

Home / News

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'Human Library' shares diverse stories

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Western Kentucky University Libraries, in partnership with The Human Library Organization, hosted its first Human Library event at Cravens Library on Tuesday.

The event allowed attendees to visit with diverse human "books," hear a short introduction and ask questions. The 12 stories told included subjects ranging from life after weight loss surgery to being a dual citizen.

Anthony Paganelli, the organizer of the event and a library instructor, said The Human Library was a "natural fit" for a program at the University Library.

"Libraries are all about widening individuals' perspectives and creating critical thinkers," he said. "It is an event that was organized in Denmark about 20 years ago and was kind of a deal where people could come together in a safe environment and have open dialogue so we thought this would be great for our students to have this opportunity and something to carry out into the workforce and into their lives."

With it being the first time the library has hosted this event, Paganelli said the event took a lot of planning – especially in finding speakers.

"This is something we are just starting and trying to figure out and at this point we were just kind of going out into the community and seeing who would actually want to participate in this, because it is not easy to come in and sometimes talk about emotional experiences," Paganelli said.

"I think diversity is extremely important because these are some of the gaps we have fallen in with our curriculum," Paganelli said. "It is great if we could offer this kind of education for our students to go out into the world. There's topics I'm sure our students have never even thought about. I can't tell a person what it was to have cancer or what it was to experience it but this person can. I think that's the best part of it."

Donielle Lovell's story was about being a female politician. Lovell was the Democratic candidate for Kentucky House District 18 in 2018. She ran against Republican incumbent Rep. Tim Moore, who won the spot.

"I ran for state representative and he (Paganelli) wanted someone to be able to talk about that experience and the challenges and the good things," Lovell said. "I wrote my dissertation on women in leadership in particularly running for office and I have had some interesting observations on what it was to do that research 10 years ago and to actually live that research while running for office."

Lovell said women's families are often brought up during campaigning.



"One of the things that came out during my dissertation research was that women talked a lot about how their family was used during campaigns and how the types of questions that women get that oftentimes men don't get when they're campaigning," said Lovell. "In particular, the question of where is your daughter and what is your daughter going to do if you are elected to state representative. That is something that I continually faced when I ran for office - just critiques of motherhood and wondering if I was going to be there enough for my daughter if I were elected."

"It takes a lot of time to run for office," Lovell said. "I wanted to convey that when you hear those questions you stop people and say, this is not relevant."

Lovell said that during the sessions Tuesday, many of the questions she received were about her time on the campaign trail.

"One of the first questions was again about being a woman and a mother running for office," she said. "There were questions about race and running for office. They were curious about the campaigning process. A lot of people don't get to sit down and talk to someone who has run a campaign. These are conversations that you wouldn't normally have ... so it was a lot of fun to just talk to students and let them ask anything they want," Lovell said.

"I was excited for the number of people that sat down at my table," she said. "To have the young men and women that sat down and had real earnest questions, I hope they do this event again. We have such a hard time talking to people these days and this is just one of those events that just breaks down the barriers and allows these conversations to happen."

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