

Lancaster
University



THE LIBRARY OF
LIVED EXPERIENCE
FOR MENTAL HEALTH

IT'S NOT ABOUT BOOKS BUT PEOPLE

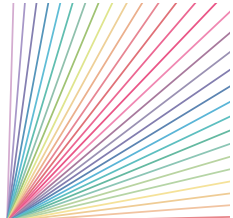


Library of Lived Experience for Mental Health Implementation Guide

Summary

- Sharing and hearing stories about mental health can be a valuable experience for many people
- Living Libraries are spaces where living 'Books' tell their stories in conversations with 'Readers'
- We are a team including people with diverse mental health experiences. This report is the result of a project in which we worked together to understand how Living Libraries can be used to share stories about mental health
- We learned that Living Libraries have the potential to help people to learn about mental health experiences in an engaging way, challenge stigma, and encourage peer support
- The key to a successful Living Library is to support people to tell their story in a way that feels safe and authentic
- It is important that Books and Readers understand the purpose of the Living Library, identify personal boundaries for discussing mental health, and where to go for emotional support
- Organisers should prioritise finding an accessible physical or online space where people feel comfortable sharing their experiences
- It is essential that the views of people with expertise by experience in mental health are embedded within the design and delivery of Living Libraries

THE SPECTRUM CENTRE



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Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge Living Library organisers around the world whose ideas have inspired our research. The movement began over 20 years ago in Denmark by the Human Library, a non-profit organisation with a focus on events that typically include stories from a range of marginalised communities (1). Since then, the Living Library movement has grown internationally, with some libraries being one-off, local events and others hosting books permanently. While some Living Libraries are more general in the books they carry, others have focused on hosting specific books on topics such as parental health, knowledge transfer in academia, and mental health as told by practitioners and service users. We use the term 'Library of Lived Experience for Mental Health' to distinguish our mental health-focused project from work done by or through existing organisations. No materials or resources have been used without permission.

We have built on the learning of our expert advisory group who have used Living Libraries to challenge prejudice within educational and healthcare settings (2) and as a way to help people manage their mental health experiences (3). We have also been influenced by wider initiatives to understand and promote the use of storytelling in the context of mental health (4). During our project, we identified a range of documents that may be helpful for those looking to understand the Living Library approach and host their own event.

These include guides for how to tell stories about mental health experiences (5) and how to run non-mental health specific Living Libraries (6). This information has also helped us to understand the approach and think about how it can be used further in mental health. We have included these documents in the list of references at the end of this guide.

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Artwork in this guide is by Grace Collins.

Who are we?

This guide was developed by a team including experts by experience in mental health, peer support experts, researchers at Lancaster University, and staff at Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust. Together, we established a co-design group that met regularly from 2021 to 2022. This report is the result of the collective work of this team. We would like to acknowledge the contribution of all of those who attended our meetings and provided advice and support throughout the project, including those who wish to remain anonymous. Contributors included the following people:

Laura Able, Saiqa Ahmed, Dan Beresford, Rachel Black, Ad Gridley, Rosie Hill, Rita Horgan, Patricia Jamal, Mike Kerins, Dr Robert G MacDonald, Tamanna Miah, Mary Nettle, Christoforos Pavlakis, Kenny Thompson, Dominique Toyra, Rethink Mental Illness, Cathy Walsh, Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Alan White, SAFA Cumbria, Ben Woffenden, Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust.

Our groups were facilitated by Karen Machin and Grace Collins, who are experts in peer-based approaches in mental health. Groups were also attended by members of the research team including a service user researcher (Chris Lodge), research associate (Paul Marshall), clinical psychologist (Prof Steven Jones), two mental health nurses (Paul Jebb and Lesley Whittaker) and two students (Zoe Glossop and Rose Johnston). The project was led by Prof Fiona Lobban at the Spectrum Centre for Mental Health Research, Lancaster University. You can contact the research team for further information about the project at: lle@lancaster.ac.uk

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1. Introduction

How to use this guide

Who is this for?

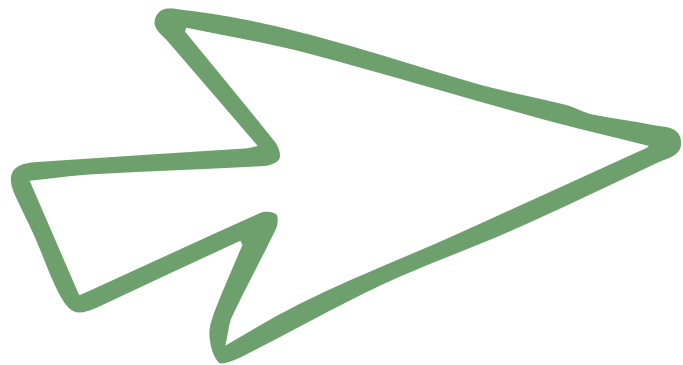
This guide is for people interested in understanding how to share mental health experiences. It may be helpful for people who are considering running a Library of Lived Experience for mental health, or those thinking about taking part as Books, Readers or Librarians. For simplicity, we will refer to a Library of Lived Experience for mental health as a Living Library in the rest of the guide.

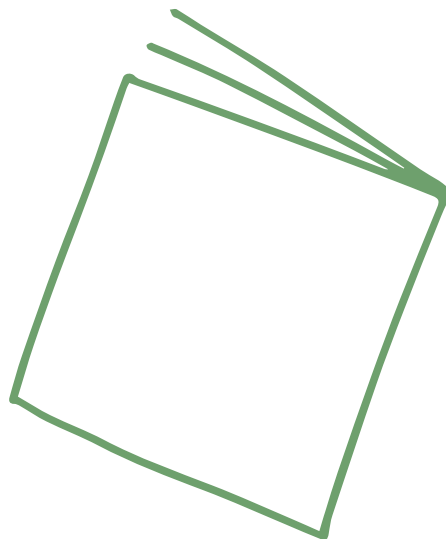
How was this guide developed?

This guide is based on ideas from 10 co-design workshops in which our team discussed important issues for running a Living Library. This included topics such as where events could be held and how people could be supported to take part. The research team recorded the group's thoughts and suggestions and used this information to write this report. The group co-designed the structure of the guide and provided feedback on its final content and design.

