

Volunteers wanted to be BOOKS (!) at our Living Library on the afternoon of Friday the 24th May 2019

The University of Sheffield is holding a Living Library for its social work students and is looking for people with either A) particular life experiences, or B) experiences of social work services, to become a Book for the afternoon and share their story with a small group of about 5 or 6 social work students.



We hold several Living Libraries with different themes throughout the year and our social work students and people with experience of services who take part in them really enjoy them.

So what is a Living Library? It's just like a real library where people go to learn things from reading books. Only in our case it's different because the Books are actually people with experience of services (service users) or carers and the Readers are the social work students.

How does it work? A Living Library is about three hours long. But perhaps it would be best for someone who's been a Book before to describe their experience of the Living Library,

'My daughter and I receive social care. We are both disabled. It's this rich and vibrant life experience that I, and many others like me, bring to the University of Sheffield MA Social Work course to share with students at the Living Library. I think it gives added value to their learning in a completely different way to how they learn from lectures, seminars or text Books.'

Ok that's the boring bit over.

Imagine a room, a large room. There are tables scattered around. I'm a little nervous but think this is going to be an amazing experience. I am a Book! A BOOK! My Book is called, 'From Tiger Cake to Tiger Mother.'

I have four Readers (social work students) sitting opposite me. I'm not a kindle but I speak. As I talk they smile or let me know by their body language that something I said interested them. I talk about assessments, rotas, meal plans, recruiting PAs, living with a degenerative disability, being in pain 24/7 and always trying to move on the positive side of life. Sometimes I mention the frustrations of receiving services, but I don't talk about anything that distresses me about it. It feels like we are all relaxed. Now it's time to answer questions or comments. It's been fun. There have been interesting, lovely

conversations and short debates. The first session is over and we all head for the refreshments.

Soon it's time for the second group of Readers and I go through it all again.

Then it's time to listen to the Readers (students) large group feedback. It's about what they learned today that they didn't know before. It's not about what I or the other Books have said – that's always private. It's about how they'll apply what they've learned when they've qualified. I'm fascinated by what they say. Then I'm given an envelope. It's my book review – a private message from my Readers to me. I'm not sure what to expect. I open the folded paper slowly making sure no one else can see it:

'Dear XXXXX,

Thank you very much for sharing your story with us. We really appreciated the time you have given to us. We will take into account what you have said in to our careers. We wish you all the best in the future.

Denis, Nigel and Carly [names have been changed]'

I'm tired but happy. Time to go home. '

So why are you being contacted? I'm trying to contact as many people with experience of services or those with different life experiences, to see if anyone is interested in becoming a Book at our future Living Libraries. We'd love you to join us if you're interested in sharing some of YOUR story about experiences of services. It doesn't matter if it's negative, positive or maybe a bit of both. We're not looking for perfect stories, we're looking for REAL stories. Good and the bad experiences all help our student social workers learn about how to approach their work once they've qualified and how the way they work impacts on the lives of REAL people.

So why bother? It's a good question. There's absolutely no pressure to volunteer and get involved. But if you choose to share your experience you'll be helping and supporting the education of people training to be social workers by being a vital part of it. The Living Library is an opportunity where social work students can meet with you for a short time and you can tell them what it's really like. It's a more equal meeting for both.

The Readers (social work students) say meeting with Books helps them understand more about what they've learned in the classroom and on placement. It supports their professional growth and development. Previously their feedback has included comments like, *'I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the event ... how inspiring X was The whole day was a valuable exercise and also a very enjoyable skills day exercise; I know this was the 1st event of its kind; I feel it is a great way for all*

participants to get to know each other and hope many more events like this take place for future SW students!!'

But most importantly the Books say how much they've enjoyed the experience. They've found it interesting and there's always far more they want to say than there's time for. Some say it's a way of giving back, others just enjoy the experience for what it is. Everyone is different and has their own reason for volunteering. But everyone is hugely respected and appreciated by staff and students alike for giving up their time, telling their story and taking a positive role in the future of social work.

For more information and to get involved please contact:

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To find out about the other things you can get involved with feel free to contact Ali anytime.

Thank you so much for taking time to read all of this. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best wishes
Ali Hayward