



Reminiscence  
Network Northern Ireland

# Best Practice Manual

## Creative Reminiscence and Life Story Work



Sharing Memories



Building Communities



# Introduction

## Sharing Memories



## Building Communities

The *Sharing Memories Building Communities Project* is an initiative supported by the Big Lottery Fund through their *Connecting Older People* programme.

The initial four year programme focused on improving the mental health and emotional well being of older people with disabilities living in the Northern Health and Social

Care Trust catchment area. The project was a partnership between the Reminiscence Network Northern Ireland and the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

Over the past four years *Sharing Memories Building Communities* has delivered over 700 creative reminiscence sessions with 407 participants and in excess of 130 memory based products have been produced. In the creation of 77 life story products 599 home visits have been carried out. In light of the project's success The Big Lottery Fund has funded an additional year of the project to establish a firm legacy of good quality reminiscence work. That legacy has included developing and delivering training courses and creating an e-manual to provide an accessible resource to continue meaningful engagement in creative reminiscence and life story work.

The resources included in this manual are firmly based on the experience of staff in this project, drawing on experience gained from other work undertaken by the Reminiscence Network Northern Ireland in recent years, including *Valuing Heritage, Valuing Memories; Remembering Yesterday Caring Today* and *Life In a Box-Older Men's Life Stories* and on the work of noted academics in this field.



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# The Importance of Reminiscence and Life Story Work

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# The Importance of Reminiscence and Life Story Work

Throughout history and in most cultures, there have been special storytellers who enjoyed passing on their experiences to others. Until the early 1960s reminiscence was viewed negatively by health and social care professionals who felt it encouraged older people to 'lose a grip on today's reality'. Then in 1963, Dr Robert Butler published his findings and stated: "My experience as a principal investigator in the National Institute of Mental Health's Human Ageing Study of the community-residing, healthy older persons...many of the patients appeared to be troubled by a return to consciousness of past experiences and unresolved conflicts". In 1972, he further developed his theory that reminiscing is a "naturally occurring, universal process characterised by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences and unresolved conflicts which are surveyed and need to be reworked and integrated alongside personal values into a personal and meaningful life story...an accepted life".

Butler's work has been complemented by leading developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson, (1950,1982) who contends that everyone has particular tasks to work on at different stages in life. The task or challenge that faces older people is to negotiate the tension between integrity and despair, to come to terms with life as it has turned out - for good or ill. Thinking, remembering, talking and writing are all kinds of social interactions with oneself, even if no audience is involved. However, having an audience, either as listener, reader or viewer does appear to help develop a 'good story'. This means a story that makes sense of life's experience and represents it in a way which the teller can live with. This introduces a social element into the individual's effort to produce a coherent story - a consistent account.

The older person is not just concerned with working through the final stage of life, but actually interpreting or making sense of their whole life journey to themselves and others. In this way reminiscence may be seen as a search for meaning as people retrace where they have come from - a process of discovering and rediscovering who they are by making linkages between disparate aspects of their lives, their families and their communities. Their 'search' enables people to better understand themselves, their values and the places and experiences which have contributed to their development. When this happens, people are enriched and changed because they begin to share a journey which, while beginning in the past, takes place in the present and enables people to choose how they want to move forward in the future.

# Why Engage in Reminiscence Work?

Reminiscing is a normal activity that we often use with our friends and families to remember and share stories from our lives. For many older people, in particular those who no longer live in their own homes, or who rarely go out or see old friends, organised reminiscence sessions can be very helpful in encouraging their memories to be recalled and shared (Sim, 1997).

Reminiscence used to its full potential, according to Professor Faith Gibson (2006), President of RNNI, can be used “to enrich, inform and entertain, to transcend present limitations and to heal and improve present well being and quality of life”. Reminiscence and creative activities are core activities according to Bill Mearns (2007) and are “as critically important as lotions and potions.”

## The benefits of reminiscence work

### It encourages a sense of unique identity

As people get older loss becomes a more pertinent reality of life. Illness can rob people of some of their independence such as their ability to do the things they once enjoyed. It can make them dependent on others and narrow their social circle. As people grow older they can feel that loss and dependence is all that lies ahead. Sim (1997) highlights that reminiscence work demonstrates that individuals are of great value to others. “In an environment that tends to dehumanize, a good level and quality reminiscence-based activity can help those in care assert their individual and generational identity.”

### It encourages feelings of self worth

Reminiscence is a person centred method of working which can improve a person’s emotional well-being by facilitating personal growth and reducing psychological distress. It can help increase a person’s feelings of worth and their sense of purpose and meaning. This is especially helpful for older people because some people as they grow older can feel they are not valued by others and that can, in turn, make it difficult for them to value themselves.

“By showing a genuine interest in the lives people have lived, by reminiscing with them, it is possible to rekindle or reinforce a sense of uniqueness, of personal identity and self worth. People will come to value themselves in the present and by feeling more in control of their own lives their present well-being may be safeguarded” (Gibson, 2011).

### **It reverses the “gift relationship” (carers learn from the person)**

As Gibson (2004) informs us, we should “use reminiscence to discover the rich, complex, colourful patterns of a person’s whole long life.” Or according to Sim (1997) we can use reminiscence to create a less clinical environment, reduce isolation and institutionalisation and offer a degree of power to the powerless. Good quality reminiscence work can feel like giving something back and balances the scales.

### **It encourages sociability and opens new friendships**

A wide range of reminiscence and life story triggers and activities can be used to stimulate a person’s memories. Schnall, Hedge and Weaver (2012) contend that reminiscence and life story work can be achieved through storytelling, music, song, dance, drama, art and technologies”, all of which increase the potential to share with others and create new friendships.

### **It aids the assessment of current functioning and informs care plans**

Gibson (2011) states “it is essential that each individual be appreciated for his uniqueness. Where there is empathy without personal knowledge, care will be aimless and unfocused. Where there’s personal knowledge without empathy, care will be detached and cold. But when empathy and personal knowledge are brought together, miracles can happen”. Too often in care settings behaviour which disrupts the institutional routines can be defined as challenging and treated medically to curtail the behaviour. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) and The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) advocate “individual biography” and reminiscence as a non-pharmacological intervention for challenging behaviour (NICE/SCIE Dementia Guideline, 2006).

Getting to know the person enables carers and care workers to understand and respond to individual behaviours. For example, one gentleman in full time care was agitated each afternoon and was treated medically to subdue the agitation. During reminiscence he was discovered to have been a gardener all his life and had never spent a full day indoors. A simple addition to his care plan which incorporated a walk around the garden after lunch, no matter what the weather, brought the afternoon agitation to an end.

### **It preserves and transmits the cultural heritage**

“If a permanent record, no matter how modest, is produced, it may be kept as a private document or be shared with others. Either way it can be of immense value to its owner in terms of preserving identity and enhancing self-esteem. If shared, it becomes an effective tool for ongoing communication with potential to become a valued family legacy” (Kitwood, 1992).

### **It assists the life review process**

“As we go through life we build up a personal history with its unique mixture of joys and pleasures, sadness and pain. Our sense of who we are is linked to that history and if we lose that history we lose something of ourselves...a life story book can be an atlas, the

compass, the guide to finding (one's) self ” (Kitwood, 1992). “Each person has come to be who they are by a route that is uniquely their own; every stage of the journey has left its mark.”

### It encourages staff development

Sim (1997) speaks of giving a voice to the often unheard people; however he recognises that reminiscence is not simply remembering but must include listening, responding and communicating in a sensitive context so that it attends to the needs of others. The quality of the interaction is more important than the accuracy of the memories. He continues, “sensitively organised (reminiscence) programmes help staff and patient or resident to respect each other as they encounter each other as individual personalities. Sessions become more special moments for all involved. Staff can become more motivated and gain more enjoyment and satisfaction from their work”.

### It is, most often, an enjoyable activity!

Despite justified enthusiasm for reminiscence work, we must be careful when making claims about its effectiveness. Positive benefits are not a simple matter of cause and effect but as a consequence of the quality and depth of attention given to the spiritual and emotional needs of those involved. We don't simply DO reminiscence as a way to make older people happy – “Reminiscence-based activities are a context for involvement with people on a personal and individual level” (Sim,1997). Reminiscence work with individuals tries to take them beyond simple recollection of an event. It attempts to help them recapture the intense pleasure of a particular experience.

## Important Points to consider

1. It doesn't matter if people don't remember correctly, the process is the most important part of reminiscence. By telling and retelling memories the detail may subtly change and that is acceptable. Gibson (2011) reminds us that the major characteristics or core of a memory remain recognisable but the fine detail may alter, reflecting differences of emphasis, mood, memory and interpretation. And memories are not neutral but come wrapped in emotion.
2. Reminiscence is a voluntary experience and nobody should be forced to do it.
3. If you are asking people to reminisce make sure you have time to listen.
4. Reminiscence cannot be rushed and everyone must be treated with respect.
5. A life story book should be a record in progress – a living growing record – never fully finished even when someone dies, as they live on in others' memories.

# Reminiscence in Dementia Care

“In dementia the inner sense of stability and security, held in place through memory and judgement, is vanishing to nothing. Now personhood can only be guaranteed, replenished and sustained through what others provide. And as the neuropathology advances, reducing individual capability, the need for that ‘person-work’ will grow more, not less. This is the fundamental challenge for good dementia care” (Kitwood, 2007).

The need of knowledge of a person’s past personality and life style is further emphasised by Brooker (2007) who states: “Understanding a person’s past history is crucial to providing person centred care for someone with dementia. As dementia progresses, it becomes more difficult to hold onto STORIES OF ONE’S LIFE and to be able to tell others of DEFINING MOMENTS THAT SHAPED OUR IDENTITY.” Therefore one of the most important responsibilities of caring for someone with dementia is to learn these key stories to hold this narrative for them.

Professor Bob Woods explains the value of reminiscence in Pam Schweitzer’s publication “*Reminiscence in Dementia Care*” (Schweitzer,1998) “Communication is (at least) a two way process, and it is argued that dementia care workers carrying out reminiscence work convey a powerful message to people with dementia:

- We value you as a person
- We are interested in you as an individual
- We respect you and your experience
- You know things we can never know
- When we know you better, the gaps in our understanding become less

For the person with dementia they have much to tell you:

- I am an individual
- My life story is part and parcel of who I am
- There is more, much more, to me than what you see now: this is the tip of the iceberg
- I have something to contribute now
- I am alive as a social being
- Once, I was at a similar stage of life to you

Reminiscence helps by using the past to re-establish these feelings, making the person feel good about who they are (Schweitzer,1998).”

# Reality Orientation and Validation Therapy in Dementia Care

When someone has mild memory impairment reality orientation is an appropriate strategy to help jog their memory and maintain their ability to function relatively independently. What does this involve? A simple adjustment to your pattern of speech when speaking to them for example, “Hello Mary, are you on your way to the dining room for lunch?” or “Hello John, having your morning constitutional, what a great way to start a lovely Friday in October?” So we are using the person’s name and orienting them to the time of day, place and schedule.

However, once the memory has deteriorated and they have become locked in their own reality then trying to orientate them to our reality will only cause upset and conflict. As dementia progresses people tend to spend more and more time “living in their past.” What would be more confusing and frustrating than everyone trying to tell them they are wrong? For example, today Mary believes she is back at work in the linen mill, so ask her about her job, converse with her in the reality she is in. If Mary is smiling while sharing a story, acknowledge her emotion, “that seems to have been a really happy time for you.” This allows us to validate and acknowledge the memory and emotion and the reality the person is in. The carer empathises with the expressed emotional needs of the person and tries to understand the thinking and feeling behind the words. Feil (2002) contends that disturbed behaviour represents the struggle of the person with dementia to revert to a more secure past as a means of surviving in the present which seems isolated and frightening.

## References

Sim, R. (1997) *Reminiscence Social and Creative Activities with Older People in Care*: Speechmark Publishing Ltd.

