

## The Melville Living Library

### Organisations Involved & Contact Details

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### Aims & Target Group

The Living Library is about building social cohesion in the community and increasing acceptance and understanding. It's about celebrating diversity and fostering respect and appreciation of any community's diversity. Personal contact is very powerful in breaking down barriers – it's very hard to maintain misconceptions and stereotypes when personal exchanges are shared a positive way.

The Living Library is a means of promoting respect for human rights and human dignity, and aims to raise awareness as well as enable constructive dialogue about prejudices that usually lead to discrimination against individuals or groups of people.

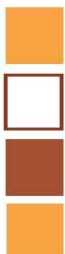
The Living Library provides an opportunity for people from all walks of life to come together.

### Project Description & Components

#### WHAT IS THE LIVING LIBRARY?

The Living Library changes the whole idea of traditional library: you don't borrow a book, you borrow a person. In the Living Library the books are people and reading becomes dialogue with the person. Each 'living book' has a story to tell – they can be borrowed for a session to talk about chapters of their life.

Living Library is an idea first introduced in Denmark in 2000 by a group called 'Stop the Violence', with the purpose to counter racism and discrimination in their community. Their inaugural Living Library was held during their largest annual music event, the Roskilde Music Festival. This festival runs over a 4-day period and





features up to 150 bands from all over the world. With so many people from varying backgrounds together, organisers wanted to ensure a harmonious environment and prevent outbreaks of violence. Concert-goers were invited to be Books and sit down with a Reader who could ask them about aspects of their life – where they come from, how they see society etc. “Stop the Violence” was a peer-led youth initiative aimed at educating young people to be active in preventing violence.

Since then the idea has been followed all over the world and adapted by different societies. In Australia, Lismore Library (NSW) introduced the concept in November 2006, running the event monthly. Brisbane City Libraries also initiated the program successfully in May 2007 and run it monthly.

## **THE CITY OF MELVILLE LIVING LIBRARY**

The City of Melville is a large and dynamic community comprising a variety of nationalities and professions. Thirty one percent of the City of Melville residents were born overseas and the diversity of countries and languages spoken at home indicates a significant multicultural population.

Melville’s Living Library provided the opportunity for people in our diverse community, who would normally never interact, to come together in a safe, supervised environment where the expectation is that you can freely exchange dialogue and ideas.

The manual developed by the Directorate of Youth and Sport, *Don’t Judge a book by its cover! The Living Library Organiser’s Guide* was used as a guide and adapted to our community and environment.

## **THE LIVING BOOKS CATALOGUE**

Living Books are usually individuals or groups of people who have had some kind of adversity in life and/or had been target of discrimination.

The City of Melville inaugural Living Library offered a diverse catalogue of ‘Living Books’, including:

- A person with mental disability;
- People with physical disabilities;
- An African Migrant;
- East Timorese refugees;
- Iranian refugees;
- A Buddhist Nun;
- A recovered heroin addict;
- A person recovering from depression;
- An Indigenous Australian;
- Gays and Lesbians;
- Carers;
- An Autistic child and parent;
- And a person living with Bi-Polar illness.

All ‘Living Books’ participating in the Living Library were volunteers.





## Process

The process included the following approaches and strategies:

### 1. IDENTIFYING THE LIVING BOOKS

All 'Living Books' participating in the Living Library were volunteers, but an allowance to cover their transport was offered. A package was developed and sent out to various organisations to attract suitable 'living books'. The package contained a letter of invitation and an introductory overview and background history of the Living Library concept. As a result, some of the 'Living Books' were referred by Non- Government Organisations (NGO's). Others 'Living Books' were members of the Melville community who wanted to share their stories.

### 2. PRODUCTION OF THE CATALOGUE

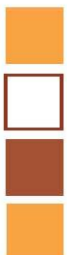
The catalogue produced contained titles and highlights of every 'Living Book' that they themselves developed. It was important the Books are allowed to develop their own details to ensure authenticity and for them to choose what they wanted to share about themselves.

### 3. PROMOTING THE LIVING LIBRARY

- The promotion of the Living Library is targeted to get as many local community members involved as possible.
- A logo was developed to identify and create a branding for the project. T-shirts were printed and distributed to the library' staff to wear leading up to the event.
- Advertorials in local community newspapers are run for four consecutive weeks before the start of the program. Bookmarks and posters with information about the Living Library are printed and handed out in all libraries and other community facilities in the area. Printed helium inflated balloons were also part of the promotions for the Living Library.
- Media releases are prepared to attract local media coverage and various articles provided for community organisations' newsletters.
- Perth local radio stations announced and conducted interviews with the organiser and Living Books about the Living Library. Interviews with the living books were also featured in the Council's newsletters.
- Electronic mail outs had proved to be very efficient to inform a wide range of networks. The 'Living Books' also promoted the program amongst their networks of families and friends.