Recognising diverse views on the use of Living Libraries

The Living Library approach is flexible and can be used to meet a range of aims. Rather than suggesting a single way of hosting a Living Library, this guide highlights important things to consider when thinking about how to run a Living Library focused on mental health. We aimed to make this guide relevant to a wide range of organisations. This could include health services wishing to train staff, community-based groups wanting to develop Living Libraries for peer support, and organisations interested in creative ways to challenge prejudice around mental health.





What is a Living Library?

Terminology

Living Library

A Living Library is a space where people come together to talk openly about things that are important to them. This usually involves people, called Books, putting themselves forward to talk about their personal experience in a short discussion with people visiting the event, called Readers.

Books

Books are people who share their stories in conversations at Living Library events. By story, we mean a part of their life experience related to mental health.

Readers

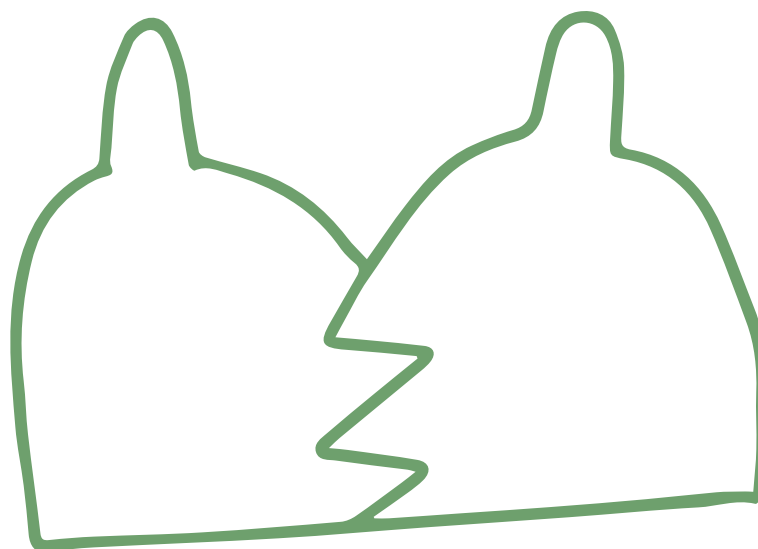
A Reader is someone who visits the Living Library. They engage in conversation with each Book to find out more about their experiences.

Loan

As in a traditional Library, people who attend a Living Library check out, or 'loan', the Books they're interested in reading. In this guide, we use the word loan to describe the process by which Readers find and talk with the Books they're interested in.

Librarians

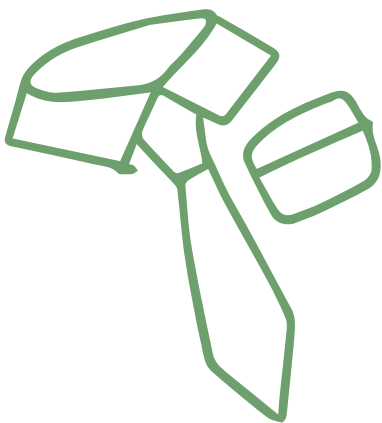
We use the word Librarian to refer to anyone involved in running Living Library events. This could include people with experience working at traditional libraries, but may also include a range of other staff, volunteers, and service users.



A brief description of the approach

The Living Library approach focuses on creating a supportive environment for conversations between Books and Readers. In practice, this would normally include the Book offering a summary of their experience and then being open to questions from the Reader. These conversations are usually live and direct, either at in-person events or over the internet. This helps to create human connections between people who may not normally have the chance to meet. Librarians are involved with organising these events, including recruiting people interested in sharing and hearing stories, organising conversations, and supporting people throughout their time at the Living Library.

Living Libraries provide a structured way to learn about personal mental health experiences. The approach offers opportunities for people from a wide range of backgrounds to train as Books and to manage their availability flexibly. Readers can ask questions and learn more about the things that are important to them, which would be more difficult with written or recorded stories. Sharing conversations with people about their mental health experiences in a safe space is also likely to reduce the sense of difference between those with mental health experiences and the wider community, which may help to reduce stigma and prejudice.

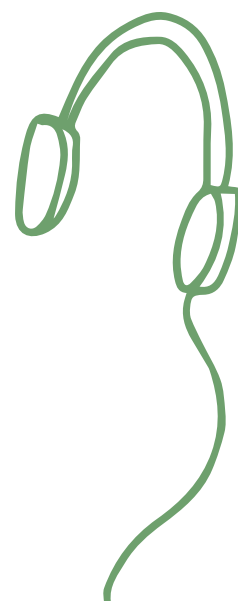


Mental health has been stigmatised for so long, people ignored, locked away and forgotten. Just the very action of telling someone that you want to hear their story is massive

(Workshop 2)

What a Living Library is not

It is important to be clear about what a Living Library is not about. It is not about 'curing' people or 'fixing' them. It is about understanding and valuing personal experiences. A Living Library is also not a replacement for other mental health services including psychological therapy or other community-led services. Improving access to Living Libraries should not be used as an excuse to reduce other services.



Why run a Living Library for mental health?

Potential benefits for those telling their stories

People with experience as Books describe a range of benefits. These include seeing their story as having value to others and building connections with people in their communities. There are also opportunities for Books to learn from others through their conversations at the Living Library. Many Books value the space to share their story and the opportunity for reflection on their experiences, which can help their story to evolve. The act of telling a story and having it heard stands in contrast to many people's sense of mental health experiences as being historically marginalised or unheard.

Potential benefits for those hearing stories

Readers may benefit from learning about mental health in non-technical, 'human' language. This could help inspire hope about their own mental health journeys. Our co-design group described the experiences of people from very different backgrounds finding common ground at a Living Library as 'finding yourself through others'. The Living Library therefore has the potential to offer more personalised, empathic support to people living with mental health experiences. Hearing someone talk in person can also allow people to see the emotion and meaning of a story more clearly. This may be especially helpful for events designed to challenge mental health stigma.

Potential benefits for groups or organisations

A Living Library could be used by organisations in a range of ways. Healthcare staff could explore the experiences of a far wider range of people than they may come across in their specific roles. Understanding the variety of ways people live with mental health experiences across different cultures, genders, ages, and times in their lives is essential for staff in many different settings. Visiting a Living Library could therefore help staff to understand people with mental health experiences as individuals first and foremost.



