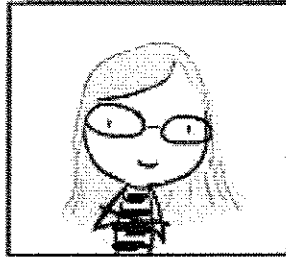
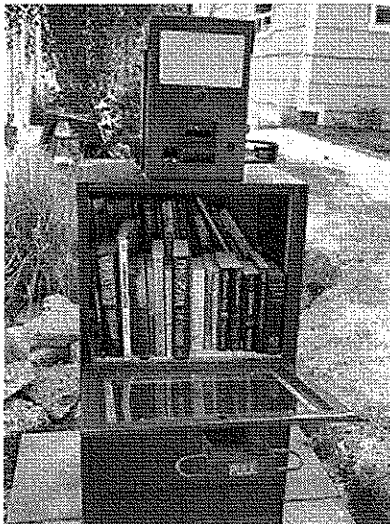


## Little Free Libraries Take Communities by Storm



By Alieda Blandford

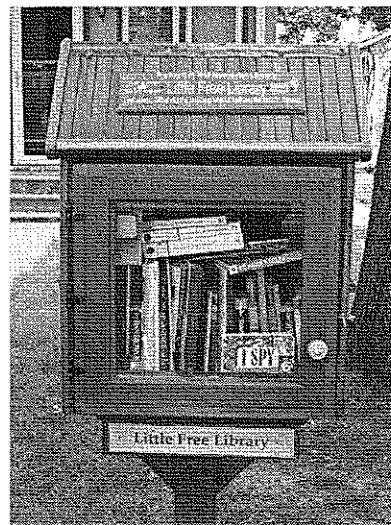
### What is a Little Free Library?



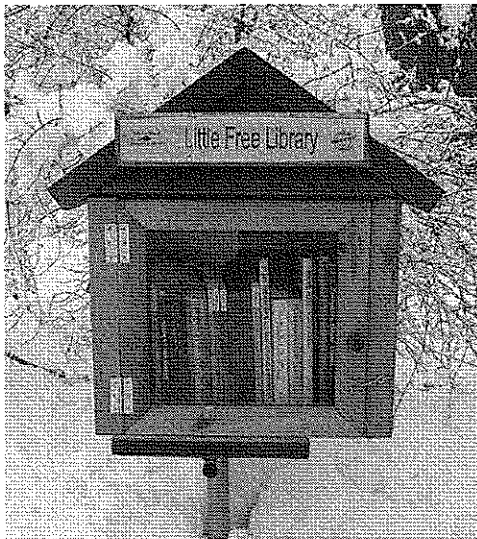
A Little Free Library (LFL) is essentially a free neighbourhood book exchange and meeting place where members of a community can leave or take books. Usually LFLs are simple boxes made of readily-available, inexpensive, or even recycled materials, with a hinged door to keep the books inside warm and dry. The premise is simple: “take a book, leave a book” (Collen, 2014, p. 4).

The Little Free Library movement began in 2009, when a man named Todd Bol from Wisconsin “built a model of a one room

schoolhouse as a tribute to his mother, a former schoolteacher who loved to read. He filled it with books and put it on a post in his front yard” with a sign that read ‘FREE BOOKS’ (Little Free Library, 2014). His neighbours loved it, and soon he was building more boxes and giving them away. From this small act, an international movement – “engaging families, neighborhoods, and entire communities” – was born (Collen, 2014, p. 4). Today, there are nearly 16,000 Little Free Libraries worldwide (p. 4).

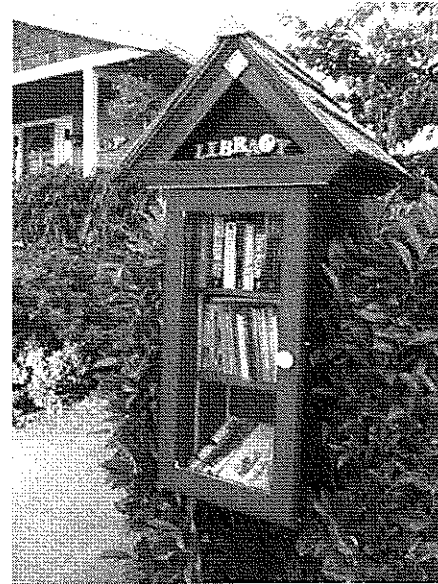


The Little Free Library movement is related to *placemaking*, a quiet movement that “inspires people to create and improve their public spaces” (Project for Public Spaces, n.d.). This movement proposes that all individuals have the power to make small differences that brighten and unite their neighbourhoods, whether through volunteering, cleaning up trash, organizing neighbourhood events, or creating community art. Similarly, LFLs celebrate communities. They can become cornerstones where neighbours can meet each other, collaborate, share, and feel connected. LFLs make a big difference in terms of neighbourhood pride and community building. As a box of free gifts for neighbours, Little Free Libraries express friendliness and goodwill in a way that can make someone’s day.



Lauren Collen (2014) argues that Little Free Library movement has managed to “address head-on the issues of low literacy, lack of access to reading materials, and neighborhood unity” (p. 4) with a small

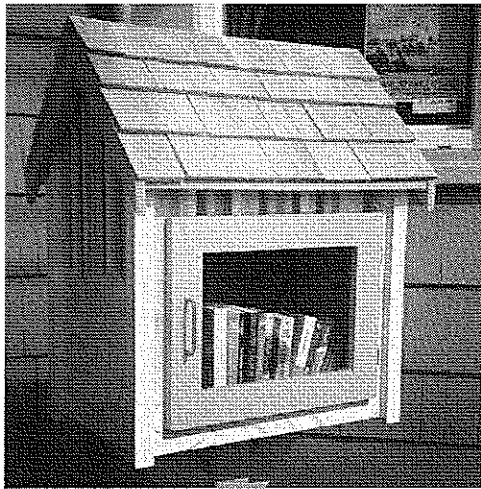
gesture that can connect individuals while making books and reading more accessible for communities. A person can browse through books that his or her neighbours have enjoyed, and maybe read something they would not have thought to try.