### 4. BOOKINGS SYSTEM

A telephone booking system was developed to enable members of the public or potential 'readers' to select living books and suitable session times. Each living book was allocated to one reader for thirty minutes conversation. Living books had up to four readers per day.





## 5. INDUCTION OF THE LIVING BOOKS

One week prior to the event the Living Books received informal training on how to manage being a book. This session was held at the venue where the event was run. All 'Living Books' had a chance to meet all the other 'Living Books', the librarians and organisers, and ask questions and make suggestions regarding the running of the Living Library.

In this session, the Living Books received some useful prompts on how to initiate a conversation and their rights and obligations as living books.

## 6. RUNNING THE LIVING LIBRARY

The Living Library was run in partnership with the City's libraries for four days during Harmony Week. Each library was adapted to offer a quiet corner where the conversations could take place without disturbing the normal routine of library patrons.

The Living Books were asked to arrive at least 15 minutes before starting time. They were identified by t-shirts and name tags. The 30 minute sessions were controlled by the organisers. Some Readers made more than one booking and were happy to come back a second time.

A café style setting was created in defined separate spaces, offering some privacy for the Living Books and Readers whilst allowing adequate supervision by the Living Library organisers. Coffee, lollies and biscuits gave the finishing touch of a warm and friendly environment.

During the Living Library, Readers were accompanied by the organisers to their nominated tables and introduced to the respective Living Books. Coffee and tea were offered and both the Readers and the Books were reminded that they would be alerted five minutes before their session was finished.

The Living Books had a 15 minute break between readings and one hour was provided for lunch. The organisers provided daily lunch, enabling an opportunity for the Living Books to eat together and share their experiences.

At the end of each session survey forms were distributed to both the Readers and the Books for feedback.

One month after the Living Library, all Living Books were invited to a de-briefing session. Results from the feedback survey forms were shared and discussed. In the same session, the organizers presented each Living Book with a certificate of appreciation signed by the Mayor. After the de-briefing a delicious lunch was provided.





## Outcomes

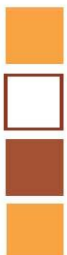
In order to assess the success of the Living Library success, both Books and Readers were requested to complete surveys. These surveys were developed with straight forward questions and that could be easily answered. All books and around 90% of Readers completed the surveys and responses were very positive. The surveys revealed that the Living Library sessions helped challenge and breakdown assumptions and stereotypes. It was very clear both parties felt that, through talking, they had gained an awareness of their mutual responsibility to social cohesion and community belonging.

The following outcomes were achieved with the Living Library:

- Bringing people together
- encouraging understanding of different lives in the community;
- Exchanging real life experiences;
- Delivering a vibrant and diverse library;
- Promotion of intercultural dialogue and intergeneration interaction;
- Promotion of cultural diversity;
- Promotion of human rights and social cohesion;
- Education towards the abolishment of any forms of discrimination and prejudices; (Not sure about this outcome and the next one as to how they can be substantiated
- Promotion of personal development aimed to people who have little access or no time for non-formal educational programs and
- Creation of opportunities to build new networks and friendships within the community.

These are some of the comments received from readers in the feedback forms regarding the question:

- *Have you learned anything new in reading a Book or several Books from the Living Library?*
- *'I learnt heaps about people and that you really can't judge someone from their looks'.*
- *'I learnt a lot about people I normally wouldn't meet'.*
- *'The Hijaab is about devotion, not a cover up'.*
- *'Don't judge a book by its cover – (ironically)'*
- *'The entire half an hour was a learning experience'*





## Challenges & Obstacles

One of the challenges faced is that Libraries are usually very reluctant to embrace new programs. The concept of Living Library needs to be endorsed by libraries as another way of informing, connecting and encouraging discovery in their readers.

The need of after work hours is also very crucial. In the feedback received, people also requested to expand the Living Library to weekend sessions. In our second Living Library we offered after work hours with sessions running from 4.30pm to 7.00pm, which proved more sought after by most of the readers.

Another element critical to the success of the Living Library is the effectiveness and targeting of promotional material. Organisers need to work very closely with media and communications experts to find the best ways to promote and advertise the program.

## Funding

The inaugural Melville Living Library cost around \$6000. No funding was received to run the pilot. In the second one we have received \$3000 from the Office of Multicultural Interests. Most of the costs involved in the Living Library were related to advertising and promotions.

## Images