**Stories trigger a response
in us that helps us
empathise with others**
(Workshop 3)

2. Guiding principles

We know that sharing and hearing stories about mental health can be very valuable, yet sometimes also challenging. It is important to think about how to create a space where those stories can be discussed in a safe and engaging way. Our workshops highlighted the importance of the following guiding principles:


Valuing lived experiences

The Living Library approach recognises the unique value of each person's experience. These experiences are constantly changing and often hold deep personal meaning. Potential organisers should therefore carefully consider how they recognise the value and contribution of each Book. Important ways of doing this include empowering people to tell their stories in a way that feels authentic to them and making space for a range of different views on mental health. This doesn't mean that everyone has to agree or disagree on every topic discussed at the Living Library, but rather that conversations should remain respectful. It should also be recognised that people hold ownership over their own stories. Living Books should therefore feel free to change and even remove their stories from the Library if they wish.

Valuing lived experiences may involve offering payment for Books. Unpaid participation may fit well with the culture of some groups or organisations, such as those that work on a voluntary basis. However, paying Books is important within organisations where payment for work of this nature is the norm. Payment can help to recognise the expertise that people bring to the Library and develop a sense that Books are equal partners in the success of the project. Flexibility around payment can also be helpful in some circumstances. For example, some people may not want to receive some or all of the payment offered because of tax or benefits implications. Organisers should be upfront about payment so people can make informed decisions about taking part.

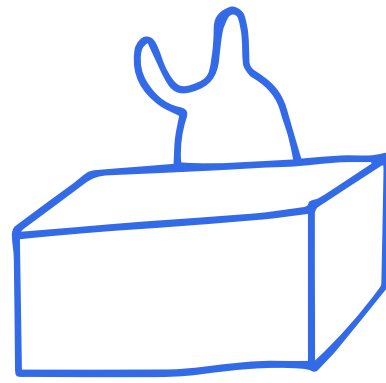
A safe and supportive environment

It is important that people feel safe and supported when sharing their mental health experiences. Organisers should think about how they can create welcoming environments in which people can be empowered to engage in meaningful conversations. People will have different views about what helps them feel safe and the right level of support they desire. For some, this feeling of safety may come from knowing that there are trained staff or volunteers on hand to provide support if a conversation is upsetting. For others, safety may mean the freedom to speak openly about their mental health experiences without feeling pressured to change or censor their story. Library organisers should invest time in tailoring the physical environment, staff training, and offers of support to the individual circumstances of those involved.



"It's important to ensure participants feel that their stories are authentic expressions of their experiences. Participants should feel that they have sufficient time to communicate what's important to them

(Workshop 2)



Safeguarding issues specific to each organisation and setting should be considered in full prior to running the first Living Library event. Issues to consider include:

- If the event will support the attendance of children or vulnerable adults and any vetting and staff training this requires
- How events held in open public places can help people feel safe discussing mental health experiences
- The need to inform people of safety procedures, such as action in the event of emergencies
- Whether Books and Readers will be asked to keep their conversations confidential
- Planning for what to do in the event that a Library visitor appears at risk of harm to themselves or others

Collaboration

A Living Library creates the opportunity for people with different roles and experiences to work together to organise and run the event. Our co-design group highlighted the importance of creating a team that includes people with personal mental health experiences. Opportunities for collaboration may include establishing an event planning group that includes people living with mental health experiences, who lead on key aspects of the event. This could involve developing materials, like training documents and advertisements, or making decisions about whose stories are told at the Library. Collaborating in this way may reduce the likelihood that people involved with the Library feel that their mental health experiences are being misused. It could also help to develop a sense of shared or community ownership of the project.

Accessibility

Organisers should think about how the Library can be made accessible to the diverse needs of potential Readers. This could include selecting a venue that is physically accessible, exploring options to promote the participation of people whose first language is not English, and ensuring that events have good access to public transport. The language used to talk about mental health can influence whether people feel comfortable taking part. A Living Library should avoid stigmatising or overly-technical language that may make people feel uncomfortable. Organisers should consider how materials, including information about the Library, can be tailored to promote engagement with the groups and communities the Library hopes to reach.



**Ingredients for a safe space:
zero tolerance on poor behaviour;
supervision; a point of contact
for support at all times**

(Workshop 8)

3. Before setting up your Library

Deciding on the goals of the Library

Living Libraries can serve a range of purposes. Events could focus on peer support for mental health, on training for professional staff or students, or target views of mental health in the wider community. Any of these options is a valid choice and leads to a series of other decisions to make sure that the Living Library is run in a way that is consistent with its goals.

Peer support

A Living Library could focus on helping Books and Readers to connect over their shared mental health experiences. This might help people feel less alone and allow people to share what helps them live with mental health experiences. It may be that these conversations offer things that health professionals may not be able to.

Example event

The Canada-based Bipolar Wellness Centre used a Living Library as part of an online package to support the self-management of bipolar disorder (3). Website users accessed a one-to-one online conversation with someone who also had personal experiences of living with bipolar disorder. Conversations lasted up to 45 minutes and focused on exploring priorities for self-management using tools available online. Feedback showed that people valued the opportunity for direct conversation with a peer and would recommend the Living Library to others with bipolar disorder.

Professional or student development

The Living Library offers the opportunity to hear a wide range of voices, including people who may not have the time to commit to formal teaching roles. This is important because health professionals tend to see people in distress and so are less likely to come into contact with people who are living well with their mental health experiences. Having the opportunity to talk with people who are not under direct care can also allow for a different kind of relationship, and open up new areas of discussion. Understanding this broader range of experiences may help professionals to be more hopeful about how people can live with mental health experiences and see these individuals as people rather than problems or diagnoses.

Example event

The University of Sheffield has run Living Libraries to support social worker training. Those who use health and social care services, including people with mental health experiences, have shared their stories with small groups of students. Examples of Book titles included 'Life after trauma', 'Living with anxiety', and 'My life as a carer'. Books saw value in using their experiences to shape the future of social work services, while Readers commented on the importance of hearing directly about the challenges people had faced in their lives (7).