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Kitwood T., (2007) *On Dementia: A reader and critical commentary*: Open University Press

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# Good Quality Facilitation Skills



# Good Quality Facilitation Skills

<b>Skills/ techniques</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Impact on participants</b>
Active listening	Demonstrate you have heard and understood by asking “Have I got this right?”	Person feels valued, important.
Genuine curiosity	Read nonverbal body language and ensure your facial expressions show you are listening. Above all be non judgemental. Never underestimate genuine interest, which can be shown through your tone of voice, pace, eye contact etc.	Builds a warm, caring atmosphere. Participants feel valued and more confident.
Observation and assessment	Using activities, assess the skills and areas of need for participants – adapt your programme to meet those needs and overcome barriers which may prevent participants from participating. Ensure your activities are suited to the group or individual you are working with.	Enhanced participation. Self-esteem and confidence raised by success.
Pacing sessions	In your speech match the pace of the participants, allowing time for participants to gather their thoughts.	Not rushed, given time to think and respond. Feel able to participate.
Allowing emotions but being sensitive and empathetic	Allow silences – don’t rush to fill them, as someone may be formulating their response. Prompt when appropriate, ask open ended questions but don’t barrage them with questions. Tears can be cathartic; sometimes someone just needs to tell their story to feel heard. Don’t ask participants insensitive questions or intrude into details of memories they do not want to discuss.	Can help reframe difficulties from past in present.

<b>Skills</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Impact on participants</b>
Motivating your group	Use your imagination, sense of humour, skills and creativity to draw people into your group.	Stimulated and happy to engage. Enjoying the session and feeling part of something.
Being flexible	Gauge the feeling of the group – if they need stimulation or a boost of energy do an activity that allows for that. Have plans and activity ideas but try not to prescribe - never be afraid to go with the topic the group may bring or something they are focused on that day. The session belongs to the participants.	Valued as active participants. Enabled to engage, worthy, valued.
Creative outcomes	Creating a product from the memories shared is a lovely legacy but the work towards the product should not detract from the quality and value of the reminiscence work. The process is more important than the product.	A product can be used to engage with family, future carers and can prove useful during periods of transition.
Ability to monitor and evaluate	After each session look at it critically – what would I do again? How would I amend certain activities to suit? What created a breakthrough? How could I have approached something differently to have a greater success?	
Sharing and seeking support	Seek out help and support with like minded staff to work with, share ideas, discuss issues and possibilities.	

# Responding to Painful Memories

A frequent anxiety among those embarking on reminiscence work is the fear of dealing with painful memories and coping with another person's sadness. Some trainees have expressed the fear that reminiscence activities might somehow unearth deeply buried pain and leave people in distress.

In "*Reminiscence and Recall*," Gibson (2005) notes "Many (reminiscence group) leaders find it hard to encourage groups to share pain. In a million ways they damp it down, choke it off and keep the conversations superficial." She notes how some workers change the conversation, attempt distraction or denial when some members become upset or tearful.

She offers the following advice;

Learn to overcome your own reluctance to share another's hurt.

Point the group members towards each other, and make links between their experiences. They will probably know a lot more about loss than you do. Ask the question has anyone else had an experience like this?

Enable powerful emotions to be expressed and encourage group members to hear each other's distressing stories and reach out and comfort one another.

Do not be afraid of tears or think that you have done harm if people cry. A member may recall a painful experience but while the recall may bring distress it may also bring relief.

Remember that memories can become a resource to assist people in coping with their distress by reminding them of good times and how they have managed to cope in the past when overwhelmed by sadness.

Learn to respect and wait out silences, and encourage group members to do the same. People need time to get in touch with deeply felt emotions. Assist by acknowledging the feelings that have been expressed by naming them. For example, it sounds as though you are feeling very angry/upset/sad/frustrated/disappointed as you recall this....

Encourage group members to make a link between those feelings and their own emotional reactions to what they have just heard.

Be aware of the body language of members who may not share, but may nevertheless be feeling pain which may need to be followed up afterwards.

In "*Transformational Reminiscence*" Florence Soltys and John Kuntz (2007) have this to say about painful memories: "Remembering and sharing painful life experiences promotes greater emotional healing and acceptance of life's unfortunate circumstances," and "remembering the way difficult times were faced in the past helps people face difficult times today."

Soltys and Kuntz (2007) believe that remembering helps people grieve the loss of people, pets and material items no longer in their lives. They observe that as one ages, the need to put one's life experiences into an understandable perspective becomes an increasingly important life task – and that as an individual ages, more and more significant people in their lives may die, become disabled, move or become unavailable, and there are fewer contacts to promote natural reminiscence, and more structured approaches may be needed to promote quality of life through the facilitation of normal developmental processes.

Gibson (2006) discusses the same subject in the following way describing, how older people frequently respond to the experience of bereavement and grief by developing physical symptoms which require accurate diagnosis and treatment but which may respond well to non-medical interventions such as reminiscence and related activities. At first older people may resist the efforts to become engaged, and find it hard to muster the energy to take part. But by providing opportunities for them to be reminded of how they have survived in the past, overcoming earlier problems and difficulties, they can gain strength from such memories and have more confidence in being able to cope in the future. The group leader can encourage the person to value his achievements and praise coping skills in the past. The leader can help the person explore those coping skills, find and name the practical and emotional supports available to the person, and give encouragement by so doing of the person's ability to draw on just such strengths in the future.

Soltys and Kuntz (2007) have also noted how individuals with painful memories may resist reminiscing about their lives as they are uncertain about resolution. But they describe how in thinking by ourselves, our thinking becomes biased, distorted, partially uninformed and prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life depends a great deal upon the quality of our thoughts. Providing the opportunity for individuals to share their joys and sadness can bring inner peace to their lives. Reminiscence can create thinking which is self-corrective. Reminiscence allows one to put one's life into perspective. It can help one see the circumstances in which a decision was made and the road taken versus the road not taken. It allows one to forgive oneself, and to express love for one's family.

“Forgiveness is essential for healing and reaching peace with one's life.” (Soltys, 2007)  
In “*Reminiscence Reviewed*” (Bornat, 1994) the usefulness of drama to explore old painful memories is described in an Age Exchange project. “Any reminiscence session can evoke painful memories, even when one would not have anticipated them from the theme under discussion, and dramatising these painful memories can bring them into sharp focus, but the process of working on those memories through drama in a small group context can sometimes allow the older person to re-experience them in a different context, and then let them go. Injustices seem to linger in memories longer and such stories can be played out which seems to help the residual bitterness. The telling or re-enactment of such stories can allow the older person to relive and then shed the painful memory, and move on with the rest of the group.” (Bornat, 1994)

There is an excellent and very detailed chapter by Ann Rainbow in “*The Reminiscence Skills Training Handbook*” (2003) which focuses on the skill involved in responding empathetically through one to one reminiscence work with people who have been bereaved. The chapter covers appropriate responding through the grieving process, endorsing reminiscence as a valuable support system for bereaved older people. In brief the following advice for coping with painful memories in grief is:

#### The initial phase of grief:

Acknowledge the momentousness of the loss experienced and how difficult it must be to accept the reality and meaning of death.

Avoid reinforcing any denial by gently referring to the person who has died, “What a shock you have had, Brian’s death was so unexpected.”

Where the bereaved person has a searching response, stress the normality of this reaction for example, “Brian’s death is such a loss for you. It is common for people to “see” the person who has died in a familiar place.”

#### Later reminiscing about the deceased person:

Be empathetic about bereavement reminiscence, no matter how repetitive. It is a valuable way of helping people cope with their grief. “This kind of remembering is very important to help you feel easier, over time, about Brian’s death.”

Offer reassurance about the normality of the extent of their emotional reaction, for example “You have spent over 40 years together; you are not likely to forget Brian so soon.”

Talk about how slowly grief will be less overwhelming.

Make it easy for the expression of tears, when a shared hug might say more than words.

As the first anniversary of the death approaches, help the individual to be prepared... “Have you thought about what you might like to do on the anniversary of Brian’s death?”

#### In later stages of bereavement.

Communicate continuing interest about rehearsing memories connected to the deceased.

Help to revive past interests which reminiscence has uncovered and may be enjoyed once again.

Dealing with strong emotions or even traumatic memories is difficult and demanding work for any reminiscence worker. Reminiscence workers need to know where to access professional counselling support for those whose memories continue to give distress, and they need to be able to access regular supervision support for themselves.

## References

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Gibson, F.(2006) *Reminiscence and recall: a practical guide to reminiscence work (3rd Ed.)*: Age Concern

Kunz, J. and Soltys, F.G (Eds.)( 2007) *Transformational Reminiscence: Life Story Work*: Springer

Rainbow, A. (2003) *The Reminiscence Skills Training Handbook*: Speechmarks



Betty was delighted to put her late husband at the centre of her memory frame and shared many memories from their life together.

# Look Closer

This poem was found in the locker of a patient in a nursing home following her death. It is thought provoking and is a great example of the need for person centre care. It demonstrates how reminiscence can be used to get to know the whole person.

What do you see nurses, what do you see?  
What are you thinking when you are  
looking at me?

A crabby old woman, not very wise,  
uncertain of habit, with faraway eyes?  
Who dribbles her food and makes no reply,  
when you say in a loud voice, "I do wish  
you'd try!"

Who seems not to notice the things that  
you do, and forever is losing a stocking or  
shoe-----

Who, resisting or not, lets you do as you  
will, with bathing and feeding the long  
day to fill---

Is that what you are thinking? Is that what  
you see? Then open your eyes nurse: you  
are not looking at me.

I'll tell you who I am as I sit here so still, as  
I do at your bidding, and eat at your will.

I'm a small child of ten--- with a father  
and mother, brother and sister, who love one  
another,

A young girl at sixteen, with wings on her  
feet, dreaming that soon now a lover she'll  
meet.

A bride soon at twenty - my heart gives a  
leap, remembering the vows that I promised  
to keep.

At twenty-five now, I have young of my  
own, who need me to guide and give a  
secure happy home,

A woman of thirty, my young now grow  
fast, bound to each other with ties that  
should last.

At forty, my young sons have grown and  
are now gone, but my man is beside me to  
see I don't mourn.

At fifty once more, babies play round my  
knee, again we know children my loved  
one and me.

Dark days are upon me, my loved one is  
dead, I look at the future, I shudder with  
dread.

For my young are all rearing young of  
their own, and I think of the years and the  
love I have known.

I'm an old woman now --- and nature is  
cruel, 'Tis its jest to make old age look like  
a fool.

The body it crumbles, grace and vigour  
depart, there is now a stone where there once  
was a heart.

But inside this carcass a young girl still  
dwells, and now and again my battered  
heart swells.

I remember the joys, I remember the pain,  
and I'm loving and living life over again.

I think of the years - all too few, gone  
too fast. And accept the stark fact that  
nothing can last.

So open your eyes, nurse, open and see  
Not a crabby old woman,  
LOOK CLOSER, --- SEE ME

# Evaluation and Critical Reflection

Evaluation is a necessary part of the work we do but, as with every element of group work, it needs to reflect the needs and ability of the group or individuals you are working with. While questionnaires are very commonly used, below are some alternative approaches.



