

Understanding personal histories



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Everyone has a story to tell, and the more you know about a person the better. Some information will be on the care plan but this often focuses on care needs rather than the person's history.

Finding out about a person

There are many ways to gather more personal information.

These could be the person's preferred name, family, previous work, hobbies, routines and things that are important for you to know.

[This is me](#) is one example that can help. Developed by the Alzheimer's Society in partnership with Royal College of Nursing.

It's free to download and gives a structure to record a person's cultural and family background, events, people and places from their lives, preferences, routines and their personality.

This additional information can help you to meet a person's needs and will give you some conversation starters.

For instance, if you notice that someone has holidayed in Greece, you could say "tell me about your holiday in Greece".

"Tell me about..." opens up a conversation and does not put a person on the spot to remember specific details, like "when did you go to Greece?" would.

Using life story work with people living with dementia

Life story work will give more in-depth information about a person and is usually in the form of a book.

It could be a collection of objects or a memory box.

There are many templates online to help people to create their own life story, or to create it with someone that knows them well.

Some family members will welcome the opportunity to do something useful like creating a life story book to help others share in their relative's history.

Templates will generally include sections about:

- Early childhood
- School days
- Relationships
- Working life
- Hobbies
- Retirement.

They will usually have space for photographs, mementos, and certificates of achievements.

[Video – Book of You: a Welsh social enterprise to help people with dementia share their life stories](#)

Why is life story work important?

Life story work can be useful in many ways.

Among other things, it can be empowering and life affirming for the person living with dementia to record their story.

It can help family members too and it's a really useful resource to staff to use and look at with the person with dementia.

It can give you as staff a real sense of the person you are supporting and this will have a positive effect on your relationship with them.

[Dementia UK has advice about creating a life story and a template to download](#)

[The Memoirs of Strang the Strong: Georgie Muscles – the life story of Tredegar man George Davies and his contribution to his local community](#)

Having a good understanding of a person's history can also help us to understand why they behave a certain way.

If they worked nights for many years, it may explain why they're awake at 3 am.

Case study

A case study to help you understand the importance of personal histories.

[Video: An Admiral Nurse talks about how creating a life story to stimulate every sense can help people living with dementia](#)

Research links

Improve your practice by accessing the latest research findings.

[Digital life storybooks for people with dementia living in care homes: an evaluation \(2016\)](#)

[Realising the potential: developing life story work in practice \(2009\)](#)

[Dementia and Imagination: a mixed-methods protocol for arts and science research](#)

[Peer support and reminiscence therapy for people with dementia and their family carers: a factorial pragmatic randomised trial](#)

[REMCARE: Pragmatic Multi-Centre Randomised Trial of Reminiscence Groups for People with Dementia and their Family Carers: Effectiveness and Economic Analysis \(2016\)](#)

We want your feedback

Help us to improve the Dementia resource for care professionals by telling us what you think about it in our short [four question survey](#).