



#WhatWENeed

Living Library Project

I was involved in this research project which was co-produced as much as possible by the University of Lancaster and was mainly for people with mental health conditions and workers from the North of England. I live in the West Midlands but was allowed to be part of the project which showed how flexible it was because of course the concept applies everywhere. The information below is from the University website.

As always, it needs funding to put on a Living Library event and this is hard to find in local authorities who run libraries and local mental health services who are overwhelmed with demand after the Covid epidemic particularly from young people. We now have the research evidence to show it helps reduce stigma so please let us do it.

Good Luck

Mary Nettle Mental Health User Consultant

People with lived experience of mental health distress are often best placed to help others. We wanted to try and explore new ways in which people can do this. One way is to do this is via a **Living Library**.

Here, people are employed as living books, trained and supported to share their experiences in one-to-one conversations. Readers are people seeking to learn about mental health to help themselves, a loved one, or they might be staff. Readers choose a book based on a short author summary and have a conversation with the book. Readers are encouraged to ask questions to create an interactive dialogue between the books and readers. The idea is to have conversations that draw on lived



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experience to inform, challenge our preconceptions and change the way we think. Everyone within the library is equal and books can choose to decline answering any of the readers questions if they so wish. Books can be employed flexibly allowing a broad range of people to contribute across ethnic, gender, sexuality and age groups, and including those in work or with caring responsibilities.

The research team included people with lived experience, staff, and researchers. This study had two parts to it. The first part involves us drawing together data from previous living libraries, and interviewing those who have taken part in them. This is to uncover how and why living libraries work and the effects that they have on the books and readers who use them.

The second part of the project involved regular co-design workshops (online) with those who have lived experience of mental health issues, living libraries and peer support. The workshops use creative methods to get attendees to think about how living libraries could be set up and any issues that may need to be addressed.

You can request the final report and useful links if you want to find out more.

<https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/health-and-medicine/research/spectrum/research/living-library/#tabs-511609-1:~:text=Here%20are%20some%20links%20to%20similar%20projects%3A>
