



# **HUMAN LIBRARY EVALUATION STUDY**

An evaluation study on the objectives and effectiveness of the Human Library Groningen  
2015

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## Introduction

In a society filled with prejudice and intolerance towards various groups, the Human Library mission is to bridge the gap between different social and ethnic groups and to allow dialogue and comprehension. Through this informal and laid-back way of bringing people together, the Human Library allows those who may have experienced segregation and prejudice to have the chance to talk to people they may feel identified with. The main goal of the Human Library consisted of three main objectives; to bring different social and ethnical groups of society together, to challenge (and overcome) prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination in society, and to learn, educate, and change attitudes. The objective of this evaluation study is to see if, with regard to mission and vision, the goals of the event were reached (Library, Meet your prejudice, 2015).

The following report will give a short background to the Human Library and the contribution of this report to the Human Library. Additionally, the methodology will be discussed, as well as results/analysis and conclusion.

## Background

### History of the Human Library

The Human Library was found in Copenhagen, Denmark by a young and idealistic youth organisation called "Stop The Violence". In 2000, the youngster organisation was encouraged by the festival director Mr. Leif Skov to develop activities that should serve to keep a general positive atmosphere at the Roskilde Festival in Denmark. The idea of the Human Library arose out of an anti-violence movement initiated by the organisation to encourage dialogue and build relations among the diversity of festival visitors (Human Library). After Ronni Abergel, one of the creators of the Human Library, realised the great potential of the idea, he decided to begin to promote the Human Library to potential new organizers. Since then he has travelled to many countries to organize launch events and to present the idea to interested organisations and public authorities. One of the first organisations that cooperated with the Human Library project was the Council of Europe.

Ever since, the Human Library grew intensely fast and gained global popularity. The Human Library has never grabbed more attention then at the moment through social media and mouth-to-mouth communication. By 2008, there were 27 countries worldwide that hosted at least one Human Library event. By today, the number of host countries will probably have doubled (Human Library, 2006).

### The Human Library in Groningen

In 2014, the Human Library was launched in Groningen for the first time. Three students from the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen found out about the project and decided to organise a Human Library event in the public library of Groningen. The event turned out to be a huge success.

In fall 2014, the author of this study decided to create an own, 'Hanze-internal' Human Library event as part of the honours program she is following. After extensive research it turned out that organising a Human Library event requires the settlement of policies, copyrights, and other general rights. Meaning, it requires a long legal procedure to be allowed to host a public Human Library event. As time was short, there was no option to go through this legal process. However, research revealed that there has been a public Human Library event in the past year, so the idea was to join the organisation team to contribute to its work for the next Human Library event.

Therefore, the author of this study, together with fellow honours students, became part of the internal organisation team of the Human Library Groningen (Library, Meet your prejudice, 2015).

### **Contribution of this study to the Human Library**

This evaluation study is of great value for the Human Library as there has never been an extensive evaluation before. Finishing the pre-organization of the Human Library 2015 Groningen the internal team thought it would be highly interesting to see if the goals of the event could be reached and if the event was a success after all. As a result, the team came up with the idea of an extensive evaluation study supervised by the author of this report. The team decided that an evaluation study with clear results could be of great help to improve the event for the upcoming year. Additionally, the team developed an evaluation in form of a survey that can be used as a generalized Human Library evaluation form in the future.

## Methodology

### Quantitative Approach

#### Survey

A survey was developed to implement the quantitative approach into the evaluation study. According to (...) a survey is a suitable instrument to collect numeric data. The survey was put together by reviewing the survey from last year's Human Library and in accordance to the three main themes of the evaluation study that are strongly tied to the objectives of the event:

- 1. Connect diverse groups of society**
- 2. Challenge and overcome prejudice and stereotypes**
- 3. Learn, educate, and change attitudes**

Every theme was covered in the survey by two to three questions per theme. The questions were developed in such a way that they would reveal if the goals of the event were reached or not.

