



Sharing Stories; Sharing Life

ErasmusPlus Project



Stor-E Tree

Story Listener

Tell your story

Share ideas

Make connections



Contents

3. **Organisation Guidelines**
4. **How to use this Guide**
5. **How you can improve your own skills**
6. **What is a Story Listener?**
7. **Encourage the Story Teller with open questions**
8. **Help the Story Teller tell their story**
9. **Active listening skills and body language**
10. **What to do if the Story Teller gets upset?**
11. **Topics for discussion**
12. **Creative story topics**
13. **Eliciting story questions**
14. **Resilience questions**
15. **Meaningful moment questions**
16. **Your eyes only**
17. **Next steps**
18. **Collecting stories and support**
19. **Interventions**
20. **Alternative solutions**
21. **Managing expectations**
22. **Notes and doodles**

Organisation Guidelines

Welcome to your Stor-E Tree Guide

It is recommended that the Store-E Tree is used following training for the professional/volunteer to ensure that the intervention is effective for the Story Teller, the Story Listener and the Organisation. Training should include the following:

- ☞ Health and Safety
- ☞ Safeguarding
- ☞ Lone Working
- ☞ Point of contact to raise issues and concerns
- ☞ What to do if a Story Teller becomes upset
- ☞ What to do if you get upset
- ☞ Dementia Awareness
- ☞ Ethics
- ☞ Privacy
- ☞ Accessibility
- ☞ Supporting someone with sensory needs (Text/Audio/Images)
- ☞ Digital Technology Accessibility

Methods of Stor-E telling sessions (face-to-face/phone/Skype/email)

Create a profile for each Story Teller that includes their motivation, soft skills, expectations, experiences etc. Determine the Story Teller's preference of Story Listener (would they prefer man or woman, someone of a similar age for example).

Consider setting up regular meetings for volunteers to share their experiences and ideas.

Holding a Celebratory Storytelling Event

Think about holding an event to celebrate your Story Tellers' and Story Listeners' storytelling successes. This can promote social connections and a chance for people to meet and share their stories with a wider audience.

Find more information at <https://www.story-tree.eu/>



How to use this guide

This guide has been compiled as part of a Sharing Stories; Sharing Life project. We have compiled ideas to help you support people to tell their stories, methods to record these stories, tips on identifying potential further interventions and ways to check if the storytelling sessions are helping to improve the Story Teller's social and emotional connections.

There are brief guidance notes throughout the booklet. We recommend that you use this guide alongside a dedicated training session with a participating organisation that can support you to make the most of this guide. There are also separate self-guided training materials available.

The Storytelling sessions can be tailored to each Story Teller's needs by using the content and adapting the ideas. What works well for one person may not work for someone else. The sessions can be over the phone, face to face, video calling or posted.

! This section must be completed before any session can take place !

Who to contact if you have any concerns or need to change an appointment

Organisation:

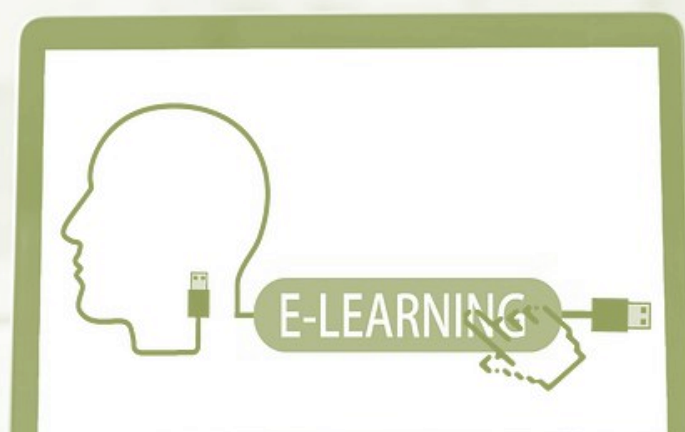
Name:

Telephone:

Email:

! Important Statement !

“The session is confidential except if you have any reason to believe the individual is in any danger or could be a danger to someone else.”



