The 14th edition of the Human Library took place at the Augustana library Sept. 28 and 29, with over 20 human books available for readers to check out and learn from. The library was started in the winter term of 2009 by Augustana librarian Nancy Goebel and has expanded through the years to cover topics relevant to what’s going on in the world at large.

Who: Paul Harland
What: Curator
Why: Goebel explained that the library is an opportunity to “learn about very difficult and interesting topics and get answers from people instead of from books, or in addition to books. They get an opportunity to explore that through human narrative as well as through the traditional ways that we would teach them to do research through a library.”

How: Human books tend to be known by the organizers or have been recommended and vetted to have a legitimate story in an effort to create a safe space for everyone on campus.

Goebel said that in the 14 editions of the Human Library, it continues to gain popularity, both about the students and staff, as well as the public at large.

“It just continues to flourish. It’s a very popular activity on campus now. It’s the kind of thing that draws people in terms of community. The human books who speak, a lot of them speak on potentially contentious issues and yet they are very giving of themselves head on, while also allowing her to bring together her passion for English and women’s studies with her life experience.

Who: Five-year-old Bennett Malaka and his mother Melissa Hande
What: Human Books
Number of appearances: Two
Book Title: My child is disabled!
Synopsis: The ins and outs of having a child born with a disability and how the family has adjusted to their new normal, including dealing with difficulties head on, while spreading awareness that a disability does not automatically mean an inability to do, participate in or lead a full life.

Why: “For me it’s mostly just trying to kind of view the perceptions of our world and the fact that unless you’re forced to look at it differently, you don’t realize just how many rules and regulations are there and the fact that this world is definitely built for people who are a certain way, that are ‘normal,’ said Hande.

Who: Lakas Buterman
What: Human Book
Number of appearances: Lost track
Book Title: Guy Hard
Synopsis: “I’m someone who figured he was trans very late in life after a lot of complex medical issues that certainly distracted from figuring that out earlier. But it also meant that as someone who is well educated, who doesn’t like being used to being an out patient, and even understands a lot about medical stuff that most non doctors wouldn’t have any reason to know about, I actually felt stupid to be that old, to be well into my 30s before things kind of clicked. I felt really dumb. But I realized that in my day we didn’t have the internet. Would my local library have anything about what they were doing differently back then and publicly what people knew about trans people tended to be pretty sensationalistic or things like Rocky Horror Picture Show, which is fun and everything but I’ve yet to meet any trans person who that would be their life story.”

Why: Buterman said he got involved with the Human Library after he got involved with trans-activism and found that people “were seeking knowledge and there weren’t a lot of places to get that knowledge locally. I know there’s lots of great stuff online, I also know there’s lots of crazy stuff online, so if you’re new to something it can be really hard to know what’s actually real and valid and what’s just people screaming into the void.”

Who: Kate Schowalter
What: Human Book
Number of appearances: First
Book Title: Trans/sexual
Synopsis: “How the public perception of how straight men act around trans women as to what happens behind closed doors. There’s often this media perception and this macho bravado perception where they’re like, ‘I would never date a trans woman because trans women are men,’ but realistically I’ve not had too many issues, with the exception of people saying that they don’t want me to be out as trans among their friends and family. Which is pretty sketchy.”

Why: To dispel popular perceptions the media has perpetuated and the public believe about what relationships between trans women and cismen are like, especially when in regards to the sexuality of both individuals. As well, to discuss reproductive technologies and “how very heteronormative, cisnormative, assumptions are about the person’s relationships.”

Amielle Christopherson
Camrose Canadian

The Camrose Canadian
October 8, 2015

Checking out Augustana’s Human Library resources