undertaken to calculate both its success and/or failure, and to identify the future direction of the project. The evaluation process typically involves Book and Reader feedback via simple, written questionnaires given out to all participants at the end of an event. Any informal positive and/or

negative comments made on the day or after the event to Librarians and staff are included. As are the organisers' own reflections or observations on their experiences organising the event, training Books, and running sessions on the day.

The general purpose or role of evaluations is threefold. Firstly a formal project Evaluation Report is often required for the practical acquittal of a funded project. Organisers need to be able to demonstrate the outcomes and impact of the project to funders in cases where monies or resources (such as a venue, staff time) have been granted, or where such funding is hoped for in the future. Secondly organisers undertake evaluation because they are keen to reflect on what worked, what might be changed, what should be discarded altogether so that they might improve their organising model in the future. Lastly, Evaluation Reports as formal and public documents are often shared with other organisers on request, and can now also be uploaded and shared via the Living Libraries Australia website. These provide a valuable resource for new and future organisers to tap into, and useful comparative examples for current organisers to consider.

At present, the success of a Living Library project is evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- Numbers of sessions, readings, Books available, Readers
- Successful recruitment of Books
- Appropriate training provided, training manual produced
- Successful drawing in of Readers
- Reader and Book feedback regarding finding points of commonality, increasing social interaction within community and
- Partnerships between local organisations within communities (Health and Council, etc).

The key challenges around evaluation that emerge from this research are the need for improved evaluation techniques, and a desire for greater feedback on the part of Living Books:

Are we progressing? Are we getting anywhere with people, what people want? Maybe it would be good to have a database of what are some of the most-asked questions in people's minds. That would really give us a better understanding of what we should be concentrating on. (Levent, Living Book, Auburn)

Organisers were also interested in more detailed evaluations. At Auburn Living Library Jenn Martin was particularly keen to know how to improve the Living Library experience for Books, and suggested that a focus group would be useful. Living Books said that it is difficult to really know the impact of the project, particularly as they rarely see the feedback that is collected. Beyond counting Readers and documenting the interest of Books and partners, many people involved in Living Libraries felt that the wider impact is difficult to measure:

Where you're trying to change attitudes and trying to change belief and you're trying for those bigger issues, I don't think you're ever going to get that sort of feedback. ... I think you just have to believe that it's going to happen. I think that becomes a matter of belief – if this message goes out and people hear it, then it's going to ask them to change an attitude.

(Deb, Living Book, Auburn)

Interviewees described various 'ripple effects' which demonstrate something of the impact of Living Libraries, and yet are rarely captured in standard 'tick-a-box' exit questionnaires. Ripple effects might reach the most prejudiced who don't come to the library:

If you reach them indirectly, then you've achieved something. ... The reader goes away full of the positive experience, and tells their friend about it, and the friend may still not be able to overcome their fears and prejudices to come here and read the book, but they've shared it second hand. And because their friend is enlightened, and no longer afraid, and has ditched some prejudices, there's a chance that that more out on the fringe sort of person might be positively affected. (Gordon, Living Book, Lismore)

Where there is anecdotal evidence of attitudinal change, the story is oft-repeated around the network of Living Libraries, such as the story of the older woman in Lismore who reluctantly borrowed a Living Book who described his life as a gay man. Afterwards the reader declared that her assumptions had been proved wrong and she went on to talk about the experience with friends and her priest:

They had a great conversation and we subsequently heard that she found out that she had a faith in common, that he wasn't able to practice his religion because of his sexuality. She then mentioned that to her minister who came around to visit. ... I describe her as one of those women in our community who are loved by many people, and so she's got a lot of informal power in the community. ... So she went to her Senior Citizens group and said you know I went to the Living Library and I borrowed this gay bloke and so you could see then she did get a lot out of it and she's been reflecting on the conversation and it's raised some questions in her mind about some things that she thought were fairly settled in how she thought about the world are starting to be kind of disrupted. (Shauna, Organiser, Lismore Living Library)

Sometimes Living Books can be aware of ripple effects which are not systematically documented by organisers:

I did have one student who went away and when I caught up with him later in the library he had actually gone and started the enrolment process, and he said, you know you helped me. (Deb, Living Book, Auburn Living Library)

As well as individual attitudinal change, people involved with Living Libraries often cite the importance of media coverage, and local media in particular, for circulating the stories of the Living Library. Living Library organisers in Lismore have worked closely with the local media since first deciding to run an event, 'drip feeding' stories and establishing an ongoing relationship. As in Lismore, the local paper in Auburn now

regularly publishes profiles of ‘Living Books’, distributing the story to wider audiences, and Auburn Living Library has been featured on the community television channel, TVS.

