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Faith

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Reading with a difference

Borrow a Human Book

By Michael Williams

Have you ever wondered what someone of another faith thinks about something that's important to you, or why anyone would want to be part of a religion at all? Now you can find out, by borrowing a person rather than a book at Slough Library.

Local group 'Art Beyond Belief' are running the "Borrow a Person" sessions as part of their Festival of Dialogue program funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Three of the 'Human Books' spoke to Clare Catford on BBC Radio Berkshire about some of the ideas behind the initiative.

Muslim Shah-Bano Razvi told Clare; "I myself am personally quite interested in learning about other faiths.

"We held a round table discussion with a group of people from different faiths who came together to discuss one topic and its there we were asked to participate."

Meanwhile Satish Sharma who is a practicing Hindu told Clare that he really enjoyed the experience.

"The atmosphere itself was the best part of it, there was an element of safety, an element of confidence that somebody could ask any question that they wanted to without being worried about stepping on my toes or me stepping on their toes."

"For me knowing someone on a human level is important"

The idea of 'Living Libraries' was introduced in 2000 by the Danish Youth organisation 'Stop the Violence'.
Shah-Bano Razvi, a Muslim Human Book from local group 'Beyond Belief'.

It has been developed in a number of countries and has been gaining popularity in English libraries. This is the first time that sessions have been offered in Slough.

Shah-Bano continued, "I found it was very positive, we managed to find similarities between different faiths, for example how we pray and the different posture.

"I was pleasantly surprised about how many common things we

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found and how we all recognise and respect the differences."



Clare Catford & the three 'Human Books'

Phillip Ind, a former priest, told us how the scheme works.

"We meet in a particular room and people have directions about where to go if they want to go and borrow a person to talk to about faith

"In the past I was asked why I became a priest in the Christian Church, and what led me to it.

"I was recently interviewed by a young woman who was the girlfriend of a Turkish-Muslim who had lost connection with her own Christian background and was very keen to understand again.

"Its a very secure environment, everyone is visible to everyone else, very conversational, its just a lovely social atmosphere."

Art Beyond Belief was established in February 2005 to provide ground-breaking arts projects to ethnically and religiously diverse communities that are often socially disadvantaged and lacking in concerted arts provision

Satish reiterated that the project was designed to break down stereotypes.

"I think so many people carry around their own ideas about what different religions are like and you never really get an opportunity to go beyond those ideas to the people who are actually practicing these religions.



Shah-Bano, Satish & Philip in the studio

"I think the moment you get past your own preconceptions you get a chance to appreciate how much is similar."

Shah-Bano also agreed that the 'Borrow a Book' initiative can help tackle a lot of inbuilt prejudice.

"A lot of people get their impression (of Muslims) from television, radio and other media, but in reality if you haven't met another Muslim you never know how true that is.

"For me knowing someone on a human level is important."

The 'living books' available to borrow will be ordinary members of

local faith communities, who will be happy to discuss their religion and traditions, faith and spirituality, beliefs and experiences and any other subject besides.

Click here to visit the 'Art Beyond Belief' website:

Art Beyond Belief Website >

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Join Clare Catford on BBC Radio Berkshire to hear more local people discussing their life and their faith every Sunday morning from 6am - 9am.

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