



Interview Toolkit

How to collect great stories

**HelpAge
International**

age helps

Introduction



Why do we use personal stories?

- To help us achieve our mission:

To promote the wellbeing and inclusion of older women and men, and reduce poverty and discrimination in later life.

- To encourage people to take action, e.g. make a donation, sign a campaign petition, implement a policy change.

Why do we use personal stories?



- They bring our work to life. We're all human. We all respond to other people's emotions and experiences.
- They inspire support for our work.
- And most of all...



They help older people around the world raise their voices.

What are our stories used for?

- Publications such as:
 - Global AgeWatch Index
 - Ageways magazines
 - Annual Review
 - Regional newsletters
 - Campaign e-newsletter

- Reports to institutional donors



What are our stories used for?

- Fundraising (printed and online) materials by Affiliates such as Age International (UK) to raise money from individuals and companies.
- Media, online and offline: e.g. personal blogs, feature stories.



Who are HelpAge's audiences?



www.helppage.org



@helppage



HelpAgeInternational

- Governments, academics, policy makers, Affiliates, partners, donors, practitioners, other NGOs – national and international.
- Potential and existing individual donors in our fundraising Affiliate countries.
- People interested in joining our campaigns, signing a petition etc.
- Visitors to our websites, followers on social media.

Preparation



Planning an interview

Are the communities happy for you to visit and do interviews?



- It is important to agree a **clear brief** for your visit with the programme team and Affiliate or partner organisation.
- Define objectives – explain the type of stories and images you are hoping to collect.
- Explain how the stories will be used (e.g. media coverage, policy report, fundraising campaign).
- Be clear and realistic about the agenda and ensure you allow enough time to collect detailed interviews.

Choosing people to interview

- Plan ahead!



- Partners and programme staff will be able to identify people who are happy to speak about their personal experiences, **but** only if they are given enough time to do so.
- Allowing enough time for dialogue with programme staff and communities is an essential part of the story gathering process.
- If you are working with an interpreter, spend some time talking to them about the question you are going to ask, before you start interviewing older people.

Choosing people to interview

- Find people who have been supported by HelpAge in different ways to show the range of our work.
- Interview a mix of women and men.
- Look for people who present good photo opportunities.
- Avoid people who are painfully shy.
- Don't just speak to those in authority like partner staff, traditional or religious leaders.
- Look for extraordinary or unusual people who have got interesting experiences to tell.
- Ask for one-to-one interviews, **not** group conversations.

Getting Permission



- Get **informed, verbal** consent directly from the interviewee – this is only achieved in the person's native language so an interpreter is essential.
- There is no obligation – they can say no!
- Show sample materials of how their stories and photos may be used (e.g. copies of Ageways, Age International fundraising appeals, newsletters).

The interview



Building rapport



- Choose an informal setting where the person is comfortable – somewhere quiet, safe and shady, away from distractions.
- Make small talk before pulling out your notebook. Have a cup of tea together, look at family photographs, talk about yourself. Often people are as interested in you as you are in them!
- Sit at the same level as your interviewee. If they are sitting on the floor, sit with them.

Building rapport

- When interviewing via an interpreter, it can be difficult to build rapport. Smile, be engaged, and keep good eye contact when your interviewee is talking.
- Don't be afraid of silence. Some people take longer to think than others.
- Be respectful. If your interviewee is telling you something sensitive, don't yawn or cut them short to go for a break!
- Take your time: 1-2 hours for a detailed interview.

Cover the basics



- Full name, age, location, marital status, ability to read and write?
- Number of people in your family?
- Do you have any grandchildren?
- How do you earn a living?
- Do you receive a pension?
- How is your health?
- What is life like now, compared to when you were younger?

Open questions – The Five Ws



- The 5 Ws is a rule used in newspaper journalism. It's important to collect all of them:

Who, What, Where, When, Why

Ask open questions:

- WHAT did you do when you lost your job?
- TELL ME ABOUT the difficulties you face at work?

Rather than:

- Did you lose your job?
- Is your work difficult?

Get personal



The best quotes are usually about feelings.

- What is it like being an older person in your community/ country?
- How did you feel when you had to leave your home?
- How would you describe your life?
- What challenges or struggles do you face?
- What are your hopes for the future?

How has HelpAge helped?



You need to find out how our support is helping.

First of all: What programme are they involved in? (e.g. OPA group, emergency response) Write down the key stats: name, dates, donor, activities and number of people we're reaching.

- How has HelpAge (or partner's name) helped you?
- What skills have you learnt?
- Has your income improved?
- What can you do now, that you couldn't do before?
- How has your life changed?
- Do you have a message for our supporters?

Writing up



Writing style



- Write what the person says **word for word** in the first person (“I” instead of “he/she”). We want to hear their voice.
- Word count is 300-500 minimum per interview. 800 for a more detailed story.
- Write the name, age and location of the person interviewed at the top of the document.
- If you include local currency, make a note of the current exchange rate to USD.
- Use plain English: simple words, short sentences and avoid abbreviations (NGO, WHO, UNHCR etc) and development jargon, e.g. write *‘running a small business’* not *‘doing an IGA’*.

Four point structure

It is useful to keep in mind these four points to give a clear narrative to the story:

1. Describe the person
2. The person tells what happened/how life used to be – a dramatic description of their situation “before”.
3. The person identifies the moment of change – when they did something as a result of an intervention.
4. The person says what difference this made.

Adding colour to your story



- Often the people who read our stories will not have seen the places and situations we are describing. So we need to paint a picture with words.
- Describe the place and the person. Give exact details: *What does their home look like? What objects are in the room? How does the interviewee look? What gestures do they use during the interview?*
- Give your own personal input to the story to bring it to life for the reader. Use your senses to describe your experience. What can you **hear, smell, taste, feel and see?**

Top Tips



- Don't ask sensitive questions at the beginning.
- Don't be afraid to ask the same question again and again, in different ways.
- If an interview isn't working, cut it short and move on.
- Always ask interpreters to translate using the 1st person, as if they are the person speaking ("I" not "he/she").
- You can use a recorder but remember it will take longer to write up.
- LISTEN! Don't interrupt your interviewee.

Other useful resources

- [Photography Toolkit](#)
How to take great photos
- [Editorial style guide](#)



Happy storytelling!

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