

Community Youth Storytelling for embedding values

Process

Below are some tips on how as a community worker you can organize a small-scale youth storytelling and story sharing event regarding values and ethos of a community as perceived by its youth. The tips provide a step-by-step approach for the event.

What exactly are we trying to achieve through a youth storytelling event:

Everyone can share an experience, a story that speaks to their connection to their community's values and community ethos as they perceive and experience it, regardless of how long they have lived there. The ultimate purpose of the youth storytelling event is to provide space and motivation for young people to tell their stories, and then to help weave together those stories and their similarities to create a shared narrative that identifies common ground, focuses on what young people collectively value, and illuminates what values are seen to characterize the community. Always remember workshops/events can begin with simple stories.

Answering the Initial questions

As you begin the process of planning and organizing a youth storytelling event/workshop there are a few questions that you and your team need to think about and answer honestly:

- **What kinds of stories are you looking to gather?** E.g., Personal stories, positive or negative stories, stories of a collective/team/club etc.

Tip: It is always good to choose a topic or two for the stories. For instance, what do I value the most in my community or how did I make friends in this neighborhood and what is my favorite part of living in this community etc.

- **How will you gather them?** E.g., audio or video recording a discussion, keep notes of the significant parts, create a table with the stories' main points etc.
- **How will stories be shared?** E.g., through a discussion between different people, a workshop etc.
- **How many people will be involved and who will they be?** In your case, you need to identify how many young people you will need to involve in your event/workshop and who they might be.

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Tip: If you, and your team are not familiar with the storytelling process, you are strongly advised to have a small event with few youngsters participating e.g., 12 people. You are advised to engage young people from different cultural backgrounds, schools, sport teams or cultural clubs from your community/neighborhood.

- **How many stories is enough to identify community values and issues?**

This depends on the topics of your discussion and how deep you want to reach.

Tip: In a small group of participants if everyone shares a story and if the facilitators break the ice by starting to share their stories you will be able to find common ground and identify community values and issues.

- **How will the values and issues be identified?** e.g., through discussion of the story, through gathering common grounds and similarities of stories etc.

Tip: We propose writing down on a flipchart, on a smart board or in a projected word document the main characters and characteristics of the stories to discuss them afterwards between participants, ask relevant questions and identify issues and values. Having participants comment and say their opinion or share their point of view or a common experience on each other's stories would help reaching good results.

- **How will the stories be used to spark community dialogue and lead to concrete actions?** This depends on the objectives of your storytelling event and the resources in your community.

1. Create a group of people responsible for sharing stories.

Form a story sharing group to establish this approach in the community and to tap into the interest and resources of others who wish to participate in this activity. Define with partners the roles you will take on (Coordinator, Facilitator, Communicator, and PR) and choose the storytelling methods and tools that will be useful.

2. Identify the objectives and potential of your storytelling event.

Design your youth storytelling event approach based on the overall goals of your event, as well as the resources and capabilities of your community. These factors will guide your

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team's choices for sharing stories as they consider a range of story collection options. It is important if you do not have relevant experience that you choose to organize a small-scale event by engaging small groups of young people and setting short and brief goals for your event. Even if there is significant support and resources available from community centres or local agencies and authorities where you are working, it is important to start with something simple in terms of objectives, story discussion topics and action size before expanding to larger community or more complex issues that require more experience, resources, time and engagement.

3. Use of local resources.

In many communities, existing organisations have already done some storytelling workshops with young people. Recognize and leverage existing work even if your event is moving in a completely different direction and has a different theme. This way you can access both the stories and the methods used during successfully implemented storytelling workshops and see what was discussed or get ideas on the most appropriate approach/method.

4. Engaging schools, colleges, and universities.

Many story sharing efforts benefit from partnerships with local schools, colleges or university programs. Students can participate in storytelling events, have the time available, ease of use of new technologies, and are accustomed to discussing and speaking their views in front of a camera without prejudice. Communicate your idea, inform and talk to the heads of a local school or directly to students of colleges, universities and cultural associations in the area to look for interested participants. You can also support the search for participants through a small-scale promotion on social media by targeting youth groups and social media groups of colleges, universities and clubs. Try to engage youth from local schools, colleges and universities or community cultural clubs to participate in your event and share their stories.

