

2 of 571 DOCUMENTS

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Experience that speaks volumes; The **library** will soon offer conversations with knowledgeable people known as 'books'

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It is being heralded as a safe and innovative way for people to have an open conversation about extremely touchy subjects, or just learn about an interesting stranger.

The **Living Library** program offers the public a chance to sign out individuals known as "books" with a specific knowledge base for a conversation. No topic is off limits - drug addiction, anarchy, rape or religion - as long as the result is a productive discussion. It launched in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2000, is free and spread to more than 30 countries, including Canada.

The idea is to challenge people's boundaries and perceptions by exposing them to individuals they may not otherwise meet.

Next stop, Toronto.

The Toronto Public **Library** hopes to launch a pilot project at one of its 99 branches this summer. The "books" will be at the branch on a specific day and members of the public will be able to chat with them about their area of expertise.

"The way we would approach it would be to look at people in the community that have knowledge and experience that is relevant to the people of Toronto," said Linda Hazzan, the **library's** director of marketing and communications.

Living Library co-founder Ronni Abergel said Toronto faces big-city issues like violence and racial tension, which is why the program would be a good fit.

"Toronto has matured to the level where it is ready to face this diversity and utilize it," he said.

The first Canadian **Living Library** began in Montreal in 2006. A Coquitlam, B.C., college has offered a version since 2006; Calgary and Guelph are planning spring events.

Hazzan said their "books" would be based around the **library's** strategic plan. Areas of focus include engaging diverse communities, the growing income gap, creativity and culture, changing technology and sustainability. "We think it would be fun to bring people with perspective in those areas."

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GRAPHIC: Tony Bock toronto star **Libraries** are more than just collections of objects to be borrowed, read and returned. Knowledgeable people are considered "books" to be signed out.

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