

Heart to Heart

*Community Organising
and the Power of
Storytelling for Churches*

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THE CENTRE FOR
**THEOLOGY
& COMMUNITY**



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& COMMUNITY**

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COMMUNITY ORGANISING AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

This series explores how different churches are using the practices of Community Organising, identifies good practice and reflects on how it helps congregations to develop.

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Graphic Design: Lizzie Kevan

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1

Why do Stories matter?



"People think that stories are shaped by people. In fact, it's the other way around."
- Terry Pratchett

EVERYONE TELLS STORIES

You, me... everyone.

We may not realise we are doing it - but stories are essential to life. They are how we explain something to another person. They are how we describe where we've been and what we've done. They are how we make each other laugh. We paint pictures for people, using words.

By telling stories, we get to know each other better. We come to understand each other.

By telling stories, we can change the world.
Because stories are very powerful.

Stories influence how we see things, how we feel. They can move us and motivate us. A powerful story can change opinions, move hearts and inspire action. So, storytelling and Community Organising go hand in hand.

This little booklet is intended to inspire and encourage anyone involved in Community Organising to tell stories, to tell them well and to tell them from the heart.

We hope it makes at least a small contribution to changing our world for the better. We hope you find it helpful.

"We learn best - and change - from hearing stories that strike a chord within us." - John Kotter

"A story can unite thought and emotion in a life-changing way. I suppose that is why Jesus told stories."
- Richard Chartres, Bishop of London

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The Benefits of Storytelling



HEART TO HEART

STORYTELLING HAS IMPACT



CONNECTING

Storytelling is a way through which people can build stronger relationships. By sharing our past and present experiences with each other, we can learn to understand each other better - and receive new insights into the life of the other person.



PERSUADING

Storytelling is one of the most effective tools in the art of persuasion. Stories can inspire empathy and compassion. They allow hearers an insight into the human and emotional side of any issue. Stories go beyond facts and figures and give us a reason to care about something.



REMEMBERING

Stories communicate more than just facts. When someone tells a story, the combination of their personality and how they tell the story will often leave a greater impression on their audience than the words they actually say. We often remember stories we have been told much more than we remember lists of facts and figures.



STORYTELLING BENEFITS ALL OF US

If we dig deeper, we can see that there are lots of benefits from getting involved in telling clear, concise and engaging stories.



FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Greater self-awareness – Through the process of telling an engaging story, we can identify important truths about our own situation, as well as identify issues that we may want to address in our own lives. When we think through the stories we want to tell, we may recognise more clearly the poignant and pivotal moments of our own story.

Growing the imagination – Helping someone to identify important moments in their own story challenges our preconceptions about what is or is not significant in our own histories. We can gain clarity about the strengths and challenges of our own situations, and through that process begin to imagine that we might be able to respond to situations that we encounter each day.

Building confidence – Putting together and delivering a story can build someone's confidence in two important and distinct ways. Firstly, their confidence is built up through publicly telling their story and gaining experience of how to communicate effectively to large numbers of people. Secondly, the process can build the confidence and motivation of the individual to identify tangible concerns to act upon. This can cause a shift in mind set as our eyes open to what is possible.



FOR THE CONGREGATION

Building deeper relationships - Storytelling has huge potential for building deeper relationships between people within a congregation. It reveals who is in the congregation and what they care about. By being more intentional about building a 'relational culture' in our churches (the regular habit of actively getting to know each other) churches can be enriched in their discernment of what God is doing amongst their people, and how God might be calling them to move forward as a community.

Strengthening discipleship - Effective storytelling has the potential to strengthen the discipleship of a congregation because it helps us to identify individuals with the potential to be leaders. Storytelling can reveal hidden talents and useful experiences – sometimes in people we did not know or expect to have those talents. These are people who might not naturally step forward to be leaders in a congregation, but who we come to realise have a particular passion or interest in an issue. It is these individuals who often make the best leaders in community organising!





FOR COMMUNITY ORGANISING

Recruiting and developing leaders - Community Organisers can use storytelling to train and develop individuals to do Community Organising. The Community Organiser can use aspects of their own story to help others identify their own stories which have similarly poignant or pivotal moments. The process also enables an emerging leader to feel valued and affirmed and to recognise that their own story has worth.

