

## A first: books that speak for themselves

STORIES are jumping to life at the Lilydale Swinburne University's Library this week. A Living Library event, a first for Lilydale and the first in Melbourne to be open to the public, will see book borrowing with a difference. Meet tutor Amanda Bell and student Mbongeni Maphisa (pictured) as they join the unis program to fight societal stereotypes.



Picture: DETLEVRUEFF NO6LEBSO

Libraries are generally places of hush hush, but there will be plenty of talking allowed this week at the Lilydale Swinburne campus library as books literally come to life. Liz Brown meets two Living Books with extraordinary tales to tell. SWINBURNE tutor Amanda Bell hopes people who come along to the Lilydale Swinburne University's living library event this week will learn a few new things about life. The difference between the usual library and a living library is that visitors can "borrow" a living person for 20 minutes and listen to their life's experiences. Ms Bell has written a book, so far unpublished called *The ParaBella*. After a family car accident when she was 10, Ms Bell became a paraplegic. Her sheer perseverance carried her through to university where she graduated with a Bachelor of Applied Science before she was 21. She is now a member of the academic staff at the Lilydale campus where she is also studying for a research Masters degree. She was pleased to take part in the university's living library because it was an opportunity to help other people understand her experience. "I can make what happened to me worthwhile," she said. "It's important for people to know that just because I'm in a wheelchair I still have feelings. "I'm a 24-year-old woman who likes men, handbags, shoes, perfume and make-up. I date, socialise and have fun." She said her acceptance of herself made her more acceptable to others. "Adolescence was horrible," she said. "Other girls had boyfriends and were going out and I didn't. I decided I would go to university and study psychology, that and supportive older sisters and parents carried me through." She went on to compete in state-level swimming and long distance fun runs but now her busy life means she works out in the gym at home. "I've started giving motivational talks at schools about what it's like to live with a disability. I want to quash the stereotype that we are brainless, boring, ugly, don't date and are scary," she said. Learn about the fascinating lives of Amanda Bell and Mbongeni Maphisa at Lilydale's Swinburne University campus this week.