



TELLING STORIES THAT MATTER

A TOOLKIT FOR EXPLORING YOUR
POTENTIAL AS A STORYTELLER

AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS



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Kiran would like to thank all those that have advised and assisted in the development of this toolkit. In particular, he extends thanks to: Melani Douglass, Billy Howard, Doug Lothes, Annie Johnson, and J Freeman. He would also like to offer gratitude to the organizations that have supported him through developing the ideas behind this project, including: The Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Alliance For Peace Building, The Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation USA, The University of North Carolina and The Rotary Foundation. Lastly, he would like to thank his friends and colleagues from Partners for Democratic Change International, as well as storytellers from all walks of life.



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Why does telling stories matter?

“**Stories...**transport us into other people’s worlds...”

—Paul J. Zak

Human beings tell stories. That’s how we have made sense of our world, connected, and related with each other since we were hunter-gatherer tribes sitting together around a campfire.

Stories are powerful and memorable. All of us have been given stories by others; passed on to us by our families and others in generations before us. Almost everything we know has been given to us in the form of a story.

This toolkit is designed to inspire meaningful conversations with the people involved in and affected by your work. It will help you discover how people have been affected by conflict, continuity, and change. It will show you how to share your stories with others in exchange for theirs. Stories and the process of sharing them are the building blocks for deep interpersonal relationships where the processes of healing, reconciliation, resolution, and conflict prevention are found.

When we engage in story-telling and story-listening, we experience new worlds and discover how other people travel in paths similar to our own. We find stories that have the power to transcend borders, time, and space. Stories tell us about the diversity of traditions, customs, and ways of life that are an important part of everyday life.

A story preserves truth, identity and helps to create a sense of belonging. It also has the power to touch hearts and excite our minds. Stories empower and enrich us and can help us build communities to challenge injustices, build potential, and realize the power of change.

Recognizing the beauty of stories as art allows creative expression to flourish and helps us collectively better understand the anxieties, dreams, and aspirations which are part of being human. The process of collecting and presenting stories, if used successfully, unlocks the magic of difference, dialogue, and collaboration as we build new stories together.

Interviews: Collecting Stories That Matter

The better you prepare,
the better the results.

An interview can be one of the most exciting and meaningful parts of any project; it can be a key activity in peacebuilding or community development, or a means of monitoring and evaluating the impact of a project. An interview is a chance for all participants, fieldworkers, and partners to gather a sense of what is meaningful, and to build rapport and trust.

As an interviewer, your task is to put the teller at ease and *listen* with all your senses. You should ask appropriate and meaningful questions that enable the teller to reveal rich details about his or her story or topic. Think of an interview as a conversation.

Clarifying your theme and interests from the start will help you decide the most effective way to start an interview. It will also make it easier to plan what questions to ask. Choose your questions wisely! The number of questions will depend on how much time you have, but the usual pattern is to start out with a few easy-to-answer questions to give the teller time to get to know you and get into a flow of conversation with you. Then you can ask the deeper questions and allow yourself time for spontaneous or planned follow-up questions.

Asking for stories often brings up deeply personal feelings and memories; the teller must decide in the moment what to share and what to keep private. Sharing personal stories can often offer validation and recognition for the teller. Be mindful of this, and try not to shy away from it. Offer the teller time to complete what they have started, give them time to reflect and offer a reciprocal story, or offer to give back a copy of the recorded material. This may also lead to further conversations that lead to better understandings of the story.

Stories may be disputed, especially ones that pertain to groups and communities. Telling stories can cause conflict. Therefore you must be willing to be open, honest and to work with participants in a collaborative way, helping to foster a positive relationship that yields greater results for you, the teller, and the wider community.

To help with this, think about the values, cultural practices, and experiences of the tellers. Ask them about what matters and negotiate a framework for engaging in a meaningful storytelling activity.

Interviews can provide:

- Participants with an opportunity to get to know one another, fostering a sense of shared understanding and respectful dialogue.
- A chance to learn about beliefs, issues, and struggles through the eyes and experiences of everyday people. These may include survivors, victims, or people on the other side of a divide.
- Multiple human perspectives, attitudes and values, not just facts.
- Rich material for writing and other forms of artistic expression.
- A sense of empowerment to those involved.

Prepare for the Interview

Pre-Interview Checklist

- Ask yourself: “What do I want to know? Who is the best person to interview who can offer a different perspective? What questions can I prepare in advance that will tell me something I do not already know?”
- Think about how this interview might benefit the teller.
- Prepare a list of questions and a list of topics to cover. Find out in advance as much as you can about the person you plan to interview. Talk to the person you plan to interview ahead of time if possible. Describe your topic, why you chose him or her to interview, and how you plan to use the information. Giving the interviewee a few days to think about the topic will result in a richer interview.
- Always fully charge and test your equipment before you go to the interview. If your recorder uses batteries always bring a spare set and check the settings and sound. Ensure that you have enough space to record.
- Take a field notebook so that you can take notes during the interview or capture movements, events, and information around you. You can use it to jot down new questions, facial expressions and ideas as they



DAFINA BYTYQI INTERVIEWING WOMEN IN KOSOVO
PHOTO BY PARTNERS-KOSOVO CENTER FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

- spring to mind during the interview, so as not to interrupt the teller.
- Ensure that the space you have chosen is comfortable for the teller and for you. Make sure that there is minimal noise and other distractions.
- Be a good listener and make eye contact. Always wait until the teller is finished speaking before asking your next question. Asking good follow-up questions shows you are interested and are paying close attention.
- Don't be afraid of silence. Give the teller time to think and reflect. Repeat questions if need be. Think of your interview as having a beginning, middle, and an end.
- Ask open-ended questions and questions that probe into personal experiences and values.
- When you have finished your questions, ask if he or she has anything they would like to add. Ask if there is anything they would like to know more about from you.
- Allow the teller time to speak with the recorder turned off at the end of the interview. This time is important for allowing you and the teller a chance to reflect on the experience or anything that came up unexpectedly. Always respect their right to confidentiality.
- Follow up your interview with a Thank You note or letter. Offer him/her a transcribed print-out of the interview. This goes a long way toward building a positive rapport.
- Remember: this story you have collected ultimately belongs to the teller!

The Interview: Asking Good Questions

Thinking about the questions you will ask is essential to a good interview. Think about how to ask questions that will offer a chance for the teller to tell you what they think about a theme or topic.

Closed-ended questions will get you a “yes” or “no” or short response. These are helpful if you want to know specific facts. For example:

What (is the name of your group?)

Where (did you first meet ___?)

When (did you first hear about ___?)

Who (is your Teacher?)

Open-ended questions invite the teller to talk at length on a chosen topic. Spending more time thinking of meaningful, open-ended questions will allow for more insightful conversations and a chance for the storyteller to tell his or her own story. Open-ended questions begin with the words and phrases:

Could you tell me about (your experiences during, before, and after coming to this place)?

What was it like (travelling from your first home)?

Can you describe (the moment when...)?

How did you feel (after talking to...)?

Why did you (decide to take that action)?



DIÁLOGO Y GOBERNABILIDAD, JUNE 2014
PHOTO COURTESY OF SOCIOS PERÚ

Listen very carefully to your teller’s responses. Make notes in your notebook to clarify or probe more deeply into a topic when you sense the moment is right. Allow the teller to speak in ways that suit him or her. If you feel they are going way off topic, gently guide the conversation back. Be mindful however that people tell stories in different ways and respond to questions in ways that reveal more than you may expect.

Always respect their right to refuse to discuss certain subjects. Remember to ask questions that encourage the teller to speak in a way that suits them; do not try to put words in their mouth. Allow them to speak freely and openly. It might be the first time someone has ever asked them for their opinion on a particular subject or topic.

Asking the storyteller for specific moments and stories to illustrate the points he or she wants to make. You can use your list of prepared questions as a guide, but be flexible and willing to change the order, ask new questions, or leave out certain questions. Different topics may come up during the interview offering insight and new areas to explore.

The understanding of ‘story’ may differ from culture to culture, so spending some time thinking of other words to explain what you are looking for can be helpful. Explain that you are interested in his or her personal experiences, reflections, and thoughts. Prepare questions that allow for a flow of conversation. You might even memorize some of your key questions to remain focused and in eye contact with the interviewee.

Following the Interview

Example questions:

- Could you tell me about your community? Your home?
- What places are important to you in your community? Can you describe a story or memory about one of those places?
- Are there any community traditions that you participate in? What is your role? How do you feel when you're conducting this role?
- Have any of these traditions changed over time?
- What do you imagine the future to be like for you and your community?
- Can you tell me some of your favorite stories about your community or involvement in an event?
- If this place/ region, building, community were to disappear, what would be lost?
- Are there other people who you think could tell stories about this community?

