

Person Centred Thinking Tool 5

Histories

Our histories make us what we are. Older people's histories can easily become lost or be left untold. A conscious effort to listen to and record individual histories can help staff to understand and appreciate people in a different way, and in doing so develop different relationships with them. This can also happen within families - especially between different generations. There are many ways to capture and record histories - for example with photographs, family trees, scrapbooks, through miniature histories in objects, with graphics or simply by writing them. Websites and commercially available packages can help to capture family histories, and most families would be delighted to help.

Cliff Richard's mother has dementia and lives in a residential nursing home. He had a glamorous photo of her, taken in the 60s, hung above her bed. He wanted staff to see who she had been in her life, not just how she seemed now. A powerful photo or graphic can speak a thousand words.



Hilda Williams

Hilda is an inspirational woman, who is proud to be 87 and living in her own home in Blackpool. You would only need to spend a brief amount of time with her to feel the joy for life she exudes.

A film buff, her knowledge of the movies right back to the 1930s is incredible. She has travelled widely visiting her daughter Joan and her family, as their work has meant they have lived in many different countries. Her latest holiday photos are from Hollywood.

Hilda was talking with her great-niece, Babs, about how the world has changed and her hopes and fears around getting older. What really frightened her was that her memory wasn't as good as it used to be and that;

"Some day I may not remember what a great life I have lived so far."

Babs and Hilda decided to spend a few hours together to capture Hilda's life on a graphic history map. This was the start, and now they are scanning in family photos to create a family history book as well.

Alice Peacock

Alice used to work in the residential home where she now lives. The imposing house, Millbrook, used to belong to a mill owner, and Alice was the nanny to his children. Once the children had grown, she became the housekeeper and cook. She was a well-known local character, always at the heart of St. James' Church community. She is great company and has always loved to chat with other people, showing a real interest in what they have to say. Alice is delighted when staff, visitors and the people she lives with at the home chat with her and she loves to be acknowledged as people walk by, even if that means saying hello a number

"We knew so little of this information - especially about Alice's past. Who would have thought Alice was a keen birdwatcher and rambler? She has lived here almost 6 years, and all that time we didn't know. I've learnt so much about her by using this approach. It's just brilliant. It has given us a chance to step aside, learn real things about people and what changes they want to make in how they live." A staff member

of times as Alice will forget that you have already spoken to her.

Alice looks forward to visits from her brother Jim and his wife Agnes. June, a friend, brings her the church newsletter each month. As she struggles to read more than the odd sentence on her own, she loves to sit and have somebody read through it with her.

Alice uses her zimmer frame now and again to take short walks around the home. Sometimes the other people she lives with tell her to sit down, which really upsets her.

She sometimes becomes very anxious, believing that her mother is still alive and waiting at home for her. At these times, Alice gets very agitated, as she thinks her mother will be worried about where she is and vexed with Alice when she gets home. During these periods of confusion Alice will wander about the home trying to open

the doors to get out to go home to her Mum. Staff try to calm Alice by asking if she would like to go out for a walk, have a bath or sit and chat awhile.

Alice sometimes believes the other residents are people she has known in the past and will talk to them as if they are. This seems to reassure Alice.

The staff and someone who enjoyed drawing worked with Alice to create a picture of her past (a graphic history) and some of what is important to her. It's up on the wall now.

"It brightens my day to have people sit and ask me about my picture. I love talking about Millbrook and telling my many tales," says Alice.

The picture gives people clues about her past, so that they can talk with Alice and ask her about it.



person centred planning with older people

How can this tool be used?

Assessment and care plans

Histories can be used at the beginning of any assessment so that people can see the person in the context of their own history and really get to know their life story.

First contact with a new service, group or support worker/team

In this way, histories can be seen as a next step on from Appreciation - knowing what people like and admire about someone can easily lead onto discussions about that person's life story, and what has shaped and influenced them. It can also offer insights into why what is important to someone is so important in their life.

Histories then are a powerful tool for building relationships and knowing whether something might work in terms of support or care arrangements, and therefore enable that person to have a good life. Histories are particularly helpful when a person is likely to have ongoing contact or support from someone or a service rather than a one-off interaction.

Reviews

Histories can be referred to as part of a review, to give a flavour of who the person is. Again, it contributes to seeing a complete picture of the person.

On moving to a care home

Moving to a care home or other form of supported accommodation can be a traumatic experience for many different reasons. Histories can help staff and others working in or visiting that home to get to know someone well. Using visual aids and prompts can bring these life stories alive. Having framed photos, pictures, framed family trees, scrapbooks to share are great ways to personalise people's living areas. People could use these to introduce themselves to new members of staff. Their past can also offer clues about what may be important to the person now. Involving family members and friends in sharing these stories, and providing photos and momentos to build this bigger picture is also a good way of ensuring they continue to have strong and positive relationships with the person who has moved to the home. Asking different family members to share their versions of family history can also bring people closer together in order to support someone through this transition.



In focus groups and research projects

Capturing personal and collective histories can also offer important insights into how services and wider systems of support can be better designed and delivered - whether these are formal systems (such as health and social care) or more informal networks and local community support such as groups, clubs, volunteer networks and so on. Asking local older people to share their histories (using clear and transparent guides that explain what is being asked and why) for example, as part of an 'appreciative inquiry' into what is working well in a local area, can offer valuable explanations as to why some services are used and are effective and others are not. It can also be used in more discrete settings e.g. care homes or day centres to understand how people came to be there, and why they think they are there. This can be important in two ways: it helps staff to understand the older person's present circumstances by getting to know their past; and it can help the older person in their move to a new place or home environment.