Changing public or community views of mental health

Living Libraries can challenge stigma in the community. They can give a voice to people who have been marginalised or discriminated against. Here, it is important to think about how stigma and discrimination might affect groups in different ways and ensure that this diversity is reflected in the range of Books at the Living Library. While conversations are powerful for challenging assumptions about mental health, it is important to recognise that mental health stigma exists across society. So while Living Libraries can help address this, they cannot resolve stigma on their own.

Example event

At an event in Hong Kong, Books with personal experience of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder shared their stories with young adults from local educational organisations (8). After the event, young adults who had taken part in the Living Library showed improvements in their understanding of mental health experiences and held less stigmatised views of mental health, yet those who had only seen a slideshow presentation about mental health did not. This suggests that direct human connections are key to the benefits of the Living Library approach.

Setting up a team

A Living Library requires a team. Our workshops highlighted that teams should include people with mental health experiences. This is important to make sure that events are sensitive to the challenges of discussing mental health. Some of the skills and capabilities that may be required include:

- Finding financial support
- Setting up suitable locations
- Administration including scheduling and promotion of events
- The ability to create a welcoming and safe space
- Offering training and support to Books, Readers and Librarians
- Knowledge of how to use video/audio technology
- Links with other community resources and services where appropriate



Scale and resources

Most Living Libraries have been one-off events. However, our work has highlighted a strong demand for Living Libraries to run as a series of events. It is important for organisers to think about the size, frequency and duration of the events at an early stage to make sure that their plans fit with available resources and the organisation's specific aims.

Our group highlighted that the most important aspect of developing the Library is finding and supporting people who wish to share their stories. In doing so, the Living Library will be well equipped to offer:

- Access to authentic and credible accounts of mental health experiences
- Connection with others and the opportunity to discuss shared experiences
- An engaging, 'living' way to learn about mental health
- Knowledge of other local sources of support

In addition, the Library team will need to develop:

- An accessible and safe environment
- Well-funded advertising resources
- Information in accessible language about the Library
- Policies for Books and for Readers, such as 'ground rules' for conversations
- An easy way for Readers to choose the right Book for them
- A way to keep track of which Books have been loaned and which are available
- Ways to provide people with emotional support
- A way to collect feedback to make improvements over time

Delivering your Library successfully over time

Organisers will need to plan ahead if they intend to run the Living Library as a series of events. Some areas to think about when planning for a sustainable Living Library include:

- Ensuring commitment from Books, who are vital to the success of the Library. Paying people may help them to take part in a series of events over time
- A plan for how additional Books could be added to the Library if Books leave or Readers flag the need for additional topics
- Ongoing training and support for Books and Librarians
- Options for continued funding. This could come from health services, charities, or corporate sources
- A plan for promoting the Library in different ways to maintain interest over time



4. Who are the Books?

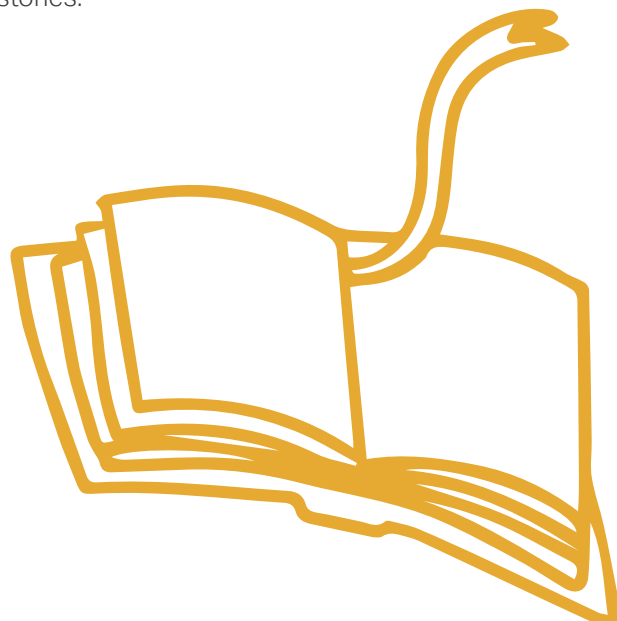
After deciding on the aim of a Living Library event, consider the kinds of stories that will need to be told to reach this goal. It may help to start by asking: 'what kind of impact do we want to have on Books, Readers and the wider community?'

Stories about mental health experiences

Setting up a Living Library focused on mental health offers a range of options when deciding which stories to tell. This could include:

- A Library with a focus on a specific mental health experience
- A Library with a focus on families or carers
- A Library in which Books and Readers have some overlap in experience, which could encourage peer support
- A Library that includes a broad range of mental health experiences. This could increase the likelihood that people find a story that fits with their interests
- A Library focused on the views of people who are not usually represented in conversations about mental health. This may help with the goal of challenging prejudice

It is important to remember that people have complex life stories that are not easily captured by a single label or title. Take care not to 'pigeon-hole' people or suggest that their stories are representative of a given group. Also consider whether Books have more than one story, or different 'chapters', they wish to share. It could be that the same Books share different aspects of their experience at different Library events, which could be themed around different topics. The process of storytelling itself can also be very insightful for Books. Regularly reviewing whether Books wish to change aspects of their story, such as the title of their Book, can help to ensure their stories remain current, and that the Books feel in control of their own stories.



Recruiting Books

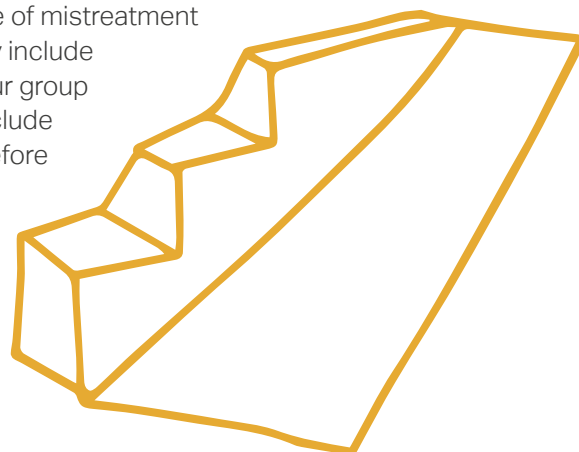
If an event intends to focus on a specific mental health experience, it may be that local and national support organisations focused on supporting people with that experience could help. A growing number of mental health networks also exist online. Online forums or social media could help organisers to connect with these networks, which may be particularly helpful for Living Libraries that are planned to take place online. Where possible, seek permission and support from these groups to ensure that recruitment is appropriate for the spaces and communities organisers wish to reach.