How you can improve your own skills

The following training will need to be covered with the organisation

| Mandatory training | Date completed |
|--------------------|----------------|
| Safeguarding | |
| Lone Working | |
| Health and Safety | |
| GDPR | |
| Confidentiality | |
| Dementia Awareness | |

Be a Story Teller before a Story Listener

We recommend that you go through the process of being a Story Teller before becoming the Story Listener. This can help you to understand the thoughts and feelings that the Story Teller may have as they tell you their story and help you to understand the emotions that may arise during the process. It will hopefully be an enjoyable experience for you too. You could ask your organisation to set you up with a Story Listener as part of your training.

Help the Story Teller to improve their Digital Skills

This material is also available online. Contact your organisation about following on a digital course to improve your skills if needed. There are lots of free courses available online too. Search Google and YouTube for something you are interested in and there is likely to be a website or video to help you. Work with your Story Teller to upload elements of their story online, contact friends and family by email or Skype, and use a website to contact the local council. Teaching someone about digital technology often works best when the person has a specific need for it.

You can find out more about all of these topics on <https://www.story-tree.eu/>



What is a Story Listener?

You are a Story Listener and you will be listening to stories told by Story Tellers. You may be a professional or a volunteer for an organisation. There is training available to help you to make the most of your sessions together and to elicit life stories from Story Tellers using techniques based on narrative therapy and previous storytelling successes. The purpose of the storytelling sessions is to enable the Story Listener to help the Story Teller to identify elements in their story - meaningful moments - which may highlight potential further interventions to help them to strengthen emotional or social connections with their community, family and friends.

The Story Teller may simply want someone to listen to their story, or they may want help to make a change in their life. Sharing their story can help in both cases. While the Story Teller talks through their story, you will be listening out for these meaningful moments that may inspire the Story Teller to re-connect with people, revisit special places or resume activities they enjoyed in the past.

Sharing stories offers many benefits for the Story Teller and Story Listener. For the Story Teller it can help to combat isolation, make friendships, find perspective, give a sense of history, and help to build self-confidence and independence by concentrating on strengths and success. It can help to identify new opportunities for the Story Teller by drawing on the past and exploring aspirations.

Story Listeners can draw on a wealth of skills and gain new skills: good listening skills, receptiveness, curiosity, sensitivity, an accepting attitude, a sense of humour, adaptability and imagination. In group storytelling settings, Story Listeners will need to demonstrate a democratic approach, confidentiality, preparedness, confidence, caring and practicality.

It is important that you and the Story Teller get on well with each other, have mutual respect and enjoy each other's company. If you find that you aren't getting on well, please ensure that you speak to your organisation to ensure that both parties are re-matched with someone else.

This guide is part of an EU-funded research project, and we are evaluating the training and guidance to ensure that it is effective. Because of this we will request feedback from you and your Story Teller at certain times throughout the project to check whether they feel that the sessions have been of value to them and helped them. This will also help us to make changes to the guidance which will help others in the future.

Encourage the Story Teller with Open Questions

Narrative conversations should be guided and directed by the interests of the Story Teller. The following information can help you to put the Story Teller in control of their own story.

Useful questions often begin with **how, what, where, when, why, who** and **if...?**

What is an Open Question?

An open question is likely to receive a long answer.

Although any question can receive a long answer, open questions deliberately seek longer answers, and are the opposite of closed questions.

Open questions have the following characteristics:

- They ask the respondent to think and reflect
- They will give you opinions and feelings
- They hand control of the conversation to the respondent

What is a Closed Question?

A closed question can be answered with either a single word or a short phrase.

'How old are you?' and 'Where do you live?' are closed questions.

A closed question can generally be answered with either 'yes' or 'no'.

These won't help the Story Teller to open up.



Open Questions

What did you enjoy cooking?

What did you enjoy most about your childhood?

Where did you go on your holidays?



Closed Questions

Do you like cooking?

Did you enjoy your childhood?

Did you go on holiday?

