



Wellbeing for Life Life Story



Learning Outcomes

- To understand what life story is and what it isn't.
- To have guidance on how to support someone to record their life story, including examples of different ways to do this.
- To have a framework to use to apply knowledge into practice.
- To understand the quality indicators of recording someone's life story.



What is Life Story?

- We all have a life story.
- Our history, important people, places, events, interests and hobbies, values and beliefs are all part of our life story. They form our memories of our lives.
- Life story work is something anyone can do – it simply means constantly collecting and documenting our lives and creating resources to reflect our experiences and the things that are important to us. *It's a continual process that can be started at any age and never ends.*
- Remember that life story work isn't just about the past, it's happening every day, so document and photograph all those special daily memories and keep them in a diary, book, folder or on a board.
- Life story work isn't about reminding a person of bad experiences in the past. You must always respect a person's right to confidentiality and privacy, and the choices they make about their information.
- Participating in life story work is a matter of personal choice for the person you are supporting – some people love it, other people don't want to do life story work.

Benefits of Life Story Work for the Person



- Life story work can help the person to feel proud of their life.
- It can help the person you support feel listened to and valued.
- Life story work can help the person to feel that they are contributing.
- It can assist in triggering memories.
- Life story work can give the person a 'voice'.



The Life Story Network

The Life Story Network define Life Story Work as follows:

“Excellent care and support is based on building relationships. This involves recognising the uniqueness of the person and their life experiences, which influence not only who they are and how they behave, but also their hopes and wishes for the future. Life story work and narrative practices enable us to see people as individuals in the context of their relationships with others, thus preserving their unique identity and enabling their rights to be respected.”





The Memory Maze

- If a person develops a form of dementia, they may begin to lose their memories of important aspects of their life. Losing these memories doesn't mean they care any less about them though!
- When a person develops a form of dementia, often more recent memories go first, with more distant memories remaining for longer.
- The items we collect in our lifetimes (photos, mementoes etc) are an important link into our memories.
- Memories can stir our emotions, and help to give us a sense of our place in the world, and feelings of comfort and security.
- It's important to remember that sometimes memories, and the items associated with them, can be upsetting too.

Collecting Memories

We collect memories throughout our lifetimes in a variety of different ways – through photographs, mementoes such as programmes from events, clothing or other items, through things we create by participating in our hobbies (like artworks or crafts), or things we are given by the people who are important to us.

No one would want to lose these items, and it's important we find ways to preserve them and utilise them to stimulate a person's memories.



Qualities Staff need for Life Story Work



- You need to be open-minded and non-judgemental
- Be curious and enthusiastic, but never nosy
- Be creative and adaptable
- Have a desire to keep learning about the person throughout their life
- Be sensitive to emotions that the person you support may be feeling



Stage 1: Where to Start

- The first aspect of life story work is to collect and document a person's life – include as much detail as you can.
- Talk to the person, family members, friends, work colleagues and staff of the person you are supporting to collect information.
- Collect information from existing documentation about the person – their one page profile, support plan, or 'Baseline Health Assessment'.
- If there is only limited information available about a person, don't be put off from doing life story work with them. This is an opportunity to be creative!
- Focus on what you DO know and how you can preserve that information and bring it to life.



Stage 2: What's Next ?

- Once you have a little knowledge about the person, think about how you might collate that – do they have lots of photos you could put into an album or make a collage photo frame?
- What about a memory book? This is a place to document the person's life from their earliest memories to current memories and future events. You might want to include a family tree or timeline within this too.
- Is a memory box a good idea? If you have lots of physical items, and the person enjoys rummaging, why not put them into a box?
- Want something for a wall? Consider a memory board, where you collate items of interest for the person.

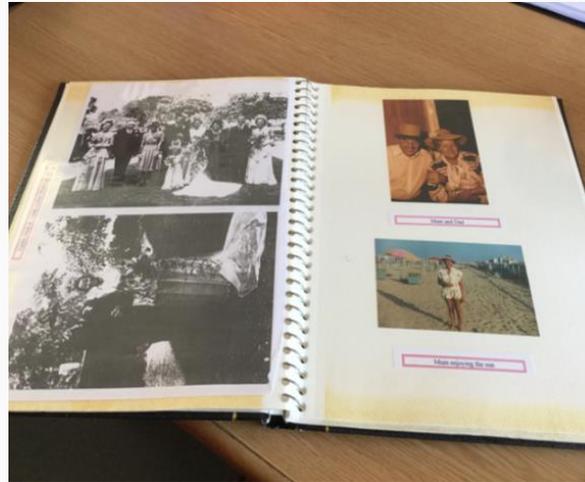
Involve the Person

- It's really important that the person whose life story you are working on understands how life story work can help them to keep the things that are important to them as vibrant elements of their life.
- Life story work should be fun – learning about the person is a great experience for everyone involved.
- If the person is artistic, can they help to personalise the resources you're creating? Every life story resource should be as unique as the person whose life it depicts.



Caption, caption, caption!

- When you make resources, don't assume that you will be the only person who will use them. You might know who's who, and why an event or hobby is so important to the person you are supporting, but someone else might not.
- Make resources as accessible as possible for everyone by captioning everything, or including a key or list to explain 'who's who?' and 'what's what?'





Environmental Life Stories

- Don't underestimate the power of the person's environment.
- Life stories don't have to be books or boxes – they can be on a person's bedroom walls, ceiling, floor, clothing, bedding, dining table, kitchen, living room or anywhere else that the person occupies or printed onto anything they use – you can even get photographic blankets!
- Make sure everyone supporting the person understands the significance of any items in their environment that relate to their life story.

The Role of Technology

- If the person you support likes to use technology, like an iPad, you may want to create digital life story resources for them.
- There are online story books available, or you might want to make a film or audio recordings.
- For a person with eyesight or hearing problems, digital resources may be particularly helpful – for example, the zoom function may help them to see photos clearer, or the ability to turn up the volume on a recording of a family member talking about the person's life story and the things they enjoy.

Stage 3: Responding to Changes

- As a person with dementia experiences changes or deterioration, you may find that the resources you've created are no longer helpful for them, or they are unable to use them.
- Constantly review the person's abilities and interest in the item(s) that have been created to represent their life story – document changes and discuss as a team how you can modify the resources you have, or create new ones.
- Make sure that life story work is always relevant for the person.





Life Story for the Life Course

- Life story work remains important throughout a person's life.
- Even when a person is going through end-of-life care, life story resources have a role to play. If the person can't hold items, or look at photographs, think about how you might use music, or read to them, or make recordings of the information you would otherwise include in a physical resource.
- After a person dies, family or friends may like life story resources as a way of remembering the person, or may want to continue to add photographs or other items as they find them. This can help some people with the grieving process.

Inspiring Colleagues

- One way to kick start life story work is for staff to begin collecting their own life stories – share photos or make physical resources like books or boxes so that the people you support and your colleagues can learn a little more about you and what is important to you.
- Remember: Life stories aren't just something to work on for the older people you are supporting, they are for everyone who wants to have life story resource(s).



Produced by the MacIntyre Dementia Project with the support of an Innovation, Excellence and Strategic Development Fund Award from the Department of Health

A special thank you to Beth Britton, and for all her hard work on the MacIntyre Dementia Project.

<https://www.bethbritton.com/>

© MacIntyre 2018. All rights reserved
602 South Seventh Street
Central Milton Keynes
MK9 2JA
www.macintyrecharity.org