Achieving greater community 'turnout' and action - Stories are a helpful way of encouraging turnout (attendance) at public actions. While it can be difficult to motivate people to regularly turn out to actions, when an organiser knows well who really cares about a certain issue, they can focus on encouraging those individuals to take the lead in an action. These core leaders will then be best placed to use their own stories to galvanise others who they know share their concerns.

Recruiting new institutions - Storytelling is a surprising and effective method of institutional recruitment. People who run schools, churches and other civic institutions are often bombarded with large quantities of information every day. However, stories which demonstrate how Community Organising can lead to real change are an inspiring breath of fresh air. When told well, these stories can paint a clear and concrete picture of a journey from a listening campaign through to real change. Powerful stories, well told, can help to recruit new people and institutions into this vital and growing movement.



SUMMARY

Storytelling is the means by which people naturally interact. It has the potential to build deep and positive relationships. It can inform and improve our ability to persuade one another of viewpoints, and it can be an excellent and imaginative way of making important things memorable. It benefits the individuals and churches involved and it supports the work of Community Organisers.

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When do we tell stories in community organising?



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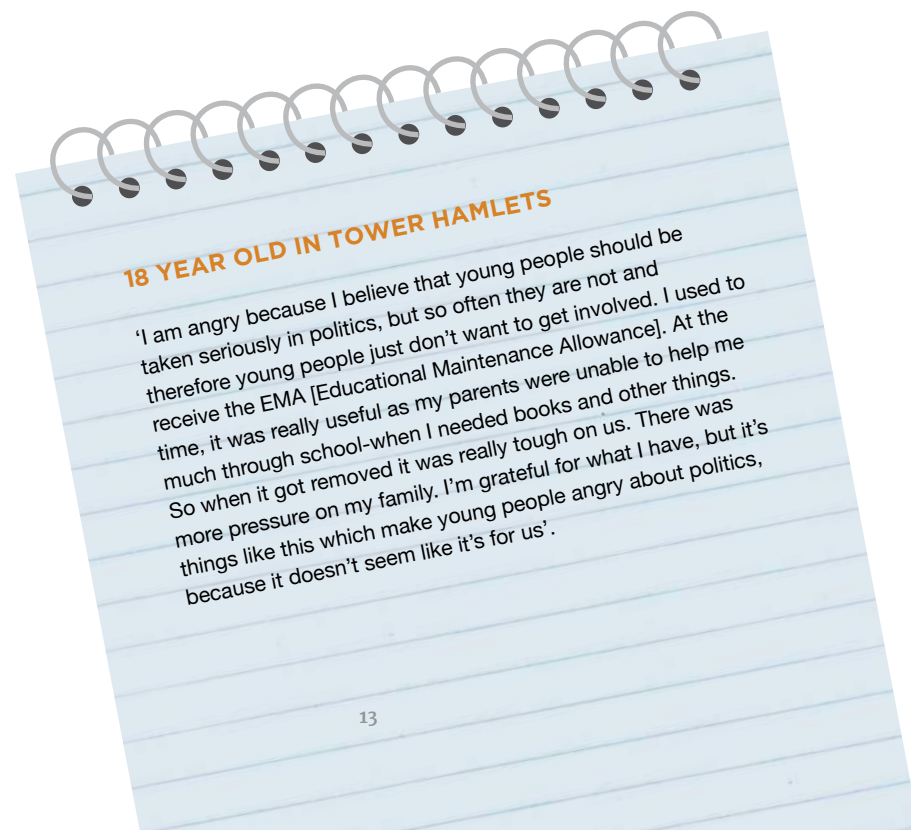
HEART TO HEART



ONE-TO-ONES

(YOU AND ME TELLING STORIES TO EACH OTHER)

The most important tool in Community Organising is the one-to-one conversation (121). This is the way that two people, who may not know each other very well, identify common ground, and perhaps shared interests or experiences. Through the process of conversation, they also learn about each other's motivations. A large part of these conversations is really storytelling – as we talk about ourselves, our past, what we do, what inspires us or makes us angry.