Overall, the impacts and ‘ripple effects’ of Living Libraries remain difficult to capture and poorly documented. Our interviews and observations suggest the need for innovative evaluation techniques beyond exit questionnaires in order to track outcomes in media and word of mouth.

Impacts Of Communicative Contact

This section takes up the crucial dilemma for Living Libraries – what change, if any, is produced? What are the outcomes and impacts of Living Libraries? And how do these relate to the original aims of antiracism and combating prejudice with which Living Libraries began internationally and in Australia? We discuss these questions with close reference to the ‘theoretical threads’ underpinning Human Libraries – the power of storytelling or conversation, the responsibilities of ‘listeners’ or readers, and the ‘contact hypothesis’.

Our interviews and observations with Living Libraries in Australia indicate that the format is indeed finely tuned to questions of risk and safety, comfort and the unsettling potential of addressing prejudices. Moreover, this research suggests that Living Libraries have for the most part found innovative alternatives to the scholarly critiques of antiracist storytelling outlined in the Introduction. That said, it must be noted that for all the careful attention to questions of safety, risk and discomfort, at Living Libraries in Australia the most common challenges have been not so much instances of threat or abuse, but rather the more general difficulties of disinterest or low levels of participation discussed in previous chapters. It is also important to note that we have been informed primarily by organisers, Books and Readers who have an ongoing involvement with Living Libraries, and we have not sought out people who might have avoided Living Library projects, been disgruntled or suffered the painful experiences described by researchers of cross-cultural storytelling such as Razack (1993), Jones (1993) or Srivastava and Francis (2006). In this section we overview the ways and the extent to which Living Libraries offer an alternative to more conventional workshops, and also the extent to which the critiques of storytelling techniques might apply to Living Libraries nonetheless.

An innovative alternative to storytelling workshops

Several features of the Human Library format offer an innovative alternative to more conventional models of cross-cultural awareness or antiracism workshops, and these alternatives go some way to addressing the critiques addressed at the more usual models. For instance, scholars and practitioners have criticised the focus on ‘knowledge’ of ‘Others’ in conventional storytelling workshops, arguing that this exacerbates unequal power relations and absolves the privileged from scrutiny (Razack 1993, Srivastava and Francis 2006). Living Libraries, however, tend to facilitate a more interactive, two-way process of conversation in which Readers may disclose as much as Books. This dynamic is most pronounced in the classic one-on-one readings, whereas group conversations involve less focus on individual readers, and thus diffuse responsibility and risk.

Srivastava and Francis (2006: 288) find that in antiracism storytelling workshops white people refuse to make themselves vulnerable and are thus relieved of responsibility. In a Human Library, on the other hand, the relative intimacy means that vulnerability is more evenly shared between Books and Readers, although participants do self-select and choose the levels of risk.

While the Living Library format originated with the assumption that Books would represent marginalised identities and be borrowed by Readers from the privileged ‘mainstream’, in practice in diverse contexts the roles are often more complicated. In culturally diverse Auburn the categories of mainstream and margin connect in unpredictable ways through the Living Library, as in the case of a Reader who disclosed her Indigeneity in a Vox Pop interview after borrowing a Book on Sufism. The relatively flexible and open-ended nature of Living Library conversations combined with the ‘escape hatches’ built in to the guidelines mean that it is possible for interactions to resemble a conventional ‘cultural awareness’ workshop in which a marginalised community is explained for the education of a more privileged majority. Nevertheless, the dynamics in play at Living Libraries are often more surprising and less clearly focused on knowledge of an ‘Other’.