Once your interview is complete, you must store or download the material so it does not get lost. Also be sure to save it on a backup storage like a USB flash drive. Make sure to label the recordings and notes so you can find them later. For recorded interviews, listen back to the recordings carefully and make a list of the key responses to your questions. Transcribe the interview verbatim (in their exact words and as they spoke them). You may want to use capitals, brackets, italics or other creative punctuation to give a sense of how these words were spoken, used facial gestures, and gives a sense of how the teller conveyed the story to you. Using a person's actual words is a mark of respect and good practice, so don't skip this step.

You can outline your thoughts on the interview in a personal journal or in your field notebook. This will help remind you of the context, setting, and events that took place that day. Details are easy to forget, even if they seem crystal clear at the time.

Journaling before and after the interview will help you reflect on the process and what you and the teller might have learned. How might you capture the atmosphere of the day that the interview took place? What else was happening locally, or in the world that was relevant?

As you read over the transcript, look for how the teller made connections between personal stories and larger topics. Explore how one story may have merged into other stories. Ask yourself if there was something he or she was trying to tell you that you missed. If so, you have a chance to ask follow up questions when you return a copy of the transcript to the teller.

Treat all the material with utmost care. You have a responsibility to not misrepresent the interviewee's words or take them out of context. If you plan to publish parts of the interview, ask your interviewee to sign a release giving you permission to use the material.



What to do with the Results

There are many ways that you can use story material beyond the basic verbatim transcript.

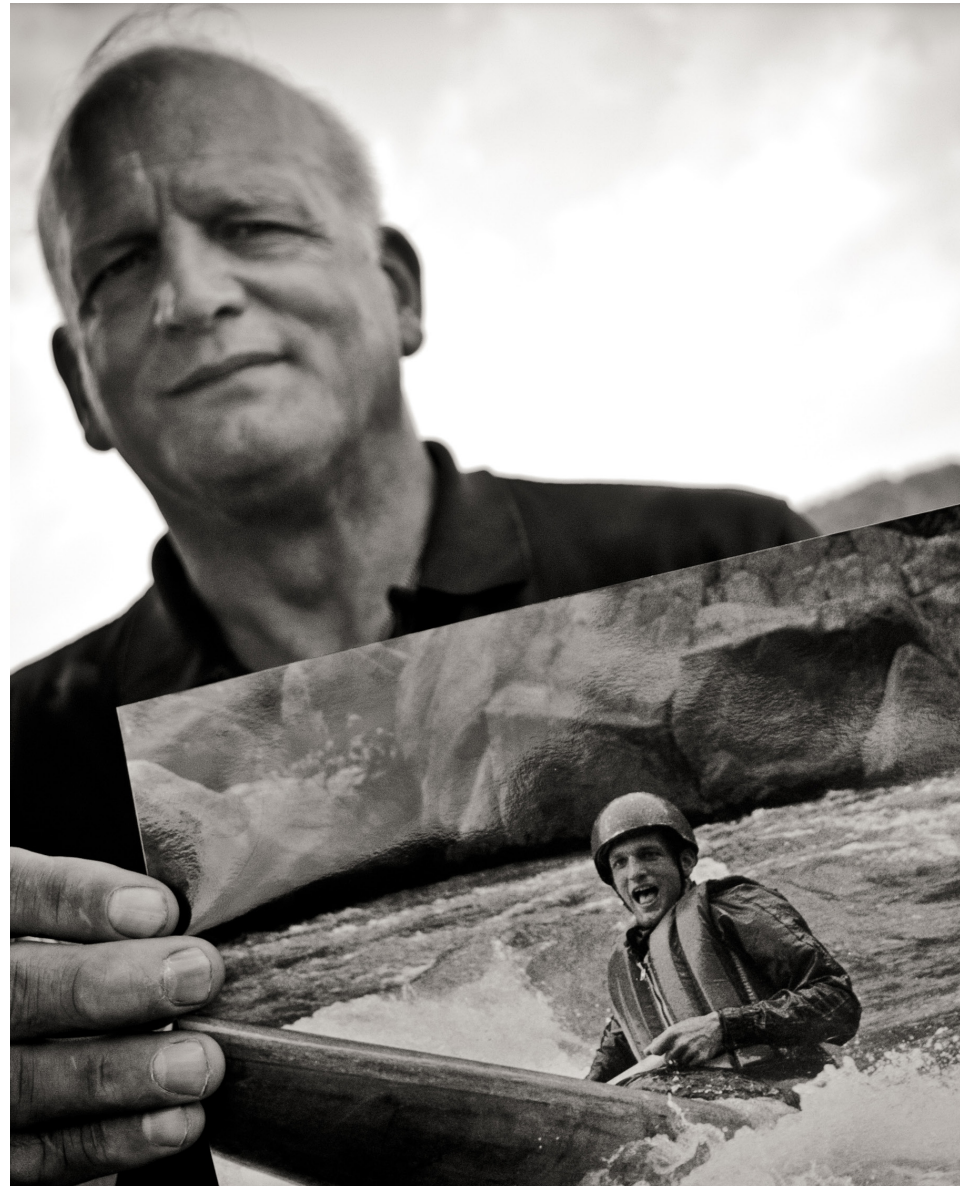
You could write up the interview as a continuous monologue, editing out your questions. This will allow for a better flow as it is re-read. You could write a personal story of the process before, after, or during the interview that includes aspects of your personal reflections about the interview process. You could create a piece of 'creative nonfiction,' or a story based on fact and a real person's account of things. Many creative literatures use these methods and have been used to create longer or shorter accounts. The way we tell stories differs from the way we read stories. Balancing the spoken against the more formal written word, whilst maintaining a sense of individual voice, is an art in itself and takes practice. Don't be too hard on yourself if you don't feel you got it right the first time!

There are many other creative ways you can use this evidence. You may want to compile a multimedia exhibition, an online audio transcription, or combine the interview with a photographic account of what took place. You could try creating a piece of ethno-poetics. This involves transcribing in a way that offers volume, depth, and some of the visual patterns used by the teller. You might use capital letters, bold, italics, or underlined text. This helps if you are trying to stress the way a teller describes an event to you.

CHARLIE WALBRIDGE
PHOTO © MICHAEL O. SNYDER

Think about using other activities and ideas from this toolkit and sharing the results by using stories through theater. You could create a spoken word poetry piece or explore other genres of poetry culturally specific to the teller or region in which you are working. The teller may want to use the transcription to create a living library book. You may decide to continue to work with the teller in writ-

ing up your interview in a way that allows the teller and others to gather a greater sense of the meaning of the stories told. The teller may also want to use the transcription to write their own story in a way that is meaningful for them. Explore additional examples in this toolkit or other examples of how you might share the results. Creativity means limitless possibilities!



Spotlight: Melani Douglass interviewed by Kiran Singh Sirah

Recently I found out that a friend of mine was also a friend of Melani Douglass, the great-great-granddaughter of Frederick Douglass, the slavery abolitionist. I was deeply excited to meet a direct descendent of one of my heroes. Frederick Douglass was a key figure in my past work exploring Glasgow and Scotland's role in the slavery emancipation movement. When I met Melani in person at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, we found that we had many connections and interests in common. Melani invited me to her community of Anacostia where we talked and taped much of our conversation as she revealed her rich family heritage to me. She spoke of her dreams and aspirations, her family and the community she lives in today, and about how she believes that her identity is a matter of choice, and it is up to us to define which path we must lead. Through our conversations we connected as friends.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KIRAN SINGH SIRAH

Melanie Douglass

Golden Threads

I'm a woman of African descent, in America, whose view of the world is informed by the black experience. My mind is always moving, always in some shape or form or fashion, as a teacher I'm always creating lesson plans!

I was always raised from as long as I can remember with a clear understanding of not just my father's father's family, but also of my father's mother and my mother's mother and father. Sometimes I'm nervous to only become defined by

one fourth of my line, as that does not inform the majority of whom I am. My Frederick Douglass line is a clear part of my family thread. It's almost like the golden thread that shimmers; it is what people see, you know? But, if you were try and cover yourself with only the golden thread, without the entire blanket you'd be quite cold. Having a new child, it is very important for me that she understands how all of these things come together to inform who she is as a person, how she can show up in this world so that

Spotlight *continued...*

she can be informed by these things but not limited by them.

I had to make that choice myself to not just be defined by only my Douglass line. A lot of people of African descent in the United States do not know their family history. Many people have questions about their family history — even my family history has been questioned. How do you walk forward when there is questionable information about your past?

Researching my own history, I came across a census paper for Frederick Douglass' daughter and they had her listed as white. And I thought, "This is very interesting." These are the same census papers that people use to see who they're related to. Even as someone as famous as Frederick Douglass, who was doing the work that he did, had a daughter that even when she became a grown woman was still mistakenly identified as white. I mean, how does that happen? If that can happen for Frederick Douglass' daughter then who else has that happened to? It makes me think about how many people were just not marked at all. What does that say about people's values, society, or their place in it? It is interesting to think about. I understand people's need for category as it allows people to give value to who they are. I do understand it's a big world and categories are often there to help.