Help the Story Teller tell their story

Drawing on narrative therapy techniques, here are some hints and tips to help you to listen actively to the Story Teller

- ☞ Be curious.
- ☞ Be interested in finding out things you don't know the answer to.
- ☞ This is a journey for both the story teller and the listener. There is no 'right' way, merely many possible directions to choose from.
- ☞ Recognise stories that stand out as positive examples and stories that show that the Story Teller has been successful and celebrate these.
- ☞ Telling their story within this project itself could be seen as a "sparkling event" and should be celebrated in its own right.
- ☞ Involve family members/friends in the story telling where appropriate and with permission from the service user. Could family and friends provide photos or their own stories to add? Be aware that some Story Tellers may 'hold back' if family/friends attend the actual storytelling sessions.
- ☞ Join in with the Story Teller to explore the stories they have about their lives and relationships; their effects, their meanings and the context in which they have been formed and authored.
- ☞ Notice events that the Story Teller mentions that are linked together over time and have implications for past, present and future actions; stories that are powerfully shaping their lives.
- ☞ The way language is used is important within narrative practice. Try changing your language to mirror the words used by the Story Teller. For example, if they say they're "feeling blue", use "feeling blue" rather than sad or depressed.
- ☞ Think about the words you use; lonely versus experiencing loneliness. Lonely is a label or identification (fixed/no change), whereas loneliness is a temporary feeling or emotion (possible to change).



Active Listening Skills and Body Language



Be attentive and relaxed

Listen to the words and
try to picture what the
speaker is saying

Ask questions to ensure
understanding



Don't interrupt and don't
impose "solutions" or "advice."

Involve family members/friends
in the story telling where
appropriate and with permission
from the service user

Look at old photos



Face the speaker and
maintain eye contact

Pay attention to what isn't
being said to nonverbal cues
or body language

Talking to people with sensory loss & dementia

- Make sure you have the person's attention
- Ask what works best for them
- Gently touching the person's arm is a way to attract attention without startling them
- Identify yourself clearly
- Check that you are in the best position to communicate e.g. don't stand in front of a window as the light can put you in silhouette
- Avoid noisy places and background noise
- Adapt the conditions to suit the individual
- Speak clearly and a little slower, don't shout
- Make your lip patterns clear without over-exaggerating
- Keep your face visible, don't cover your mouth
- Use gestures and facial expressions to support what you are saying
- If necessary, repeat phrases or re-phrase the sentence
- Be aware that communicating can be hard work, take regular communication breaks
- Try writing things down, experiment with different size letters, coloured paper and pens
- For phone conversations consider using a text relay service
- Some people with sensory loss will use a particular communication method, e.g. Sign Language, Deafblind Manual or Block. For assistance contact a communication support professional

What to do if the Story Teller gets upset?

Acknowledge your role and limitations as the Story Listener and help the Story Teller to seek professional advice if needed

Keep a Safe Emotional and Physical Distance

- Ensure you understand the Safeguarding Policy.
- Check with your organisation about how to keep safe (e.g. risk assessments).
- Be aware of the Story Teller's, and your own body language.
- Be aware of signs of abuse.
- Sit near an exit to ensure that you are able to remove yourself .
- If the Story Teller won't calm down, finish the storytelling session.
- Discuss anything that worries you with your organisation

ABCD-Dignity Model by Harvey Chochinov

Attitude:

How would I be feeling in this patient's situation?

Behaviour:

Professional behaviours towards patients must always include respect and kindness.

Compassion:

Experiencing some degree of identification with those who are ill or suffering.

Dialogue:

"I can only imagine what you must be going through."

"Who else should we get involved at this point, to help support you through this difficult time?"

(e.g. psychosocial services; group support; chaplaincy; complementary care specialists etc.)

Know your Personal Limits

- Story Listeners also get negatively affected by sad/traumatic stories.
- Identify your own emotional triggers before being the Story Listener by being the Story Teller
- Consult your organisation. You can say that you are not comfortable with this topic.

Managing a Group Storytelling Session

With a group, you need to think about seating, numbers, props, refreshments. Have a second Story Listener in case a Story Teller gets upset.