Our workshops highlighted that the Living Library is still a fairly unknown concept. Organisers should ensure that people fully understand the approach and what's expected of them before signing up. Being able to talk to a member of the team about the event could help people to decide if it is a good fit for them. Also consider ways to make the recruitment materials engaging. This could involve creating accessible and appealing documents, videos, or artwork. At this stage, think about the number of Books required for the event. Keep in mind the number of expected Readers, the frequency of events, and Books' views on how many times per event they feel comfortable sharing their story.

Deciding which stories are told

Deciding which stories are told in the Library requires careful consideration. Potential Books may have a range of motivations for sharing their stories, including having had few opportunities to share their stories in the past. Many people experience prejudice and discrimination related to their mental health and this may be a key part of the stories they wish to share. It is important that the process by which stories are chosen does not reinforce these experiences. Try to make the decision-making process clear and transparent so that people feel that they have been treated fairly.

Depending on an organisation's culture and aims, it may be that specific types of stories are not appropriate. This may include those that involve a political agenda or that advertise products or services. Try to make this clear to potential Books early in the recruitment process. People looking to share their mental health experiences may also have aspects of their story that are focused on sensitive and potentially controversial topics. This could include opinions on different treatment approaches or services, thoughts or behaviours linked to self-harm and suicide, and past experience of mistreatment or discrimination. Potential organisers might be tempted to only include stories that offer a positive experience of recovery. However, our group emphasised that it is important not to censor stories or only include a narrow range. Any limitations on stories should be decided before the event and preferably alongside experts by experience in mental health. These boundaries should be communicated clearly and in a timely way with Books and Readers before their conversations.



5. Who are the Readers?

Who does your Library aim to reach?

This depends on the goal of the Library. If the aim is to challenge stigma across the community, a public venue may help reach a wide range of potential Readers. However, using the Living Library to train staff or offer peer support would require reaching out to educational or support organisations to find the most appropriate audience.

Potential Readers you may wish to reach could include:

- People looking for information and support for their own mental health or for a family member or friend
- Mental health professionals
- Other professionals working across the NHS, local authorities, and voluntary and community organisations
- Students on health and social care courses
- People in the local area who want to learn more about mental health

Recruitment and promotion

Recruitment should reflect each Library's goal. If the goal is to reach a diverse local audience, consider advertising using local and social media. This could include posting to local online groups, advertising in newspapers, or distributing flyers at public places. Where there is more of a focus on peer support, reaching out to support services may be needed. If the purpose is to address the perceptions of professionals, consider approaching local public services and colleges or universities. In each case, the promotional materials need to include clear information about what to expect and what support will be offered. We suggest that these should be co-produced with the groups the Library wants to reach to help ensure they are appropriate for the intended audience.

Whichever version of the Library is being promoted, a team member focused on promotion should ideally oversee these activities, respond to questions, and adjust the recruitment approach as needed. Options to reach specific groups, such as people from communities that are underrepresented in existing mental health support services, include translating promotional materials into other languages or partnerships with organisations supporting those groups.





6. Who are the Librarians?

The role of the Librarians

Librarians are essential to successful Living Libraries. Before the Library, Librarians may be involved with:

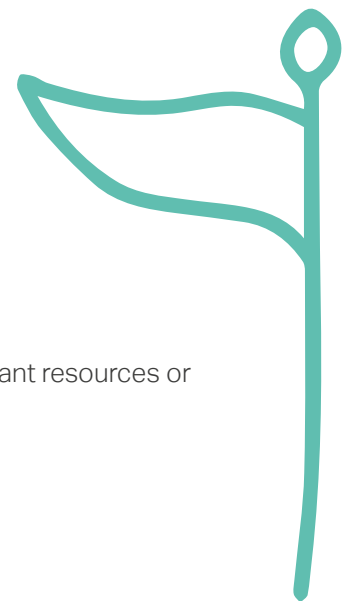
- Curating the Book collection
- Training and support planning for Books
- Ensuring that there is a clear system for Readers to find and loan the Books they're interested in
- Ensuring any equipment or materials are available. This may include refreshments, tables and chairs, and stationery
- Developing policies for support, safeguarding, and evaluation
- Ensuring that all involved are aware of safety procedures

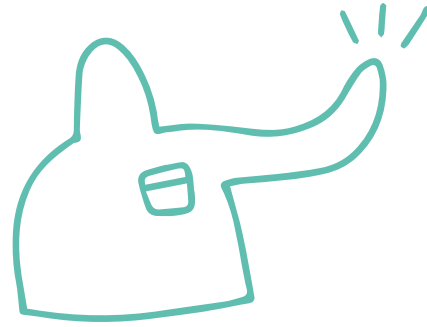
During the Library

- Being a friendly and knowledgeable first point of contact for visitors
- A 'Living Bookshelf' with the ability to direct Readers to the right Books
- Ensuring Books and Readers are in the right place at the right time
- Informing Books and Readers of any 'ground rules' for their conversations
- Ensuring conversations keep to a time limit
- Being on hand to offer emotional support
- Managing any conflicts or disagreements

After the Library

- Collecting feedback
- Reviewing what went well and what could be improved
- Payment of those involved, if appropriate
- Debriefing with Books, Readers, or other Librarians
- Linking people to ongoing support, including signposting to relevant resources or services, if required
- Updating the collection by recruiting new Books



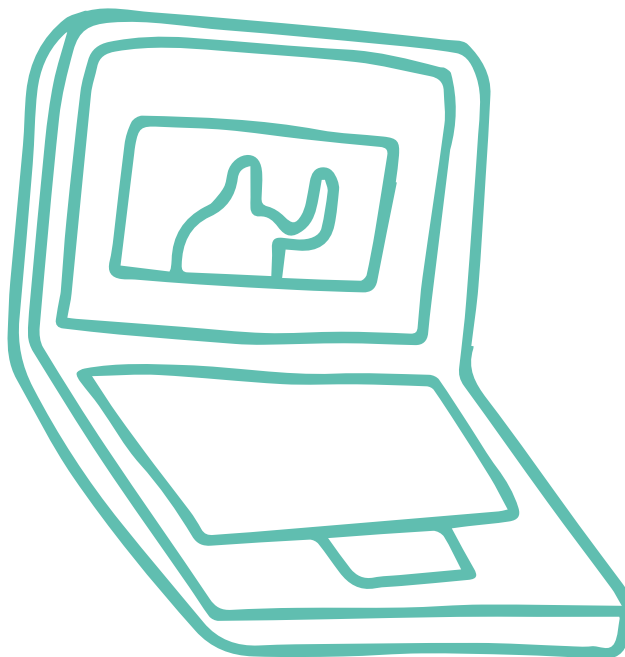


Who makes a good librarian?