For me, home is not always where it's easy or where it is comfortable. Finding a decent apple in Anacostia is

very hard, you know! [laughs] Don't try and get tomatoes unless you grow them yourself. But that's not what makes home for me. Home to me is a place that calls you and brings you back to your center and allows you to collect your spiritual self in a way that can operate even with adversity. I wanted to put my time and my energy into this place I now call home and help contribute to this community.

When I moved to Anacostia, my grandfather on my Douglass side made it a point to see this house, because this place is where he grew up as a child. One day he sat and looked out of my window into the yard for an hour. He literally just sat there, still, in this place, but he still won't talk about it! My grandfather is one hundred, but he doesn't talk a lot about history. In our Douglass family we have this huge Bible, which has been in our family since 1844, but he will not talk about where this Bible came from. It has inscriptions in it, a letter from Frederick Douglass Junior to my great-grandfather Charles Douglass. It talks about him as his son, and mentions his grandson Joseph, but he will not talk about that. Whereas my grandmother on my mother's side, when she got to be 72 years, she said, "I don't like being old, I don't want to be here longer, I did my three score and ten, I'm leaving in two years". And in those last two years she spent time telling us everything.

Looking back at her photos, she was gorgeous. She was a diva! And then she would flip, as she had to put on

men's clothing and bring up four children. She had to be a domestic and was very vulnerable, as many black women were then. Not only was she a black woman, she was a black woman with four little girls and her husband was dead. She had to continue to make money for her family, and so she had to change her walk from this diva woman to this rough man that would shoot you! She moved out of slavery and sharecropping and moved here and looked after her land, her daughters, and she was a black woman from the South! She had to survive. What she did was amazing. She really just told me the truth, and I appreciate that more than anything.

Today, thinking about the world and in raising my child, I think about how we must act in a way that actively moves us forward and moves us together, and I want her not to be intimidated by the overwhelming presence of wrong, as life is resistance. Things will always be there, and so it is a chance to grow spirituality and develop. It is one thing to confess God and freedom, but it's another thing to stand, to be alone. I want to raise my daughter in this way, in this world as it exists today.

Taking Photos that Matter



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAKE NAUGHTON

Photos tell stories and capture experiences, events, moments, places, and people in ways that can be as powerful than the written or spoken word. As a photographer, capturing a good photo is about using your camera to tell a story, whether it's a portrait that reveals something about a person's personality or a snapshot of an important moment. Here's a simple guide to how to do it effectively.

Taking Photos at Events

Exuberant and expressive people make for good pictures. Look out for people who gesture with their hands or people with interesting characteristics. Generally, giving people a chance to do what they feel they do best, or talk about what they do, will bring out more charismatic photos.

Think of the story you want to tell with your pictures. How might each photo illuminate the beginning, middle, and end of your story? Are there any photos that can be taken over a period of time at the same place? Think about the moments that might reveal much about a day, a group of people, a situation, a problem, or a solution. In capturing people, think about:

How can I get close up to the main characters?

How can I capture the tone of the event?

How can I photograph these characters and elements of the story?

Think of your camera as an extension of yourself and allow your camera to participate in every moment, event, and conversation. Allow your camera to capture expected and unexpected moments. Of course, be respectful to those you photo! Sharing the results can often be a good way to build a relationship, pick a good photo together, and help to create better pictures and sharing of stories.

Taking Photos that Matter *continued...*

Make a Plan

Think about the story you want to tell with pictures—the mood you want to convey. Before the event, write a list of people and moments that you want to capture. Imagine a wedding without images of the bride or groom, or the in-laws! You also want to try to capture people participating in some way that gives a sense of the fuller story to be told through photos.

Setting Up the Shot

The key is to try and capture something that is unique or relevant to the person you photograph. Simply making them pose can be a waste of time. If they talk more with their hands, consider framing the shot to include that detail. If they stand in an interesting way, don't shy away from a full-length frame. If they are doing something that is relevant, get them to talk about it or try to capture them in action, while you snap away!

With people that you're meeting and photographing for the first time, spend time talking to them. Observe how they talk and move. Spend some time with your camera so you and the person you're photographing become comfortable with one another. Imagine there are three of you having a conversation—that includes your camera!

Try to get the person in focus and the background out of focus. The easiest way is to make sure the camera is fully zoomed in on their face. Allow the person to talk about something meaningful or important to them.

With digital photography you can take plenty of pictures as you will be able to pick the best later. Don't be shy! Move in as close to the person or event taking place as possible.



PHOTO © MICHAEL O. SNYDER

Lighting

Make sure you're in a bright environment so there's plenty of light on their face. Outdoors during dusk or dawn offers soft light, which is good for portraits. Bright days also make for good pictures. Unless you have good lighting indoors, try to make sure there is some natural light. If this is not possible, ensure you're in a brightly lit environment, as you will want to try to capture the personality of the person you are photographing. Test your camera before each event; check light exposure, especially if your camera is new or unfamiliar to you. For simple, Point-and-Shoot cameras this may be easy; however, if your camera is more advanced, get to know the settings and take a few test photos. A camera is basically a light box: Finding the right amount of light to let in is the key to great photos.

Rule of Thirds

Not everything has to be centered in the picture. The eye is naturally attracted to non-centered parts of the photo. Use all parts of the picture frame in order to introduce unexpected drama or tension. A good rule of thumb is to mentally divide the scene into a 3X3 grid (see example on Page 15) and consider what elements you want to include in each section. Sometimes pictures can be more interesting when the main subject is not directly in the middle of the frame.

Capturing the Unexpected

Keep your camera out so people get used to it and become comfortable with it, and then be prepared for any moment to tell a story and provide an interesting photo. Move around a lot. Look for ways to show the depth and distance in the photo. Detail photos can help to tell the story of a place or event.

Take some time to look closely at the space to see what can be learned in the details. Think about the use of negative space within a frame. Negative space is space in a photo that is mostly empty. Negative space provides an interesting balance and helps the viewers to focus on other parts of the photo.

Extra Tips for You as a Photographer

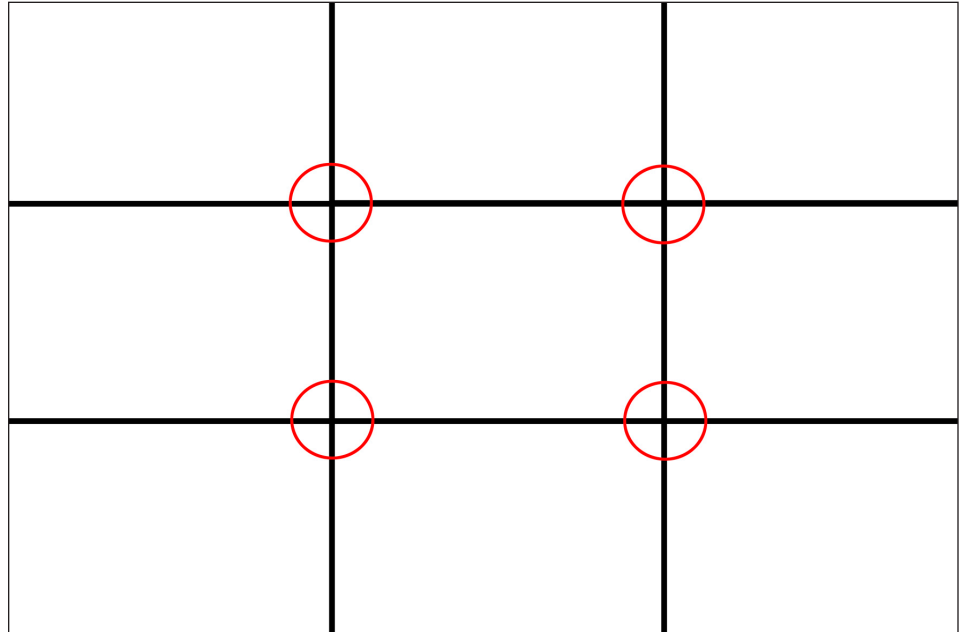
Always make sure people are OK with you taking pictures. If they ask you not to take their picture, respect that. Ask permission from a spokes-

person at an event, especially if taking photos of children and vulnerable adults. Sometimes talking to people first helps people to feel comfortable with you, and often draws exuberant characters your way!

What to do with the Results

After you have taken all your photos, download them or look back at them in ways that suit the type of camera that you have. Programs such as Light Room or Photoshop are worth investing in, with Light Room being the more accessible for the unfamiliar new user. Look back at your photos and select which ones help to tell the story that you're looking for. Look for themes of colors, people, the time of day, or main characters in the story. Try to be selective, and choose the best photos that speak to your broader story. Often working with others will help to select the best photos, creating a slide show of 10-20 photos will help you be selective and help to focus the project. Take your slide show, or print out the photos and create copies for your participants. This way they may also have a story to tell about the photograph, why they wore something that day, how they were feeling, or what might have happened next.

Use the photos to ask for quotes, or short stories that may accompany a photo or perhaps you have a story about the people in the photos you want to share in a reflection.