Example: Questions per theme:

1. Did you have a conversation with someone that you would usually not talk to?  
(Theme 1)
2. Do you think that the event helped to bridge gaps between different groups of society to some extent, and thus, bring people together? (Theme 1)
3. How much do you agree that the Human Library is a good way to challenge prejudice, exclusion, stigma, and discrimination? (Theme 2)
4. Did you gain insights on prejudice and discrimination? (Theme 2)
5. Have you learned about yourself during (a) conversation(s) you had? (Theme 3)
6. Did you learn about understanding, respect, and tolerance? (Theme 3)
7. Would you say that the Human Library changed your attitude/mindset?  
(Theme 3)
8. How would you rate your overall experience at the Human Library? (Theme 1,2,3)

#### Desk Research

Additionally, desk research was conducted to obtain information about the vision and mission of the Human Library as well as about primer approaches on survey

strategies. To be more specific, the survey of the Human Library 2014 was reviewed to elaborate the general idea and to implement some major pattern to the updated survey. The official Human Library website was reviewed explicitly to completely understand concept of the Human Library.

## Qualitative Approach

For the quantitative approach, personal interviews acted as the instrument. Interview questions were designed specifically for the roles that people took in the event. E.g., books had different interview questions than volunteers. However, there were a lot of questions that overlapped.

Example: interview questions for a volunteer:

- 1) What was your role at the event?
- 2) What were your expectations about the event?  
Connect groups of society
- 3) Did you interact with people that you would usually not interact with?
- 4) If yes, how did you perceive this?
- 5) Do you think that the Human Library is a good event to bridge gaps between different groups and minorities of society?
- 6) Do you think that the event helped to bring people together and to encourage dialogue?
- 7) Did you face (maybe even overcome) prejudice/stereotypes?
- 8) Do you feel like the human library changed your mindset/attitude?
- 9) Did you learn about yourself during the event?
- 10) Did you learn about understanding, respect, and tolerance?
- 11) Did you gain insight into prejudice and discrimination?
- 12) How you explain your overall experience at the Human Library?
- 13) Did the expectations you had before the event come true?
  - a. In a positive/negative way?

The interviews were conducted in a private and quiet setting in order to obtain the best results possible. The interviewees were given the choice to stay anonymous or to tell their names. They were promised that their data would be processed confidentially and only for the use of the Human Library evaluation study.



## Results

The evaluation form of the Human Library 2015 revealed that there was a total of 103 respondents. However, the internal organization team estimates the total number of visitors for both days to a total of

around 200 people. 92.2% of the respondents were readers (95 people), 4.9% volunteers (5), and 2.9% books (3 people) (Figure 1). The small number of books resulted in lacking communication between the organizing team and the books to fill in the survey. However, there was a lot of positive feedback spread mouth-to-mouth.

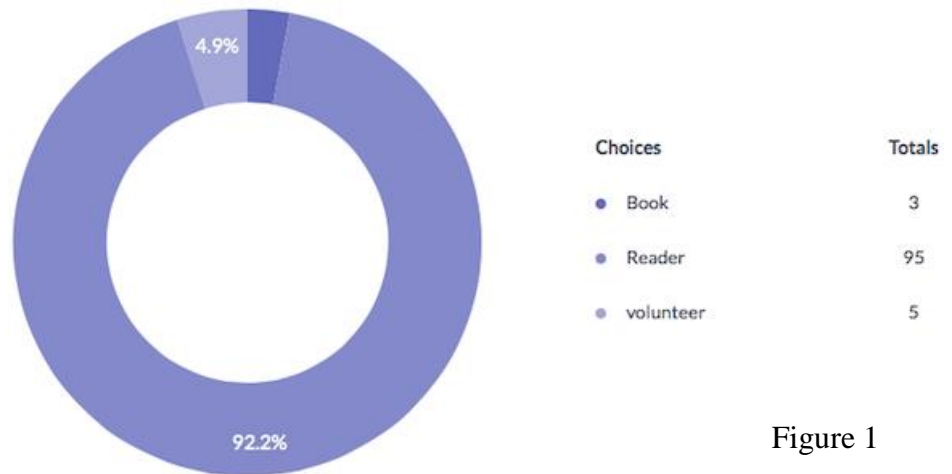


Figure 1

The second question of the survey “With what kind of expectations did you go into the event?” gave diverse answers. 44.6% said that they would expect to get new insights and to learn about themselves. 18.8% mentioned that they were excited but also fearful. 16.8% said that they were willing to change prejudice and stereotypes, 12.9% did not have any specific expectations and 6.9% expected to change their own attitude (Figure 2).