Where Living Libraries adopt the recommended training and guidelines the projects also tend to pay more explicit attention to questions of emotion and vulnerability than is typical of conventional workshops. Case (2007) concludes that race-focused discussions need to acknowledge the emotions, and guilt in particular, that may arise for participants when confronted with race inequality, and Pederson and Barlow (2008) argue that it is important to focus on intergroup emotions such as guilt and empathy. As we have seen, the design and management of Living Libraries does address the possibilities of pain, trauma and risk for Books and for Readers and highlights various safety measures. The Living Libraries that we have observed do not, however, address the challenges of guilt specifically, nor do they incorporate strategies which might direct Readers’ emotional responses into further productive conversations or activities.

Srivastava and Francis (2006) identify a number of factors in the antihomophobia workshops organised by TEACH which provide a positive alternative to the unequal power relations that they find in antiracism workshops. Several of the innovative features of TEACH workshops are present in Living Libraries as well. For example unlike many antiracism workshops in the workplace or school, TEACH workshops ensure anonymity for the storytellers (Srivastava and Francis 2006: 292), who also have ‘the opportunity to “script” their stories in advance of their presentations’ (*ibid*: 297) and are given training and support in how to work safely within the workshop format. The ‘protections’ of anonymity, scripting, preparation and working in a peer-to-peer environment all contribute to shifting the ‘power relations between tellers and listeners’ which in antiracism workshops are often experienced as ‘punishing constraint’ or ‘dangerous’ (*ibid*).

The limits of storytelling

If Human Libraries offer an innovative format which shifts some of the inequalities associated with more conventional antiracism workshops, the Living Library project is also open to some of the same criticisms. For one thing, participants in Human Libraries self-select, so that positive outcomes may result, but on the basis that those who have participated were already open to changing behaviours and attitudes (Pederson and Barlow 2008). Another common critique is summed up in the question, ‘who needs cross cultural dialogue?’ (Jones 1993, Ho 2007). The question reminds us that those who are marginalised do not need workshops in order to learn about the workings of the ‘mainstream’, and the benefits of conversations across difference often reflect the needs and desires of the privileged more than the priorities of those who are subjected to prejudice.

According to this critique, storytelling may be a ‘feel good’ experience for listeners, precisely because they are absolved of the responsibility to ‘do their own race work’ (Jones 1993). Listeners may congratulate themselves on their good deeds while doing nothing further to challenge racism or to work for substantial change. To underline this argument, researchers and practitioners stress the need to examine what is not talked about in antiracism storytelling, and the limits of the interpersonal approach for bringing about organisational change. Focusing on stories of marginalisation, critics suggest, means that the privileged do not need to talk about or address privilege, or the knowledges and structures which perpetuate inequalities.

Importantly, strategies of storytelling are seen as obscuring or diverting attention away from the need and possibilities for deeper organisational or structural change. A highly personalised exchange ‘supports individualized and emotionally volatile strategies for antiracism, rather than organizational ones’ (Srivastava and Francis 2006: 284). Srivastava and Francis give examples of workshops in which the initial aim of addressing the unequal division of labour, resources and respect in an organisation is quickly overtaken by emotional debate on individual experiences, and argue that conversations ‘that focus on systemic change as an initial objective might be more appropriate’ (*ibid*: 303).

The limits of contact

As well as patchy evidence for the effectiveness of contact theory, there are scholarly critiques which challenge the very premise of the ‘contact hypothesis’. Three key criticisms are discussed here: the focus on individual rather than organisational or structural change; the failure to address privilege; and the need for multi-faceted longitudinal strategies.

The contact hypothesis has been widely criticised for focusing on individual attitudinal change rather than directly targeting structural inequalities and institutional racisms. Hill and Augousitinos (2006) note that stereotypes remain resistant to longterm change unless there is broader social change. In the absence of societal change, even those who are willing to question stereotypes within a workshop or dialogue will be constantly exposed to the stereotypes outside the workshop setting, in media, public culture and everyday conversations.

