

"Kindness in Mind" Event November 18th 2016

As part of Acts of Kindness / Interfaith and Anti-bullying week (13th -20th Nov), Community Development staff, Colleagues from Beechcroft and Volunteers from Birmingham Mind held an event called "Kindness in Mind" at the Zellig gallery on Friday 18th November 2016.

The event was held in conjunction with the "Love Your Neighbour" campaign. The campaign was formed after a rise in hate crime following on from the referendum in June 2016. For more info see www.loveyourneighbour.org. The event aimed to promote understanding of mental health problems as well as providing opportunities for acts of kindness and connecting with others which are key tools for improving mental health and wellbeing.

As part of this event a "Human Library" took place. A Human Library involves taking out people for 1:1 conversations instead of books. The aim of a human library is to reduce the prejudice and stigma that many people face.

The Human Library provided a space for people to communicate with others from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences. This gave people an opportunity to ask questions that they may normally have felt too afraid to ask.

We had 12 people who volunteered to be "books". They included an eclectic mix of the following at times purposely provocative titles

"Registered blind",

"Living with Bi-Polar",

"Transgendered Lesbian"

"Voice Hearer"

"Bearded Muslim"

"Trannie"

"Chronicles of a Pakistani Woman"

"Polish"

"Refugee"

"Queer Survivor"

"Mental Illness and Stigma"

"Witch"

Other activities included some crafting an art display from “2 art guys” and music from the Friday music group at Beechcroft

Training

All the books received half a days training in the Human Library concept. This provided an opportunity for potential “Books” to understand the background of the human library as well as it’s aims and objectives. It was also an opportunity for participants to see if this was something that they really wanted to do, to ask questions, address any fears or concerns and meet and connect with other potential “Books”. The feedback from the session was very positive and in fact managed to produce some of the aims that we were trying to achieve at the event itself.:-

“The session was wonderful, I loved sharing my experiences, thank you for a lovely morning.”

“it’s been eye opening we face many of the same issues”

“Really good to talk to people about their “Labels” and experiences.”

Outcomes:

Overall there were nearly 40 conversations that happened at the event. Not all of the conversations were recorded and evaluated as some of these conversations happened sporadically outside of the structure of the Human Library. Of those that were held via the more formal process 33 respondents filled out evaluation forms with the following outcomes:

1. How much did you agree that the Human Library is a good way to challenge prejudice, exclusion, stigma and discrimination?

Strongly Agree	29
Agree	4
Undecided	0
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

2. Has your experience at the Human Library changed your views about challenging a person if you witnessed them doing something unfair to another person because they are different?

I'd be a lot more willing	11
I'd be quite a bit more willing	16
I'd be a little more willing	0
No change in my view	6
I'd be less willing	0
Don't know	0

3. Has your experience at the Human Library changed your views about speaking more openly about prejudice and discrimination?

I'd be a lot more willing	8
I'd be quite a bit more willing	0
I'd be a little more willing	13
No change in my view	7
I'd be less willing	0
Don't Know	2

4. How would you rate your overall experience at the Human Library?

It was excellent I loved it	25
It was good I liked it	8
It was ok, it could be better	0
It was poor I didn't like it	0

All the people who volunteered as “Books” for the event felt that it was a positive experience and were all willing to volunteer again for any future events.

“I thought it was an excellent experience and was great to share my experiences with others.”

They enjoyed having conversations with the other “books” and appreciated the variety of the book titles “ I thought the other books reflected the diversity of the city.”

They also felt that the conversations that they had made an impact.

“These events on mental illness makes people more aware of the stigma of people with mental illness.”

There was an enthusiasm from the people involved in being books to run future events which would widen the “readership”.

“ Encouraging more readers to attend the event might lead to a greater variety of opportunity to experience the human library and the issues arising within the discussions”.

We are hoping to hold another Human Library event in Birmingham during Mental Health Awareness Week in May 2017. We will be posting more information on this nearer the time. If you would like more information or would like to be involved in a future “Human Library” hosted by Birmingham Mind” please contact Emmamarks@birminghammind.org.uk