5. How to compose your stories in your project.

Be sure to think about how you will connect the stories to shared values and community issues without losing the language and expression that makes these individual stories so valuable. Depending on your approach to the stories you gather, community members can

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help in this process of connecting and redefining meanings. Your team can play the role of synthesis and the younger community members who listen to and share the stories can discuss and identify key commonalities and differences.

6. Choose which stories you want to collect.

Based on your event goals, your timeline, the specific characteristics and temperament of your community, decide which topics to focus on in your storytelling event. If you notice that there is resistance or hesitation towards sharing stories or entrenched positions within the community, start with a more general theme: e.g. stories about solidarity and kindness of people in the community.

If your event has a more specific focus, you may be interested in gathering stories about a particular topic.

7. Don't dwell on the past.

Depending on the theme you choose for your storytelling event, consider avoiding focusing on the past. It's a fact that many communities when it comes to storytelling and story sharing stick to capturing the history of the community. However, in the case of a community's youth, it would be preferable to capture stories about the here and now in order to seek out the values, ethos and common ground among the community's youth. When planning the sharing of stories, also think about future stories - what do the young people of the community want to see in the future? How do they think and how will they create that future together?

10. Find the right questions for your stories.

Should your stories have a narrative orientation? Should they be grouped around themes? If so, what would they be? Or should your group gather whatever kind of story the youngsters want to share?

In the case of the event, you are asked to organise, you are mainly aiming to gather stories that speak to the participants' connection to their community's values and community ethos as they perceive and experience it, regardless of how long they have lived there.

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This connection can come from telling and sharing stories that can be about different topics:

Possible topics for collecting stories may for example include:

- **Place:** stories about important places that highlight and promote the community's values and principles and how they promote them; stories about natural and historic places and their importance to the community's values and principles.
- **People:** personal stories about lifestyles that reflect community values and principles, such as how you made friends, solidarity, and positive examples of mutual aid among residents in everyday life or in crisis situations, or simple stories of why you live or stay here.
- **Future:** capturing dreams and aspirations. What do you want your city to look like in the future and what relationships would you like residents to have with each other? What values and principles do you consider essential to maintain and expand in your community?

11. Listen to all the stories.

Not all stories are happy and ideal nor do they all include good examples of the community no matter how much we shift and focus our themes to positive examples and stories. Some stories may be full of struggles, difficulties and conflicts and may lead to important reflections and discoveries about values and ethics in the community. All facilitators in your group who will be involved as discussion coordinators in the youth storytelling event should be prepared to show empathy, patience towards the participants and be prepared both to create a friendly atmosphere and a safe space for all participants to express themselves, and to work and connect the difficult or negative stories with the other stories in order to make the connections to find the similarities and common ground between the various stories.

12. The clarifications, discussion and notes help both to identify common values and cooperation between all participants.

When using storytelling to identify community values or ethos, the key challenge you face is to document the information and parts of the stories that relate to the values so that they are understandable and discussable. Equally important is to confirm what you are hearing at

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that moment with the person sharing it. In group sessions such as the youth storytelling event you are organising you can use simple tools such as sticky notes where people can write down what they heard and then gather shared values or ideas.

It is important to follow a common order throughout the event.

A good sequence is as follows:

- The discussion coordinator explains to the participants the topic and their role (Topic of discussion, Role: storytelling, commenting, notes on shared values and ethos of the community).
- A participant tells his or her story.
- The discussion coordinator records on a whiteboard or flip chart the key information, meanings and values offered by the story
- The other participants take notes on sticky notes.
- The discussion coordinator asks the storyteller for clarification and recapitulates key points recorded.
- The discussion coordinator asks each participant individually to comment briefly on the story they heard and to stick on the flip chart their notes on the community values and principles as they emerged from the brief discussion and recording.
- The process continues until all participants have shared their stories, comments and notes.
- At the end, the event coordinators discuss with the participants and summarize their key points of agreement on the principles, values and ethics in the community as they emerged through the participants' stories.
- The event can be videoed or recorded to preserve the stories and the results that emerged.

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