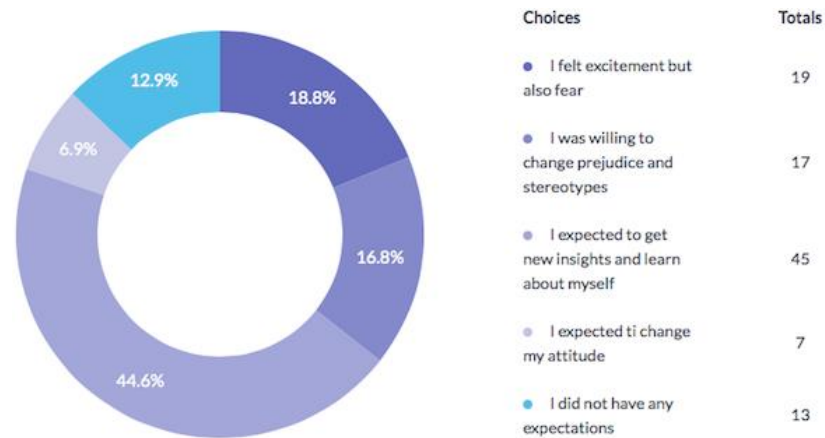


Figure 2

For the third question “Did you have a conversation with a person that you would usually not talk to?” the survey gave

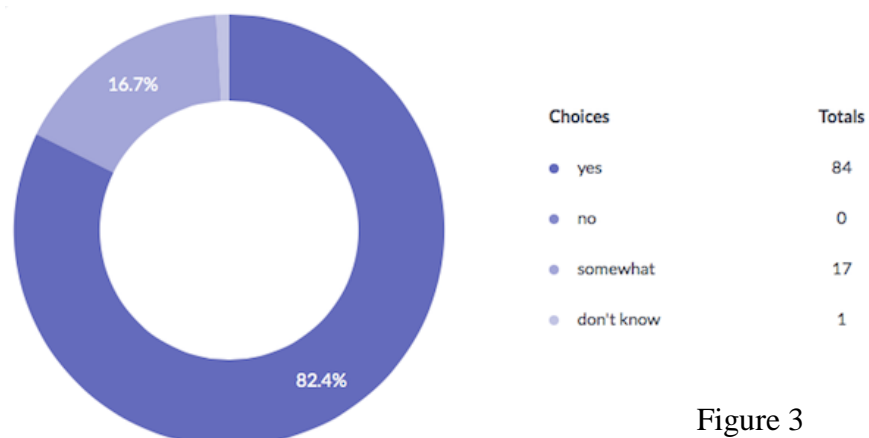
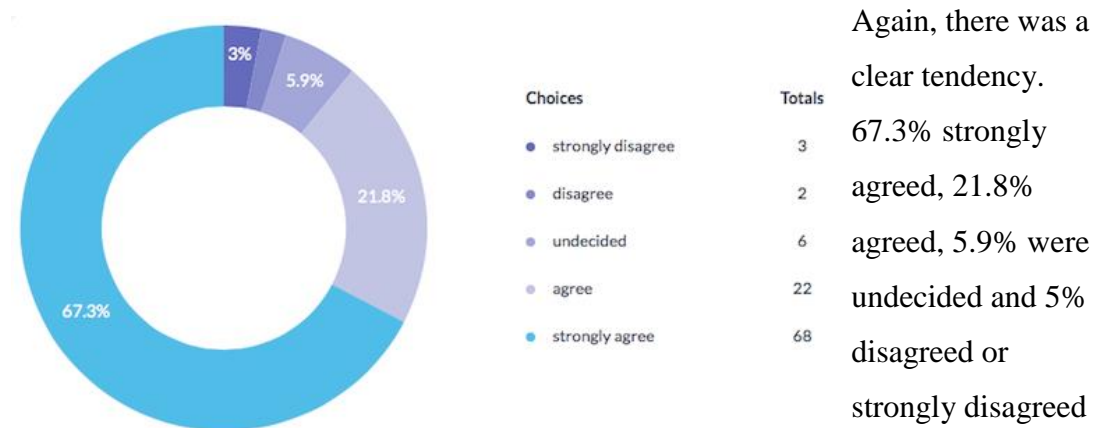


Figure 3

clear results. 66.7% answered yes, 34% said no.