Validate and reassure them

Reassure them that getting upset is not bad

Give the Story Teller time and space to be upset

Let them know that they don't have to talk about it

Find and explore positive elements of the story

Provide a diversion; put the kettle on

Be empathetic and authentic



Don't fill silences

Don't judge

Don't try to give "good" advice

Topics for Discussion

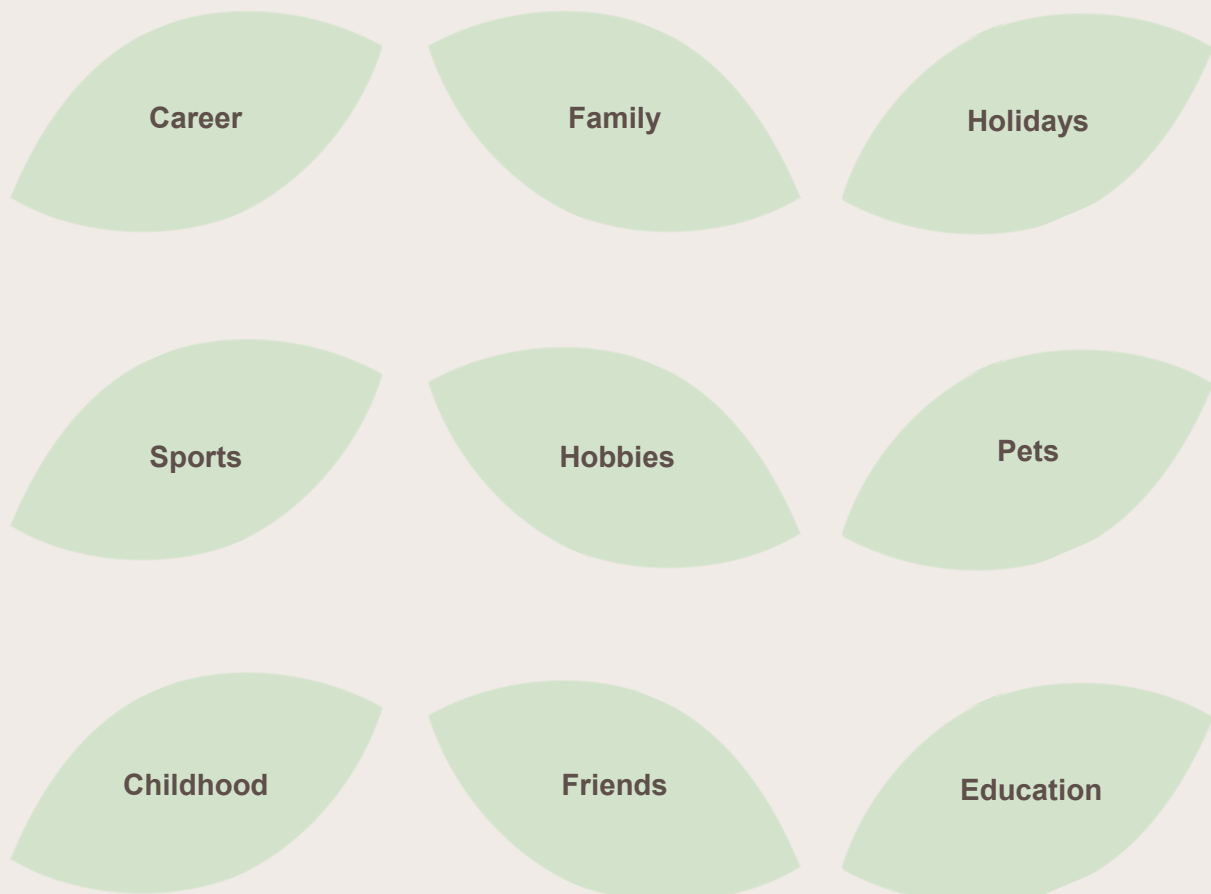
The following are examples of pages which you might wish to use with your Story Teller to capture their stories and aspirations.

There is no set way to complete these pages. You can note down keywords, short notes or complete sentences. Your Story Teller might like to add notes on it too.

Your Story Teller will have a copy of this so they can prepare in advance if they like. Plan topics for the next session, if it helps, so that your Story Teller has time to think about the topics/questions. If anything stands out in the story, ask the Story Teller if they would like it added to the meaningful moments box so that you can explore it in more depth and determine if it is something they would like to revisit.

- ☞ Is this something they just like to reminisce about?
- ☞ Is it something they might be able to do again?
- ☞ Is it something they'd like to talk more about to someone else?
- ☞ Is it something they could teach to someone else?
- ☞ Is it something they could do elements of?

Here are some autobiographical topics followed by some more creative topics on the next page:



Creative Story Topics

You can also use more creative story triggers like the vivid, strong terms on this page or images such as mountains, forests, beaches and buildings.

