



## Read a human 'book' at Bishan library on Sunday

By JOANNA SEOW

INSTEAD of checking out a "dead trees" book from Bishan public library this Sunday, one can enjoy the company of a living, breathing human "book".

Fifteen volunteers, each specialising in a specific field, will, if selected by a library user, take questions and enter into discussions for 20 minutes at a time – or 15 if the library is crowded.

This is what has been called a "human library".

New to Singapore, the concept first came about in Denmark in 2000, and has since been replicated around the world.

The catalogue of "books" at this coming weekend's library includes Member of Parliament Denise Phua, who will represent the Autism Resource Centre, and Mr James Ong, an executive officer at the Singapore Association for the Deaf.

Mr Xavier Loo, 20, a polytechnic student and member of Parkour Singapore for four years, will also be on hand for those

who want to pick his brain on the French sport of vaulting, rolling, running and jumping to clear obstacles, usually in urban environments.

He told The Straits Times that he hopes to explain the underlying aspects of the sport to people who come to talk to him at the event.

Mr See Yong Feng, 20, one of the 10 youth organisers of the first human library, said they undertook the project "to encourage people to be more open-minded about differences in society".

The young people, aged 18 to 22 and waiting to start their undergraduate or graduate studies, met while working at Pathlight School earlier this year, and started working on the project in March.

After securing approval from the Human Library Organisation in Denmark, they contacted more than 40 organisations here to ask whether they were keen on sending representatives to Singapore's first human library.

The National Library Board (NLB) agreed to sponsor the venue.

An NLB spokesman said: "The event contributes to NLB's mission to encourage reading and learning, as it gives participants opportunities to learn first-hand about various life experiences here."

Mr See said he learnt a lot about autism during his time at Pathlight. "There are many other groups here similarly misunderstood, or who are just people you wouldn't normally talk to in your daily life," he said, adding that face-to-face interaction was still the best route to an open, meaningful conversation.

Another "book" at Sunday's event is Ms Nazli Anwari, 60, an alternative healing practitioner who works with medicinal plants and body therapy such as massages.

"I've been doing what I've been doing since I was 30. I'm very happy to share my knowledge," she said.

Similarly, National University of Singapore undergraduate Kokila Annamalai, 23, will share her insights on rural development, which she gathered from taking a year off her studies to do social work in southern India.

She said: "There are a lot of things we can read in books, but when it comes to a person sharing those ideas, I think that's a lot more relatable."

The human library will be open this Sunday from 11am to 4pm.

For more details, visit <http://humanlibrarysingapore.blogspot.com>