Human Library

Loudoun County Public Library

Young Adult

|

Adults

|

Intergenerational

Human Library

Mar 19, 2015

$101-250

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Byline

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The Human Library is a living, breathing library where humans are the books and the stories are their lives. Readers are invited to browse the catalog and check out a human book for a 20-minute one-on-one conversation, during which they can learn and ask questions. The program builds community by providing an opportunity for the reader to challenge prejudices and learn about individuals who have had different life experiences. The Human Library was a unique way for library customers

to have what could be a transformative experience. Instead of reading stories, they were hearing them from people in their community, firsthand, face-to-face.

Advanced Planning

The goal of the Human Library was to engage and build community through an interactive adult program. A system-wide group of library, programming and administrative staff was convened six months in advance to lead planning efforts. The team — which offered skill sets in marketing, program planning, operations, scheduling and writing — consulted with other library systems who had done the Human Library and researched best practices.

The team recruited a catalog of 15 "human books" that represented Loudoun County, including a ghost hunter, tech guru, sports writer, holistic veterinarian and student in debt. The planning group did a great deal of groundwork to develop the structure and essential pieces of the program, including the timeline, human book invitation, catalog and bibliography entries, training for human books, handouts, operational details and marketing.

Marketing

The Human Library team marketed the event by creating a webpage and utilizing social media. Additionally, the library programming department created posters and fliers. The team blanketed the community with print collateral and promoted the event to library patrons, friends, colleagues, area businesses, community groups and schools.

Budgeting

Costs were nominal for this event and covered by our programming department budget. Programming provided t-shirts, print materials and refreshments for the Human Library book training. Snacks were provided for the human books on the day of the event. The $150 budget covered the food.

Day-of-event Activity

Conversational spaces need to be set up the day of or the night before the program. A "Green Room" was set up where human books could take a break during the event. The Human Library team had pre-assigned roles and all worked the event exclusively.

Program Execution

There were 71 conversations with the human books. Overall, the day was a success, eliciting wonderful comments from the public, such as, "This is the best library program I have ever attended." The library was pleased with the success from 2013 and is actively planning the next Human Libraray for April 12, 2015, to kick-off National Library Week. The team thought it was a fun project and gave us the opportunity to learn about the community.

Advice

One lesson learned for the next Human Library: it is more important to have interesting human books than to challenge social prejudices, especially in a busy, metropolitan community branch. The ghost hunter booked the most conversations of all the 15 human books. The catalog should be limited to 10 to 12 human books, so the books are busier. Too many choices can be overwhelming for the "reader." The Human Library was a wonderful team-building event for the library system. Most of the team had only worked together a short time and intense project planning brought them together. This kind of event needed all types of talent to plan it and a well-rounded team to pull it off.

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Supporting Materials

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- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

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