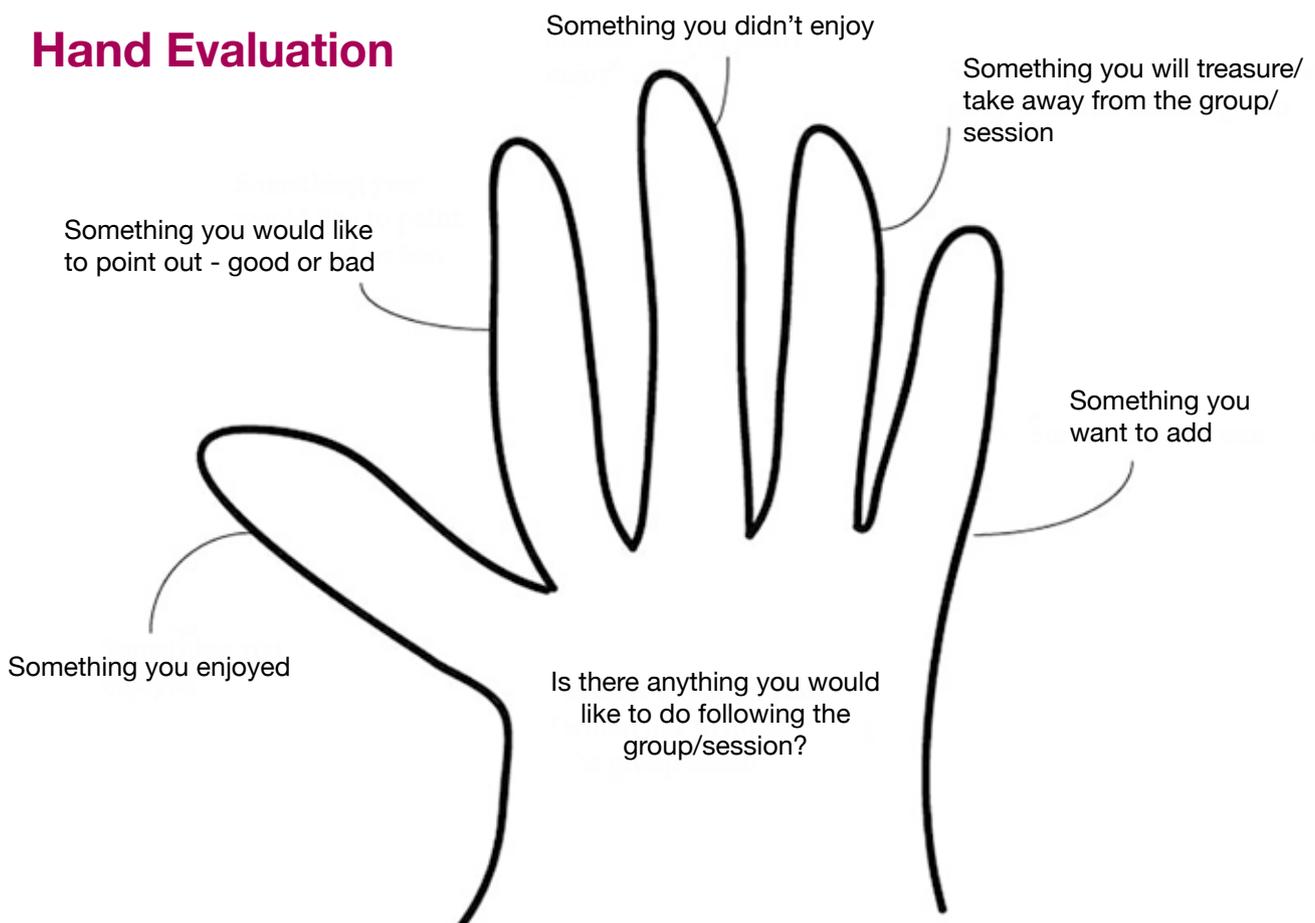
## Evaluation Tree

Give out luggage tags and ask everyone to write their comments and display them on the tree. Either give a specific question, such as what are you taking away from today or ask the participants to simply leave a comment or state one thing they enjoyed.



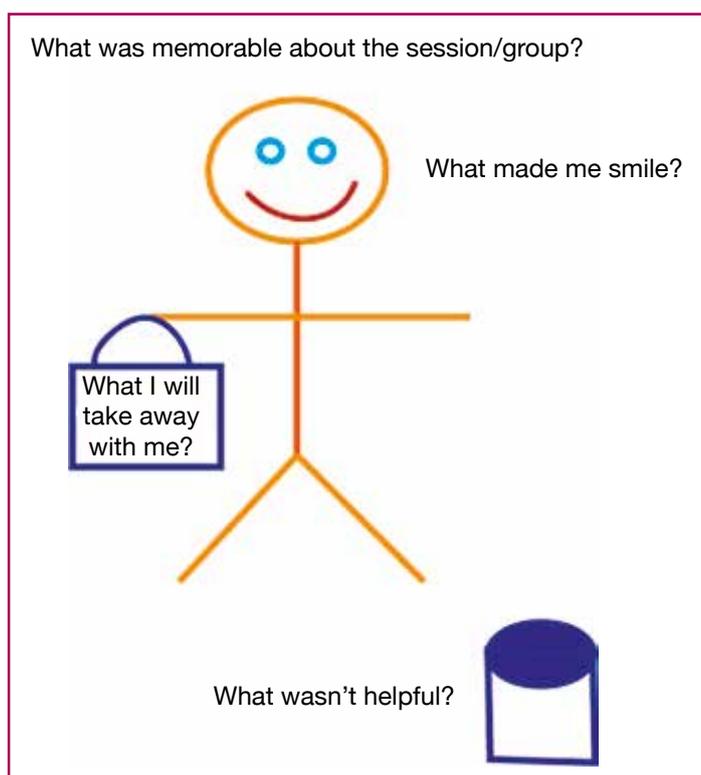
These trees can be built up over a number of sessions or, alternatively, they can be drawn on a flip chart page and post-it notes used instead of luggage tags.

## Hand Evaluation



## Evaluation Person

This simple drawing on a flip chart page can encourage people to document the things that made an impact during the session. Again these can be written on post-it notes and attached to the page.



## Critical Reflection

In a lot of cases the evaluation comes from observations from the facilitator or staff. Observing the activities participants enjoyed or didn't enjoy enables facilitators to adapt activities to suit the needs of the group. Overleaf is a table used by staff to improve their observation and assessment techniques. By getting into the practice of completing such forms at the end of each session we develop our skills and ability to assess and reflect. Over time these skills become second nature and enable us to become responsive, reflective and more attuned facilitators.

Gibson (2011) encourages facilitators to “develop the habit of critically evaluating each reminiscence session to become a better listener, more skilled at encouraging people to share memories.” As a facilitator our aim is to “develop the attitudes, knowledge, understanding, values and skills needed to encourage people to value themselves by valuing their past.” Gibson continues to advise facilitators to “develop the habit of keeping records to help develop the skills required at different phases throughout the life of a reminiscence project or group”.

Gibson also recommends we “keep observing the memories continuously to be aware of individual responses. Be finely tuned to the emotions being expressed, not just the words spoken. Reach out to anyone who looks uncomfortable or upset and value everyone's contribution.” Always remember “positive attitudes and willingness to try to talk and to listen are far more important than a list of techniques”.

## Session Observation

**Session Date:**

**Session Theme:**

<p><b>Name of person you are observing:</b></p>	<p><b>Activities undertaken:</b></p>
<p><b>Visual observations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General mood of the person at beginning, middle and end of the session. This will inform your evaluation about what improves their mood.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Memories shared:</b></p>
<p><b>Activities/topics they liked/could manage:</b></p> <p>How could these be used to get more engagement?</p>	<p><b>Activities/topics they liked/couldn't manage:</b></p> <p>If the person was unable to do certain activities how could they be made more accessible?</p>

# Life Story Work

the process is more important  
than the product

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# Guidelines for Life Story Work

According to Gibson, in *Reminiscence and Life Story Work A Practice Guide 4th Edition*, (2011) these are the key guidelines to remember when undertaking life story work.

- Remember life story work is meant to be enjoyable – it is neither an exam nor an inquisition.
- It is usually undertaken in a series of spaced joint conversations taking account of a person's health, mood and energy levels which may fluctuate from week to week; informed consent or assent needs to be obtained before the first session, if possible, and it should be made clear that a person may withdraw at any time during the work.
- Completion of written consent towards the end is highly recommended. This may cover issues of who may have access to the book, where it will be kept and who is to become its future custodian.
- Respect that the book belongs to the subject person.
- Explain to family members or next of kin, if appropriate, the purpose of the book. Seek their cooperation and allay any anxieties.
- If using a template do not use it as a straitjacket but as a flexible guide.
- Agree mutual roles and responsibilities especially concerning the preparation of written materials.
- Photographs and documents are better copied rather than including originals.
- Never take over tasks the interviewee might wish to do themselves.
- Whenever possible use the person's own words and capture the emotions attached to the memories.
- Be sensitive to the possibility that significant relationships may be complex.
- Some recollections are bound to be sad and they too will require sensitive empathetic listening.
- Respect any information the person does not wish to have included although they may still have benefited by talking about such recollections.
- Try to go beyond mere facts and encourage reflection on the values that have underpinned the person's life.
- Encourage reflection about how the person sees their whole life and reinforce positive achievements.
- Always seek agreement at the end by working through the book and making any requested alterations or deletions.

Remember that writing is a complex process which includes present circumstances, the passage of time, the intensity of emotion associated with the original memories and their recall, the need to adapt the recalled memories so they fit with the person's present ideas about themselves and how they want to be perceived by others. Teaching people to be responsible for their own writing is a more empowering experience for the story teller (Perks, 2001) *The Century Speaks: A Public History Partnership*. *The Journal of the Oral History*.

# How to Use a Life Story Book/ Product

The person who is the focus of the life story book can use the book

- as an enjoyable pastime
- as an activity to promote self esteem and self confidence
- to retain a sense of identity
- to entertain others with anecdotes from it
- to help reinforce long-term memory

Care staff can use the book

- to get to know the person better
- as the foundation for person-centred care plans
- as an enjoyable activity to be shared both in the compilation and afterwards
- to understand the individual's behaviour
- to let new members of staff understand the individual
- to prevent feelings of distress in the individual
- as a diversional activity when the individual is distressed
- to gain job satisfaction
- as a means of educating other staff in other agencies (or hospitals) who come in contact with the person later
- as a source of ideas for group reminiscence sessions
- as a means of working through grief when the person dies

Family can use the book

- as an enjoyable activity when they visit their relative
- as a way of sharing unspoken feelings with their relative
- as an opportunity to touch and praise
- as a keepsake, and support through grief
- as a way of transmitting family heritage



# Useful Life Story Work Resources

Throughout the *Sharing Memories Building Communities Project* we developed, reviewed and amended our resources and approaches to suit the needs of the individuals or groups involved. These resources are included to assist others embarking on life story work; however, do remember that they will need to be adapted to suit the needs of your work.

At the beginning of the life story work process ensure that all participants are aware of the confidentiality implications and discuss this statement with them and leave a copy for them to keep.

An important aspect of life story work is to be very clear about the amount of time you will be spending doing it and what type of product you can produce. Look honestly at the time and budget available and always err on the side of caution. As Professor Gibson says, “what no one should be asked to accept is being misled, used and then discarded.” Being honest from the outset can stave off complications as the process is coming to an end.

As part of the *Sharing Memories Building Communities* project we devised a contract to discuss and leave with participants to ensure they were fully aware of the process on which they were embarking. This contract can be amended to suit your particular situation.

## Confidentiality Statement

Life story work is a voluntary process and the aim is to provide you with a resource which records the parts of your life story which are important to you.

If there are areas you do not wish to speak about that is perfectly acceptable and if we ask questions you are uncomfortable with simply tell us you don't wish to speak about that. The resource we produce is your life story and will only include what you want us to include.

This process is confidential however, we are governed by organisational policies and a code of ethics. We are therefore required to seek guidance with our managers on any disclosures which may put you or others at risk or have potential criminal or legal implications.