Tell a story about:

- ☞ a moment you will always remember
- ☞ a moment you were proud of
- ☞ a surprise
- ☞ a time when you felt lucky
- ☞ a compliment you received
- ☞ a person who has had a big impact on your life
- ☞ how a film or a book has influenced you
- ☞ something you have created or want to create
- ☞ a place that makes you feel good
- ☞ a time when you broke a rule

Clothes

Technology

Animals

River

Rain

Trees

Beaches

Mountains

Sun



Eliciting Story Questions

Examples of questions that can start a story



Are there any particular memories of home life you like to recall?



What are your memories of ...?



Can you tell me about a time that you...?
(Add your own topic here)



What do you remember about ...?
(add your own topic such as 'your early childhood?')



What is something you used to really enjoy doing?



What good memories have you got about...?



What have you done that you were most proud of?



Resilience Questions

Examples of questions that can remind the Story Teller of their own strength and resilience.



What are your strengths?



What big challenges have you overcome in your life?



What personal qualities or characteristics have you gained from these experiences? E.g. kindness, bravery, versatility, loyalty, etc.



Which of these personal qualities are you most pleased to possess?



How does this make you feel "now", when you reflect on this personal quality?



How has this quality shown itself recently?



Meaningful Moment Questions

Examples of questions that can help you and the Story Teller to identify meaningful moments in their story.



You said that you used to....

- ⇒ Is this something which you would like to talk about more?
- ⇒ Is this something you are still interested in exploring?
- ⇒ Is this something you'd like to do again? Do more of?
- ⇒ Is this something you'd like to share with others?



Is this interesting for you? Is this what we should spend our time talking about?



What impact could the meaningful moment from your past have on your present life?



What would you like to happen as a result of these story telling sessions?



How important would it be to you if others (family, carers) were aware of meaningful moments from your life ... Are there meaningful moments you would like to share?




Would you like to re-connect with X [person/group/family member]?



You mentioned an interest in...Is this something you would like to talk more about?



You talked about ... and it seemed to make you very happy. Is that something you would like to talk more about?



Use Images and Props

Encourage Story Tellers to express and share their emotions by asking them to share photographs, drawings, pictures and images to help them to build up their stories.

! FOR YOUR EYES ONLY !

Research has shown that writing down your private thoughts and concerns, without anyone else reading them, can help make you feel more positive. Encourage the Story Teller to take these pages out, note down their thoughts and keep them for themselves.

The purpose of expressive writing is for you and you alone. It doesn't need to be read by anyone in order for you to benefit from it. Emotional effects include feeling sadder but wiser after writing. The longer term benefits show people to be happier and less negative. Expressive writing can also encourage positive behavioural change, such as helping people to better adjust to a difficult situation.



Next Steps

What skills do you have that you might share with others?



Research has shown that sharing skills with others can have a positive impact on both emotional and social connectedness. Story Tellers may want to share their own skills by teaching, demonstrating, or presenting them to others. Skills might include sewing, reading, writing, DIY, gardening, knitting, making bread, jam-making or woodturning. These are just some of the skills that Story Tellers may be able to support others with, either physically or through discussion.

What are the most important lessons you have learned in your life so far?

Imparting wisdom to others can help people to feel validated. It can also be empowering to be asked for advice.

Ask what life learnings, personal philosophies, mottos, and core values the Story Teller might want to leave as a legacy to their descendants. How did they learn these lessons or acquire these philosophies?



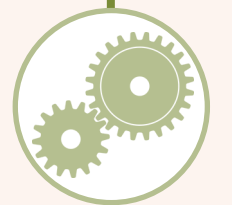
What wishes would you like to add to the wish tree?



This question allows people to share aspirations they may not otherwise have a chance to talk about. For example, someone might want to spend more time with their grandchildren, attend a concert, watch a play or fly a plane! Not all wishes can be granted, but some elements may be possible. Expectations will need to be managed so look at alternatives and build on the Story Teller's ideas.

What activities would help you and *your community* to build up new connections and friendships?

Research has shown that helping others makes people more likely to think positively about their own lives and start to live more positively. Ideas about helping others and connecting with others could be shared on a local version of a Stor-E Tree in a community centre. Ideas could also be shared on the Stor-E Tree webpages.