Another clear result can be extracted by the fourth question “Do you think the event helped to bridge gaps between different groups of society to some extent?”. 82.4% answered this question with “yes”, 16.7% answered “somewhat”, and the rest answered “don’t know” or “no” (Figure 3).

The next question considered challenging prejudice, exclusion, stigma, and discrimination. The exact question was as follows: “How much do you agree that the HL is a good way to challenge prejudice, exclusion, stigma, and discrimination?”.



(Figure 4).

The fifth question served to gather information about whether the participants gained insights on prejudice and discrimination or not. The question

was “Did you gain insights on prejudice and discrimination?”. 47% thought they did a little bit, 40% said that they did gain insights, 8% thought they did not gain any insights and 5% answered with “don’t know” (Figure 5).

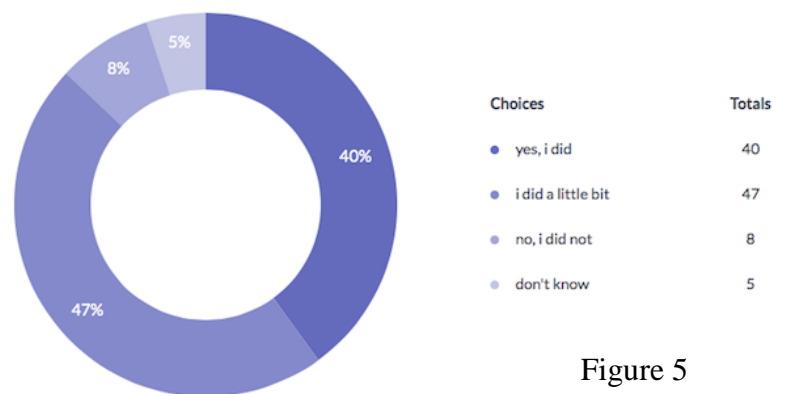


Figure 5

As learning about oneself and one’s environment was one of the objectives of the Human Library, the question “Did you learn about yourself?” considered that topic in the survey. 49% of the respondents thought that they learned a bit about themselves, 37.3% thought they definitely learned about themselves. 9.8% thought they did not learn about themselves and 3.9% answered with “don’t know” (Figure 6).

Another question, “Did you learn about understanding, respect, and tolerance?” added to the topic of learning. 79.4% answered that they learned the importance of it. 10.8% mentioned that these terms were not present during their conversation(s), thus they did not learn from it. 9.8% said they did not know (Figure 7).