The effectiveness of such prejudice reduction programmes must be seriously questioned given their excessive focus on locating prejudice and racism within the psychological and cognitive domain of the individual, rather than, or in addition to, the oppressive structural arrangements and power relations within society. (Hill and Augoustinos 2006)

These authors suggest a highly challenging measure of effectiveness for projects facilitating contact and storytelling across differences: 'one measure is if contact leads to social action and positive change in social systems'. (2006: 38)

Srivastava and Francis (2006: 281) echo the concern that much prejudice reduction work 'sidesteps a direct challenge to the systemic and organisational aspects of racism'. Indeed, these authors suggest that the focus on the individual and the interpersonal, typical of much contemporary antiracism work, actually diverts attention and energy from the challenge of organisational change:

Can the lack of organisational change be explained, in part, by pervasive techniques of emotional and personal disclosure, and the ways these strategies support persistent constructions of knowledge about racism and homophobia? Particularly in reference to antiracist changes in community organisations, one implication is that changes in organisational policy, practice, or curriculum get sidelined as the individual, personal, and emotional takes centre stage. (2006: 298)

As our research suggests, most Human Libraries are more attuned to questions of comfort, safety and risk than conventional contact and storytelling projects are. Nevertheless, Human Libraries do not necessarily ensure a shift from a 'disadvantage' framing to a focus on whiteness and privilege as advocated by many scholars and practitioners of antiracism. Pon (2009) for example argues that we should pay less attention to cultural difference and 'grapple instead with racism and colonialism', which includes attention to the privileges of whiteness and 'a self-reflexive grappling with the history of racism and colonialism which otherwise is allowed to be forgotten'. Razack (1993), Srivastava and Francis (2006) and Borell et al (2009) all suggest the need for critical self-scrutiny from those occupying 'normalised' positions in order to understand and challenge 'conferred advantage' (Borell et al 2009: 35) rather than focusing only on experiences of disadvantage.

From contact to social action

In response to the identified limitations of the 'contact hypothesis', Pettigrew suggests a longitudinal model involving a number of different stages over time to develop a sequence of 'contact' experiences. Overall the contact research suggests that the kind of communicative contact fostered by Human Libraries may be a useful first step but is not a sufficient strategy for antiracism or tackling prejudice. Key recommendations for improved effectiveness of 'contact' projects include:

- Contact alone is not enough, further factors are required. (Pedersen, Walker and Wise 2005: 24)

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- A sequential process of events and activities is preferred to ineffectual one-off events, varied and repeated contact across multiple settings is preferred (Rodenburg and Huynh 2006)
 - Continuing follow-through is necessary in order to ensure productive, antiracist outcomes (Case 2007)
 - A combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies is needed (Pedersen and Barlow 2008). Big, historical and structural changes in society shape attitudes (Pedersen, Walker and Wise 2005: 21).
 - Effective strategies must respond to local conditions and meet local needs, uniform strategies are less effective than tailored approaches (Pederson, Walker and Wise 2005: 26, Dunn 2009)
 - Activities should be organised to focus on working for organisational change (Srivastava and Francis 2005)
 - In order to combat racism and shift prejudices, projects must link to social action (Rodenburg and Huynh 2006) and ‘serious challenges to the social realities that shape and govern intergroup and structural relations’ (Hill and Augoustino 2006: 260) and
 - Antiracism strategies need clearly defined goals and objectives and a means for measuring success against these criteria (Hill and Augoustinos 2006).

In contrast to the common assumption that storytelling or dialogue will produce better knowledge of the ‘Other’ and thus better social relations, the scholarship outlined above suggests that alternative strategies are required to focus more on issues and privilege rather than on marginalised identities, to work towards systemic and organisational change rather than interpersonal understanding and to link conversations to further social action.

Key Challenges

The key challenges to emerge from this overview of impacts, outcomes and evaluations associated with Human Libraries in Australia are: the need for enhanced evaluations; the importance of clear aims and purpose; and the imperative of connecting with wider processes of antiracism and social change.

More and better evaluations

Most evaluations of Living Libraries in Australia, this research included, rely primarily on self-reporting by participants gathered shortly after the one on one conversation. These evaluations are often supplemented with anecdotal observations by regular organisers of Living Libraries. These forms of evaluation suggest that Human Libraries can have a positive impact on social skills and connection, or the self-esteem and the knowledge base of individuals involved in the one on one interactions. There is an urgent need, however, for more detailed and rigorous research to better understand the wider outcomes. The existing research on intercultural contact demonstrates the

need for longitudinal research to gauge the extent, if any, to which the Human Library experience facilitates a change in attitudes or behaviours which persists over time. It is also important to track the ripple effects of Human Libraries – to analyse the ways in which the stories travel through media and social networks. In regards to the original antiracist aims of Living Libraries, it is also vital to better understand the connections, if any, between participation in Human Libraries and involvement in processes of organisational or structural change.

