

## WHAT IN THE WORLD IS THE HUMAN LIBRARY?

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**A**s I have shared the Redwood City Public Library service priorities for this year with various people, the most frequent question I've been asked is, "What is the Human Library?" Piloting a Human Library program is one of the library's actions to support the community aspiration to help Redwood City be welcoming and inclusive, celebrate the diversity of our population, and enjoy a friendly, neighborly community spirit.

Started in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2000, the Human Library is a program in which participants have the opportunity to "borrow" a person for a conversation, much in the way people borrow a book to read (although not for three weeks at a time!). The goal of the program is to build a positive framework for conversations to challenge stereotypes and prejudices through one-on-one conversations. Over the course of a day, the collection of "human books" is available for

15- to 20-minute conversations, and participants can sign up for an appointment with the human or humans of their choice.

The humans available for conversations have stories to tell about their lives and are willing to answer questions from community members through these one-on-one conversations. When San Diego Public Library held a Human Library program in 2017, their humans included a Muslim, a triple amputee, a veteran, a homeless advocate, a refugee, a transgender individual and more. The idea is to foster communication between individuals who might not have an opportunity to interact with each other on a daily basis.

Redwood City Public Library is planning to hold its first Human Library program in mid-September to coincide with Welcoming America's national celebration of Welcoming Week. The library will be partnering with Redwood City Together, an initiative of the community collaborative Redwood City 2020. Redwood City Together has facilitated numerous world

café-style group conversations over the last few years, but the focus on individual conversations will bring a new level of learning and relationship building to the idea of community conversations.

The library is currently working on building its "collection" of humans, so if you or someone you know has a story to tell and might be willing to share it in this context, please reach out to Serena Gregorio at [sgregorio@redwoodcity.org](mailto:sgregorio@redwoodcity.org), and we can provide more information about the program. Likewise, if you are interested in attending the program, email Serena, and we will keep you up to date as the program develops.

To learn more about the Human Library, visit [www.humanlibrary.org](http://www.humanlibrary.org). To learn more about Redwood City Public Library's service priorities, visit [www.redwoodcity.org/departments/library/repl-info/service-priorities](http://www.redwoodcity.org/departments/library/repl-info/service-priorities).

*Editor's note: This article is supplied by Derek Wolgram, library director at the Redwood City Public Library.*