

Guidance Notes – My Life Story Book

- This book belongs to the individual, so try to use their words, expressions, and ideas. Use the first person, if possible, e.g. "I went to school in Glasgow".
- In a Care Home setting, if possible, start a book like this as soon as the person moves in. It helps make a genuine connection and build a trusting relationship.
- Working through a life story book will trigger many memories, both happy and sad. Be sensitive to the persons feelings and try to focus on the topics they most enjoy talking about.
- Just ignore areas of the book that are not relevant to the person.
- For people with Dementia focus on their long-term memories, for example their childhood or school days. For people with Dementia a life story book can be the key to their identity and provide a very reassuring sense of self-worth.
- Be careful how you ask your questions. Don't ask too many questions that may be difficult to answer. A life story book is not a questionnaire that can be finished quickly. It will take many months, if not longer to complete.
- Try using a short statement followed by a question, for example, "I live in a small cottage in the country, where did you live Doris?" or "I had to stay at school until I was 16 years old, was that the same for you?".
- A person with Dementia may use the present tense to refer to something that has passed or a person who is no longer alive. In your conversation use the past tense.
- Be sensitive about correcting the person if their facts aren't quite right. You can always ask an additional question as a way of clarifying e.g. "I thought....".
- Choose a good time to talk, information wont be forthcoming if the person is tired or not in the right mood to talk. Some of the best conversations will arise naturally when you least expect. Collect stories and anecdotes as you care, if that works better, then write them later.
- Encourage family members to get involved, with providing information and photos. They could work on some pages of the book during visits.
- Avoid using original photos. Using a colour photocopier to copy old black and white photographs works very well.
- Talk to other members of staff who may have known the person longer than you.
- Most importantly! It is the process of making a life story book with an individual that is more important than the end product. Sharing memories together is an enriching experience and one that should be savoured and enjoyed!

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