Clarity of aims and purpose

In Chapter Two we outlined the diverse aims and approaches to which the basic Living Library format has been adapted in Australia. The limited evidence available on the impact and outcomes of Human Libraries suggests that it is very important to clarify the goals and rationale of any project using the format. The evaluations available to date indicate that Living Libraries may contribute to interpersonal connections and to individual awareness, but existing scholarly research suggests that the strategy in isolation will make only a limited contribution to wider aims of combating racism and discrimination. While Human Libraries may contribute to general aims such as ‘community connection’, improved confidence or awareness of diversity, a more focused or determined approach is required to address entrenched disadvantage or persistent prejudices. As some critics (Razack 1993, Srivastava and Francis 2006) claim that strategies of interpersonal interaction can actually hamper or divert more challenging antiracism strategies, it is vital that Human Libraries be specific and realistic in their stated aims and the means to achieve these goals.

Connecting with wider processes

If Human Libraries are to contribute to wider processes of social change, such as antiracism, it is important to link the one-on-one conversation strategy with advocacy campaigns, policy work and leadership at the local and national levels. To the extent that Human Libraries confine their aims and strategies to changing personal attitudes through one-on-one conversation, the projects are and will remain typical of a shift in contemporary funded antiracism work which has seen the focus move from questions of access and equity to an increasing focus on dialogue and social inclusion. The early years of the ‘war on terror’ saw an upsurge in interest and funding for interfaith dialogue as the preferred antiracism strategy, alongside a decline in funding for strategies whereby institutions seek to address racism within (Ho 2007). Human Libraries can be seen as a more generalised strategy with similar aims but a broader focus, beyond relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians. Interfaith Dialogue has been criticised for focusing on personal beliefs and attitudinal change at the expense of fundamental questions of discriminatory policies and international conflict (Ho 2007). Without connecting to wider processes of social change and transformation, Human Libraries will be open to the same criticisms.

In order to address the concern that one-on-one encounters have only short-term and small-scale impacts, Human Libraries might incorporate strategies to encourage ripple effects and further participation by Readers. Indeed, as Human Libraries in Australia

are most often associated with local public libraries, those public libraries are in fact well-placed to act as a reference and referral point to encourage readers to participate in follow-on activities and share their learnings. In Australia there are a number of ongoing projects as well as strategies in development which provide valuable models and resources for connecting Human Libraries to wider processes of antiracism work.

In 2011 the Australian government announced a new multicultural policy. A key component of the policy was the establishment of a new national partnership to develop and implement a comprehensive National Anti-Racism Strategy for Australia, led by the Race Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission (see http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/NARPS.html). This policy development acknowledges the need for dedicated antiracism work alongside the celebration of diversity. It also provides an opportunity for Human Libraries to connect with the policies and resources being developed.

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, or VicHealth, has developed a comprehensive suite of resources and an evidence informed framework for multilayered antiracism strategies (see <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/buildingonourstrengths>). The *Building On Our Strengths* strategy includes a framework for action which stresses the importance of linking multiple layers – individual, organisational, community, society – to reduce racism and support diversity. The strategy also provides ideas and examples on how to connect strategies across the different layers, linking individual strategies to actions with a wider impact.

VicHealth and the Challenging Racism project based at the University of Western Sydney are also taking the lead in focusing on ‘bystander antiracism’ as an emerging area of research and practice. Bystander antiracism encourages people who are neither the subjects nor the perpetrators of racism to respond to discrimination and prejudice when appropriate and to promote ‘prosocial’ attitudes of respect for difference, and intolerance of racism. Human Library readers who have developed a greater appreciation of diversity and marginalisation through the Human Library conversation might well be supported to find out more about the possibilities for bystander action beyond the library, such as with family and friends, in the work place or in public spaces. A number of toolkits and resources are available to encourage and support bystander antiracism. Advocacy groups such as Amnesty and ANTaR (Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation) publish tips for addressing prejudice in everyday conversations, including how to manage difficult questions and how to avoid unproductive conflict (Amnesty 2011, ANTaR 2008, see p.54). A list of further resources is included at the end of this report.