18 YEAR OLD IN TOWER HAMLETS

'I am angry because I believe that young people should be taken seriously in politics, but so often they are not and therefore young people just don't want to get involved. I used to receive the EMA [Educational Maintenance Allowance]. At the time, it was really useful as my parents were unable to help me much through school-when I needed books and other things. So when it got removed it was really tough on us. There was more pressure on my family. I'm grateful for what I have, but it's things like this which make young people angry about politics, because it doesn't seem like it's for us'.

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TESTIMONY

(TELLING MY STORY TO AN AUDIENCE)

Testimony is an important tool for communicating a story to an audience, or a group, sometimes in church or in public. It is a way of giving evidence in a personal way about a real situation that affects you. Testimony can allow an audience to understand someone's felt reality. It is important to make the distinction between a 121 and a testimony. A testimony is a moment from an individual's story, told to emphasise a particular point and cause a specific reaction. It is used to illustrate a particular issue.

STUDENT SUPPORT WORKER

The pace of development and extraordinary increase in house prices is narrowing the availability of life in this borough to a smaller scope of people - ultimately meaning that people who have been here for years as well as less affluent yet creative and aspirational newcomers are excluded. For me this means the prospects of living here and contributing to the life of the borough seem remote and this is an experience of many young people in this borough today. Realistically I feel like I will have to move out of London or abroad in order to rent at a reasonable rate or own my own home.

As residents there are many things that attract us to the borough. As someone who has lived here since I was 7 years old, I have always been struck by the diversity of people from different cultural backgrounds and increasingly different economic backgrounds. In order to maintain this diversity and make sure this borough is a place that all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds can apply their talents we need to formulate a plan to tackle the housing crisis at a local level.



ORGANISING

(SHARING STORIES WITH OTHERS)

It is important to be able to draw together the different stories that we hear when listening to a large number of people in an area. The more 121 conversations that have taken place, the better able we will be to identify issues of genuine common concern. But we need to be able to then distil a 'common story' out of all this information and then tell it.

CITY SAFE WORKER

It was only through talking to students in different boroughs that it became clear that policing patterns needed to be in sync with hours of the different school days. Some students were leaving school at 2pm, and therefore had time to get to the gates of another school that finished at 3pm. This was causing certain levels of conflict between students of the two different schools, as well as anxiety among younger members of the school.

By working with students across the schools, we could identify the problem, and negotiate with the police to create a new policing pattern, which reflected the experience of the students at the end of each day. The positive results have had a significant impact on safety in the area.



PUBLIC ACTIONS (TELLING STORIES IN PUBLIC)

Stories are often used in public campaign actions in order to clarify the reason why we, as citizens, are taking action and to provide a focus for those in power to respond to. The stories used at these moments are always sharply focused on the identified issue that is being addressed, as well as chosen to emphasise the emotive essence of why this issue has had a significant impact upon the life of the individual. It is also extremely important to demonstrate that this story is the experience of many others too, not just one person.



EXAMPLE OF A STORY USED IN A PUBLIC CAMPAIGN

Just Money? Storytelling in a public campaign

WHAT THEY SAID TO THE MAYOR OF HACKNEY (IN A PUBLIC ASSEMBLY OF 300 PEOPLE)

COLLEEN:

My name is Colleen, I'm from St John's Church in Hoxton, and this is Violet from St Michael and All Angels Church in Stoke Newington, and we've been part of the leadership team on the Just Money campaign.

It's clear that money is a problem for many people in our borough, but it's not always an easy issue to talk about so last year we started having 'Money Talk' events in our institutions. What we learned was that many people have been getting ripped off by payday lenders and other companies who prey on people in difficult circumstances.

So we came together across our different institutions and decided we needed to do something about this. We started a petition asking Hackney Council to ban payday loan adverts from as many places as possible – public computers, Council-owned properties, local newspapers and billboards. We knew that if we got more than 750 signatures then our proposal would be considered at a full council meeting, so we set ourselves the ambitious target of reaching that number in just a few weeks before Christmas. The question was, "could a small and ordinary group of citizens

COMMENTS ON THE STORY STRUCTURE

WHO WE ARE

Set the tone by introducing ourselves well. We look powerful by identifying the institutions we represent.