# Life Story Work Contract

1. (Name) will meet you once a week for an hour over approximately 6 to 8 weeks. Life story work endeavours to highlight the most important stages of your life, it will not be a full autobiography, merely the highlights up to the present time. Therefore it will be necessary to update your life story on a regular basis.
2. Each week a different period in your life will be discussed. For example: childhood, family, working, social life – dancing, cinemas, hobbies, travel, getting married and setting up home, having a family, retiring and welcoming grandchildren. The sessions are guidelines and flexible to suit what you want to include in your book.
3. Each week (Name) will record your conversations and type it up for the following week so you can check over it.
4. Confidentiality - the process of life story work is confidential; however, RNNI are governed by organisational policies and a code of ethics. Therefore they are required to seek guidance with their managers on any disclosures, which may put you or others at risk or have potential criminal or legal implications.
5. Family photographs are always a great help in prompting memories but they also can be wonderful in your book. If you have photographs, (name) will scan them and return the originals to you. Other items such as old letters, postcards, marriage certificates etc can also be scanned and added to your book.
6. After 6 to 8 sessions you will sign off on your book and there will be a two week break to enable the book to be printed and then there will be a final visit to give you your Life Story Book.
7. On completion of your life story all scanned photographs and digital files will be destroyed.
8. This process is funded by the Big Lottery Fund and is offered to you free of charge.



Be aware that within this project staff have designated time set aside to deliver in depth life story work. Do not undertake the process of recording sessions to be transcribed without setting aside adequate time to transcribe. A one hour recorded session can take two hours or longer to transcribe.

When creating a printed life story book it is useful to get the draft signed off officially by the person or a designated family member. The following is the template used in the *Sharing Memories Building Communities Project*.



## Signing off Life Story Work Product

We want you to enjoy and be happy with the end product produced through the process of life story work.

1. The participant or appointed family member is responsible for the proof reading of all the text, particularly before printing. Reminiscence Network NI is not liable for any errors in the text once the Life Story Book has been signed off and printed.
2. The participant agrees that changes required to the life story book/or any other medium will be made within the estimated time frame of 6–8 weeks and work undertaken over and above this may not be permitted. This is to allow for new participants to embark on the life story work process.
3. Where possible the participant will supply good quality photographs and images. This is not always possible with aged photographs. However, if used, Reminiscence Network NI is not responsible for the quality of print of such images.
4. The participant declares that they hold the appropriate copyright and ownership of photographs for inclusion in their Life Story Book or any other medium.

Signed .....

Date .....

Sign off for Print

I / a family member have proof read my Life Story Book. Please proceed to print.

Signed .....

Date .....

# Opening Statements for Life Story Products

Whatever product you are creating, it is advisable to include a statement of respect, to ensure anyone looking at the book or memory box understands the importance of the memories or items within the product. Particularly with a Memory Box it is important people respect the objects and do not remove them.

## This is my Memory Box

I don't mind you looking through my box at the special items that hold memories of my life, as long as you ask permission first and also that you handle it carefully, as it is very special to me.

Please remember that this box contains a lot of personal and private items and memories and should be treated with respect at all times.

Thank You



## This is my Life Story Book

I don't mind you looking through my book at the memories that make up my life, as long as you ask permission first and also that you handle it carefully, as it is very special to me.

I would like you to look at my Life Story book and talk to me about all the memories in it. Please remember that the book contains a lot of personal and private memories and should be treated with respect at all times.

Thank You



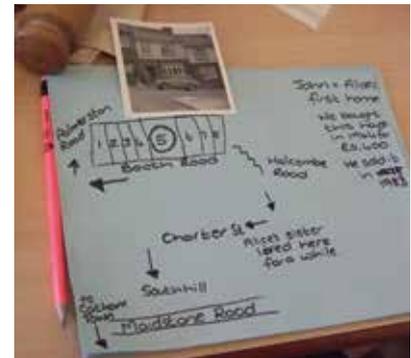
# Activity Sheets

The following activity sheets can be a useful beginning to life story work or a creative reminiscence group to get to know members and help design subjects for future sessions. There are several different versions and they can all be adapted to best suit the needs of each person.

When asked to think of key points in life some people will focus on relationships and people, some will see it in terms of achievements, for others it may be in relation to places they have lived, or key events - this list is endless, and so we should allow each person's individuality to shine through. Such information can be attractively displayed on wall hangings to stimulate conversation with visitors or care staff.

The Memory Box drawing is a useful tool for people who may have had to downsize and have had to let go of a lot of their possessions.

As with everything else these templates are only samples and can be amended to meet each individual's needs. Some people need a template to get started while others simply need an idea and their creativity will do the rest.



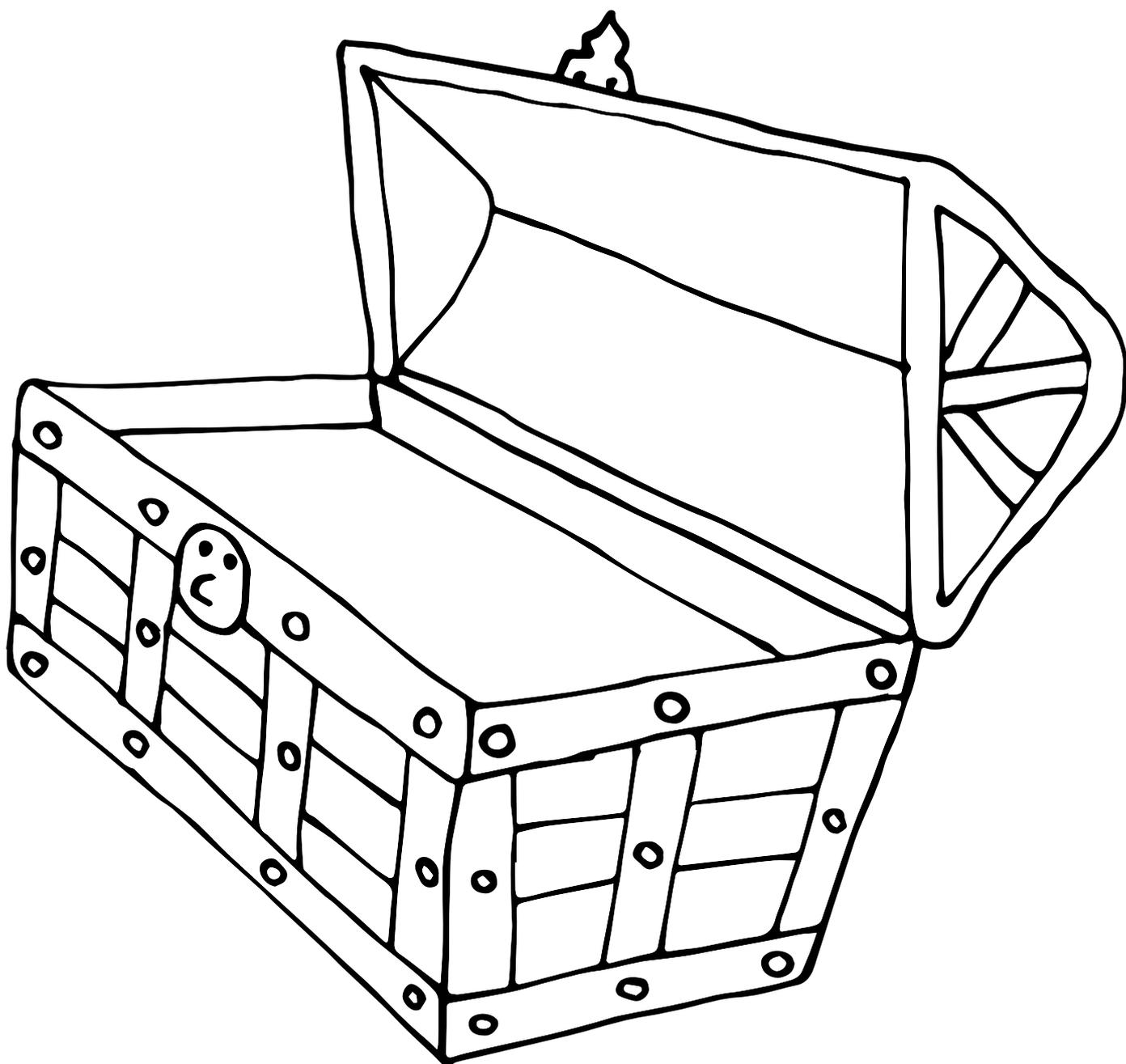
This map was drawn as John looked at the photograph and described the first home he lived in as a married man.



## My Memory Box

What would you put into your memory box?

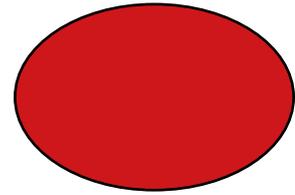
Write or draw the items.



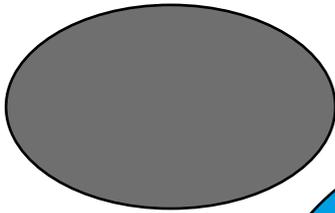
# Relationship Circles

Add or remove circles - change size according to need.

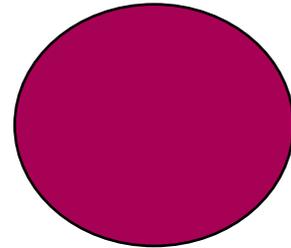
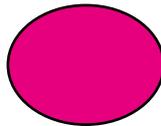
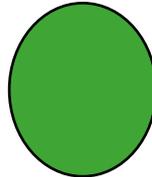
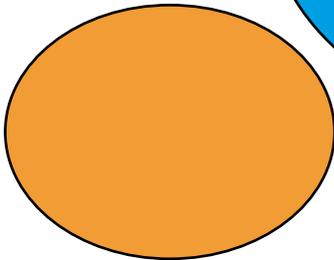
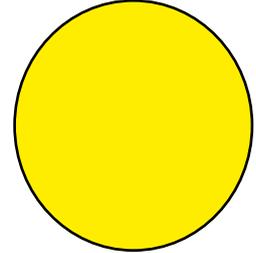
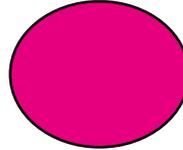
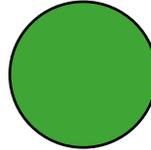
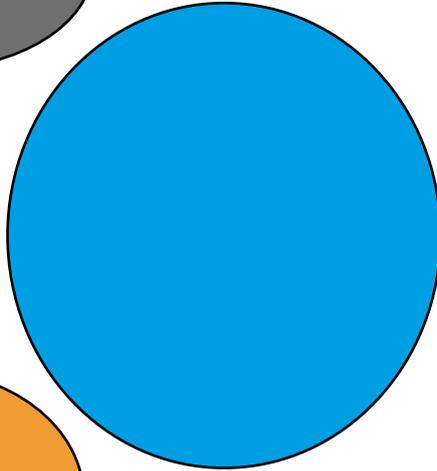
Think about relationships, why they are important to you, what they mean to you.