The Library is best delivered by more than one Librarian. Not only will this allow tasks to be spread between individuals, it also creates a collaborative team with a diverse skillset who can support each other to run the event. A Librarian team may seek to include or develop the following skills and characteristics:

- A 'Social Librarian', with strong communication skills including the ability to listen to and empathise with people discussing their mental health experiences
- People who recognise the diversity of views on mental health and who do not seek to impose their perspective on others
- People with knowledge of local services and information that may be relevant to Library visitors
- Where possible, people who are willing to commit to being available to support the Library over time
- Record keeping, administration, or events management experience

Our co-design group also emphasised the importance of embedding lived experience of mental health within the Librarian team. There was a sense that those who have personal mental health experiences intuitively understand some of the challenges Books and Readers may face when discussing mental health, helping to promote the acceptability and safety of the Library.



7. Choosing a setting

An advantage of the Living Library concept is that it can be delivered in a range of settings, both in person and online.

Finding a physical space

The Living Library location might impact how people feel about taking part in the event. For example, local libraries are often familiar public spaces, but the presence of the public around the venue might influence how Books and Readers feel about discussing personal stories. If the Library is hosted by health services, choosing a space which is seen as non-stigmatising is important. For example, some people may not want to use a Library in a clinical space that could trigger difficult memories. In contrast, the increasing development of recovery colleges (in the UK) offers supported spaces which might fit better with the tone of a Living Library event. In-person events may allow more natural free flowing conversations. Yet, these conversations can be emotionally demanding and having a quiet space to get away from the hustle and bustle of the event is important.

Other issues to consider include:

- Timing – is the space available in the evenings so people could come after work or school?
- Refreshments – are there resources to provide people with drinks/snacks to make the Library as welcoming as possible?
- Accessibility – is the space connected by good transport links, accessible for people with limited mobility, and welcoming for the general public? Is there a creche so parents with young children are not excluded?
- Privacy – is the space secluded or overlooked? Does it strike a balance between being too noisy and too quiet?
- Language – can the space support the involvement of translators?



Physical safety and psychological safety are both important. Consider ways people relate to the space. Is it familiar? Community oriented? Non-stigmatising?

(Workshop 8)

Online Libraries

Running a Living Library online can make it more accessible for people who might find accessing a face-to-face Library difficult for personal or practical reasons. Online, people also have control of things like their username and whether or not to keep their webcam on. Although there can be advantages to this format, it may exclude some people who are less confident with technology or have limited internet access.

One way to address this would be to offer computers with Wi-Fi access in community hubs or physical libraries so that people can access events online, with technical support from staff.

It is also possible to create a virtual Library in which stories are recorded and saved for people to access in their own time. This may be useful for people who can't attend the live event or for those who want to find out more before they commit to taking part.

However, this format would lose the advantages of live conversations, key to the Living Library approach. It is likely that people will have a range of views about having their conversations recorded. Having the option to update and delete recorded material, knowing where it is saved and who has access, and anonymity of recorded stories, need to be carefully considered.

Hybrid and travelling Libraries

At a hybrid Living Library, the event takes place at a physical space with additional online access. This could work well in spaces like university or public libraries with staff and resources to support both in-person and online conversations. A travelling Library is another option for delivering Libraries into communities that might not have access to suitable community spaces. Organisers could use flexible event spaces such as a marquee or a mobile Library bus that could be set up in different places across a local area.



8. Organising your library

Browsing the collection

All Libraries require a way to inform potential Readers of the Books that are available in their collections. Events that take place at places like festivals or public libraries may aim to attract passers-by and then inform them of the nature of the event and the kinds of Books available on the day. Other events may require Readers to arrange a specific date to attend the Library. Readers then browse the collection and choose a Book that's right for them.

It may be helpful to arrange a reception desk where potential Readers can browse the Living Library collection. Here, Readers could find a booklet with details of the Books and their stories. Another option is to use a pre-booking system. Organisers could send Books' details to Readers before the event and allow them to arrange a time to loan a specific Book.

Organisers may wish to think about how Books are described to Readers at this stage. Providing Readers with Book titles and summaries that include details of the topics that the Book intends to cover can help Readers decide whether they feel comfortable discussing those particular issues. Having content or trigger warnings linked to specific Books is likely to reduce the chance that Readers are unexpectedly exposed to conversations they find distressing. Equally, summaries could include a list of topics that Books do not wish to discuss and a request for Readers to avoid asking questions about those topics.

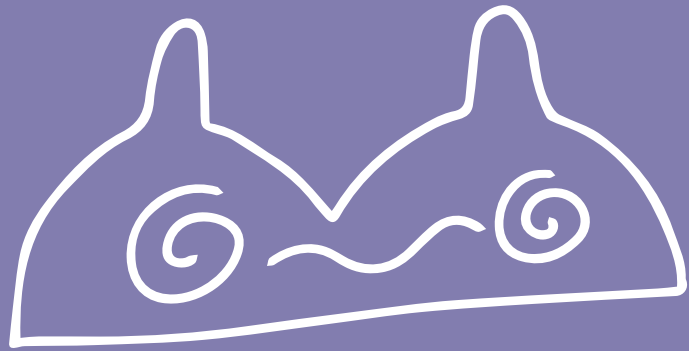
Loaning Books

A clear system for tracking loans is essential to the smooth running of any Library. Organisers will need a way to introduce Readers to Books, a way to note which Books have been checked out and which are available for loan, and a record of when ongoing loans are due to end. All the while, the Librarian team will need to be on hand to offer support and guidance to visitors. We suggest a practice session to help Librarians prepare and get a feel for what will happen on the day of the event.