WE DID SOME LISTENING AND FOUND THIS OUT

This is not just what we think, but reflects what lots of different people have actually experienced

WE RESPONDED WITH ACTION



in Hackney really get so much support in such a short space of time?” <Pause here to allow the audience to consider the question for a moment.>

VIOLET:

And the answer was yes! <Changing the speaker helps to maintain the energy of the testimony and picks up the pace again after the pause.>

We saw an amazing interest in our petition from across Hackney Citizens and beyond, and in the end we managed to get almost 900 signatures! So just before Christmas we decided to deliver them to the Council with a particularly festive theme.

We made sure we had a chance to tell Cabinet member Jonathan McShane some of the stories of our members who had suffered at the hands of payday lenders.

Soon after, we met with Deputy Mayor Sophie Linden and had a really productive conversation about how the Council really cares about this too.

In February, the Council officially met to consider our petition, and we were delighted when they decided to unanimously approve a formal ban on payday loan adverts on any spaces controlled by the Council within Hackney, and to write to Boris Johnson asking him to ban payday adverts on all London public transport.

**CELEBRATE THE
SUCCESS OF OUR
ACTION**

We identify the specific names of who is in power and celebrate successful work with them.

This evening we want to congratulate all the people who have worked hard on the Just Money campaign in Hackney, listening and planning and collecting signatures. We also want to say thank you to Hackney Council and to Deputy Mayor Sophie Linden in particular for their enthusiasm to work with us on this issue.

We'd like to ask the Deputy Mayor to come up and receive a token of our appreciation.

COLLEEN:

And just in case you're thinking we're packing up and going home on this issue, we're not! Banning payday loan adverts from publicly controlled spaces is just the first step in our fight against exploitative lending. St James' Church and St Thomas' Church in Clapton are now leading the way in supporting the local credit union to give people in Hackney a fairer alternative.

And recently we've discovered that one payday lender which has a branch in Dalston has been using children's colouring pictures to advertise their loans (picture of colouring comes up on screen). We think this is outrageous, and so we will be acting together soon to demand that they stop targeting our children. So join us and let's make Hackney a place where money and financial institutions work for us and not against us and our families. <Strong confident finish which is clear and energetic but not rushed.>

**WE THANK
KEY PARTNERS
INVOLVED**

We thank the key political leaders for doing the specific things we asked for. (This is not about general praise!)

**WE FINISH BY
ENCOURAGING
FURTHER ACTION**

the fight goes on!
Always finish on an inspiring and motivational note!

4

Tips for Storytelling

HEART TO HEART

How can we tell our stories better? How can we be more persuasive, entertaining and memorable? Here are a few ideas to help you.

CLEAR, CONCISE AND ENGAGING STORIES

Behind every good story is some careful preparation. It may look natural, it may look easy, but actually nearly every Storyteller carefully prepares what they are going to say and how they are going to say it.



1 - THINK ABOUT IT

- Try to think about your story opportunity well in advance. Mull it over in the bath or on the bus. You may be surprised by how many different thoughts and ideas you have. Giving something a bit of time is usually helpful – it is much harder to sit down with a blank piece of paper and rush something out in one go! Creativity is like fine wine – it improves if you give it time!



2 - DECIDE WHAT TO SAY

- It is essential to think through what to say and what not to say. There are often lots of details that don't need to be included. Why are you telling this story? Always start by considering your audience and what you are trying to achieve by telling the story. What is the main point of the story?
- Stories have structures. They might be really simple, but it usually helps to plan a simple one out. For example, if you're describing a situation, it may involve these headings (although there are lots of other possibilities):





1. Meet the characters – introduce the people and places involved, the where/when/why.
2. See what happened to them – explain what their experience was, maybe some problem occurred?
3. See how it ended – describe how the situation changed, maybe with a solution/happy ending, or maybe it is still waiting to be resolved? Is there a hero who helped out?