Less significant relationships in outer circles

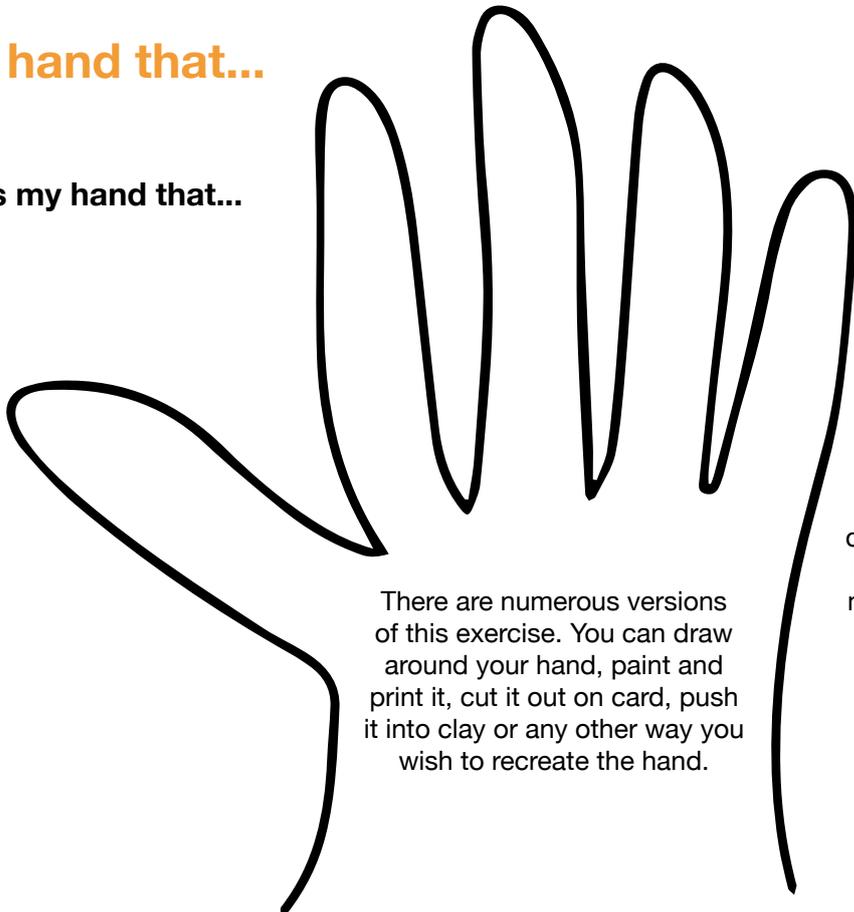


More significant relationships close to me



## The hand that...

This is my hand that...

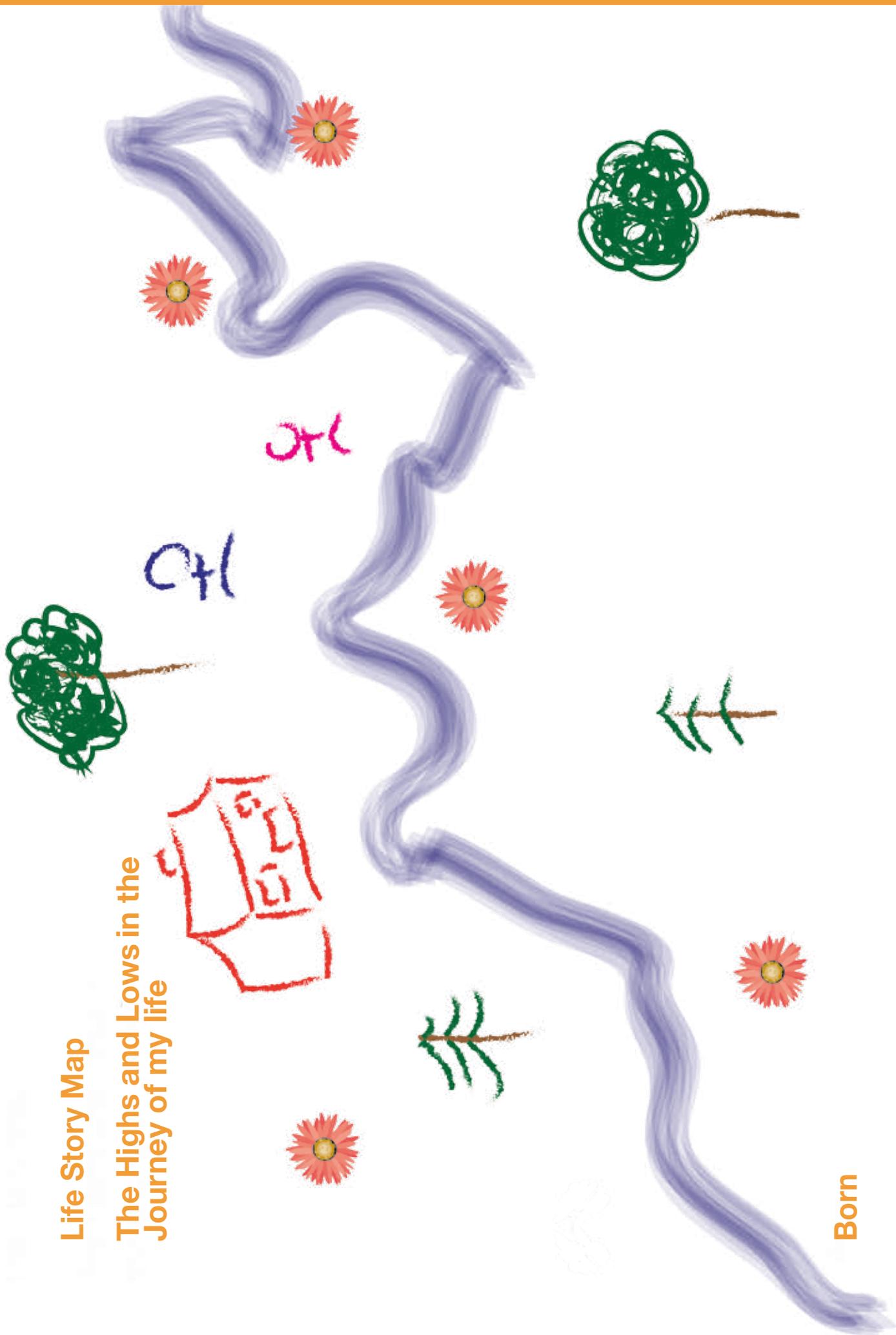


There are numerous versions of this exercise. You can draw around your hand, paint and print it, cut it out on card, push it into clay or any other way you wish to recreate the hand.

Write in some of the things you are proud of your hand doing - for example jobs you have done, things you have made, hobbies, caring roles, achievements, etc.

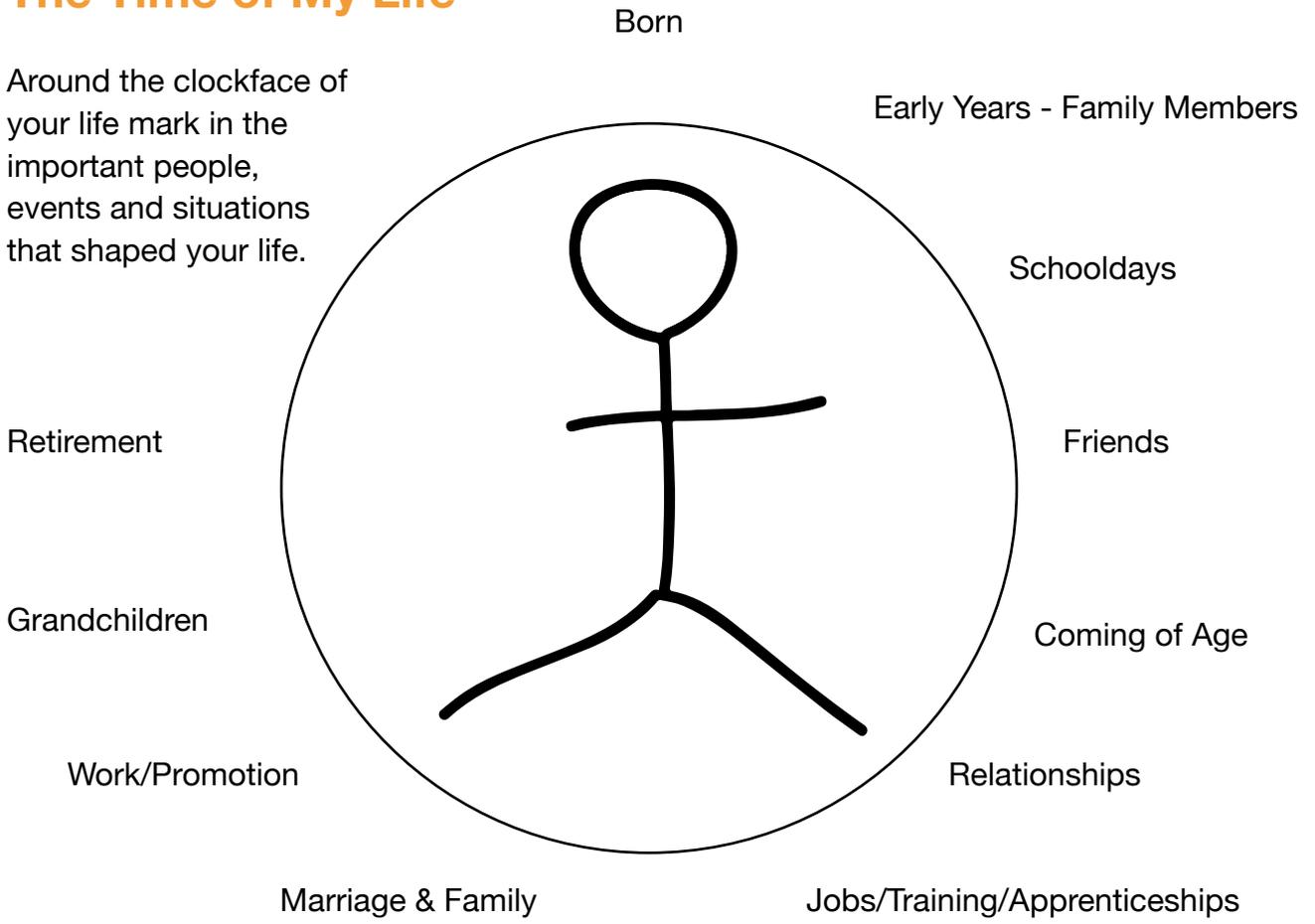
# Life Story Map

## The Highs and Lows in the Journey of my life



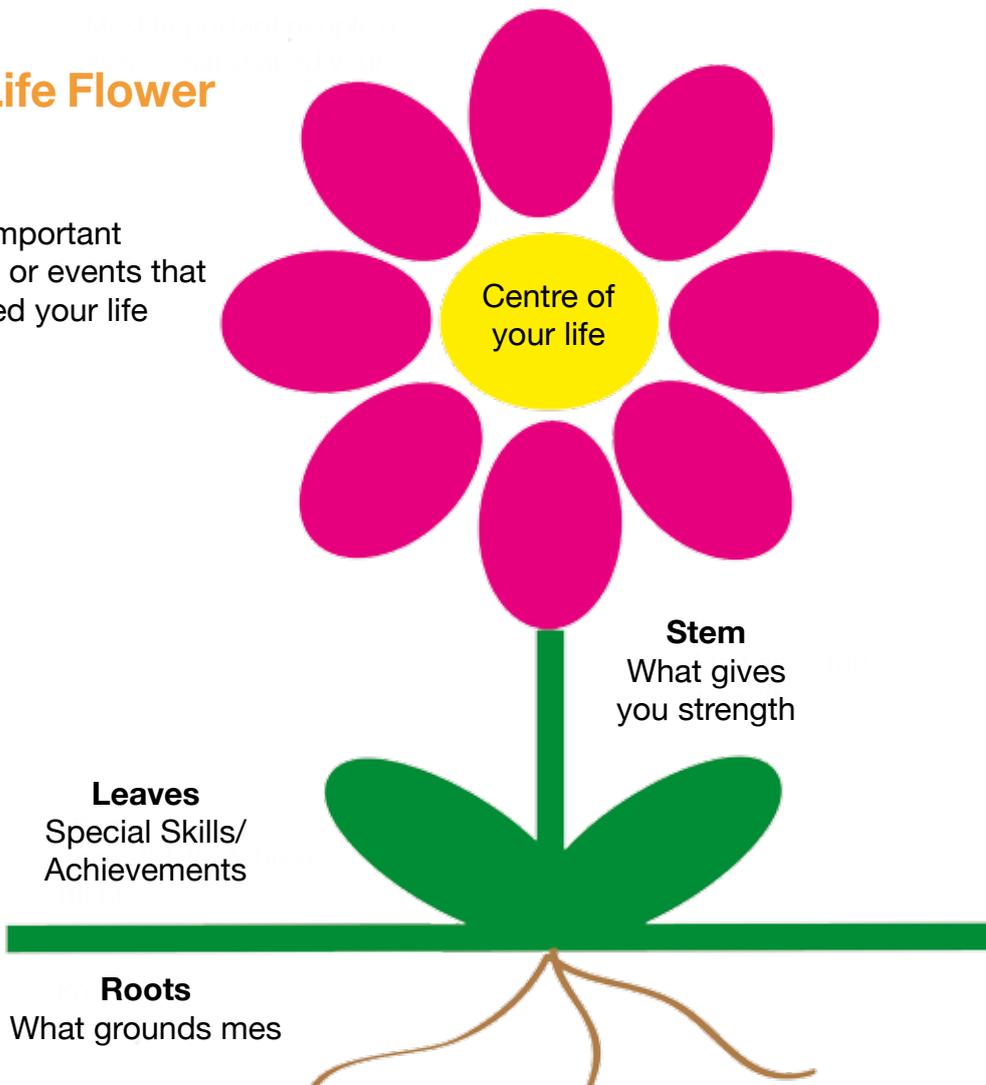
## The Time of My Life

Around the clockface of your life mark in the important people, events and situations that shaped your life.