TOP: RULE OF THIRDS GRID

BOTTOM: EXAMPLE OF A PHOTO WITH GOOD USE OF THIRDS. JULIA ROIG SPEAKING AT NEXT SUMMIT ON OCTOBER 13, 2012. PHOTO COURTESY OF BENJY FEEN

Spotlight: In the Time of AIDS: A Photographer's Story *by Billy Howard*



DOUG LOTHES
PHOTO COURTESY OF BILLY HOWARD

Twenty-one years ago I photographed an anonymous person with HIV for a book I was working on, “Epitaphs for the Living: Words and Images in the Time of AIDS.” D, as he referred to himself, wished to remain anonymous, fearing that being identified would cause him to lose his job and his insurance, a loss he could hardly afford. Wishing to be unmasked, he suffered from the fear and ignorance of those who would judge him and chose to cloak his identity in deference to that reality. Over the course of the next two decades, most of the people - over 70 that I photographed for that book- have died. Many died before the book even came out and I went to a succession of memorial services in the years after, trying to keep in touch with the people I had grown close to and grieving as, one by one, I lost them to the horrendous disease.

They were the first to suffer from this plague, some diagnosed with GRID, Gay Related Immune Disorder, before AIDS was even a name, and all before the cocktails that have saved so many lives were invented. I had not heard from any of them for several years and my fear was they were all gone. This week I received an email from a friend who was meeting a man who said he was photographed by me for a book. It was D. Miraculously he has survived. He has not only survived, but thrived. He no longer fears the repercussions of a society that shunned him and has embraced both his life and his diagnosis. This morning, I photographed him again.

Anonymous has a name: Doug Lothes. Like a ghost he has come back into my life, reminding me once again of all the beautiful people I was honored to photograph for that project and giving me hope for the amazing resilience of the human spirit.

KIRAN: Could you tell me about yourself?

DOUG: In 1958, I was born on a June Saturday morning in Charleston, West Virginia. That makes me a Gemini, for those interested in such things. I graduated from West Virginia University with a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Theatre (cum laude) and moved to the Big Apple, where I rarely worked as an actor, but mostly did office work in an advertising agency. Thank goodness I took that “touch typing” class in tenth grade! I have three older brothers. Our father died about a year after I was born, so our mother raised four sons in a time before single motherhood was fashionable. She was a very strong, smart, beautiful woman who sang operatic soprano leads with the Charleston Symphony. She taught voice and piano lessons in our home. After she passed away in 2008, a childhood friend who had taken piano lessons from her wrote to me, “Your mother could be, at one moment, utterly charming and, in the next, completely terrifying! She did not put up with laziness in her students.” Nor did she put up with much of anything from her sons – or anyone else. She taught me to stand up for myself when I am in the right and do not back down. It has been put to the test many times in my life. Speaking of tests, I tested HIV positive in September 1985, while living in New York City.

KIRAN: What are you passionate about today?

DOUG: I love my family and my friends, who are like an extended family to me. I am passionate about social and economic justice, as well as, a

A Conversation with Doug Lothes

fair and transparent democracy. I am an Episcopalian with a deep, personal relationship with God – he’s usually right, by the way, which makes it a “complicated” relationship for me. Yet, it is the single most important relationship that sustains me. I love music, films (mostly classic ones), history, and travel. I’m passionate about the need for universal, pre-natal-to-palliative healthcare coverage for all Americans. We pay more money per capita for healthcare, yet have very poor results when compared to other nations with universal coverage.

KIRAN: How would you describe some of the struggles that you have faced?

DOUG: Since my HIV infection, the main struggle in my life has been securing and maintaining health insurance. Honestly, I have been extremely L-U-C-K-Y! My immune system fought the virus by itself, pretty much, for about 11 years. Then, I needed medication. Since it would be financially impossible for me to obtain a private insurance policy, I have had to be anchored to regular employment in office administration with companies large enough to carry me on their policies. I was trapped in a cycle of jobs that were not my calling to pay for healthcare to keep me alive to go to a job that was not my calling to pay for healthcare to keep me alive so I could go to a job...I have felt rather like Sisyphus for most of my adult life. Another ongoing struggle is the emotional toll of losing many friends and thousands of my generation to AIDS and the waves of survivor’s guilt

that peak and trough over the year... However, there were and are so many people worse off than I am, with far greater tragedies they have survived. Again, let me acknowledge that I am so lucky to have been born the son of teachers who saw that I had a good start and learned to think critically. Because in the healthcare morass, one needs an advanced degree in medicine and economics to figure out how to get care. I’ve jumped through more hoops than a circus pony just to get a prescription refilled.

KIRAN: From your experience how do you think attitudes towards HIV and AIDS have changed?

DOUG: As the AIDS epidemic progressed, I saw the activation of the gay and lesbian communities beyond issues of equality and sexual freedom. It was a fight for life itself. Before the epidemic, the gay community and the lesbian community interacted less with each other. As the epidemic continued, there was more of a coming together of the two communities and in the inclusion of Bisexuals and Transgender folks, as well. When high profile celebrities or sports figures were infected, the social stigma began to crack ever so slightly. As the science became more widely known, some of the irrational fear lessened. In 1987, I moved to Atlanta from New York and joined an HIV/AIDS support group. A photographer came to one of our meetings at someone’s invitation and explained that his book project was to document people with HIV/AIDS by taking their portrait in black and

white and then, under their portrait, they could inscribe whatever they wanted to say. Billy Howard was the photographer and I volunteered to be photographed, on the condition of anonymity. Being new to Atlanta and wanting to act there, I didn’t want the story of my HIV status getting out in front of me, possibly causing me to lose jobs, be denied health insurance, etc. He agreed and photographed me in my apartment living room with a turtleneck sweater pulled up to over my nose and my hands on my face, one covering an eye. In 2008, Billy and I met up again. He was shocked to see me alive. He said he believed that most everyone he photographed for his book was dead. He asked to take another photograph. This time, in color, full-faced, sweater unzipped, and able to say my name in public without the fear of the past.

KIRAN: What is the one thing or story you most want people to remember about you?

DOUG: I would like to be remembered as a good son, brother, uncle, and friend to the people I have been blessed to spend time with in my life. And, I’d like to be remembered as a talented man who wrote and performed “Gone with the Wind in 20 Minutes.”

To find out more, you can follow the work of Billy and Doug on their websites: www.gwtw20.com, www.billyhoward.com

Creative Ways to Use Stories

Project Idea 1: Living Library Project

How does a Living Library Project work?

A Living Library activity offers an approach to dealing with often serious or difficult topics, and it can go a long way in breaking down barriers and assumptions while potentially preventing issues of tension and alleviating conflict. The activity involves people offering to act as “Books.” Visitors to the “Library” have the opportunity to “borrow” a book for a conversation about themselves and their experiences. A Living Library helps us to travel the world by listening to people’s stories about where they come from and where they’ve been. People who have experienced discrimination or who are at risk of exclusion can be ‘Books’ in a Living Library. Living Library activities create safe environments in which people who would not normally converse may engage in a meaningful and constructive dialogue. The process increases understanding between people of different backgrounds.

For your event, you may choose a room, a library, community space or alternative safe venue, where “Books” can be made available to visitors. Having t-shirts or badges printed with ‘Book’ signs, and creating library cards and a library catalogue will help you to begin to create a space for people to choose a topic of interest, read books, and learn more about someone’s story.

Benefits and Opportunities:

- Increased understanding between groups – ‘Readers’ and ‘Books’ of diverse ages, ethnicities, or backgrounds.
- Young ‘Books’ give older adults a chance to meet with young people and help them to face their own prejudices.
- Living Libraries offer people who are ‘Books’ opportunities for growth. They create opportunities for ‘Books’ to read other ‘Books,’ to make friends with each other, to develop and increase their understanding of people in their community.

How to Choose and Recruit Living Books

‘Books’ from different cultures are some of the most popular books read by readers. ‘Books’ on different religions, ways of life, specific customs and practices, issues of sexuality, abuse, and responses to conflict are also popular amongst ‘Readers’. There is also great value from reading elderly people’s stories as ‘Books’.

It is important to be clear about the purpose of your Living Library. Find ‘Books’ that represent diverse personal stories. Individuals who have experienced marginalization, negative stereotyping and prejudice in their local community offer new readers a chance to gain new perspectives and insights into current issues or unresolved tensions. Include people from various backgrounds and ages, including those that represent a way of life that is different to those of most of the readers. Choose people to become books from diverse cultural or faith backgrounds as well as indigenous, disabled or people from mixed sexualities and gender perspectives. Traditional artists, poets, and community storytellers offer great insights for understanding the traditions held by a community. Consider what stories are missing from your library and try to include them. ‘Books’ need to have a personal story to share.

Once the initial contact with potential ‘Books’ has been made by phone, referral, or in person, set up a first face-to-face meeting. Give ‘Books’ an overview of the project and discuss how a Living Library works and what is involved. Listen to their stories and encourage books to think about key chapters they may tell to others. Coming up with a Book title for the catalogue will encourage focus. Discuss story ideas and help books to formulate their story pages. Help them decide which parts of their story to talk about.

