The River Campus Libraries (RCL) support the research, teaching, and learning needs of the University of Rochester community by providing access to resources and expertise and by creating opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to engage with diverse perspectives and ideas. In keeping with these efforts, this past year the RCL organized two Human Library events that brought members of the University community together to share their stories and celebrate their diversity in an interactive setting.

What Is a Human Library?
A Human Library is an educational event designed to foster personal connections and understanding between groups and individuals who may not normally interact. Initiated in Denmark as a means of combatting prejudice and racial violence, Human Libraries celebrate differences and promote tolerance among people of various backgrounds and cultures. Participants in a Human Library have an opportunity to “borrow” and engage in 30-minute conversations with Human Books, who volunteer to share their stories with others. During these conversations both “readers” and “books” can ask questions and learn about one another’s life experiences or special interests.

Human Libraries at Rush Rhees Library and First Niagara Rochester Fringe Festival
In January 2013, the RCL organized a Human Library at Rush Rhees cosponsored by the Office for Faculty Development and Diversity. Eighteen volunteers from across the University agreed to serve as Human Books and shared their stories with more than 45 readers. Human Books included “Afghan Higher Education Innovator,” who was a medical doctor from Afghanistan currently studying at the Warner School, and “Refugee from Togo,” who described her journey from a noneducated refugee girl to a graduating senior at Rochester.

In September 2013, as a part of the Rochester Fringe Festival, the RCL hosted a Human Library downtown on the Eastman School of Music Campus. Eighteen Human Books and more than 100 readers participated in this three-hour event. Examples included a married couple that discussed their struggle with the husband’s anorexia and a Vietnam War veteran who faced a court martial after refusing to fight.

Details on participating Human Books from both events can be accessed using the following links:
www.library.rochester.edu/HumanLibraryCatalog2013
www.library.rochester.edu/humanlibrary/fringe2013

RCL staff members are currently working with the Rochester Public Library to organize a Human Library scheduled for January 25, 2014, and recently offered a workshop entitled “How to Organize the Human Library” for the Rochester Regional Library Council.