## My Life Flower

**Petals**  
Most important people or events that shaped your life



# Creative Reminiscence Group Work





Reminiscence is a process focused activity and is an excellent mechanism to enhance communication, raise the self-esteem of participants, empower the teller, provide a stimulating and fun activity, lift depression and can also be a format to record people's memories and collect social history.

## Getting Started

To put people at ease try to find a warm, welcoming venue with comfortable chairs if possible.

Set out the room in an informal manner such as horseshoe of chairs as opposed to around tables. A smaller table can be placed in the centre of the room to display items but should not block anyone's view of other participants.

Serve tea and coffee to break the ice and relax participants.

Be aware of any difficulties participants may have which may impact on their ability to participate in the session e.g. hearing difficulties, unable to walk unaided etc. and cater for these effectively, without singling out the person.

Always develop a back-up plan, additional activity ideas, to use if needed. Also be prepared to drop a topic if discussion is flowing well to avoid stopping it.

Be realistic about the size of group you can work with to achieve effective results (depending on the needs of the group). If dividing into smaller groups, do you have additional support to assist in this?

Negotiate with the group:

- Aims and expectations of the session/programme.

- Would the group like to record their session in some form?

- Ground rules - see group contract

# Group Contract or Agreement

At the beginning of each new group it is advisable to establish group rules or a contract. Below are some items you may wish to discuss in setting up a group agreement or contract. As with every part of the process, adapt your group rules to meet the specific needs of those in your group.

## How can we make this group comfortable for you?

### Respecting Differences

It is quite likely that we will have different views and opinions, can we agree to respect other's opinions?

Can we agree not to judge what people are saying?

### Giving everyone time to reflect and talk

We may ask "big talkers" to give others a chance to take their turn.

Ensure the members of the group who need more time to formulate their thoughts are not rushed or sidelined by the rest of the group.

Can we agree not to interrupt others or correct them?

Can we agree to listen?

### Expressing Feelings

Old memories can bring up strong feelings. Can we agree that it is quite all right for people to express their feelings?

Can we agree to be supportive to anyone overcome by their emotions?

There is no pressure on people to share - you only share what you want to share.

### Photographs and video as a recording of the group

Photographs and videos are an important part of the group's history. Is everyone happy for photographs to be taken or to be filmed?

## Know your group

Some activities will work better with small groups, those who already know each other, larger groups, more able bodied participants or total strangers. So how you plan your activities will depend a lot on the make-up of your group.

To facilitate those who find it difficult to share in larger groups consider breaking the group into smaller groups of anything from 2 to 5 depending on the size of the large group.

Be aware of people who tend to dominate or withdraw to ensure each person is given a fair share of time to speak.

Ensure those who want to share their memories have that opportunity, but don't force anyone, as reminiscence is a voluntary activity and some people do not wish to participate as such and this should be respected.

## Enjoy the session

While there can be some difficult memories brought up during reminiscence sessions it is usually a cathartic experience.



# Creative Reminiscence Techniques and Exercises

The following are examples of creative ways to explore memories and stimulate recall. They can be used in a group context or with individuals.

## **Quotations/Poems/Stories**

Use quotations, stories and poems to set the scene for different themes. For example poems learned at school such as 30 days hath September..

## **Visualisation**

Take participants on an imaginary journey e.g. the place they went to school or a favourite garden from their childhood. Invite your group to visualise the scene and use some questions as prompts to guide people through their recall. For example, who did the garden belong to, perhaps it had a gate, a summer seat etc? Use multisensory prompts e.g. what do you smell, hear, see, feel? Participants can close their eyes or keep their eyes open depending on the group.

## **Drawing/Visual Arts**

Encourage participants to draw a map of their childhood street, neighbourhood, home, school, place of work or uniform. Prompt and pose questions throughout the exercise or assist participants to draw if they give permission.

## **Mime**

What's my line? Ask participants to act out their first job or hobby. Mime household activities and chores from early life such as using the washing mangle or steam iron.

## **Re-enacting**

As stories arise and participants are willing to share, encourage them to re-enact the event or some memory e.g. sandals being washed out to sea, a factory outing etc.

## **Multisensory Triggers**

Use loan boxes or memory boxes. Bring in items you have at home which will stimulate some of the 5 senses. Encourage participants to touch, taste, smell, see and hear.

## **Music/Songs/Sounds**

Encourage participants to choose sounds from their memories and perform a soundscape e.g. beach sounds (waves, gulls, ice cream sellers, boats, donkeys, slot machines, children, etc). Explore different genres of music e.g jazz, classical, country. Music is now well recognised to promote a sense of well being (see [www.thebestbrainpossible.com](http://www.thebestbrainpossible.com))

### Photographs and Imagery

Use participants' personal photographs, or generic ones to evoke memories.

### Prompting questions

Encourage memories to flow and encourage discussion by formulating questions around different themes e.g. Weddings - Can you describe the outfit that you wore?

Ways of asking questions. Closed questions invite only a short answer, perhaps one word e.g. did you go to school in Belfast? Answer 'No'.

Try open ended questions instead e.g.

'Tell me what you remember about your school'

Answer 'Well I remember the big red brick building and the strict teachers, and my friend Annie'.

### Put items in bag

Carry a schoolbag, picnic basket, suitcase, bottom drawer and ask people to put an imaginary item into it and describe the item and why they picked it.

### Cooking/baking/sewing/cleaning

Simulate activities if it's not possible to actually bake soda bread, etc. When simulating mixing in a bowl see how many people lick the spoon!

### Mirroring activities

Sit facing each other and mirror your partner's activities – getting ready to go out, telling your children off, school teacher, etc.

### Pearls of wisdom

Ask participants to give advice e.g. have you any advice for the newly married couple/ new parents/someone starting a new job?



# Creative Products Suitable for Individual or Group Work

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*“By translating mental images into speech, writing, poetry, drawing, painting, drama, mime, music, dance or some other communication medium, the recollections have the potential to be shared with others and to give their owners additional benefits (Gibson 2004). This process of sharing enriches the experience for both teller and listener, providing the storyteller experiences the listener as genuinely interested, and totally without patronising condescension.”(Sim, 1997)*

Always remember the process is more important than the product but the product can be useful at times of transitions and a wonderful heirloom for family members. When doing life story work understand that in a life that took many years to live it will not be a full autobiography – merely the highlights the person chooses to record. The product should reflect the person and the details they wish to record.

## Life Story Map

This product gives a brief overview of the important events, people and achievements in a person’s life. It can be as detailed as you wish. It can be displayed on a wall for all visitors to see and can trigger conversations. It is low cost and can be created quickly and can be added to as the person continues in life.

## A Noted Photograph Album or Scrapbook

A visual stimulus for personal memories. Individuals can be involved in creating it which usually makes an enjoyable activity. It is important to capture some detail as to why each photograph is being included. The process can be time consuming and costly.

## Life Story Book/File

If the life story is created in a file it is easy to add to it over time and move information around. Within a bound book this isn’t as easy. It can provide a lot of personal history and detail about the person’s life but this can be time consuming to make and to read. It may get filed away or kept safe and not be accessible to care staff and visitors.



## Commercially Produced Life Story Books

These are easily available and can be relatively cheap to buy. They are easy to use, simply glue in images and answer the questions. But some topics may not relate to the person's life and could lead to a feeling of having missed something or not having achieved enough. However, they are a great starting point for those new to life story work.

## This is the Hand that...

This details what the person has achieved with their hands. It can be done simply on a page with a pencil or elaborated into a more creative piece. It may not contain a lot of detail but can be a great conversation starter and builds self-esteem in those who say – “I never really did anything.”

## Audio Visual Recording

This can be used to aid conversation. It can be used when the person is unable to communicate and still provide enjoyment. This needs some skill in using technology to edit, create and make easily useable but if images are put to music on a DVD they are easily accessible and can be a welcome diversion at times of stress.

## Memory Quilt/Cushion

This can encompass hobbies and skills of the person if needlework played a part in their life. Images can be put onto photo fabric such as miracle fabric, available on Amazon or Ebay. It can provide a visual trigger that can be visible to all visitors or staff. This needs some skill in assisting the creation. It can provide a comfort when moving to keep photographs of family close.



## Playlist of My Life

A playlist of music from the person's life can give enjoyment and can aid communication. It can be enjoyable when communication proves too difficult. It can prove to be calming at times of stress. Cheaper MP3 players may not last long and it can then prove expensive to buy a good quality Ipad or mp3. More expensive versions can be difficult to work for someone with dementia.

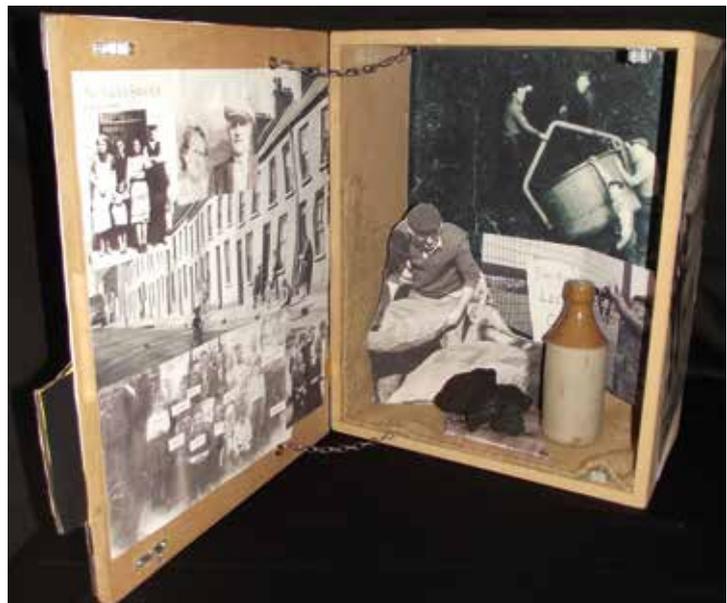
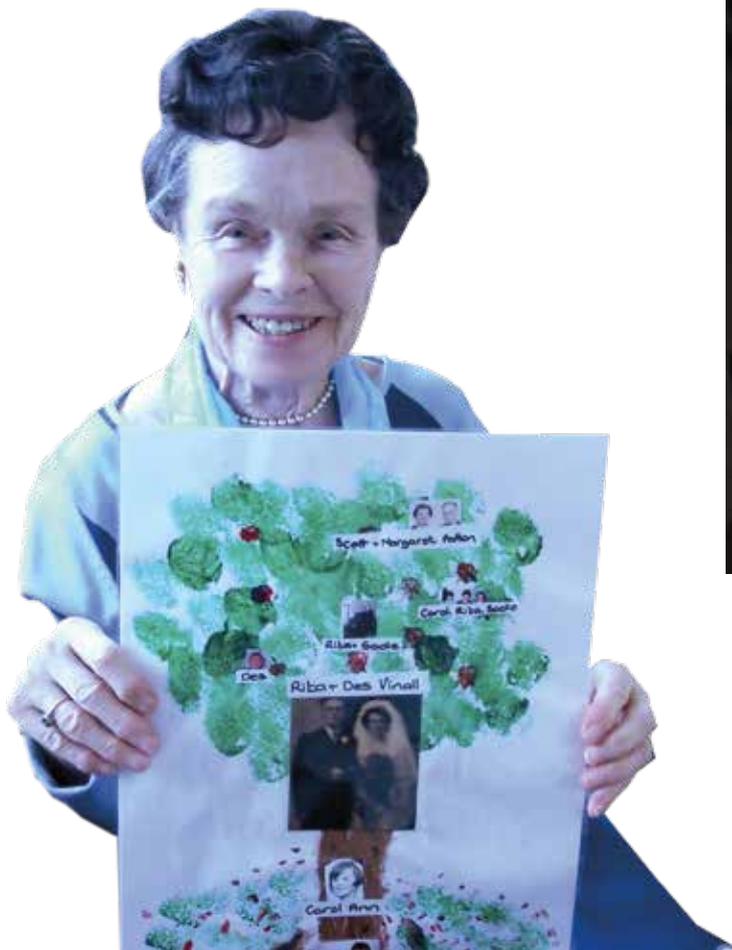


## Illustrated Family Trees

These are very easily made. The person can use sponges, paintbrushes or hand prints to paint the tree. It can be displayed openly and is easy to read at a glance. It can aid communication. It doesn't give a lot of detailed information but a basic overview of family members.