- A good story will not just convey information but will capture your audience's imagination and engage their emotions. So, if you are telling a personal story, it is often good to talk about how something made you feel – about your emotional response to what happened. This is often the most compelling part of a story, and the bit where people really sit up and take notice.
- Stories are more powerful and memorable when they are real, honest and personal. For example, if you are talking about yourself and your own life:

Early years...

Explain something of where you grew up and what life was like as a young person. Describe your environment and the things that were important - key people, school, groups, church.

Particular people and places...

Think about why particular places and people have been important to you. What was it about them that has influenced you and why?

Key decisions or moments of change...

It is also helpful to share key moments of revelation which have affected your life's journey - perhaps events that have happened to you, or key decisions you've made or people you've met who've inspired you or changed your opinions about an important issue.

3 - DECIDE HOW TO SAY IT

- Delivery is everything. However great the content of the story that you are about to tell, if it is delivered poorly then it will not achieve the desired impact. Try to speak loudly and clearly and not too fast. Always ask the question; what is the best way to communicate this story? What is the impact I am trying to achieve?
- Be concise. If you only have two minutes, then only plan to speak for two minutes. This is really important if you are speaking in public as part of a bigger event. It would be better to speak for a minute and have an impact on your audience, than get cut off after three or four minutes without ever having finished your key point! The best way to make sure you don't speak for too long is to practice at least once or twice beforehand, so you are confident about what you are saying and how long it takes. All of the best public speakers rehearse beforehand!
- Using the 'element of surprise' can sometimes be very useful when you are trying to get your audience's attention. Maybe complement what you are saying by using pictures or even holding up a relevant object. The visual impact of a presentation is often remembered long after the words are forgotten. Alternatively, a 'killer statistic' about your subject or even a bit of (appropriate!) humour can catch people's attention.
- Be yourself! Don't try to be someone you're not. Just be yourself. Put things in your own words. Your audience will like that.

TELLING STORIES IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

We need to tell stories differently when we are in different contexts.



INFORMAL STORYTELLING IN 1:1 CONVERSATIONS

This is a more informal setting. Even so, thinking beforehand about which story (or stories) you want to tell, and why, is still very useful and often makes for a more productive encounter.

Be prepared to lead the conversation by sharing a pivotal moment from your life. Lead by example. This will encourage the other person to share moments from their own life.

Be an enthusiastic listener too and think about how the stories the other person is telling you relates to your experience.