Collecting Stories and Support

Think about how you can trigger memories through the use of sound and images, and how to collect stories to share with a public audience.

Involve Story Tellers in gathering the stories and teach them to collate and share stories as a way to increase engagement and maintain enthusiasm and commitment to the project.

Think about how you and the Story Teller can:

- ☞ Use a digital tool to record stories
- ☞ Use an activity such as cards to prompt discussion
- ☞ Involve others in formulating questions, for example young people and children
- ☞ Include a puzzle or game element to engage and motivate



Support existing connections or create new ones using digital technology and social networks online

Help the Story Teller to use websites to encourage independent searches for things of interest. Explore what their idea/wish is with regard to deeper relationships with friends, or family and what they could do to make this happen:

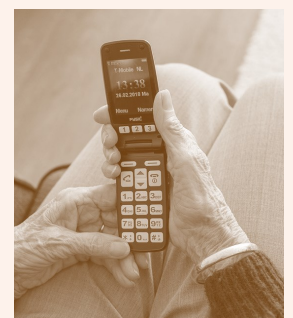
- ☞ Teach the Story Teller how to use texts, email or video calls tools to connect or reconnect with friends and family
- ☞ Support the Story Teller to write postcards to family members who may live far away
- ☞ Help the Story Teller to use features on a mobile phone which can make conversations with grandchildren more fun, such as Augmented Reality games on video calls

Support for individuals

Befriending: visits, phone contact or help with small tasks such as shopping

Buddying or Partnering: helps people re-engage with social networks

Community Navigator Initiatives: helps individuals to find services and support.



Interventions

Allow the Story Teller to tell their “inner story” - their yearnings, imaginings, aspirations, dreams, fantasies and even misconceptions and lopsided perceptions, as well as “actual events”. This freedom of inventiveness may allow the Story Teller to reveal more than they otherwise would.

Explore the idea of further interventions with the Story Teller. Are they interested in pursuing activities or sharing their skills with others to further their social participation? The storytelling intervention may be enough in the short term. But the Story Teller may require additional support or information once the storytelling intervention is over.

If so, you could signpost the Story Teller to:

- ☞ Useful or interesting websites or directories
- ☞ Telephone help-lines providing information
- ☞ Health and social support & needs assessment services

Courses & Workshops

Volunteer Centres

Local Community Activities & Events



What's available in the local area?

Alternative Solutions

Listen out for **meaningful moments in the story** and try to ascertain if reconnecting to these people, activities or places are still of interest to the Story Teller . For example, if someone talks about feeling happy and included while they were cooking with their family as a child, a solution to overcoming their current feelings of loneliness or isolation could be joining a cooking group or setting up a group to watch a cooking show together.

A group activity may not suit everyone. Be aware that you might trigger emotions that can't be managed easily by offering group activities. Events or activities that might have been experienced in a positive way in the past (e.g. cooking with family), can now be perceived in a negative way now (e.g. reminders of the loss of family members). Sometimes it might be more helpful or appropriate for an older person to have the opportunity to *speak* about something and be *listened* to than to actually *do* something. The process of storytelling might be enough.



Take your mobile phone to the shops and enable a housebound Story Teller to chat to the people in the shop via live video.



Arrange a phone call for a competition-based programme such as Eurovision or the Olympics so the conversation can focus on the content rather than small talk.



Group Intervention Ideas

[Care Home Bikes](#)
[Robot Football](#)
[Men's Sheds](#)

Managing expectations

You are not able to make all of your Story Teller's dreams and aspirations come true. Be aware of your own limits and adapt your own expectations in a realistic manner. Not all situations can be healed by an activity; not every gap can be filled. Be aware that people may get upset and suffer grief about the loss of physical, functional, mental, or social capacities. Think of ways to support elements of their wishes.