Ask Books to bring along a draft story page and practice readings with other Books.

People may recognize they need more time for healing before they are ready to be a Book therefore it is the organizer’s responsibility to make a judgment call if Books

are ready to share their stories in this way. Often personal objects, like photos will help to illustrate stories and help to focus a story. You may decide that giving people the transcriptions from an interview will help participants to create their own Book story. The interview process will ignite ideas about personal stories that he or she may feel compelled to turn into a book themselves.

Invite readers to select their books

Once you have your books and readers confirmed and have chosen a day to host the Living Library event, you are now ready to begin your Living Library project. Open up your Living Library and allow readers to interact with their chosen Books. You may ask readers to select a few Books to meet that day, or carry out a rotation. You may decide to host your Living Library around World Book Day, International Women's Day, Human Rights day or International Children Day, as this will help to promote and offer focus to your event. Ideas about important years and dates are provided in the appendices of this toolkit.

Encourage readers to select books that offer something new to them. These may be interrelated with specific themes or events. As you compile your library think about how to offer a wide ranging selection that draws from refugee stories or themes around home, belonging, place, identity, migration, travel, change, family, or community.

Feedback & Follow-Up

Following the Living Library event, encourage your Books and readers to share what they have learned. You may want to do this by asking them to write up their own personal stories or tell their experience of the event in their own way. You can choose to conduct an informal interview with them to allow readers to share what they have learned about others. Taking photographs of one-on-one conversations can also be used as follow-up material to spark great conversations and allow further follow-up events. These materials may be used in conjunction with a local museum, art gallery, community

space, town square, or place of worship to create a living community program that speaks and tells the stories of its own community. Of course, how you pitch your events and programs will depend on the groups you are working with, the issues being raised, and what you're aiming to achieve by hosting the event.

*The world is a book and those
that do not travel will only
ever read the first page.*

—St. Augustine Golden Threads

Spotlight: Annie Johnson — Transgender Identity



ANNIE JOHNSON PHOTO COURTESY OF
KIRAN SINGH SIRAH

Meeting and interacting with Annie was a unique experience for me. In the past I had met people that identify with the transgender community, but never have I had the chance to discuss the process of going through such a transition. Annie is a warm, giving, and caring person, who is passionate about equality issues in our world, not just those that affect the LGBT (Lesbian Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community. We had a chance meeting and, after I wrote the first draft of this story from the original taped interview transcription, I sent this draft to Annie via e-mail, and we exchanged versions until we were both happy with the final product.

A Conversation with Annie Johnson

There are a lot of people who want to learn how to deal with their own discrimination. If other people do not give you a chance to be different with them, I don't know what you do, but if they do give you a chance, you need to be centered, and you need to deal with other people's discomfort by being friendly and open.

I was born in Indianapolis in 1950. Transition for me means a whole bunch of things. After I transitioned, my mom told me that when I was about 18 months old, I used to climb up on to her bed and get into her night gowns. I had my first

haircut when I was two, I had long curly blonde hair down to my shoulders, and when it all went I think at that point, at some level, I knew they were going to make me be a boy, and so the experience was really traumatic. When I try and put myself back, mentally, in elementary school, there is this sense of terror that came from the fact that I had to be a boy, which I did not know how to do. I wanted to be a girl. I just felt lost.

It is very common for transsexuals to lose their family, their jobs, and friends, literally a lot of people lose everything, and then many transsexuals end up working on the street, because often there is nothing else that they can do.

There were times that not dealing with my gender identity issues kind of overwhelmed me. I've told people before that most of the things I have

done in my life that I am ashamed of came out of not dealing with my gender identity issues, because there was all of this latent energy looking for a way out. This all the more reinforces to me the importance that LGBT people and people anywhere that have issues and who are not dealing with them—these can come back and blindside you and make you do things that you would not normally do.

I spent forty years pretending to be a guy, and when I was in transition I was also pretending to be a girl, because I just didn't know how to be a girl. When I first went out in public as a woman I was scared half to death, and all I did was go for a walk. Later I got to where I went out and shopped, but I could tell that I was being read as "a man in a dress". The next day I went out again and a sales clerk came up to me from behind, and asked if she could help me, and I

“Confidence...is so important, because people pick up on discomfort and then they start to wonder what’s wrong.”

just fell apart. I quickly left the store, and found a bench and sat down. I thought to myself that my reaction was so stupid, and remembered that I had shopped for women’s clothes as a man, and joked with the sales clerks. I decided that I needed to put that attitude on, that I was going to just have a good time, and if anyone read me the rest of the day I couldn’t tell. Confidence—being comfortable with yourself—is so important, because people pick up on discomfort and then they start to wonder what’s wrong. When I got well into my transition I realized that what I most needed was to be accepted in the women’s community. This is the most important thing to me.

Nowadays I live pretty much out as a transgendered person. I don’t wear a sign on my head saying that I am TG, but I also am not embarrassed about it. If I speak with someone for more

than a few minutes I almost always tell them that I am TG. My rule is that if I am avoiding saying things to hide that I am TG, it’s time to tell. I think that my self-confidence combined with the live and let live attitudes where I live allow me to be as out as I am. I am one of those very few people that get both Mother’s Day cards and Father’s Day cards. My forty two year old daughter said to me when I told her I was going to transition, “I’ve always been who I thought I should be, and you should be who you think you should be, but you’ll always be my daddy.” She writes me notes, and signs them saying “Dear Daddy” [smiles].

When Harvey Milk was active in San Francisco, before he was assassinated, one of his big messages was that you have to be out, because when you’re out, your neighbors, your family, your straight friends will come

to know someone who’s gay, and knowing that you’re a good person, the idea that you’re gay, doesn’t then automatically mean you’re a bad, evil, or terrible person. I think people being out is the single biggest factor in changing attitudes.

Creative Ways to Use Stories

Project Idea 2: Photo Voice

Photo Voice was first developed in 1995 by Caroline C. Wang as a means for women living in rural villages in China to communicate important health messages to policymakers. Photo Voice is a photographic approach to auto-ethnography, activism, and social participation. It is a participatory approach that supports and creates tools for empowering participants to develop personal voice, a sense of community, and to identify future directions for social change.

Photo Voice is about putting cameras in the hands of participants to give them ownership over the stories they tell and the issues they address. These stories may be used to explore the root causes of social issues and can be used to alleviate conflicts, challenge stigmas, and promote a sense of community and shared group identity. Photo Voice helps to document meaningful moments and encourage critical discussion.

The Process

You can use digital cameras, mobile phone cameras, or disposable cameras. It has become more common to use digital cameras or phones; however, disposable cameras may be useful if you're working with groups with little access to digital devices. This is a judgment call on your part, depending on your group and the context of your work.

Consider using video and/or audio to document the process as well as to capture the discussion elements of the workshops. This will provide great stimuli for follow up discussions and interviews.

1) Initial workshop

Allow time to discuss photography examples in the initial stages. You may want to provide some examples of photographers from around the world who use photography to highlight social, local and global issues, such as Jenny Matthews (<http://www.jennymphoto.com/>), Sebastiao Salgado (<http://www.unicef.org/salgado/>), and Roland Freeman (<http://www.tgcd.org/>).

You may also want to watch “Born into Brothels,” an award winning documentary that uses a Photo Voice approach (Can be found on <http://freedocumentaries.org/>). This film does contain some difficult ethical issues, therefore watching it in advance and preparing some questions and reflections would be useful.

Give participants the tools and materials. Review the purpose of Photo Voice and the purpose of your specific project. Use open questions to help participants identify photo subjects that are meaningful for them. A few open questions will allow participants to focus but at the same time open up opportunities to explore and share their unique voice. The questions you ask depends on what you want the group to focus on. Consider using or adapting questions from the interview guide section and following up the process with an interview as well.

Some questions to consider asking participants:

- What places, turning points, and meeting points best show what is happening in your community?
- In what ways does your community cross boundaries (of race, class, ethnicity, age, gender, etc.)?
- What changes would you like to see in your community?
- What barriers are there for progress in your community?
- What is working well for you in your community?
- If you could change one thing in your community what would it be?

2) Photo taking, development, and reflection

Allow participants a week or more to become familiar with their cameras, take pictures, and return them (plus time for processing if you are using film). Assist participants with the process if it is new for them. Process a digital/CD copy and 2 standard-sized prints of each photo. Label both sets of photos on the back. Keep the digital copy and one set of photos.

Ask participants to select 3 photos that best respond to the initial questions that they're willing to share. Encourage participants to select photos they find most significant and meaningful and that tell the story they want to share. You can provide photo reflection sheets with questions to help participants write up accompanying narrative descriptions. Planning time for this will help with reflection on the whole process and enrich the final group workshop.

Mount the printed photos and narratives onto poster board in a uniform manner that doesn't distract from the photos and the accompanying descriptions. Simpler is better, so consider using black text on a white or cream background. Depending on your group, you may want to translate text, or use the primary language of participants or a combination of languages.

