

The Power of Stories

Stories inspire, influence and persuade. Stories are tools to help organisations and people learn and change. People can grasp meaning through stories far better and much quicker than through presenting facts, theories or lectures. Stories are actually a form of qualitative data which can be far more powerful in moving people to understanding and action because of their ability to stir something intangible in the listener.

Quality in Practice

Sharing each others' stories connects people quickly and at deeper levels of understanding than other forms of information sharing. Consider these ideas:

- When bringing people together in a group, ask them to bring something that is a symbol of who they are to the gathering and have them introduce themselves through their symbols. Symbols can be photos, an object, and a piece of art, a poem, a book or anything that tells something about the person. This process works with staff, at person-centred planning meetings, at training events, etc. It works with people who are new to each other or already know each other.
- Introduce staff to people they work with through the individual's story, not their service system casebook. Use photos and written stories about the person to help staff get to know them.

Telling the story of an organisation helps people inside and outside the organisation to understand its purpose and work. Descriptions of the organisation's programmes and services do not help people "know" the organisation, but stories that demonstrate the organisation at its best, can. Stories help to integrate our heads (the facts and figures about an organisation or person) with our hearts (our reason for being; who we are in a larger sense; what we bring to the world) and with our hands (what we are moved to do or how we act in a situation). When our heads, heart and hands are working in sync, we are at our best and have the opportunity to do our best work.

- Use stories about the people you serve and about the organisation in newsletters and on your web site.
- Use simple, ordinary, day-to-day language in your storytelling.
- Encourage everyone in the organisation, staff, people served, board members and family members to share their stories — put them in the newsletter and on the web site or compile a book of these stories.
- Accompany stories with photos and images to bring the story to life.
- Incorporate storytelling in reports, programme audits, accreditation, at staff meetings and board meetings, during programme evaluations — in short, any time you are trying to share important information.

Stories are another form of data that can be used most anywhere and anytime to vividly highlight a point or a situation.

Stories about the organisation — its founding, that pivotal point in its development, the leaders who changed the organisation, its successes, its uniqueness — give shape to the culture of the organisation. Leaders can use this to continue to shape and change the organisation by asking the question, "What will the next chapter be in this organisation's story?"

Listening to these stories from staff members, people supported, family members and board members can guide future work by taking into account a larger number of ideas from a larger number of people in a format with which most people are comfortable. These shared stories have the power to unify different groups and move them forward together in a common goal.