

Making a Difference Hall of Fame

Celebrating life

Capturing the life story of individuals with dementia brings rewards to service users, their families and staff



The Challenge

"How do you care for someone you don't know?"

Paul Batson recognises that caring for older adults who are diagnosed with dementia can be challenging. Getting to know the person behind the illness is important and gaining a rounded view of the individual reaps benefits for everyone.

This 'Life Story/ Life Review' approach isn't just about how the person is today but is about looking back to see the full and fruitful lives they have led up until now.

Medical notes are not routinely used to capture the personal life story of service users, however, the electronic patient record has potential to record fuller information about the individual. Using the electronic record in this way requires a significant culture shift.

What we did

Paul Batson, dramatherapist, has been working hard for many years to spread the practice of life story work; both as a therapeutic tool and as a source of rich information for health professionals to draw upon.

Paul facilitates the creation of both story boards and books in group settings or by working with an individual and their families. He supports people to tell the story of their life.

The product of life story work is a story board or book that is kept in service users rooms and is accessible to all. They contain facts and information about jobs and families, hobbies and interests. Story boards or books include photographs and reminiscences, likes and dislikes as well as habits and life values.

Key learning

- Life story work promotes personalised care for individuals with dementia, promoting dignity and respect
- Life story/ life review work is evidence-based and included in NICE guidelines
- Life story work helps individuals with dementia to recall aspects of their life
- Life story work actively involves family in therapy
- Story Boards or Books give healthcare workers a new way of understanding their clients and improves communication

Making a Difference Hall of Fame



Who was involved

Paul Batson	Arts Psychotherapist Drama
Ellie Gramlich	OT Technician, Victoria Centre
Alex Kay	Staff Nurse, Charter House

It is especially important to show the person in their prime as well as over the years. This information enables staff to connect with service users as a person

The process of generating the story board/ book is as important as the final product. Therapeutic sessions bring up a variety of memories, some painful for the service user and their families. The presence of the therapist helps support the different parties in facing what can be uncomfortable to address.

What difference did it make

A questionnaire was used to gain feedback about the Life Story approach and capture satisfaction from carers, service users.

Responses demonstrated that this approach made a positive difference. 58% of Carer feedback reported that the Life Story work helped their relative to recall people, events and achievements. 100% of staff reported positive benefits of life story boards and books in their work with individuals with dementia.

Paul identifies multiple benefits in life story work. The prime benefit is to the service user who can engage with their history again and this has the effect of improving self confidence and self esteem. Individuals feel that they are not lost from memory but can find themselves again in the book or story board. It helps them connect with their strengths once more and restores a sense of dignity.

The following comment captures the experience of life story work for individuals with dementia;

"I have liked to see the photos to remind me of my family. I like the pictures to help me remember the good times"

Family members and carers benefit from helping to gather photos and life story information as it enables them to share in the good times again and to see their loved one in happier times. They

also express appreciation that staff are interested and care about patients as people and can get a glimpse of them in their 'heyday'.

Life story boards and books enable staff to see the person beyond the illness and often find things in common with them. It can assist understanding of behaviour and provide important information about a patients needs which leads to improved care quality.

"It makes such a difference, to have this understanding of the person; for me who often has to go in to work with someone briefly with less day to day awareness of their life. I am finding it superb", ward manager

Contact

For more information please contact

Paul Batson

Paul.Batson@awp.nhs.uk