Bystander action can also contribute to organisational or structural change by addressing policies or organisational cultures which do not adequately support diversity or address discrimination. There are possibilities for all involved in Human Libraries to be supported in promoting respect for difference and in challenging discrimination in their organisations, including the libraries, local governments and community organisations which are typically involved in organising Human Libraries. Readers might also be given the opportunity to access further information on how to become involved in advocacy work or campaigns, such as a Living Book – telling the story of

having a gay son – who has flyers for the organisation PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) available for interested Readers.

To sum up, a key opportunity for Human Libraries to more effectively connect with wider processes for addressing prejudice and discrimination lies in the potential to work as a reference and referral point to encourage ongoing action and maximise the ripple effects of Living Library conversations. The rationale here is to position the Human Library encounter as a starting point or a first step rather than the end point of the Human Library strategy. At the very least, Readers who have developed an increased respect for difference can be encouraged to spread the word where it will be most effective and in ways that will be most productive – whether in local media or by challenging everyday prejudices or by working for change at work. A wide range of resources could be readily on hand and made available to interested Readers. This could include tips and guidelines that both encourage and support all involved in Human Libraries to take on the often challenging work of further spreading the impacts of one on one contact.

THE LIMITED POWER OF ONE ON ONE

This monograph has considered the organisation and the impact of Human Libraries in Australia with reference to the views and experiences of participants and organisers, our own observations, and contemporary research on storytelling and contact in antiracism work. The research has identified considerable enthusiasm for the Human Library strategy and a number of practical suggestions for practitioners and policymakers. Our research also suggests the need for critical reflection on key questions about the strategy and its implementation. Overall, there is a need to be cautious and realistic in evaluating the impact of Human Libraries as a means to address prejudice or combat racism. Despite the ‘buzz’ around Human Libraries, a number of key issues require careful consideration:

Sustainability remains a key concern for all involved in Human Libraries. There is a need to recognise and support the volunteers who make Human Libraries possible, and to manage the expectations of all involved, and Living Books in particular.

Attracting Readers is the central practical issue for the sustainability of Human Libraries. Attracting greater numbers of Readers is a recurring challenge, as is the problem of self-selection, whereby those who are already open to difference and to having their attitudes challenged are the most likely to become involved in Human Libraries.

The library metaphor produces dilemmas as well as facilitating the smooth organising and effective promotion of the projects. The Human Library remains a difficult strategy to explain, and the library metaphor can both help in this process, and can sometimes lead to confusion regarding the purpose or goals of the project. Some people interviewed for this research believe that using the library metaphor runs the risk of dehumanising people who volunteer as Living Books.

Community ownership is crucial to the effectiveness of Human Libraries. The original Living Libraries in Europe and Australia began with grassroots community activism. Current projects can ensure the close involvement of community stakeholders, NGOs and advocacy groups, and Living Books in the running of Human Libraries through steering committees and an emphasis on community ownership. Some people involved in Human Libraries fear that the institutionalisation of the strategy through government funding and public libraries can quash the energy and political commitment underpinning the original projects.

Responding to locale and context is vital to the impact of Human Libraries. Projects will be most effective where they respond to local issues and the specifics of the local community. Community ownership can help ensure the ability of the Human Library to identify and address local needs and generate interest among constituents.

Choosing and curating Books can be a complex task. Challenges include the need to guard against proselytising and balancing the aim to highlight the stories of the most marginalised with the need to attract Readers.

A safe environment for risk-taking is one of the most innovative and significant achievements of successful Human Library projects. In contrast to more conventional cross-cultural storytelling workshops, Human Libraries pay close attention to questions of privacy and anonymity, safety and protection, as well as permission and responsibility.

The result is a context in which some of the risk and pain faced by marginalised storytellers is ameliorated.

Improved evaluations of Human Libraries are required to better understand the longer-term impacts, if any, in terms of changing attitudes and in terms of wider antiracist aims.

Clarity of aims and purpose is essential for the task of managing expectations and in order to address the most challenging criticisms of communicative contact for antiracism work. Human Library organisers and participants need to be clear about the aims and also the limitations of the strategy. For example, if a Human Library is framed in terms of social inclusion it may achieve impacts such as increased interpersonal interaction and connection, but will not necessarily address entrenched racism and discriminations.