3) Reflection/Final Workshop

Organize a one-day workshop for participants to come together, share, and learn collectively from the Photo Voice experience. This workshop can be organized into the following themes:

- Appreciating of one another's photos
- Developing a collective story
- Sharing a story and photo montage

Appreciation

Encourage photographers to circulate through the room to view and appreciate each other's photos and stories. In appreciating photos, a simple way for participants to engage in discussion is to follow these three steps:

- 1. Description:** Participants simply describe what they see: the subject, landscape or portrait, black and white or use of color, etc.
- 2. Interpretation:** Participants discuss what they think the photographer was trying to achieve, what it means. What messages might the photographer be trying to convey, address, challenge, or explore?
- 3. Judgment:** Participants discuss what they like or dislike about the image and why. Personal judgment is an interesting discussion for engaging with art. A person might not like a world-renowned masterpiece, but at the same time appreciate what it has to tell us. Judgment is subjective, and helps to develop individual voice.



PARTNERS FOUNDATION FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT, THE ROMANIAN ORGANIZATION AFFILIATED WITH PARTNERS, USED PHOTO VOICE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE TO DOCUMENT THE DISCRIMINATION THEY FACE EVERY DAY.

Photo Voice *continued...*

Story Development and Sharing

Depending on the size and composition of your group, you can form smaller teams to work together on selecting photographs that speak to a particular story or theme. Teams can do this verbally or through placing dots or post-it notes next to the photos that they feel relate best to their chosen theme, story, or topic. Each group then uses those photos to create a photo board with a title and give a short oral presentation of their photo board. They can discuss how the photos complement each other: are there any layouts of photographs that help to tell a story from beginning, middle, and end? Is this important? Does the grouping of photos give rise to any other thoughts about how they might be displayed together? Managing inclusion is the role of the facilitator at this stage, judging which photos are included and not included and being mindful that people feel included in this process of selection. Ask for any thoughts, reactions, or questions. This is a good time for photographers to share their individual and collective experiences as they relate to specific photos.

As facilitator, you can stimulate group discussion by asking groups to explain:

- Why they have selected these photos.
- How these pictures work together? What story do they tell?
- How are the pictures similar and how are they different?
- What challenges are being highlighted here? How are they being addressed successfully or unsuccessfully?
- What kind of discussion will these photos spark in your community?
- How does this relate to your life and the lives of people in your community?
- If the sky were the limit, what would be your next steps to further the work of your group?
- What barriers are there to making this happen?

Photo Voice offers a visual and impactful way of sharing a group message and collective issues with a wider audience. With the permission of the photographers, photos may be made available to the public, stakeholders, and policy makers through a public exhibition.

Photo documentary work can be a part of or support other activities in this toolkit. Participants can use the photographs to inspire scripts, plays, or poems. People who are shy or reluctant to tell their stories with an audience are often helped by focusing on their concrete work. Having a selection of photos with stories also make great examples for multimedia presentations, creative exhibitions, or online narratives, where a combination of written poetry, spoken word performances, interviews, and images can be used.

Creative Ways to Use Stories

Project Idea 3: Stories Through Theater

Theater can be a powerful tool for building, shaping, and developing stories. The use of theater is especially useful with groups in breaking through language and cultural barriers. It does not require background experience in drama, nor does it involve literacy skills to be effective. Often theater communicates with the whole person as it appeals to our emotions, prejudices, and aspirations using mime, dance, and images. Theater can be used to make us face up to aspects, tensions or conflicts in our own lives that we often try to ignore.

Theater has been used in community development in various ways. Some of the most effective theater was developed by Brazilian theater specialist Augusto Boal, where his Theater for the Oppressed is now used extensively across the world in building social movements, in teaching, and as an empowerment model to support marginalized communities in developing a ‘voice’.

Theater can be used to turn personal and collective stories into public dramas, that support advocacy or as a way for the participants to engage more readily in the issues raised. Theater does often ignite a desire for people to respond and take action on issues they feel are important to address.

How Does Theater Build Meaningful Stories?

Dramatic action allows ideas to come to life. This particular technique allows participants to experiment with their own ideas so it is, in a sense, automatically person-centered. Topics that can be raised through theater can include; drugs, marriage, friendship, environment, health, employment, conflict, community tension, land disputes, elections, anxieties and many more. In using forum theater, invisible theater, and playback theater it is easier to raise awareness of choice and action because cause and effect can be explored safely through a fictional framework.

Benefits and Opportunities:

1. Gives ‘voice’ to marginalized people and communities.
2. Provides a mirror to concerns in the community and creates a forum where these issues can be explored.
3. Presents attitudes and behaviors which may seem difficult to imagine for communities affected by war, conflict or division.
4. Introduces models that meet challenges and difficulties experienced as a result of conflict and provides a “way out.”
5. Deals with sensitive subjects such as justice, peace, conflict resolution and reconciliation, as well as conflict prevention, which are often difficult subjects to tackle for communities affected by instability and crisis.
6. Promotes discourse, dialogue, and agreement as an ideal to follow, acting as a catalyst for change.
7. Highlights traditional artists and tradition-bearers living in conflict regions as a way to engage in the process of collective community story-building through theater.

Helping People Develop Their Own Stories

Stories help individuals and communities make sense of their place in the world. Facilitators planning to use theater with a community need to spend time building relationships with individuals. Finding an interesting way of encouraging people to talk about themselves is often a good start. Participants could be asked to bring to a meeting an object or photo of personal value. They could be asked, in turn, to share the histories and stories of those objects. People could also be asked to sing culturally-specific folk songs, tell traditional jokes and explore the use of proverbs in their communities. These may then be used to create short drama pieces. By the sharing of stories, important and relevant aspects of the community will gradually emerge.

You can begin simply by getting people in pairs or small groups to tell each other stories. The listener can retell the story they just heard to another person. Participants could pass one story around a circle, with each person making slight changes each time the story is retold.

Introductory Theater Activity

This activity does involve movement and therefore encouraging groups to wear light and comfortable clothes, to warm-up and use voice exercises helps in making people feel more at ease with themselves. Participants then divide into two groups and form two circles – an inner circle and an outer circle, with each inner participant facing one outer participant. The inner circle participants begin a story. It helps to provide them with a suggestion. For example, “Tell a story about a special moment that happened to you this week.” Each person then creates a one-minute story and tells it to their outer circle partner.

The outer circle move around one place and then passes on the story they have just heard to their new inner circle partners. This time, however, they add something new in the story. Have the outer circle move around one place again to the next inner circle person, who will repeat to them the story they have just heard. Continue this process of moving the outer participants one place each time. They will alternately listen to a story, passing it on to another person each time, always adding one new aspect to the story. When all outer participants have partnered with those on the inside, stop. Stories will be jumbled up but this is part of the fun!

By the end each person will have a unique final story, which includes input from the others. Now divide participants into several smaller groups. Each person tells their final story to each other and decides which story is most preferred. What is included in the stories will reveal a great deal about the group as a whole – what is important to them, how they are interconnected, how they feel, what they believe, or what has happened to them in the past week, for example, and how they might relate to others in the community.

Turning Stories into Theater

Participants should agree which story to choose to develop into a play. How ‘good’ the performance ends up becoming relates to the amount of ownership that the group feels towards the material they have created. As facilitator you may need to highlight issues concerning what is possible to act out, as discarded stories may also be incorporated into the chosen story. They may want to embellish aspects of the story and/or add characters, events, and situations taken from real life. At the same time it is okay to use made-up events, as this is a creative process and allowing participants to take ownership and feel in control is a key aspect of using theater.

Exploring Issues, Local Culture, and Audiences

Often delicate and sensitive issues that are difficult to discuss can be explored through the use of dramatic action. Role Playing of a different character enables people to say things that would be difficult to do in their own voices. Humor can often help share difficult issues in ways that are easy to understand and make sense of. However, starting out more lightly and working towards more difficult subjects takes time and patience, and therefore it is worth allowing time for groups to become more comfortable with each other and confident in their abilities to use drama before stepping into controversial or difficult subjects.

Participants do not always have to base theater around their own life situations. Imagining different cultural settings can also be used, as can the use of local culture.

Cultural forms such as dance, storytelling, games, music, visual images, and food customs can be strong components of using theater. Cultural activities often encourage lively participation and communication.

Give careful thought about how to involve the audience. Could they be involved as other actors? As participants? Through follow-up activities? Wherever possible, people within the community can be identified who can be involved to support the process to be sustained by the community.

Exploring Issues with Role-Play

Role play asks participants to improvise a scene or character. They may create a scene about a topic they choose, such as violence, power relations, child soldiers, health, birth, death, or sickness. Other participants can interact; when they recognize a scene, they can shout “Freeze.” The scene becomes frozen and the participant can then enter the scene. The facilitator and the two actors continue the improvisation. The facilitator can freeze the scene again and ask, “What is missing from this scene?” They can invite suggestions from other participants or audience members. This process can be repeated until a scene is complete. This dramatic action highlights issues for discussion within the group. The activity can then go on to be developed as these stories emerge.