Stephens (2012) points out that libraries’ “core values are alive and well in the LFL movement, even though many (if not most) of the LFL facilities are built and stewarded by people who are not librarians” (p. 32). He suggests, though, that libraries should consider sponsoring LFLs in their area as a “form of outreach” that has the potential to “create some new connections with neighborhoods in your community” (p. 32).

You can read more about the Little Free Library movement, and see some great examples, videos, and success stories at: <http://littlefreelibrary.org/>.

## The “FYI Halifax” Little Free Library Initiative



*Photo by Alieda Blandford*

In the summer of 2014, a group of MLIS students from Dalhousie University met over coffee to discuss issues related to information ethics and information activism. They wanted to undertake real-world projects that would engage their community with the idea of the importance of free access to information.

In September 2014, the group built and installed the city’s first LFL on Agricola Street. Over the next six months, social media played a key role in recruiting community members to support the initiative. The movement garnered the

attention of local press (Ryan, 2015), and soon, local businesses were asking if they could fund LFLs to be built and installed outside their shops. FYI Halifax hopes to install a second LFL on Gottingen Street in the summer of 2015, and has now recruited more than 20 community volunteers eager to act as stewards for LFLs in their own neighbourhoods.

### What do I need to make a Little Free Library for my community?

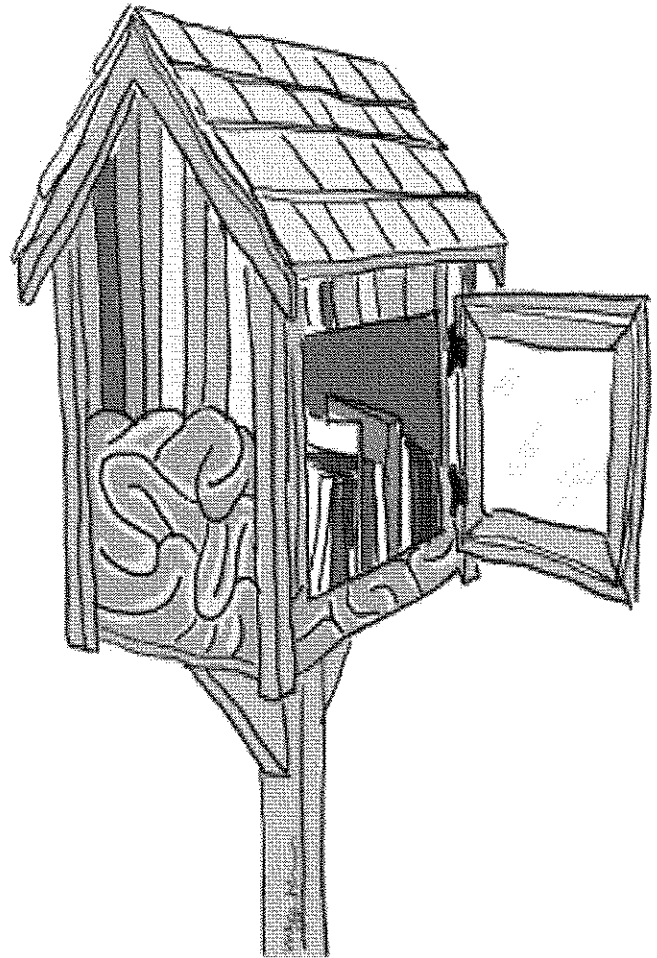
With a piece of  $\frac{3}{4}$ ” plywood, some Plexiglas, and a few basic hand tools, anyone can make a Little Free Library for their own front yard or community corner. You will also need some hardware (screws and hinges) and a piece of weather-stripping to keep the box watertight.

It is strongly advised to recruit a carpenter or someone with woodworking experience to lead the building of the LFL. Many communities have tool libraries (such as the Halifax Tool Library, [once we get everything formatted we should include the page number of the HTL article here!]) where members can borrow the necessary power tools, including drills and palm sanders.



### List of Materials Needed:

- One sheet of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood
- A piece of Plexiglas (for a window in the front)
- A 1x2 board (for trim – this can alternately be cut from the plywood)
- Roof shingles (optional)
- A 4x4 post and a bag of cement
- Hardware: a box of  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " screws, two cabinet hinges and a drawer handle
- A piece of weather stripping
- Some wood glue
- A palm sander and some sand paper
- A half-gallon of outdoor (latex acrylic) paint and brushes
- An electric drill
- A skill saw and two saw horses, or a table saw
- A utility knife (for cutting the Plexiglass and roof shingles down to size)
- A measuring tape and pencil
- A shovel (for digging a hole for the post)
- A wheelbarrow (for mixing cement)



You will also need the following plans:

[http://littlefreelibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/LFL-Building-Design\\_6.17.13.pdf](http://littlefreelibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/LFL-Building-Design_6.17.13.pdf)

For inspiration, you might also want to check out Little Free Libraries on Pinterest:

<https://www.pinterest.com/littlefreelibrary/library-plans-instructions-and-ideas/>

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