

Life Story Good Practice Case Study

Barry and The Grove Staff Team

Success Story Case Study of a team in Bedfordshire that undertook some Life Story Work:

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.

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.

Why do Life Story Work?



- 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'.

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 and can be started at any age and never ends.

What We Did?

MacIntyre's Dementia Project has an aim to improve lives of people we support that live with a learning disability and dementia and we have many ways we can do this but one of the ways that is proving to be successful with people supported is Life Story. Life Story work can be presented in so many ways and what we do at MacIntyre is think of ways a person likes to learn, communicate and be creative when developing that person's Life Story, as we want it to engage the person as much as we can in a meaningful way.

The MacIntyre Dementia Project team spent time with a MacIntyre Registered Care service to talk about 'What is Life Story?' and how it could benefit the people that live there. One gentleman called Barry lives with Downs Syndrome and dementia so the team really wanted to work with us to learn about Life Story, to support Barry to live well with dementia. We spent some time with the team, giving ideas and showing examples of good Life Story work, and then we left the team to work their magic and were eager to return and see what they were going to create.

What Went Well?

When we next arrived at Barry's Service, we were presented with a vast amount of photo albums capturing the life of Barry from a young age to now. Staff were proud of the work undertaken, and so they should be, as it was detailed and was already showing to improve the quality of Barry's life. He was able to show staff, family and friends his albums and the we were delighted to see that photos were also captioned (telling us the place, year, the names of the people in the photo etc.), this meant that conversations could be facilitated with anyone that Barry showed his albums too, and the names captioned is great as a prompt.

The team explained that at first, Barry was engaged with the album, but as time went on, it appeared that Barry wasn't interacting and looking at the book of photos, and we quickly learnt that Barry would leave the room if the book was brought out and was used. It worked once for Barry but at this point of his life it wasn't proving to be very useful or meaningful for Barry.

We reflected as a team, we could see the enthusiasm in the staff team and wanted to keep this fresh. We explained to the team that Life Story can be presented and created in so many ways, see below some examples:



- 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.



Life story doesn't just have to be a photo album or a Memory box, it can be so much more.

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 impairments, 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.



What We Learnt?



After our explanation, a staff member went on to say that due to Barry's dementia - his eating was becoming a cause of concern. Getting Barry to eat was becoming a worry and could we make something that would encourage Barry to sit and eat but not focus just on the food.

So the team and Barry created Barry's very own Life Story table. His own table that captured his favourite football team and things that were important to Barry. This worked wonders and went on to be a great tool for Barry to develop conversation with new people that worked alongside him but for Barry to be able to start conversations and feel empowered which was just fantastic.

Barry has since moved to another MacIntyre Registered Care service and has settled in really well, Barry no longer uses his Life Story table as regularly as he used to. The team once again are getting creative, and thinking of another way to do Life Story in way that is engaging and meaningful for Barry.

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. This is a great example of a team that is constantly reflecting and ensuring Life Story remains relevant to Barry, and we are so proud of them for persevering and remaining enthused, creative and inspired.

What Next?

The team understand that Life story is so important but for this part of Barry's life and his progression of dementia - the team will go with how Barry feels hour by hour. It is important to know that Barry still has his Life Story table and captioned photo albums, as Barry may become interested in this again someday.

What staff are going to do next is start to recording events and experiences that they have had with Barry and try introducing technology as a way to engage Barry with Life Story work, this will become so useful as Barry can listen and remanence past events- being read to him by people that he knows and voices that will be of ccomfort to him. Even encouraging Barry to speak and record his thoughts and memories too.

Not sure where to start? Follow our top tips on the next page for getting started:

MacIntyre Dementia Project

602 South Seventh Street, Milton Keynes, MK9 2JA

t: 01908 230100 e: www.macintyrecharity.org

Have we Inspired you?

Ten top tips on how to create Life Story work:

1. The first aspect of Life Story work is to collect and document a person's life – include as much detail as you can.
2. Talk to the person, family members, friends, work colleagues and staff of the person you are supporting to collect information.
3. Collect information from existing documentation about the person – their one page profile, support plan, or 'Baseline Health Assessment'.
4. 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!
5. Focus on what you DO know and how you can preserve that information and bring it to life.
6. 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?
7. 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.
8. 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?
9. Want something for a wall? Consider a memory board, where you collate items of interest for the person.
10. Involve the person, and have fun!

If you would like to find out more about Life Story then you can complete the Wellbeing for Life What is Life Story eBook which can be found on:

My MacIntyre > eLearning > Should > Theme 2 > Life Story



MacIntyre

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 01908 230 100

 health.team@macintyrecharity.org

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