

Orangeville's Human Library tells a diverse story

By **AMANDA JEROME**
Special to The Banner

The old adage "don't judge a book by its cover" was the underlying theme of the Fifth Annual Headwaters Human Library.

Held at the Mill Street branch of the

Orangeville Public Library on Saturday, March 1, 15 human subjects spoke with visitors about their stories as diverse members of the community.

"It heightens the awareness of people in our community while showing the diversity we have," said repeat attendee Laura Ryan,

Mayor of Mono. "The willingness of people to show who they are without barriers."

Mayor Ryan attended the very first Headwaters Human Library even though she knew nothing about the event. During that visit she was so struck by the story of an East Indian woman that she couldn't continue with the event.

"I was so moved by her story that I couldn't sit with another one," Mayor Ryan said. "I had to go away and ponder her experience. I was more than happy to come back this year and hear more."

With titles ranging from Living With Asperger's to First Nations Women: Idle No More, this year's Human Library had a lot to

offer new and repeat readers alike.

"Criminal or Sweetheart?" was the title of first time participant Cassie Wagg's story. A student of the Criminal Justice Program at Loyalist College, Wagg is interested in federal corrections and working with youth in conflict with the law. However, her 20 body piercings, innumerable tattoos, split tongue, and desire to have sub-dermal implants put over her collar bone make her look like the troubled youth she hopes to one day help.

Wagg's body modification and interest in suspension (the act of hanging from hooks put through body piercings) has made her a

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Amanda Jerome — for The Banner

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Project tears down stereotypes based on appearances, assumptions

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target for stereotypical assumptions at school and in public.

"People assume I do drugs, or I'm violent," said Wagg. "As soon as you do visible stuff (with your body) you're inviting people to comment on it."

One of Wagg's peers at school once made the comment "why doesn't she just go hang herself already?" A shocking comment based on Wagg's experience with suspension. Wagg confronted that individual who admitted to feeling intimidated by her because of her appearance.

Despite having people ignore her personal

space by grabbing her arm to examine tattoos, or strangers making comments about her lifestyle based on stereotypes, Wagg doesn't regret a single modification to her body. She thinks these alterations make her look more like her true self.

"I'm nice. I swear!" Is what Wagg would say to people if she had a chance to speak before they could judge her. That, and "I'm not a drug addict. I don't know why people think that."

Transvestite, Ann D. Lishous, is a repeat title at The Headwaters Human Library.

"I had three sisters growing up and we had a Tickle Trunk," said Ann. "They all wanted

to play princesses and I wanted to play too."

Ann was born and raised in Orangeville. She worked at the Uptown Theatre for a year to get a projectionist licence before moving to work in Toronto. In the city, Ann was asked by friends to play Dr. Frank-N-Furter in a *Rocky Horror Picture Show* skit.

After that experience she came up with her own show. Creating her own outfit out of wires and lights, Ann becomes a "Trans-Sister Radio" for her performances, which can be found on YouTube.

"My art form is my activism," Ann said. "We live in a great country where we can do this. From Russia to the U.S. there is a war on rights. I've lost a lot of respect for Russia and America because of their human rights issues, but I am very proud of Canada."

Ann says men don't normally access the feminine part of their brains, but if they did their minds would expand ten-fold.

"It's a very powerful thing," Ann said. "Men don't have any idea how to be a woman. I'm barely close to it. People can morph themselves into tough bikers, I'm just on the other end of the spectrum from that. With the use of clothes we can bend peoples' perceptions."

"It takes a hell of a man to go into a store and ask for a bra and perfume, even if it's just for their wife," said Ann describing that north

of Hwy. 9 men have to dress a certain way - blue jeans, a checkered shirt, work boots, and cowboy boots. "I refuse to dress the way the world wants me to dress."

Ann retired from being a projectionist nine years ago and returned to Orangeville.

She enjoys skiing, helping the ladies at the clothing depot at the United Church, and working with people suffering from addictions through a 12-step program. Although she dresses in feminine clothes for her shows she said she wouldn't want to walk into Mochaberry dressed like that.

"Society is more accepting of women in men's clothes than of men in women's clothes," Ann said.

Orangeville's Mayor Rob Adams attended the Human Library as a reader and spoke with Laura, a visually impaired student, with her service dog, Watson.

"It really gives people an opportunity to see and understand the world from a different perspective," said Adams.

"It's a chance to appreciate different values and question how we treat people. Meeting with Laura and Watson today I was overwhelmed by the adversity and challenges she faces. Going off to school is challenging for anyone, but when you add her disability it increases the challenge. I appreciate the courage she has to go and do what she does."

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