Loans don't have to be one-to-one conversations. Some people may feel worried about taking part on their own, so being able to attend with a friend or relative could be helpful. Living Libraries do sometimes make room for multiple Readers to loan a Book at the same time. One advantage of this approach is that many more Readers can attend each event. However, an important part of the Living Library approach is its focus on direct conversations. Organisers should ensure that there aren't so many Readers per Book that people feel unable to explore what's important to them. We also suggest that Books are asked about how comfortable they are with sharing their experiences in a group setting.

Timings and returns

Living Library loans typically last between 15 and 45 minutes. Some discussions will naturally end before the time limit, while others will find that they want more time for discussion. For these reasons, planning some flexibility into the schedule for the day is important. Having a Librarian on hand to offer a gentle reminder of time remaining (a 'five-minute warning') is a polite way to encourage Books and Readers to bring their discussions to an end.



For Readers: make processes as smooth and easy as possible so the focus is on engaging with Books

(Workshop 8)



9. Training and support for Books

Tailoring support to Books' experiences

Some people will be experienced and comfortable with talking about their mental health, while others will be doing so for the first time. Consider developing support plans with each person to account for differences in the kind of support people will need. This can help to identify potential emotional triggers and what helps in these situations. The mental health charity Mind has an online Wellbeing Action Plan which might be helpful when developing these plans (9).

Constructing a story

Books should be supported to think about what they want to share. Organisers should make it clear that they are not required to reveal anything that they feel uncomfortable sharing. This should be reviewed regularly as each story is living and can change.

A list of questions Books may wish to consider include:

- What is the message I want other people to take away from hearing my story?
- Do I want to tell my story from memory or would it be useful to have prompts to guide me?
- How does it feel when I talk about the story to people I've never met before?
- Are there parts of the story I don't want to discuss?
- If the conversation moves towards a topic I'm uncomfortable with, how would I respond?
- How would it feel if someone disagreed with me or challenged some part of my story? How would I respond?
- How would I end the conversation if it went beyond my personal boundaries?
- What would I do if I noticed someone becoming upset while sharing my story?

Consider providing group training sessions to support Books with creating their story and thinking about their own personal boundaries. Bringing people together in this way can help to create a supportive community prior to the event.

Preparing for the conversation

A training session should include time for Books to try out their stories in a supportive environment. Practices can help Books to reflect on what it feels like to be open to conversations within their personal boundaries. An important part of this preparation is supporting the Books to say 'no' to questions they do not wish to answer. Books could also try listening to each other's stories to get a feel for what the event will be like for Readers.

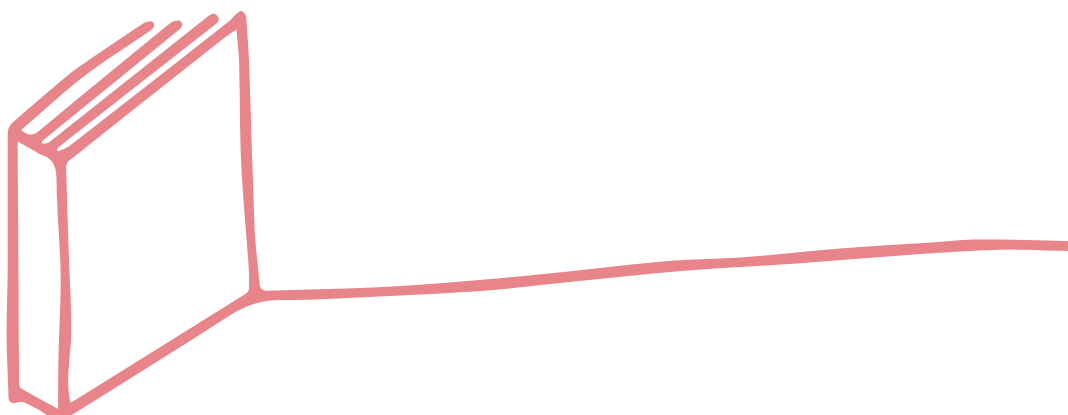
Where a Book's story highlights complex long-term challenges, this might lead some Readers to see their own experiences as more negative than they previously thought. Stories may also trigger emotional distress for Readers. Training for Books should therefore involve thinking about how their story might impact the Reader and what to do if Readers experience distress during their conversations.

Support during the Library

Providing a quiet space for Books to relax and reflect between and after conversations can be an important aspect of the support that a Library can provide. Librarians themselves also need to be available and trained to offer emotional support where this is needed. Books might need support because of the impact of sharing their own story. There may be occasions when a Reader becomes distressed or a Reader may ask they touch on something that the Book does not wish to discuss. Librarians should think ahead about how to best manage these situations. It is important to keep in mind that the Library involves conversations which cannot be wholly predicted, yet preparing for potential challenges as far as possible is important.

Support after the Library

Books will vary in how much, if any, support they need following each event. However, offering the option of a debriefing session after the event and other wellbeing checks, such as a pre-arranged phone call after the event, could form part of the individual support plans noted above. These can be important for managing any distress that may occur following the event and for helping the Book to think through their ongoing involvement in the Library. In addition to this support, signposting or linking people to existing services can be considered where appropriate. If the events have created a community of Books through training sessions and perhaps multiple Library events, consider further developments such as group meetings, or 'Book Clubs', for the Books to attend and offer each other ongoing peer support.



10. Support for Readers

Organisers should help Readers to understand what the Living Library involves, what's expected of them on the day, and the kinds of conversations they can expect.