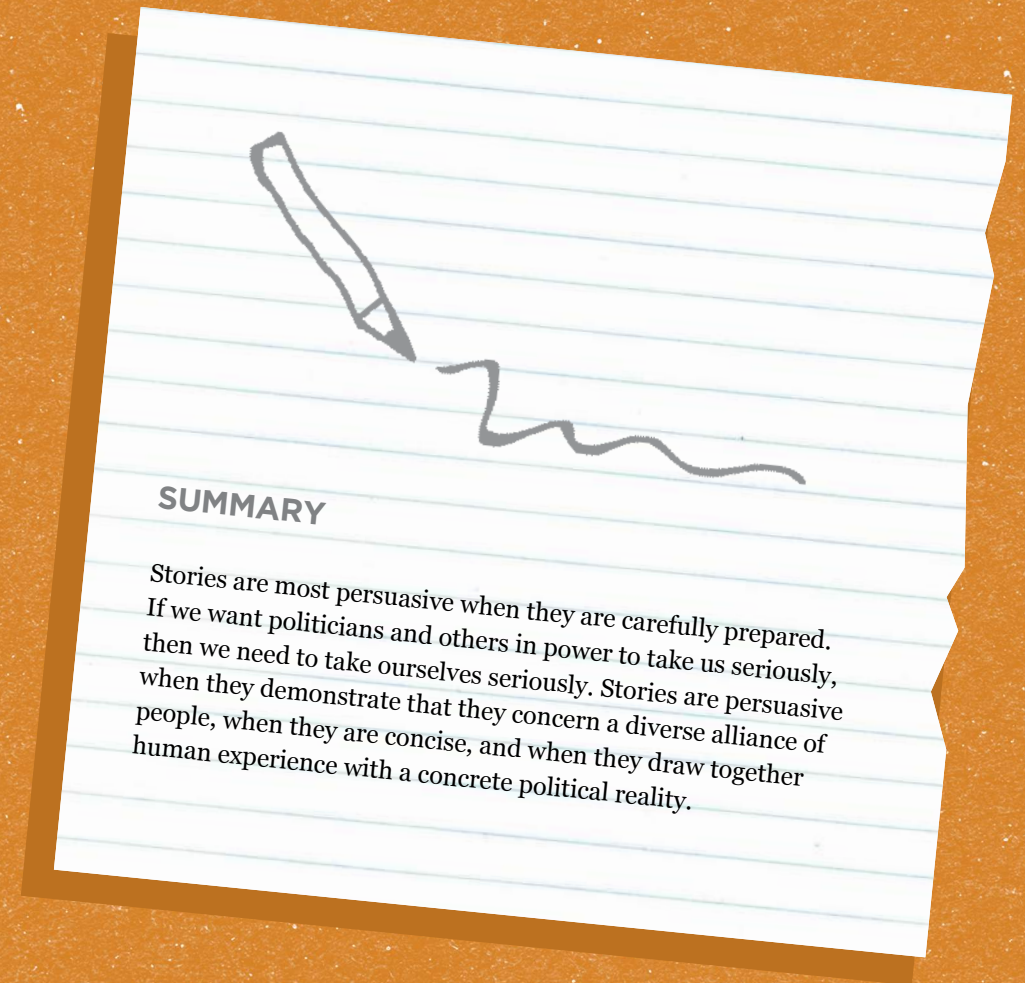
FORMAL STORYTELLING IN GROUPS OR IN PUBLIC

These are more formal settings. If you are talking to a larger group of people, it is really important to speak clearly and at a steady pace so that people can hear you.

Don't be afraid to use <pauses> before or after key points. A brief silence can really grab people's attention! It can also help you to talk at a steady pace.

Stories told in public are more powerful if they are told by the individual whose story it is. Stories should always be honest. A good story doesn't need to be exaggerated.

When telling a story in campaigning, it is important to take the audience on a journey where they can see a clear beginning, middle and end.



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Practice makes Perfect



THE BEST WAY TO BECOME A GOOD STORYTELLER IS TO GET INTO THE HABIT OF TELLING STORIES

Practice is the way to go. And it's fun!

Stories can be unearthed and practiced by doing some very simple exercises. In this section, we suggest some simple exercises for you to try. Doing these can help your institution thrive and also develop its approach to Community Organising.

There are four sections below, each of which has exercises to help with different kinds of Storytelling, and which could easily be used within Community Organising processes.



1 - PERSONAL STORIES

These exercises can be done on your own and will help you to reflect on your story and how best to tell it. This is particularly useful in 121s.



2 - STORYTELLING IN GROUPS

We encourage you to practice telling stories in groups – partly because it's fun, partly because it can be a great way to get to know people better and partly because it's a good way to practice the art of storytelling. Everyone has stories to tell. It can often be surprising - and thought provoking - to see quite how fascinating and diverse the stories from a group of people can be. Part of the joy of Community Organising is discovering how diverse and interesting our communities really are. Group storytelling can also be a good way to identify local 'issues' that may merit campaigns.



3- STORYTELLING TO IDENTIFY LOCAL CONCERNS

These exercises are designed to help people get outside of our churches and talking to those in our neighbourhoods. The purpose is to use storytelling to identify the local concerns faced by individuals in the local community.



4 - WRITING TESTIMONIES

The purpose of these exercises is to help individuals to shape stories into testimonies prepared for specific audiences. It's extremely important to recognise that testimonies are not simply a re-telling of events in an individual's life. They are crafted to communicate a particular message, and to motivate a response in the listener.

1 - KNOWING MY STORY, TELLING MY STORY



EXERCISE 1.1 - WHY DO I DO WHAT I DO?

Before considering anyone else's story, try this step-by-step guide to help you reflect upon your own story.