Example 1: A Story Teller may talk happily about hill walking and say that it's something they wish they could do again, but they're unable to due to physical impairments. You could ask them questions to find out what they particularly enjoyed about hill walking. You may discover that they loved the sound of the birds, the breeze, the views, or a particular snack they took with them. With this information the following suggestions could be possible:

- ☞ Look at Ordnance Survey maps together
- ☞ Look at Google maps and 'walk' the route together
- ☞ Find bird sounds on the internet
- ☞ Share their hill walking snack with them
- ☞ Arrange for someone to take them for a local walk with support

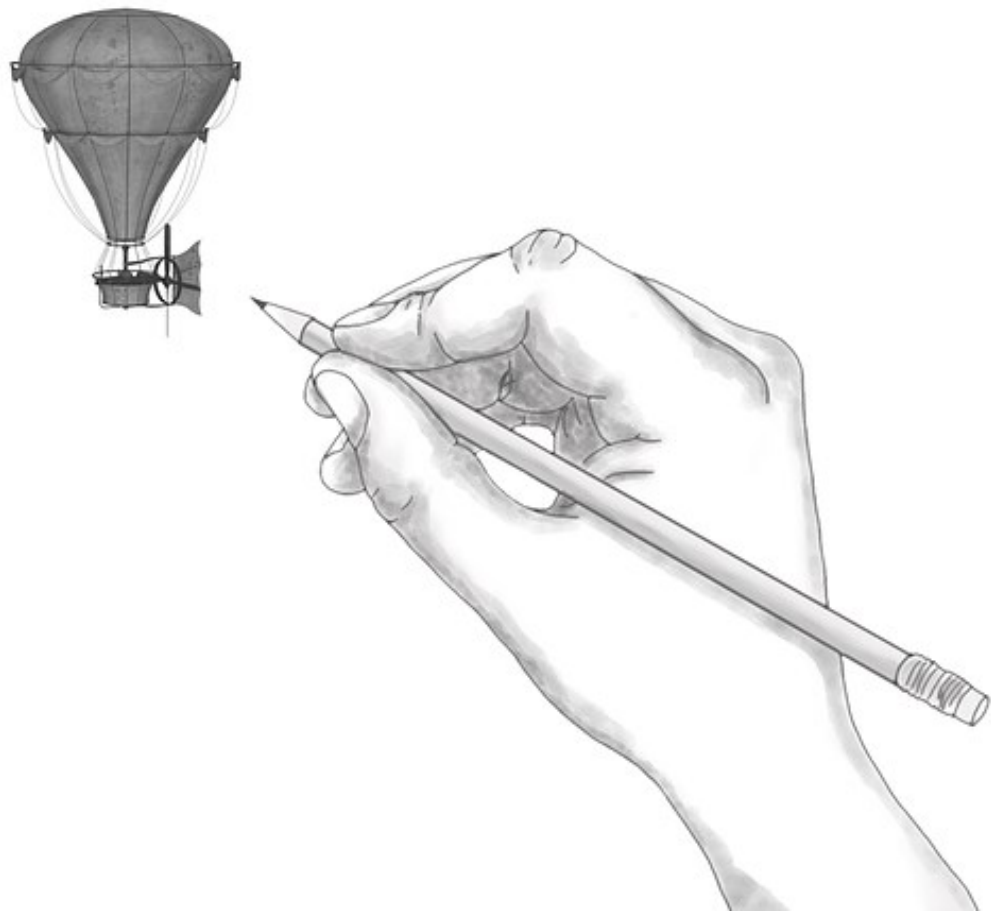
Example 2: The Story Teller may have loved gardening but can no longer maintain their own garden. Ask questions to find out what they particularly liked about gardening. It may be they enjoyed growing vegetables or attracting bees or they love the smell of a particular flower.

You could consider the following interventions:

- ☞ Help them to take care of indoor plants or window boxes
- ☞ Support them to hire a gardener or find a local volunteer gardener
- ☞ Move their chair so that it looks out over their garden
- ☞ Add a bird bath or feeders to the garden
- ☞ Link them with gardening groups online to discuss their interest with others
- ☞ Take them out into their own garden or a local garden for your Storytelling sessions

Notes and Doodles

Give the Story Teller space to make their own notes and doodles either on paper, or on a tablet, laptop or mobile phone. They can use them as an aid memoir for future sessions and can work on their stories outside of the formal story telling sessions if they wish. There are some pages in the Story Teller booklet for intuitive doodling. This can help with honest self-expression and in the exploration of difficult emotions. It can help people to get in touch with the powerful visual dimension of their imagination, and help expand their awareness. Story Tellers might express thoughts and feelings that may even surprise them!



Add ideas and doodles here:

