Expanding Understanding of Prejudice and Stereotypes: Learn About the 'Books' in Our First 'Human Library'

“I struggled for a long time to understand how someone could judge me and my teaching ability based on my sexual orientation,” said Jane Hix, Senior Legal Counsel for Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, and one of Jefferson’s first “Human Books.” The Human Library event last month was held to promote understanding and decrease prejudice.

Before attending law school, Jane Hix, Senior Legal Counsel for Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, was teaching at a seminary. She taught there for six years, living a quiet and content life. Until one day, when she received a letter that said based on unsubstantiated information, she was “promoting a homosexual lifestyle” and was no longer employed by the seminary.

“It was painful,” said Jane. “I struggled for a long time to understand how someone could judge me and my teaching ability based on my sexual orientation.”

Jane has since moved on, emotionally and professionally. But she remembers that pain well and knows that others still struggle. So when she found out about an opportunity on the Jefferson campus to increase understanding, promote dialogue -- and ultimately reduce prejudice -- she volunteered to help. In doing so, she agreed to become a “human book.”

Jane was one of six human books available for loan at the first-ever Human Library hosted at Jefferson on April 2 at Scott Memorial Library. We are the first academic medical center in the US to host a Human Library.

“A Human Library is where people volunteer to ‘go on loan’ and share their stories,” said Pat Wynne, Associate University Librarian at Scott Memorial Library. “Each person, or book, has a title and is available for readers, or visitors, ‘to loan’ for 30-minute time periods.”

The Human Library organization, which started in 2000, was created by five teenagers in Denmark after a mutual friend was stabbed at a nightclub. The teens’ friend survived but the group decided to use peer education to help stop violence. The Human Library was then born -- focused on the idea that by putting different people together in a small space and creating dialogue, understanding is bound to happen. Human libraries have since been re-created all over the world.
Anthony Frisby, PhD, Director of Scott Memorial Library, embraced the notion of having the event on the Jefferson campus.

“When Pat approached me with the idea, I said ‘Let’s go for it.’ For the community we serve, our students, and clinicians -- we agreed this affects all of us and we could all learn from it.”

At the April 2 event, 20 readers registered to borrow books at Jefferson’s Human Library. The readers included students, staff and clinicians -- varying in age from early 20s to late 70s. Each book had a session with four or five readers.

Jane’s book, titled *Out for Good*, was borrowed by five readers. “Some readers sat down and started asking questions right away,” said Jane. “Others preferred I start talking and then the conversation went from there. Each session was so interesting and different, since no two readers are the same. But the common theme throughout was that this dialogue is helping people understand one another -- all in a safe environment.”

Other Jefferson self-titled books included:

- *A Human Being First; Gay, Married, Working Mother of Two Second*
- *Mums the Word*
- *Disabled Veteran*
- *Homeless, Not Helpless*
- *Queer Transman*

“In a multicultural society, this type of dialogue helps build bridges,” said Jane. “I’m curious to see the form the next Jefferson Human Library will take.”

Plans are underway to expand the Human Library and bring it back to Jefferson in the future.

To learn more about the Human Library at Jefferson or to become a Human Book, contact Pat Wynne at 3-7815, or visit the Human Library [WEBSITE].