The limits of storytelling as an antiracism strategy in Human Libraries include the tendency for participants to self-select, the possibility for ‘mainstream’ participants to avoid the difficult work of grappling with privilege and the danger that strategies of storytelling can divert attention and interest away from more fundamental organisational change.

The limits of contact as an antiracism strategy in Human Libraries include the focus on changing individual attitudes rather than working for structural change, the failure to articulate the need for change of the ‘mainstream’ or status quo, the need for multifaceted longterm strategies and the need to connect to wider processes of social action and social change.

From these key findings we find that the ‘buzz’ around Human Libraries may somewhat overstate the impact of this innovative strategy. The communicative contact facilitated by Human Libraries may well be a very useful first step in antiracism work and our research indicates that the Human Library format can contribute to raising awareness of a range of issues and differences and to challenging some common misconceptions and stereotypes. For a longer-term impact beyond individual attitudes, however, Human Libraries must be explicitly connected to and complement other initiatives in the difficult ongoing work of changing policies and public debate, access and participation, political leadership and social structures.

There is no doubt that the Human Library has become a popular strategy which has quickly spread around the world and throughout Australia. Living Library events have been held in at least 65 countries and hundreds of Living Libraries have taken place across Australia. The strategy has won awards including the 2008 social project of the year award in Austria, the Little Brother Award for the Human Library bus tour in Denmark and the Grand Marketing Event of the Year Award in Australia. For many who have participated in these events, there is a noticeable air of excitement and a strong belief in the power of the one-on-one interactions facilitated to challenge stereotypes and combat prejudice.

Our research also suggests that the power of one-on-one communicative contact is in fact limited, and the potential for Human Libraries to meet the original aims of antiracism and challenging prejudice depends on clarity of purpose and on connections

to wider processes of social change. As the strategy has become more widespread, the original goals have expanded to encompass a diversity of aims and approaches. These approaches can undoubtedly contribute to social connection and awareness-raising for participants, and for organisers and organisations. The challenge for contemporary antiracism work, however, remains to grapple with the ‘fraught politics’ (Dunn and Nelson 2011: 598) of challenging privilege and shifting inequalities. While communicative contact can contribute to ‘the unfixing of difference and norms’ and ‘developing habits of coexistence’, intergroup contact can also find conservative expression as ‘community harmony’ which avoids an explicit focus on tackling racism or unsettling the privileged (Garbutt 2008). Without a clear commitment to challenging the mainstream, Human Libraries may well serve diverse and valuable aims and purposes, but fail to make a significant contribution to antiracism work in Australia.

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Online Resources

Living Libraries Australia (<http://www.livinglibraries.org.au>)

Downloadable Resources

General Organisers' Guide: <http://www.livinglibraries.org.au/setupLL.html>

Youth Toolkit: <http://www.livinglibraries.org.au/images/uploads/youth.toolkit.finalv7.pdf>

DVD (downloadable order form and clips): <http://www.livinglibraries.org.au/video.html>

Evaluations: <http://www.livinglibraries.org.au/evaluations.html>

Australian Living Libraries Wiki: <http://www.livinglibraries.org.au/wiki/pmwiki.php>

Human Library Organisation (<http://humanlibrary.org>)

General Organisers' Guide: <http://humanlibrary.org/assets/files/guides/Living%20Lib%20Organisers%20Guide.pdf> (English, but available in various other languages at site)

Miscellaneous (posters, guidelines for Readers, Library Card, T-shirt design, Reader rules, evaluations, scholarly publications re Living Libraries, etc): <http://humanlibrary.org/downloads.html>

Overview of international Human Library activities and events: <http://humanlibrary.org/activities.html>

Enough Rope with Andrew Denton, episode 127: 30 October 2006 re Living Libraries: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/enoughrope/transcripts/s1776670.htm>

jtv Hack Video, 23 February 2007 re Lismore Living Library: <http://www.abc.net.au/jtv/2007/1855866.htm>

Further Resources: Antiracism

Anti-racism Response Training (A.R.T) Trainer's Manual for High School Students <http://www.diversityteam.org/resources/7>

Nonviolent Community Safety and Peacebuilding Handbook (Pt'chang) <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ptchang/download.htm>

Building on Our Strengths: a framework to reduce race-based discrimination and support diversity in Victoria (VicHealth) <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en/Programs-and-Projects/Freedom-from-discrimination/Building-on-our-strengths.aspx>

- This framework was developed to guide the work of VicHealth and others in taking action to address race-based discrimination and support cultural diversity. Drawing on the latest Australian and international research, the framework identifies:
 - Key factors that contribute to race-based discrimination and intolerance of diversity
 - Actions that can be taken to address these factors
 - Priority settings for projects and programs (such as local government and sports clubs).

Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing race-based discrimination (VicHealth) <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Freedom->

[from-discrimination/Bystander-approaches-in-support-of-preventing-race-based-discrimination.aspx](http://www.uws.edu.au/ssap/school_of_social_sciences_and_psychology/research/challenging_racism/initiatives)

- This review focuses on bystander action in response to both interpersonal and systemic racism. The potential role of the bystander is explored in relation to the varied forms and levels of racism, and across multiple levels and settings. It is based on the assumption that such action may be applied across a range from preventing racism occurring, to limiting its reoccurrence, to intervening after a racist incident.

Prejudice Mob <http://www.psychology.murdoch.edu.au/prejudice.html>

- This site lists selected references from a group of Australian researchers across disciplines and locations who examine prejudice and its effects. There is a focus on attitudes toward cultural groups such as asylum seekers & refugees, gays & lesbians, Indigenous Australians and Muslim Australians as well as research relating to gender relations.

Challenging racism: Types of antiracism initiatives http://www.uws.edu.au/ssap/school_of_social_sciences_and_psychology/research/challenging_racism/initiatives

- A website from the UWS Challenging Racism project, providing an overview of 23 antiracism strategies, including practical examples and scholarly analyses.

StepOne <http://www.stepone.org.au/>

- StepOne provides guidance and practical resources to councils and community groups interested in implementing community cohesion initiatives in their local areas.
- The site features downloadable 'best practice' case studies covering a range of communities and issues, especially those which:
 - Reduce racism, intolerance, and negative stereotypes
 - Build positive and sustainable relationships between communities
 - Get communities working together and interacting
 - Deal with the 'difficult stuff' of living together, not just soft multiculturalism
 - Move beyond the 'multicultural festival' model (food, dance etc)
 - Show us how to live in harmony, making the most of our racial, cultural, social and religious diversity.

Appendix: Research conducted

List of interviewees

Baghavadas Srikanthadas	Auburn Living Library	Book
Chiu Poon	Auburn Living Library	Book
Deb Neyle	Auburn Living Library	Book
Desmond Dyer	Auburn Living Library	Book
Gordon Haynes	Lismore Living Library	Book
Mary*	Auburn Living Library	Organiser
Jenn Martin	Auburn Living Library	Organiser
John Jessup	Lismore Living Library	Book
Levent Gunaydin	Auburn Living Library	Book
Linda Boustani	Auburn Living Library	Organiser
Lucy Kinsley	Lismore Living Library	Organiser
Lyn*	Auburn Living Library	Book
Pamela Davies	Auburn Living Library	Organiser
Sabina Baltruweit	Lismore Living Library	Organiser
Shauna McIntyre	Lismore Living Library	Organiser

* Interviewees requested that their names be withheld for publication.

Eight anonymous 'vox pop' interviews were conducted with Readers who participated in the Auburn Living Library, 30 October 2009 event.

List of Events attended

Date	Event	Location	Research outcome
3 – 7 August 2009	UTS Living Library stall	University of Technology, Broadway campus	Participant observation
24 August 2009	Ryde Living Library launch	Gladesville Public Library	Participant observation (fieldnotes)
1 September 2009	Ryde Living Library event	North Ryde Public Library	Participant observation (fieldnotes)
25 September 2009	Auburn Living Library visits Oberon	Oberon Public Library	Participant observation (fieldnotes)
2 October 2009	Lismore Living Library event	Lismore Public Library	Participant observation (fieldnotes)
			Book interviews
30 October 2009	Auburn Living Library event	Auburn Public Library	Participant observation (fieldnotes)
			Vox Pops (x8)

Date	Event	Location	Research outcome
11 December 2009	Auburn Living Library end of year celebration event.	Auburn Public Library	Participant observation (fieldnotes)