1. Where did I grow up? Why?
2. Who were the people who influenced the first few years of my life? Why?
3. What did I like or dislike about the environment? Why?
4. What were the main influences on my youth and my time as an adult? Why?
5. Who and what have been the main influences in my life recently? Why?
6. Name 4 pivotal moments in your life so far.
7. Choose one pivotal moment-What surprised you in this moment? What influenced a change of direction or vocation? Perhaps a decision? Why?
8. What are the biggest decisions you have ever made?
9. Why did you make them?
10. What do you spend most of your time doing?

Always ask yourself: 'Why'...

Why did I do that?

Why was I surprised at that moment?

Why am I still thinking about that event?

Why am I interested in this?

Why do I spend my time as I do?

The aim of this process is to get to the heart of understanding what motivates us.



EXERCISE 1.2 – GOING DEEPER

Having gone through this process there are further stages of reflection you can try. Ask yourself:

- For each of the individuals who have been particularly influential: what do you think were their motivations?
- Identify one pivotal moment in your life and spend 30 minutes reflecting upon it. What were the most surprising things that happened?
- What are things that have been said to you over your life which have stayed with you? Why?
- Consider in depth your current life situation - where you invest your time, money and energy. Why is this?



2 - STORYTELLING IN A GROUP: TESTIMONY SHARING AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Storytelling in groups can be a very creative and stimulating way of building relationships – it's a great way to get to know people. Here are a few suggestions of exercises which have proven to be effective with groups.

At the end of each session it is good to spend a short time evaluating what has been learnt, how people felt about the session and what they liked about it (or didn't!) Also, are there any stories that people feel should be communicated more widely? Should we be doing anything about what we have heard today?



EXERCISE 2.1 - USING OBJECTS TO ENCOURAGE STORYTELLING

In group situations it is always good for the group facilitator to lead by demonstrating what to do, before asking anyone else to join in.

Typical everyday objects could include almost anything - things like: an apple, a soft toy, a garden spade, a wrist watch, a phone, a pair of gloves etc.

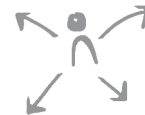
- Bring out the object and ask people to think of a memory in their childhood that the object reminds them of.
- Give each person a couple of moments to reflect on that event. Ask a few thought provoking questions: what happened? What role did the object play? Who was there? Did you learn anything interesting? Did the event shape you in any way?
- Ask each person to tell their 'object' story. Use an egg timer to ensure no-one speaks for more than the designated time. 2 minutes is a good start. Stories might be serious or fun (or a bit of both).
- Get the group to reflect one by one on the most poignant moments of each story. As a group consider the following questions:
 - What are the common themes?
 - When was I most moved or affected by the stories?
 - Who surprised me?
 - Which stories were told best? Why? Content or delivery?
 - What didn't work so well?



EXERCISE 2.2 - USING IMAGES TO FACILITATE STORYTELLING

For example, you might use photos of landscapes, or household items, or travel/holidays.

Follow a similar process to that above with the object, encouraging people to reflect upon what the image reminds them of.



3 - STORYTELLING TO IDENTIFY LOCAL CONCERNS

Storytelling is a brilliant way of encouraging people to get out in to the local community and meet their neighbours. Not only does storytelling give individuals a licence to talk with those they may live near to but not already know, it also equips individuals with the tools required to collect a large amount of stories with a common thread.

This is a suggestion for how a small group of people could use storytelling to help identify local concerns, in a session which might last a couple of hours.



STEP 1 - AGREE THE PURPOSE

As with all Storytelling, it is incredibly important to start every exercise by planning.

As a group, think about the purpose of the session. What are we trying to achieve?

- Where do we have existing relationships in this area? Where do members of our congregation go regularly? E.g. local shops, community centres, school gates etc.
- Do I have a general area of concern I want to focus on (e.g. fuel poverty) or do I want to begin with an open attempt to identify concerns?



STEP 2 - DEVELOP A PLAN

1. Begin by choosing one group of people to focus on – e.g. a row of shops near the church - or asking each person in the group to talk with three neighbours on the street where they live.

