

Most Significant Change – notes for story collectors

September 2019

General notes for text based stories – using the story collection form

The story collection form is separate to this sheet. One side of the form is for information about the person; the other to record their story of change. You might record details on the form, or make separate notes: type it up as a Word document.

It's really important that you collect stories from people who agree to their story being shared. It can be anonymous, or they can choose to be known by a different name; but if they don't agree to their story being shared, it can't be discussed with *anyone*. If someone says they won't share their story, thank them and move on to someone else. If you're uncomfortable doing that, please feel free to ask them some or all of the questions on the form - but bear in mind you won't be taking or keeping notes, and you'll have taken up the person's time, perhaps unnecessarily.

When you're writing down someone's story, record it the way they say it eg if they say to you *"I was worried about not being able to paint, but it turned out I was just as good as everyone else"*, write it that way as it's their point of view you need.

You might not be fast enough to write down absolutely every word, but it's likely there will be phrases and words that leap out at you. Do your best to record as much as possible using the words you hear. Don't go too slowly – the person doesn't need to dictate their answers to you. It should be fairly spontaneous. You can always check with the person at the end if you've missed a word – or misheard. Don't worry about how much anyone has to say. It's fine if someone only has one change they can think of - or 5! Just check at the end that the story adds up – see below.

Typing up the stories to share

Focus on the 'change' part of the story – questions 2-6. The information about the person and how they spend their day (etc.) can be summarised at the beginning. Here's a made-up example drawn from stories shared in previous work:

'I wasn't expecting that!'

Percy is an 89 year old man who usually spends his days watching TV and *"doing the domestics"*, or coming to the community centre. His main change was he felt much lighter and happier at the end of the session; it had made the day better:

"I wasn't looking forward to today. The weather's really gloomy, and although I like coming here, it's our wedding anniversary this month and I miss my wife. And I don't really like art, so I wasn't looking forward to that. Never got on with it at school. But the lady who ran things was really nice. We all got a chance to paint. We could choose to paint from our imagination, or we could copy something in the room. There were postcards we could copy. I found a card with a picture of a vase of daffodils. They were my wife's favourite flower. It really cheered me up, painting that. Everyone was laughing. Some people made a right mess. Lucky we had these pinnies on. But the lady liked mine. She said I'd done a good job. I wasn't expecting that! I'm going home now. I think I might do pilchards on toast for tea."

This puts together the answers using Percy's words: what it was like before (*not looking forward to the day*); what caused the changes (*the lady was really nice*;

everyone was laughing; I found a picture of my wife's favourite flowers); how it is now (I wasn't expecting that, I feel much happier and lighter); why was it significant? (it made the day better); what title would you give it? (I wasn't expecting that!)

This is just an example - you don't have to follow this exact format. The stories you record and collect might be shorter or longer; or the person might tell it in pieces that don't fit together quite so neatly. That's all okay. It's their story – you just need to be able to 'match up' the story; so at the end, check that you've got these 4 elements:

1. Which is the most significant story of change, for them?
2. What is the change that they're talking about?
3. What caused that particular change, do they think?
4. What's different for them, as a result, do they feel?

Sharing the stories – and thinking about the panel discussions

Once you've collected stories, these need to be discussed by a panel that you set up. (This is why consent to share is needed: stories can't be discussed without this.)

The panel

Ideal numbers for your panel are 5-8 people, with 8-15 being the ideal number of stories to discuss (otherwise it's unwieldy). The panel should consist of people who:

- Haven't told stories (or, at least, haven't told a story that's being discussed)
- Haven't collected the stories. (You might, as facilitator, have collected stories: if this is the only way you can do this, just be aware of your own views of the stories when you are facilitating)
- Might well be people you want to influence eg funders and other stakeholders; housing or health professionals; artists; other older people.

Make sure everyone has copies of the stories in good time, before the meeting.

Panel discussions

Allow around 1-2 hours for discussion. Ideally, everyone will have read the stories in advance, but in reality time may be needed for reading at the start of the meeting.

Record the discussion (using the best method for you), because it needs to be shared. You're asking everyone to say – *which story stands out most to you, and why?* Ideally, everyone agrees on one story. But if the group is split:

- Invite the competing parts of the group to say why they've made their decision
- See if that encourages anyone to change their mind.

It's fine if people stick to their original choice – just make a note of, for example, the two stories chosen, the discussion, and maybe the numbers who chose (*five people wanted story 2 because ... three people chose story 6 because ...*)

Feedback

One important part of MSC is to give brief feedback to the storytellers – in person, or email or letter – to thank the person; to let them know the story is being used; and to share something about what it was in their story that struck the people who read it.

Sharing with the Evaluation Team – Celebrating Age programme

Once your panel has met and decided which is the Most Significant Change story, please share this with your national team contact – whether Imogen, Mark or Lorna.