## Memory Box/Life in a Box

If someone has a lot of precious mementoes this is an ideal resource to use. Keep an inventory of what is included in the box and why it is important. It can aid communication. It can prove calming and enjoyable to go through. It can be created as more of a display box, showing images or items from a certain moment in time. It can provide a focal point and excellent conversation starter.



## Some additional points to consider when creating products:

Some people you work with can have lots of information and photographs. This can give a better picture of the person and the life they led but it can be so large that neither staff nor family take time to read it.

Individual pieces can give an overview at a glance – for people in residential care they can be posted on the wall to encourage staff and visitors to interact with and to engage in conversation.

If possible use the skills and hobbies of the person to create a product. For example, if they enjoyed needle work make a memory quilt or cushion where they can sew, embroider, crochet or knit items to be attached. If they enjoyed woodwork, building a wooden box to display important images and items from their life can be an interactive and enjoyable activity.





The basic tenets of group work are assumed in relation to this resource. However, if you wish to learn more about reminiscence and life story work there are some further options. Reminiscence Network Northern Ireland regularly runs *OCN Level 2 Introduction to Reminiscence and Life Story Work*.

Further information is available at [www.rnni.org](http://www.rnni.org).

An excellent reference book is Faith Gibson's "*Reminiscence and Life Story Work: A Practice Guide*" (2011) Published by Jessica Kingsley:London



# Using Triggers and Memory Boxes





Reminiscence  
Network Northern Ireland

# New Memory Boxes

Home Life  
Cooking and Baking  
Love and Marriage  
In Style  
School and Childhood

Earning a Crust  
High Days and Holidays  
Winter Wonderland  
1940s  
1970s



# Memory Box Services

Reminiscence Network Northern Ireland provides 10 Memory Boxes, on a variety of themes. This service was created as part of the *Sharing Memories Building Communities Project*. There are also loan box services in The Ulster Museum, Bagenal's Castle, Newry, Craigavon Museum Service, The Tower Museum Derry, The Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh and The Braid Museum, Ballymena. Some other museums and libraries may also provide a service so check out your local service provider.



## A Simple Introduction to Memory Box items

Lay out the Memory Box objects on a display table.

Encourage each member of the group to select one object which evokes memories for them and return to the group.

Ask each member to say a little bit about why they picked the item they did.

As each person finishes speaking, encourage other group members to add any memories which may have been evoked.

As a follow up session you can ask people to bring in their own items or photographs to share with the group.



## Home Life: Then and Now

Many household utensils have changed dramatically over the years.

Invite people to show how they or their parents used the objects in the Memory Box.

Ask how they had changed from when they were children to when they were running their own homes.

Invite them to make a list of chores they would have carried out as children (fetching water, cutting up newspaper for toilet paper, sweeping up) and ask them to compare with the chores their children or grandchildren had or have to do.



## Make Do and Mend

Invite your group to list the activities that took place to repair clothes, shoes, furniture, such as darning, sewing, crocheting, rug making, cobbling, woodwork, bleaching flour bags, finding ways to reuse e.g. tin can telephones, flour bag sheets, cleaning jam jars, food scrapings to feed animals, turning coats inside out or patching knees in trousers.

## Cooking

“Nothing tasted better than my mummy’s homemade soup,” “soda bread off the griddle with the butter melting on it was the greatest taste on earth.” Ask the participants to discuss their favourite homemade recipes. Encourage them to describe the taste/smell/feel of the food and their memories of making it.

Decide upon a few of the recipes to make for another session.



Encourage participants to whisk, knead, chop, wash and prepare the food. As the food is being prepared encourage them to discuss the memories it brings back.

## Wash Day

This activity can be done with themes such as bath night, spring cleaning, going through the days of the week or finding the activities which had to be done on a specific day.

Ask which day was wash day and at what time did the washing begin?

Who had to fetch the water, how was it heated, was a mangle used?

What happened when larger items, such as blankets, needed to be washed?

How was the washing dried? What type of soap/irons/washing equipment was used? When did you get your first washing machine and did this make a big difference to wash day?



## Shopping

Begin the session with the following quotation:

“In them days a shop didn’t come like it does today. You had to weigh your own sugar up, make your own sugar bags, they were always blue. Things like tapioca and rice were put into brown paper which was a bit thicker. You patted your own butter up, and you weighed everything.”

Make a list of the shops and services that came to you such as the bread man, milk man, tick man, rag and bone man, fish man, Mickey Marley’s roundabout, knife sharpening man, etc.

### 1939 Prices

Tin of tobacco – 2s6d (half a crown)  
 Newspaper – 1d  
 10 Wills Embassy cigarettes – 7d  
 100 watt lightbulb – 2s  
 Odol toothpaste – 6d

### 1957 Prices

Half pound of Echo Margarine – 9d  
 2oz Marmite – 1s4d  
 Silvikrin shampoo sachet – 7d  
 Tin of polish – 1s3d  
 Norvic Ladies shoes - £2 2s9d



## Things Were Much Stricter Then!

Ask the group for sayings they heard constantly while growing up, such as things their parents used to say to them, “Have you washed behind your ears?”, “Remember your ps and qs”, “Eat up all dinner or you will get no dessert”. Sayings also from teachers, other family members and authority figures.

Encourage the group to tell of their memories of school and childhood days and how things have changed.

Ask the group then to consider the following statements:

“Our teachers used to hit us with canes, dusters and gym shoes.”

“If we were sent to the headmaster’s office we worried more about the fate that awaited you when your parents found out.”

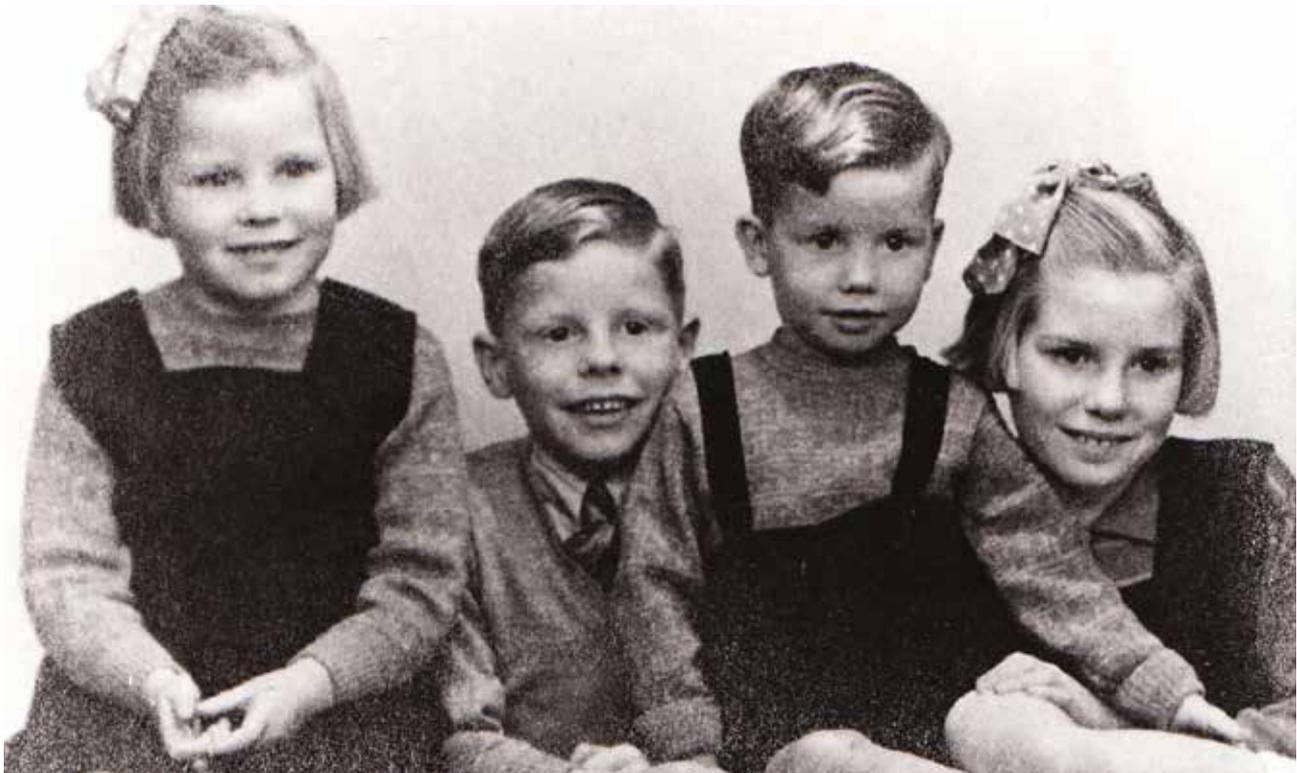
“We could ride in cars with no seatbelts”, “10 of us were driven to school in a Morris Minor.”

“We rode bikes with no helmets and home-made go-karts with no brakes.”

“We were always playing outside”.

Ask the group to consider the freedom they had as children compared to young people of today – fewer cars on the road, hitchhiking, walking to school, the ability to go out and play all day without contacting home.

Ask participants to think of songs or rhymes that their parents or grandparents would sing to them. Encourage the group to say or sing their song or rhyme.



## Childhood Fun and Games

If your group is lively you can draw out a hopscotch on the floor and encourage them to play the game and participate in skipping games.

For a more sedate group encourage them to play games such as dominoes, cards, etc. and encourage them to tell the skipping rhymes and songs they used in play. A skipping rope can be turned rhythmically to aid rhymes.

Prompts can include: skipping songs:

“Ring a ring of roses”

“All in together girls, this fine weather girls, when I call your birthday please fall out, January, February.....”

“Cinderella dressed in yellow, went upstairs to kiss a fellow, made a mistake, kissed a snake, how many doctors did it take? 1,2,3,.....”

“My Aunt Jane, she called me in, she gave me tea out of her wee tin, half a bap with sugar on the top and hot cross buns out of her wee shop.”

## Street Games & Songs

“In and out of the dusty bluebells x 3 I’ll be your master,

Tapper, apper, rapper on my best friends shoulder x 3 I’ll be your master.” What time is it Mr Wolf?

Queenio, Queenio who’s got the ball –i-o?

“Did you ever, ever, ever in your long legged life see a long legged man with a long legged wife.” Clapping game.



## Earning A Crust

Encourage participants to think about the first job they had and discuss it with the group.

Prompts can include:

How they found the job.