Using theater to build collective stories requires patience, trust, and active participation. This encourages groups to get to know one another, interact with one another, and to know that it does not matter how good an actor is, but that taking part is what counts. Here is a simple warm-up exercise you should consider using for newer groups and for people that have met for the first time.

Crossing the Circle and Building Trust

Participants form a large circle facing inward. Participants identify someone standing opposite him or her. When you say “Start,” each participant must close his or her eyes, walk across the circle and stand in the place of the person opposite them. All of the participants involved do this at the same time. People get muddled and mixed up, but eventually will sort themselves out and find their opposite partner. Although fun and lighthearted, the activity encourages participation, interaction, and solidarity-building. Participants can be asked how they felt doing this with their eyes closed and how the exercise relates to real life stories and personal experiences.

Follow-Up and Feedback

Encouraging people to write up their experiences on the chosen themes will allow for people to be able to make sense of many of the issues explored. It will also allow the group itself to explore solutions to difficult themes and complex ideas. You may want to ask each group member to complete a personal journal, and look at creating a short script, poem, or short play as a result of what they have learned. This can be fictional or based on an aspect of the story they have just played out. This is also a form of creative nonfiction, where theater may be used to transform real life stories.

The conviction that there is an actor in each of us is the driving force behind a form of drama that seeks to awaken consciences and change lives.

—Augusto Boal

Spotlight: Forum Theater by FPDL Romania



"YOUNG MULTIPLIERS" PROJECT
PHOTO COURTESY OF PARTNERS FOUNDATION FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (ROMANIA)

Partners Foundation for Local Development (FPDL) is a Romanian non-profit organization committed to the enhancement of the democratic processes of governance, supporting local development, strengthening the civil society, and promoting a new culture of change and conflict management. As a part of their "Youth Multipliers" project, promoting youth participation, Partners Foundation for Local Development (FPDL) staged six Forum Theater plays in Bucharest together with young volunteers (18-25 years old). The project promoted the principle of youth participation through volunteerism and was supported by the European Commission's Youth in Action Program. The use of Forum Theater increased awareness of the importance of volunteering and its impact on personal and community development. 500 young people, public authorities, and NGO sector members participated.

"Advocacy and Forum Theater" implemented a complex capacity-building program in advocacy for youth organizations from Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Serbia, and Lithuania, and added a Forum Theater component as a means to build public awareness around issues identified by their communities. Themes included child education and hygiene. The Azeri Organization, having raised public awareness on these issues and gained public support, have further developed advocacy campaigns to bring internet access to public schools and ensure proper facilities for child hygiene.

Volunteers from France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, and Turkey staged three Forum Theater plays for community members from Bucharest to challenge discrimination against institutionalized children, increase awareness of the reality of institutionalized children, and to create a positive change of attitude in children's lives.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PARTNERS FOUNDATION FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (ROMANIA)

Creative Ways to Use Stories

Project Idea 4: Spoken Word/Slam Poetry

Poetry is a powerful tool for helping people make lasting changes in their lives. Poetry is also a form of storytelling. Many professional storytellers often incorporate poetics into their stories and storytelling repertoire. The use of poetics in our stories can often make our live storytelling more compelling and engaging. The language and performance of poetry can influence us deeply. When we put our thoughts onto paper or deliver poetry to live audiences, it's a first step in finding out what we think. Poetry is effective because it's short and gets to the point quickly. Communities around the world have been using oral poetry for years, to teach or to pass on traditions, values, beliefs and messages to the next generation. Even people who do not think of themselves as poets can write some of the best poetry when they talk about personal life experiences.

Reading other people's poetry can also be a way to shift the way we see our problems and come up with different solutions. Poetry can be used to heal and impart wisdom in everyday language. Poetry is accessible to anyone to see, experience, and imagine life and ideas in different ways. Poetry has the power to connect us to ourselves and to others so that we know we are not alone. Poetry can change our lives and societies.

Slam poetry has become ever more popular amongst younger people across the world (though not exclusively amongst young people). It evokes emotional responses from the audience through the rhythm of the lines, the choice of words, the concrete and visual images that are created, and the short but snappy three-minute time frame. Slam is poetry created to be performed to a live audience; it is as much about the audience's reactions and act of performing as it is about the words themselves. In Slam, the two go hand in hand; when the reader speaks the words aloud, there is communication between the poet and the audience which does not often occur with a story that is read silently.

A poem attempts to say the most by saying the least. Poets have certain methods at their disposal, such as symbolism, rhyme, meter, personification, and many others.

Slam poetry carefully arranges groups of words in verse that have an effect that is both beautiful and hard-hitting. While you can choose any topic, Slam poems are frequently used as a way for the poet to make a statement about society. They are almost always written to be performed aloud. Although there might be a competitive element, Slam poets use poetry to share ideas and support one another through personal stories. The role of the audience is to offer their support and this can be done through snapping fingers whilst the poet reads aloud, especially when a poet says something meaningful, puts together a great line of words, or perhaps when the poet has an emotional response and needs encouragement from the audience. Snapping fingers is like a silent applause, and builds solidarity amongst audience and poets and encourages poets to keep going when they might forget words or feel anxious about performing in front of others.

You may want to start off poems with first line phrases and repeat these for each verse. This works well when working with groups on common themes and ideas or focused topics. You may think about focusing a theme of a writing workshop on issues of 'scars,' hurt, loss, gain, love, belief, or God.

Here are some ideas of first lines or statements that can help to begin poems.

"I honor my ancestors..."

"I cherish my mother..."

"Inside my heart there resides..."

"You're like a..."

"There is no such thing as..."

"This poem talks about..."

You may want to prompt participants to become aware of rhyming patterns of sound or image and repetition and provide a variety of other poems as examples.

Writing Group Slam Poems

Writing group slam poems is a very effective way of getting started and introducing people to this form of poetry. You may pass around pieces of paper and ask people to write one sentence that may relate to a chosen theme or end with discussion of a difficult topic. Everyone in the group will write one line, but to build some patterns into the poem, all the lines need to have some things in common. The group needs to make some choices: Each line could begin with “I,” “You,” or “We”—which will it be? Each line could include a color, a shape, a sound, or a person in the group—which will it be? Each line could include a feeling, a place, event, or object - which will it be?

Allow the participants one minute (or less) to write their lines.

As pieces of paper are passed around the room in a circle, these papers eventually come back to the original author and that person can then read out aloud the group poem that they started. As facilitator, you can ask, “Does the poem feel rhythmically whole? Disjointed?”

Are there any topics or themes that people want to focus on specifically?

Have each participant come up with a title for their own composition, and then discuss the proposed titles. Why do they differ? Does the composition/poem mean different things to different people? Do participants think that the title is acceptable for the poem?

There are many forms of poetry specific to local cultures, regions, and parts of the world.

In some languages, finding end rhyming couplets is easier. For example, in Spanish there are many words that end in similar-sounding vowels. In some cultures, proverbs and poetry might also be used more every day, in schools, in places of worship, amongst family, or in rural communities as a mode to call and respond to one another and remind each other of identity, group, or belonging. When we listen carefully, we will also hear poetry in everyday speech, preachers, religious leaders, or politicians

who often use poetics in their speeches to make it more appealing.

In Mexico, corridos are a popular form of song poetry that often includes characters and themes about family, historical events, betrayal, oppression, or daily life of local communities.

The Smithsonian Institute’s *Corridos Sin Fronteras* has an example of creating your own corridos to music, which can be viewed at www.corridos.org

*It is through poetry that we
give name to those ideas
which are—until the poem—
nameless and formless, about
to be birthed, but already felt.*

—Audre Lorde

Spotlight: A Homeless Shelter Story

by Kiran Singh Sirah



J AT THE SHELTER
PHOTO COURTESY OF KIRAN SINGH SIRAH

I never expected to meet and connect with another artist when I started to record homeless stories. But that's what happened when I met J, who now volunteers and supports other homeless people in a shelter that was once his home. When we met we connected through our conversations and love for art and music. J told me his story. I decided to turn this into a performance slam poem as a way to communicate a sense of life in shelters. When I turned up at the homeless shelter kitchen to interview J, he was busy washing some dishes in the corner of the community kitchen sink. After a while we sat adjacent to one another at one of the canteen tables; it was as quiet a space as I could find. I placed my small white digital recorder on the table. We faced one another with no physical obstructions but our hands. I gave J a transcribed version of the interview and since then we have been working together to support the collection of more homeless stories. Our hope

is that through this process we help to challenge the stigmas attached to homelessness in the town we both live in.