2. Agree a very short series of three or four questions to guide these conversations - for example, if you were looking to have relatively short 10-20 minute open-ended conversations with neighbours, you could use questions like these:

- How long have you lived in this area?
- What do you most enjoy about living here?
- What do you think are the greatest challenges for this area?

What chatting, always encourage people to be specific wherever possible – for example, if people say they are, “worried about safety” ask them to be specific – do they mean crime on their own street, or something else?

3. Encourage everyone to start by practising Exercise 1.1 (see over the page).



STEP 3 - HAVE CONVERSATIONS!

This is the bit where your group goes out and has some conversations with neighbours, or whoever you have agreed to talk to. You might do this all at the same time, as part of your session, or you might agree to do it over the next fortnight perhaps, and then come back together after that. Do whatever works for your group.



STEP 4 - REFLECT

1. Draw the group back together and share about the people you met and the stories you heard.

2. Then evaluate what you heard:

- Were there any common themes in what people said to you?
- What were the biggest concerns?

3. It is also good to evaluate how the process worked, and whether there is anything to learn for next time:

- Did the questions work well?
- Did you share your own stories? How helpful was it to do this?
- How could we do this better next time?

4. Then decide what to do next. Do we need to gather more stories? If so, shall we go to a different area or shall we continue talking to other people in this group? If you feel you want to have more conversations, then agree how and when to do this, and when you are meeting again.



STEP 5 - COLLATE STORIES AND IDENTIFY COMMON ISSUES OF CONCERN

1. When have finished collecting stories, let everyone feedback their findings, and reflect on what you have found out – as above in Step 4. Identify any common or significant issues of concern.

2. Decide what action, as a group, you should take in the light of this. This is where the storytelling feeds back into the process of community organising.



4 - WRITING A TESTIMONY FOR A PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Through 121s and group discussions, it is likely that some stories will stand out as particularly relevant for use within campaigns. It is important to listen to, and reflect on, which ones might make good public testimonies.

Once identified, the person who is to deliver the testimony should be encouraged to write it down to ensure that it includes the relevant information and isn't too short or too long.

This is some advice about how to write a public testimony. It would also make a useful exercise which anyone could do, to improve how they structure a story. (It could be done in groups too – give the group a topic or question to respond to, and perhaps half an hour to draft a short testimony).

STEP 1 - PLAN: ALWAYS START BY CONSIDERING THE PURPOSE OF THE TESTIMONY

Think about the following questions on the purpose of the testimony:

- Who am I speaking to?
- What is the purpose of my testimony? What are the issues I need to focus on?
- What is the key point?
- How many minutes do I have to speak?

STEP 2 - WRITE: THEN DRAFT AND CONSIDER THE SEQUENCE OF THE NARRATIVE

Draft a simple structure of key headings of what you want to say, and the key points. The structure might be something like this:

BEGINNING

The opening needs to be powerful and make the focus of the testimony clear. Can I tell the main point of the testimony in the opening line?

For example: a young person giving a testimony to the Police to encourage them to improve relationships with young people began like this:

“Kenneth was my best friend as a child. Last month he was murdered in Mile End. I’m here to ask you to help us make sure this never happens again.”



WHAT HAPPENED

Briefly describe the sequence of events which have taken place.

REFLECTIONS

What impact has this event had on my life?

CONCLUSION

Summarise the key point in a sentence or two – reinforcing the message you started with and what you are asking for.

Then when you think the structure is about right, try writing it out in full. If you are a confident public speaker you may only need key points to remind you what to say. If you are not used to public speaking, it is better to write it out in full.



STEP 3 – CHECK AND PRACTISE: HOW WELL DOES IT WORK?

Ask yourself:

- Is it short enough? Most people speak for too long! Testimony does not usually need to be more than 3 minutes long, which is quite short – for most people that will be less than one page of writing.
- Is this testimony truthful? We should not exaggerate or be emotionally manipulative, the truth is powerful enough.
- Will the audience understand the significance of what I am saying? Have I focused on the most important things?

Always practise delivering your testimony out loud and time yourself. If you feel brave, ask a friend to listen to you and give you constructive feedback. If you are the one giving feedback, try to be positive!

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