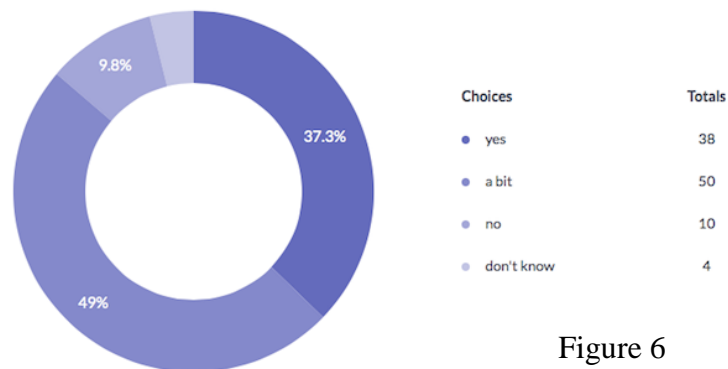


Figure 6

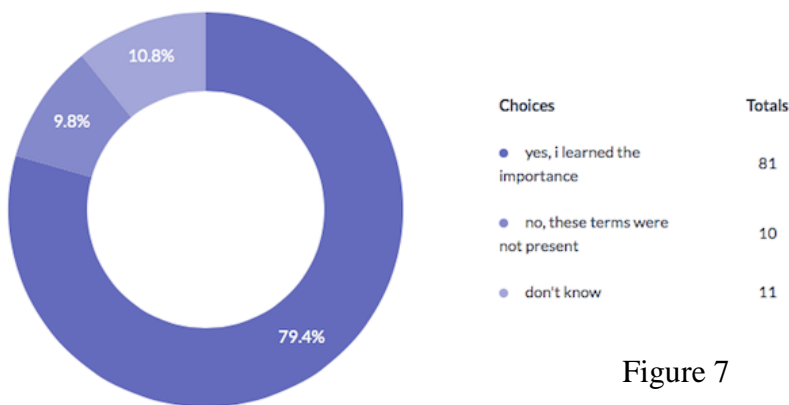


Figure 7

The following question was again adapted to one of the objectives of the Human Library. It considered the change of attitude and mindset of participants. The question was as follows: “Would you say the HL changed your attitude/mindset?”. 52% of the respondents said that it did to some extent and 30.4% thought that it actually did change their attitude or mindset. 13.7% said that it did not change their attitude or mindset. At this point it has to be mentioned that the majority of the people that answered “no” added as a comment that they already considered themselves to be very open minded, without having preconceived ideas or prejudice. Another 3.9% said they did not know (Figure 8).

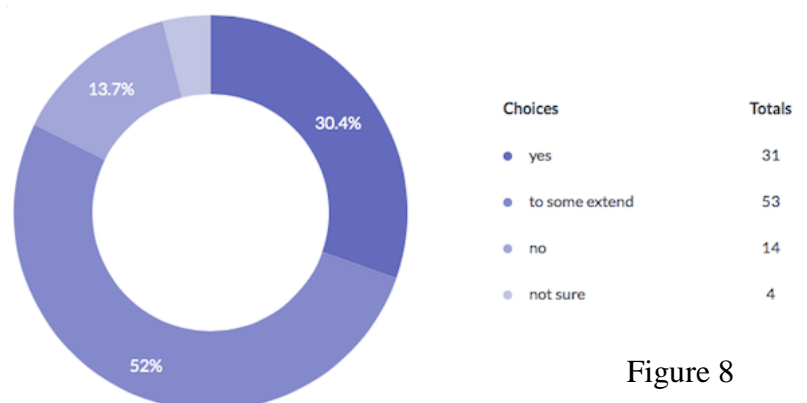


Figure 8

The last question of the evaluation survey was rather broad, attempting to get an insight into the general experience of the participants at the event. The question “How would you rate the overall experience at the HL?” should collect this information.

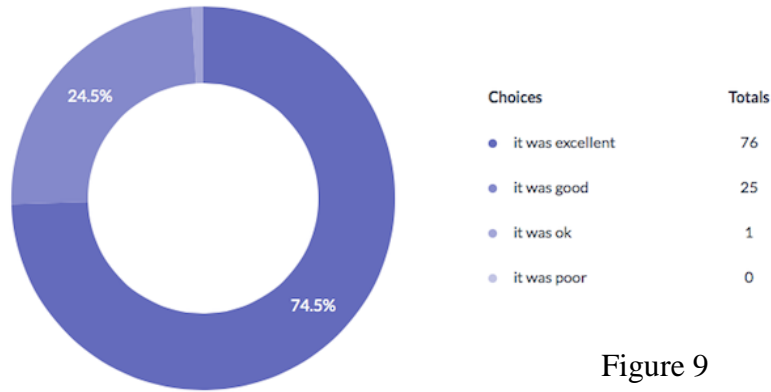


Figure 9

This question revealed a very clear tendency; 74.5% found the Human Library excellent, 24.5% said it was good, 1% found it ok, and no one said that the event was poor (Figure 9).

The results of the interview can be found in the appendix in form of an example of an interview conducted with one of the volunteers.