A Conversation with J

I come from a patchwork family; my mother died when I was seven so I went to live with my grandmother. The only thing she ever wanted for me was to go to college. Two weeks after I started college, she died. You hear the news stories of how close many of us are to homelessness and I never thought that I would end up in that position. I came to the shelter the day after Labor Day in two thousand and eight and I stayed here for two years. That was a very difficult part of life and these people helped me get through it. Now I come back to volunteer. I wish I had the finances to contribute. But all I have is time, so I give that. One of the things

about this place is that you're given the opportunity to improve your situation. There's just about everything you need to reconstruct your life, which is a powerful thing when you have nothing. To get that assistance is priceless.

One of the things about homelessness is that there are no written directions to how your progress should be. Sometimes it's about negotiating your way in order to find a way out. People here don't just ask who you are, or where you've been. Instead they ask you about the things that you need to help you to reconstruct your life. When I was living here I found myself to be a far different person than what I had grown up to be. It doesn't matter where you come from or how well behaved you have been in your life. This is a different experience to deal with. At first I found myself more difficult to connect with. I had become withdrawn. For me the most difficult situation was to offer my friendship to anyone, much less, accept other people's friendship. It takes longer to make a trusting connection, but overtime, I've made some really good friends here. I can now speak for what was one of the bleakest experiences I can think off. I am now finally developing the ability to talk about it. With homeless people every story is different. It's quite a revelation to have nothing and that's the story that I would like everyone to come to know and to give proper acknowledgement to.

Spotlight *continued...*

Shelter Stories

by J Freeman

(A slam poem written to be performed)

How to write a slam poem:

1. Write down the main subject of your slam poem, such as “the homeless.” This subject will serve as a focus as you write.
2. Write a rough draft of your poem, focusing only on the emotions and ideas you want to express. Do not worry about verses, rhyming, or even complete sentences. Simply get the feelings you want on paper.
3. Use words that are associated with local dialect, language, and local culture, if it is natural for you to speak in this way.
4. Find strong verbs. For example: instead of “laughed,” consider “giggled” or “fell off my seat.”
5. Look for places to use metaphors and similes in your slam poem. These create visual images that evoke emotional responses. Instead of saying “you’re comforting,” change it to something like “you’re as consoling as a snug fireplace.” Instead of “she got angry,” say, “she erupted like a volcano”.
6. Read your poem aloud to yourself, then to the group. Read with emotion and passion: Slam poets are performers. Find the rhythm of your poem.

If shelters could speak,
 What stories they’d tell
 Some stories speak softly
 Others stories do yell
 His story, our story, stories untold
 Speaking, spoken, stories unfold

Words of survival,
 Carve out in bold,
 Words more precious
 Shinier than silver,
 Richer than gold
 Judgment may
 Sometime lie
 Talking sidewalks
 A questioning of why
 A poetic script,
 Poem, performance, slam
 Shelter kitchen,
 Serving
 Pork, beef, ham
 Beans, Bread, lamb
 Corn, Jelly, spam
 A mosaic of stories
 Scribing moments with hand.
 Narratives rippling conversations
 Like waves into sand.
 Senses take note
 Men joke
 In circles of smoke
 Losing dimes and dollars,
 In strokes of bad luck,
 Bread butter knife
 Blandest and bleakest experiences of life
 Trails of tears,
 While do others continue to embellish their fears?

Listening to the beats from a homeless drum
 If shelters could speak, what stories they’d tell
 Some stories speak softly
 Whilst others stories might yell

Links and Resources on Storytelling

Below is a set of links that are worth looking into for ideas about how to use stories to suit the work that you do. Some of these examples have been designed for different audiences how using this toolkit, you can try and adapt and apply the resources to the examples in this toolkit.

Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage Cultural Education Resources:

www.folklife.si.edu

www.culturetools.org/resources.html

www.comingtothetable.org

The Art of Storytelling Show: Interviewing the best of the Storytelling Community www.bit.ly/1ujnnqD

How to Master the Art of Storytelling to Increase Social Sharing www.bit.ly/1DMEJMy

Storytelling, Passport to the 21st Century, contains archives of compelling stories and helpful hints on how prepare a story www.creatingthe21stcentury.org

The National Storytelling Network www.storynet.org

Ismael's Corner, storytelling through a business prism, offers helpful techniques and guidance for storytelling

www.ishmaelscorner.com/tag/storytelling-techniques

The International Storytelling Center www.storytellingcenter.net

The ISC Learning Library www.storytellingcenter.net/learning/learning-library

World Storytelling Day www.worldstorytellingday.org

Partners www.partnersglobal.org

Interdependent Pics. www.interdependentpictures.org

Michael O. Snyder www.michalosnyder.com

We welcome your feedback!

We would very much like to hear your thoughts on this toolkit. Has it been useful in your work? How might it be improved? Can you give one suggestion as to how the Toolkit can be developed in the future?

If you have used this toolkit, please let us know which section you found most relevant. Perhaps you might like to share some stories that have come from using this toolkit?

Your feedback and comments to us would be very welcome.

kiran@storytellingcenter.net

efelix@partnersglobal.org

Appendix 1: Interview Release Form

Name of Storyteller: _____

Date/Time/Place of interview: _____

Interviewer's name: _____

Project Name: _____

Contact details (Address/Phone/Email): _____

: _____

Age/Date of Birth: _____

By signing the form below, you give your permission for the interview and/or video and/or audio made during this project to be used for publication purposes including exhibitions, World Wide Web, and presentations.

Should you have any specific restrictions or agreements, please indicate them below:

I agree to the uses of these materials described above, except for restrictions outlined above.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2: Sample Photo Release Form

Name of Storyteller: _____

Permission to Use Photograph

Subject: _____

Location: _____

I grant to [insert organization], its representatives and employees the right to take photographs of me and my property in connection with the above-identified subject. I authorize [insert organization], its assigns and transferees to copyright, use and publish the same in print and/or electronically.

I agree that [insert organization] may use such photographs of me with or without my name and for any lawful purpose, including for example such purposes as publicity, illustration, advertising, and Web content.

I have read and understand the above.

Signature _____

Printed name _____

Organization Name (if applicable) _____

Address _____

Date _____

Signature, parent or guardian _____ (if under age 18)

Appendix 3: UN Awareness Days and Years*

UN Awareness Days and Years are a good way of focusing telling stories that matter. They may be used to focus efforts, workshops, and storytelling events around as way of connecting with internationally- themed programs, opportunities, and events. There may also be other events in the community that coincide with such days and therefore offers an opportunity to foster new partnerships with other organizations and groups. The UN awareness days may be used to plan your events or you may choose to focus on local religious and cultural days of the year that are more specific to the communities you are working with. In planning these, you may also think about sharing story examples of your projects by connecting with other themed programs that take place across the world on the same day. There may also be opportunities to adapt projects to encourage live intercultural dialogue with use of the web or Skype.

January

January 11th: National Human Trafficking Awareness Day

January 15th: World Religion Day

January 27th: International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust

January 31st: Street Children's Day

February

February 4th: World Cancer Day

February 6th: International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation

February 12th: Red Hand Day - Child Soldier Awareness

February 20th: World Day of Social Justice

February 21st: International Mother Language Day [UNESCO]

March

March 8th: International Women's Day

March 21st: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

March 21st: World Poetry Day [UNESCO]

March 22nd: World Water Day

March 24th: International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims

March 25th: International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

April

April 1st: Youth Homelessness Matters Day

April 2nd: Autism Awareness Day

April 7th: Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Rwanda Genocide

April 22nd: International Mother Earth Day

April 23rd: World Book and Copyright Day [UNESCO]

April 26th: World Intellectual Property Day [WIPO]

April 29th: International Dance Day

May

May 15th: International Day of Families

May 17th: International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia

May 21st: World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development

May 30th: International Rape Awareness day

June

June 6th: Hunger Day

June 20th: World Refugee Day

June 26th: International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

June 26th: United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

July

First Saturday in July: International Day of Cooperatives

July 18th: Nelson Mandela International Day

July 26th: Disability (ADA) Awareness Day

July 30th: International Day of Friendship

August

August 9th: International Day of the World's Indigenous People

August 9th: National Women's Day in South Africa

August 12th: Youth Day

August 23rd: International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and Its Abolition [UNESCO]

September

September 8th: International Literacy Day [UNESCO]

September 10th: World Suicide Prevention Day [WHO]

September 21st: International Day of Peace

October

October 1st: Day of Older Persons

October 2nd: International Day of Non-Violence

October 5th: Poetry Day

October 10th: World Mental Health Day

October 15th: International Day of Rural Women

October 16th: World Food Day

November

November 14th: World Diabetes Day

November 16th: International Day for Tolerance

November 20th: Universal Children's Day

November 25th: International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

November 9th: World Freedom Day

December

December 1st: World AIDS Day

December 3rd: International Day of Persons with Disabilities

December 10th: Human Rights Day

December 18th: International Migrants Day

December 19th: United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation

December 20th: International Human Solidarity Day

United Nations Years**2015**

International Year of Light and Light-based Technologies

International Year of Soils [FAO]

2016

International Year of Pulses

International Year of Camelids

*UN dates may change and vary year to year.



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