



# HOW TO GATHER A GREAT STORY

A guide for UK mission

Stories of your work can be shared online, in newsletters and even in the media. A great story is one of the best ways to spread the word about your work and even convince people to volunteer or support you financially.

Great stories aren't a rarity - they're everywhere. You just need to spot them. Once you have done that you just need to collect enough details so that you or someone else can write them up for publication.

We have created this guidance to help you collect your stories but remember this isn't a definitive set of instructions. It is here to inspire you and help you better understand the things you need to write a good story about your work.

## What every story needs

There are some key components that are key to every story:



**A clear, simple outline of the problem(s) the people in your story are/were facing.**

In other words, how their day to day life has been affected. Outline the extent and the implications of the need they faced.



**The ways that you have helped must be clear.** What have you provided - food/advice/mentoring/friendship? How many people are being helped?



**How has this change or intervention improved people's lives?** How, in concrete relatable terms, are people's lives different?



**Let the subjects of the story speak for themselves.** Try to gather plenty of quotes so that the beneficiaries themselves help to tell the story. Ensure you quote them directly in their own words - don't summarise in your words. Use your phone or another device to record the conversation and include the best quotes.

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# GOING THE EXTRA MILE

How to make your story into a great read

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**You aren't just imparting a piece of information, you are telling a story. People won't automatically find your story interesting. You need to make sure the readers are gripped and want to read right through to the end.**

## Simplest ways to make your story stand out

# 01

### HAVE A CLEAR STORY TO TELL

Think for a moment. If you were sat in a cafe and someone asked you, 'so what's your story about?' you'll often find you can sum it up to them pretty easily.

For instance:

*'Oh it's about a couple from the local council estate who were struggling to afford food to feed their family after their benefits were cut due to a technical fault in the system. But then they came to our foodbank and joined our 'Eating Healthy on a Tight Budget' classes and have learnt to cook healthy meals with not much money so everyone is healthier. They have started inviting their neighbours round to teach them how to cook too!'*

Get the story clear in your mind. Once you are clear you will tell your story so much better. Sum it up in two to three sentences.

# 02

### THINK: 'WHAT'S UNIQUE (OR SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT) ABOUT MY STORY

It is said that no two snowflakes are identical. Neither are two people's stories. Try and unearth what is unique and interesting about your story (or the people that it features).

In the previous example the interesting/unique feature was the couple starting to teach their neighbours what they had learnt. People also got to hear about the power of community.

# 03

### ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE'S EMOTIONS

We are emotional beings, we don't just want facts or figures. When you talk to people be ready to ask 'how did it feel?'

# 04

## PAINT A PICTURE WITH WORDS

Don't just say 'people are going hungry because they can't afford food', paint a picture with words eg: "Beth goes to play, but her hunger prevents her from playing", says her mother. "And when she is hungry she will just come and lie on the sofa all evening, she can't even concentrate on her homework." The story of a mother and daughter is the sort of concrete detail that a reader can picture.

## Asking the right questions

When you interview people make sure you are prepared.

- ❓ **Record your conversation on a dictaphone, mobile phone or other device.** That way you can include full quotes which make a huge difference to your story
- ❓ **Prepare some suitable questions.** You can always add a few spontaneous questions too.  
*Tip: Be ready to ask some informal, fun questions to put the interviewee at ease.*
- ❓ **Use 'W' questions: who, what, where, why, when (and how).** What was your life like before you were made homeless? What help did the project give you? How did you survive when you lost your flat?
- ❓ **Get quotes from people about what life was like before and after they received help.** This is vital for a good story.
- ❓ **Ask open ended questions.** Such as 'How are you coping now?', 'What does the future hold for you?' rather than questions that can be answered yes or no.
- ❓ **Always listen to people's answers.** Be prepared to adapt your questions based on what they say.
- ❓ **'How has [the name of your church/group project] helped you?'** Spell out the part that you have played.
- ❓ **Where it is relevant and appropriate, ask how people's faith has been affected.** And be ready to ask how they would like people to pray for them - you can then put these requests at the end of the story.

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# PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDELINES

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**If you're gathering a story - don't forget to take photos! Really strong, high-quality photos to accompany your case studies are essential to engaging supporters.**

Key points to remember when taking pictures:

- **Essential: Always get the details of who the subjects are, where they are, and who took the photograph.** (NB Close up portrait shots as well as wider establishing shots help to 'show' the story which is 'told' in the text).
- **Take close-up photos in both portrait and landscape formats** when taking a photo of an individual person/people in your story
- **Try to photograph people in their daily lives** as well - eg. if they have learnt to cook, as in the story example above, take a photo of them cooking
- **Get some scenic shots of the area as well** - ones without people are always useful and can help to set the scene and context of your story
- **Always ask** 'am I happy with the shot(s) are they clear and in focus? If necessary, stay a bit longer and gather some more shots - they really can make a story



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