Some guidance on what the Library is not, and any limitations on conversations, will also help avoid tensions and misunderstandings on the day. Depending on the format of each Library, this guidance could be circulated in writing before the event, in flyers handed out at the reception desk, or as part of in-person briefings for Library visitors. Information could include:

- A description of the Living Library model and the aim of the event. Try to make it clear that while Books will share their stories, Readers are able to ask questions and share their experiences, too
- Guidance on the values of the Library and any 'ground rules'. This may include a request to engage in respectful conversations and be aware of any personal boundaries highlighted by Books
- A list of topics, prompts, or example questions. This may help to reduce the likelihood that Readers run out of things to ask
- A note on confidentiality. This may include a request not to share discussions outside of the event
- Information on what to do if they experience any difficulties during their time at the Library. This should include who to go to with any questions or concerns and the support options available during the session
- Basic but essential information like the time limit for the conversation and the location of toilets
- Information about sources of support. This could be given on a flyer with a list of national or local services, helplines and crisis numbers, including those for carers





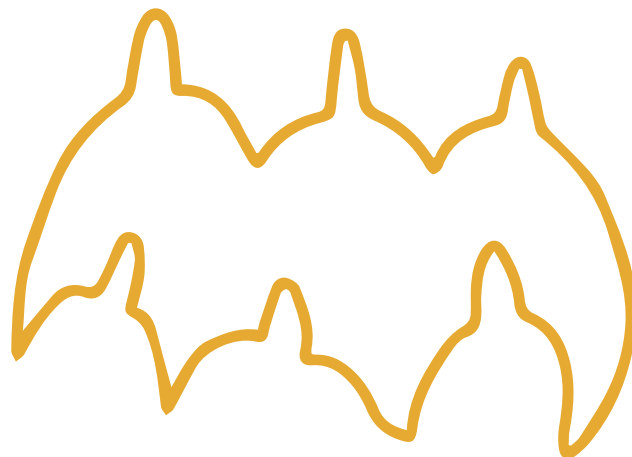
Support during conversations

The open nature of conversations in the Living Library can help people to explore new and important ideas. However, this style of event also means that Readers may be exposed to conversations they find unexpectedly distressing. For some people, events related to mental health can be the first time they have reflected on their personal experience or voiced their experiences to another person. It is important to ensure that the Library team running the event includes people who are confident and experienced in offering emotional support in this context.

This might include taking the time to sit with someone over a cup of tea during the event or discussing Readers' feelings about their experience at the end of the session, until they are ready to leave the Library. Depending on the organisation and setting, support could be supplemented with other staff, including health professionals, peer supporters, or volunteers.

After-loan support

The level of support offered to Readers after their conversations should account for a range of possible responses. A quiet space to reflect on their experience may be very welcome following a particularly moving conversation. For others, a group de-brief or the opportunity to discuss their experience with a Librarian before heading home may be helpful. This could also be an opportunity to provide Readers with information about other local support services, so having an accessible list of services, websites and phone numbers is likely to be helpful.



11. Training and support for Librarians

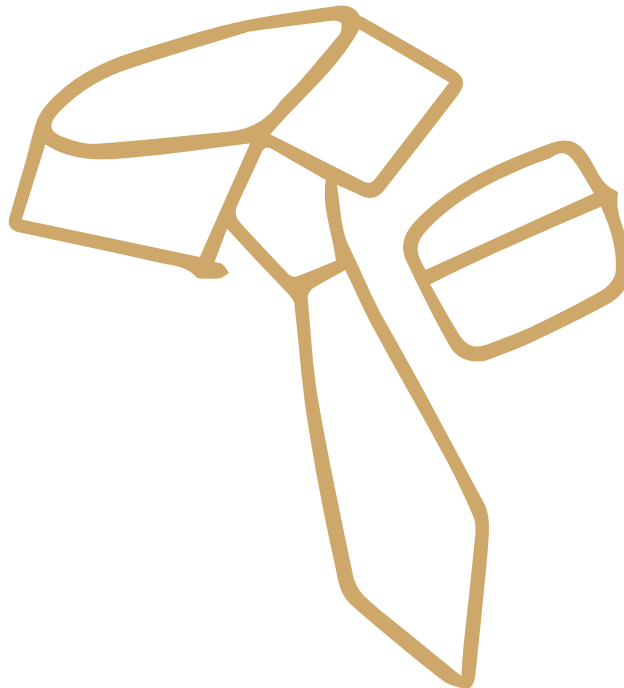
Preparing the team for the event

Librarians will be the point of first contact for visitors, direct the event, and provide support to visitors as needed. This can be challenging, especially when the team is running their first event, so it is useful to consider a practice session. Here, Librarians can explore the different aspects of the role in a safe space with access to feedback from the wider team. An important aspect of delivery of the Library is to plan for possibilities such as some Books or Readers not attending or technical issues for online libraries. This would include having ready access to appropriate services should mental health or other emergencies arise during the event.

Support for Librarians

Maintaining a successful Living Library over time depends on building a motivated and engaged team of Librarians. The right level of support for Librarians will depend on the nature of the event and on how each individual Librarian feels about their role. If appropriate, consider developing individual support plans to help support Librarians during their time at the event.

Team debriefs following each Living Library session can help provide a space for Librarians to reflect on things that went well and potential challenges that could be addressed in the future. Also consider regularly asking Librarians' about their workloads and level of support required.





12. After the library

Feedback and evaluation

Collecting information about peoples' experiences of each Library event can help to see if the event's aims have been met. Understanding what Readers liked and disliked, and what could be improved about the Library, will also leave organisers well placed to make positive changes to future events. Collecting this information could be done in person at the time of the event or afterwards using an online survey or phone call. You could ask the following questions:

- Did you find a Book that fit with your interests and experiences?
- How would you describe the conversations you had at the Library?
- Was the online/physical environment appropriate?
- How did the experience impact your views on mental health?
- Were the materials (adverts, guidance, information etc) appropriate?
- Were there enough Librarians?
- Was the level of support right for you?
- Did you feel able to ask questions?
- What could be improved?

Some organisers may wish to assess the impact of the Living Library on specific outcomes, like stigma or wellbeing. Here, it may be useful to seek the involvement of research or service evaluation staff to help plan how this can be done.

Our co-design group highlighted that because the Living Library approach is all about connecting with people, formal 'box-ticking' activities, like rating scales, might not fit with the feel of the events. It was suggested that Living Library organisers could work with the community the Library is trying to reach to design an acceptable method of evaluation that reflects community needs and values.



The Library needs co-designed or collectively designed evaluation.

What's valuable to the people who are using it?

(Workshop 9)

Conclusion

We hope that this guide will help people to organise their own Living Libraries for mental health. Our team hopes to continue research into understanding how Living Libraries can be used to support mental health. We would encourage potential organisers to contact us to discuss collaborating on this goal. If you would like to contact the research team to discuss this or any aspect of this guide please get in touch by email at: lle@lancaster.ac.uk

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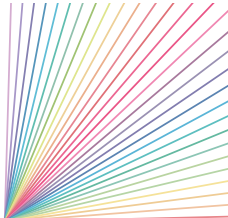
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