## Conclusion

As already mentioned in the introduction, the main goal of the Human Library consisted of three main objectives; to *bring different social and ethnical groups of society together*, to *challenge (and to overcome) prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination in society*, and to *learn, educate, and change attitudes*.

Throughout the two-day-event, the internal organisation team received a lot of positive feedback from all kind of visitors, but mostly from the books. A lot of books found the Human Library “one of the most challenging but also fulfilling things” they have ever done (Human Library). Considering the statistics discussed in the result section, it can be interpreted that there is, in general, a strongly positive tendency towards the event. Figure 9 shows that almost 75% thought that the event was a total success.

It can be said that all the objectives were reached at least to some extend. Statistics show that the first objective was reached; 82% of the respondents agreed that the Human Library helped to bring different social and ethnical groups of society together. Additionally, 67% of the respondents revealed that they talked to people they not talk to in their daily life. Furthermore, it can be said with certainty, that the second objective, to challenge prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination in society, was reached at least to some extend. This is proven by the fact that 88% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that the Human Library is a good way to challenge prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. Finally, the third objective, to learn, to educate and to change attitudes, was also reached to at least some extend. The survey revealed that 47% of the respondents gained new insights. Furthermore, 97% of all respondents stated that they learned about themselves to some extent or a lot, and considering another question, 79% thought that they learned about tolerance. In terms of changing attitudes, 52% stated that their attitude was changed to some extend, 30% of all respondents felt a complete change of attitude.

## Bibliography

- Library, H. (2006, March 20). *Don't judge a book by its cover*. Retrieved April 16, 2015, from human library: <http://humanlibrary.org>
- Library, H. (2015, February 12). *Meet your prejudice*. Retrieved August 20, 2015, from human library groningen: <http://www.humanlibrarygroningen.com>

## Appendix

### Interview MATHJIS ARENSEN (VOLUNTEER)

14) What was your role at the event?

I was a matchmaker → volunteer

15) What were your expectations about the event?

I didn't expect that it would be that cool/awesome. I thought it would be less crowded → way better than expectations (didn't really know what to expect, what the whole event would look like), surprised by the books that they were so open, positive, enthusiastic

#### Connect groups of society

16) Did you interact with people that you would usually not interact with?

- Yes for sure!

17) If yes, how did you perceive this?

- In the "normal life" you have this kind of boundary to talk to those people that were books. Here, they were there to talk. → I had to get used to the people (not usual to be surrounded by HIV-positive guy and transgender people). I'm pretty open minded so I wasn't really shocked by the people

18) Do you think that the Human Library is a good event to bridge gaps between different groups and minorities of society?

- Yes and no: Yes because you go against the preconceived ideas and no because people who come to the human library are already open-minded and don't have "real" prejudices

19) Do you think that the event helped to bring people together and to encourage dialogue?

- Yes, there was this guy who wanted to watch a movie in the library and then he found out about the human library. He was confused that it was 1 by 1, but later he spoke to 5 other books. At the beginning he was afraid but then he got really into it

#### Challenge/overcome prejudice/stereotypes

20) Did you face (maybe even overcome) prejudice/stereotypes?

- **Long thinking break** the Christian guy was actually exactly how I imagined him → real decent guy, looked a little "nerdy", he didn't curse
- No prejudice that I preconceived that wasn't true

#### Learn about one, change attitude/mindset, educate

21) Do you feel like the human library changed your mindset/attitude?

- No. It was fun to talk but I never had a lot of prejudice before anyway

22) Did you learn about yourself during the event?

- Maybe I became a little more open

23) Did you learn about understanding, respect, and tolerance?

- I already was tolerant, so no

#### General

24) Did you gain insight into prejudice and discrimination?

- Of course you learn a few things about the books, so you have more knowledge about different groups

25) How do you explain your overall experience at the Human Library?

- Super positive, some nice conversations, fun to help, everybody was positive, very open and willing to talk books, organization was very good

26) Did the expectations you had before the event come true?

- No, the event was even better than my expectations → positive way

a. In a positive/negative way?