Had they to go for an interview?

How much did they get paid and what did they do with their pay?

Did they have to leave home to find work?

What time did they go to and from work? How did they get to their place of work?

Did they wear a uniform?

What were the other people at work like?

“

*“I left school on Friday, at the age of 14, and started working in the apple peeling factory on the Monday. My pay was given straight in to mummy, there was no question about that.”*

*“At 18 I started working in the Mill and I hated the sound of that siren. When I went in it was dark, when I came out it was dark and I spent all day in that dark factory.”*”

Participants can be asked to think of their most interesting job and mime it for the others to guess what it was. Begin this activity by yourself, as the facilitator, miming out your most interesting job.





## Going Out and Having Fun

Invite participants to discuss getting ready to go out for the night. Did it take a week to plan? Ask participants to do this activity in pairs. One person mimes putting on their make-up or shaving in preparation for an evening out and their partner copies their actions.

Play a piece of music and encourage each group to select the type of dance they would do to it. If participants wish they can play along with their percussion instruments, sing, clap or dance. Discussion can be stimulated around memories of the dance hall years, bands they heard, how they learned to dance, what they would wear going out to dances, cost of getting to a dance.

Picture houses - which did they attend, can they name their favourite films/actors/picture house? How much was it to get into the picture house? Did anyone sneak in through the bathroom window? Did anyone pay to get in with jam jars?

This session can be continued by reading out the following famous film lines and ask your group if they can identify the film.

- “Frankly my dear I don’t give a damn” from *Gone with the Wind* with Clarke Gable and Vivienne Leigh.
- “Play it again Sam” from *Casablanca* with Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart.
- “There’s no place like home” from *The Wizard of Oz* with Judy Garland.



## High Days and Holidays

Encourage the participants to pick out the cars they would have travelled in, ask about the colour of the car, where they lived at that time, the type of journeys they would have taken. How much did their first car cost, what happened when it broke down? Discuss their favoured method of travel (which may well have been the bus or train, bicycles, motorbikes, walking).

You could encourage participants to bring in photographs of their old cars to compare and discuss. Discussion could include driving tests, hand signals, driving during the Second World War.

Invite participants to think back to their favourite day trip or holiday. Ask them to share their memories with the following prompts:

Where did you go?

Who did you go with?

How did you get there?

What did you do when you got there?

What smells would bring you back there?

What clothes did you wear?

What did you eat (picnic or eat out)?

How often would you have had days out or holidays?



## 1940s

To begin this session it is useful to ask people to discuss things they remember doing during the war – were they in the services, civilian workers, evacuated children or children in the areas evacuees were sent to?

Ask the group if they can remember the type of precautions they had to take at home during the war e.g. blackout curtains, carrying a gas mask.

What did the rationed food taste like e.g. dried eggs? “I would bake cakes with the dried eggs, they didn’t rise much but they tasted better than trying to eat them any other way.”

Did they ever smuggle items across the border?

“My daddy wore my mummy’s wedding dress before she did, because he smuggled the material across the border wrapped around his waist.”

Make Do and Mend – how did families economise and make do when food, fabric and fuel were all rationed - did you Dig for Victory?



## Love and Marriage



Meeting husband/wife:

Where you met?

Who introduced you?

How long did you know each other before getting married?

First Kiss?

How did you spend time together?

Did family and friends support/oppose the relationship?

Did you have to wait and save to get married – how long?

*“I was working as a builder’s labourer. Money was very scarce. We’d keep our savings in a tin. Sometimes it was 3 or 4 bob, sometimes less. We were engaged for 4 ½ years. We had to court a long time in order to save up.”*

## Your Wedding Day

Can you describe your wedding outfit – colour, style, bought, made, etc?

Did you follow any traditions e.g. old, new, borrowed, blue; keep wedding cake for first child’s christening.

Other things like veil, flowers, jewellery, bridesmaids, men’s buttonholes, new shoes, wedding cake.

How did you get to the venue?

Did you have a reception/wedding breakfast? If yes who was at it?

Were there any war time weddings?

What types of things were given as wedding presents?

## Winter Wonderland

Discuss with your group their memories of winters in time gone by - did they seem to be colder? What changes have helped you stay cosier during winter time over the years e.g. running water, central heating, double glazing?



Fun in the snow as children - did you have a sledge or did you make one or use a tray? If you used a tray did your mother know before you used it?

## Christmas Celebrations

How did you decorate the house as children? Would you have had to collect holly and acorns, make paper chains and Christmas cards?

What did you put out as a Christmas stocking? What type of presents did you receive?

Who would be in your house for Christmas dinner, did other family members come to stay?

How was Christmas dinner prepared and who would have been there? What was served? Would games have been played, what type and did everyone join in? Did anyone ever really get a stocking full of ashes for being naughty?

What traditions do you still carry on today? How is Christmas different for children now?



## Neighbourhoods

Ask participants to list the qualities that make good neighbours and bad neighbours while discussing how community spirit has changed over the years.

Prompts can be made regarding the people who frightened the children, the local gossip, the one who helped everyone, those who were especially nice to children, etc. You can use the following quotation as an example of a good neighbour:

Ask participants to discuss particular acts of kindness from neighbours.

Did you have any street parties or celebrations where the whole neighbourhood took part?



*“ I was the second oldest of 13 children and my neighbour would ask if I was going to the dance. She knew I loved to jive and if I said I wasn't going she would say I must get you to come in and do my hair. When I done her hair she would give me a few shillings which would take me to the dance. ”*



# Recommended Reading

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# Recommended Reading

## GENERAL TEXTS

Bamford Review (2007), *Mental Health and Learning Disability*, Belfast: Department of Health

Bender, M., Baukman and Norris, A. (1999), *The Therapeutic Purposes of Reminiscence*, London: Sage

Bornat, J. (Ed.) (1994), *Reminiscence Reviewed: Evaluation, achievements and perspectives*, Buckingham: Open University Press

Butler, R. (1963), *The Life Review in Psychiatry*, Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Process

Butler, R. (1995), *The Life Review* in Haight, B.K. and Webster, J.D. *The Art and Science of Reminiscing*, Washington: Taylor and Francis

Clare, L. (2005), *Cognitive Rehabilitation for people with dementia* in Marshall, M. *Perspectives on Rehabilitation and Dementia*, London: Jessica Kingsley

Clarke, A., Hanson, E. and Ross, H, (2003), *Seeing the person behind the patient: Enhancing the care of older people using a biographical approach*, Journal of Clinical Nursing.

Coleman, P.K. (2005), *The uses of reminiscence: Functions and benefits*, Ageing and Mental Health

Erikson, E.H. (1950), *Childhood and Society*, New York: WW Norton & Co.

Erikson, E.H. (1982), *The Life Cycle Completed*, New York: WW Norton & Co.

Garland, J. and Garland, C. (2001), *Life Review in Health and Social care: a practitioner's guide*, Hove: Brunner-Routledge

Gibson, F. (2011), *Reminiscence and Life Story Work: A Practice Guide*, London: Jessica Kingsley

Gibson, F. (2006), *Reminiscence and recall: a practical guide to reminiscence work* (3rd Ed.), London: Age Concern

Gibson, F. (2006), *The Past in the Present: Reminiscence in health and social care*, Baltimore: Heath Professionals Press

Haight, B.K. and Haight, B.S. (2007), *The Handbook of Structured Life Review*, Baltimore: Health Professionals Press

- Hunt, L., Marshall, M. and Rowlings, C. (1997), *Past Trauma in Late Life: European perspectives on therapeutic work with older people*, London: Jessica Kingsley
- Kunz, J. and Soltys, F.G (Eds.)( 2007), *Transformational Reminiscence: Life Story Work*, New York: Springer
- Lindsay,T. and Orton,S. (2008), *Group work Practice in Social Work*, Exeter: Learning Matters
- McKeown, J. Clarke, A. and Repper, J.(2006), *Life story work in health and social care: a systematic literature review*, Journal of Advanced Nursing
- Webster, J. D. and Haight, B. K. (2002), *Critical Advances in Reminiscence Work: From theory to applications*, New York: Springer-Verlag

## CONTEXT SPECIFIC RECOMMENDED READING

### Dementia Care:

- Bassett, R. and Graham, J.E. (2007), *Memorabilities: Enduring relationships, memories and abilities in dementia*, Ageing and Society
- Batson, P. Thorne, K. and Peak, J. (2002), *Life Story Work sees the person behind the dementia*, Journal of Dementia Care
- Brooker, D. (2007), *Person-Centred Dementia Care*, London: Jessica Kingsley
- Cappeliez, P. and O' Rourke, N.(2006), *Empirical validation of a comprehensive model of reminiscence and health in later life*, Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences
- Department of Health (2009), *Living Well with Dementia: a national dementia strategy*, London: Department of Health
- Department of Health, NICE and SCIE (2006) *Dementia: Supporting people with dementia and their carers in health and social care*, Clinical Guideline 42, London: NHS
- Marshall,M.T. (Eds.) (2005), *Perspectives on Rehabilitation and Dementia*, London: Jessica Kingsley
- Nolan, M. Davies, S. Ryan,T. and Killick, J. (2008), *Relationship-Centred Care and the "Senses" framework*, Journal of Dementia Care. Jan/Feb
- Schweitzer, P. and Bruce, E. (2008), *Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today. A guide to good practice*, London: Jessica Kingsley

## Depression and Mental Health

Bohlmeijer, E. Roemer, M. Cuijpers, P and Smit, F. (2007), *The effects of reminiscence on psychological well-being in older adults: a meta analysis*, Ageing and Mental Health

Cappeliez, P. O'Rourke, N. Chadbury, H. (2005), *Functions of reminiscence and mental health in later life*, Ageing and Mental Health

Chao, S. Y. (2006), *The effects of group reminiscence therapy on depression, self esteem and life satisfaction of elderly nursing home residents*, Journal of Nursing Research 14

Stinson, C.K. and Kirk, E. (2006), *Structured reminiscence: an intervention to decrease depression and increase self-transcendence in older women*, Journal of Clinical Nursing

## Learning Disability

Hewitt, H. (2006), *Life Story Books for people with learning disabilities: a practical guide*, Kidderminster: British Institute of Learning Disabilities

Kerr, D. (2007), *Understanding Learning Disabilities and Dementia: Developing effective interventions*, London: Jessica Kingsley

Meininger, H.P. (2006), *Narrating, writing, reading: Life story work as an aid to self advocacy*, Journal of Learning Disabilities

Wills, T. and Day, M.R. (2008), *Valuing the person's story: Use of life story books in the continuing care setting*, Clinical Interventions in Aging

## Journals

Ageing and Society

International Journal of Aging and Human Development Journal of Dementia Care

Journal of Evidence Based Social Work

Journal of Gerontological Social Work

Journal of Social Work Education

Journal of Learning Disabilities

Oral History

## Websites

[www.internationalinstitutereminiscenceandlifereview](http://www.internationalinstitutereminiscenceandlifereview)

[www.scie.org.uk](http://www.scie.org.uk)

[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hss](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hss)

[www.communitycare.co.uk](http://www.communitycare.co.uk)

[www.niscc.info](http://www.niscc.info)

[www.swap.ac.uk](http://www.swap.ac.uk)

[www.evidencenetwork.org.uk](http://www.evidencenetwork.org.uk)

[www.makingresearchcount.org.uk](http://www.makingresearchcount.org.uk)

[www.socialworkonline.com](http://www.socialworkonline.com)

[www.rqia.org.uk](http://www.rqia.org.uk)

[www.rememberingtogether.eu](http://www.rememberingtogether.eu)

[www.rnni.org](http://www.rnni.org)

[www.thrbestbrainpossible.com](http://www.thrbestbrainpossible.com) [www.hopkinsmedicine.org](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org)



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Twitter: **[https://twitter.com/RNNI info](https://twitter.com/RNNIinfo)**

Sharing Memories

