

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.







- 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.









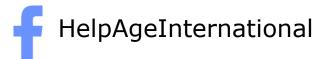
Who are HelpAge's audiences?





www.helpage.org





- 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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