# Client Stories

Tools for Understanding Clients

Personal stories are an important way of amplifying the voices and perspective of clients and their family members. Client stories provide insight into the experience of those we are trying to serve.

**Why do we need Stories of Client Experiences?**

- Clients bring lived experience expertise and their stories are a powerful way of demonstrating issues and showing where the gaps are in services and communication.
- The client story individualises data and statistics; it provides a concrete scenario to which people can relate – deepens our understanding
- Individual stories provide details that can only be understood from the perspective of the individual, especially the feelings and impacts of events.
- A client story can help to understand the perspectives of marginalised or unique groups of clients who may have more nuanced experiences.
- For clients, sharing their story can be a way of helping to resolve issues, or may help process a previous traumatic or negative experience. It can be empowering knowing that their experience matters.

**How to Collect Client Stories**

An interview format is useful to gather the stories of clients. One-on-one interviews allow a relationship of trust to be developed between in the interviewer and the client, which is essential to gather detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions, and opinions. Interviews also allow for the capture of non-verbal cues, together with recording the client's own words, allowing for a more accurate representation of their experience.

There are a number of ways to frame an interview to elicit a client story. These can be used to encourage sharing and story-telling.

*1. The client experience*

Ask about a client's own personal experience as a client, carer, or family member. The focus can be on stories and issues that happened at one time or over a long period of time; in a single context or multiple service interactions.

Consider asking:

a. What happened and when? Start from the beginning and provide as much detail as you recall and anything that was important to you.

b. What was the impact of your experience? What about in the short-term, long-term; financially, socially, emotionally? How did it affect your family or friends? What did you gain from your experience?

c. Why do you want to share your experience? What motivates you to share this experience?

d. What matters most to you?

*2. Significant events and transformation*

Focusing an interview on a specific event or experience can allow a 'deep dive' into a particularly significant event or time of transformation. Some lines of questioning to help understand significant events and moments of transformation are:

a. If there was one thing that you wish could have been different, or anything that you would like to see changed or improved, what is it and why?

b. Was there a particular event or moment that changed things for you? How so and why?

c. Knowing what you know now, what would you have done differently? What do you think others could have done differently?

d. What stands out in your memory? The one thing you'll always remember is…

*3. Strengths-based and motivation for change*

One of the main motivations for clients to share their stories is to help others in similar situations. Focusing a client story on overcoming obstacles and demonstrating resilience is another valuable frame for client stories.

It could be worthwhile acknowledging this resilience, before asking questions about the lessons learned. For example:

a. Considering some of the challenges you have shared about your journey, and the experience and lessons you have learnt along the way, you have demonstrated remarkable resilience/ determination.

What would you say to people going through a similar experience that might be helpful to them? What were the things that helped you in the face of challenges?

*4. Partnering initiatives*

Client engagement often involves partnering with clients in collaborative initiatives. Client stories are a useful way to understand how well these approaches are achieving their partnering intention.

a. Why did you become involved as a participant or in an advisory capacity?

b. What motivated you to become involved?

c. What have you been involved in?

d. What impact do you believe you have had?

e. Are there things that would help you in your role?

f. What advice would you give someone thinking about becoming involved?

**Tips for Collecting Client Stories**

- *Respect the privilege*. The client story is not a commodity to be exploited; it is their life story, potentially of a significant event in their lives that they choose to share and for a particular reason. However, having the opportunity to share an experience that is important to clients can also be empowering, provides a platform to generate their own reflection and insights outside of clinical data and provide closure.
- *Reduce power differentials and barriers*. Peer-led discussions and interviews are a good way of building peer support and ensuring clients feel comfortable. Neutral spaces (community and/or home settings, if possible) and using people outside the immediate service area are also important techniques to build confidence and gain feedback.
- *Informed consent.* Ensure you secure consent from clients to record their story. Some people may prefer to remain anonymous and its important to provide ways to share stories whilst preserving anonymity. For example, recording stories on video is only appropriate where clients are comfortable being identifiable.
- *Privacy and confidentiality*. Clients have the right to know who will have access to their information and how their stores will be shared. It is important to provide clients with an opportunity to review the final version of their story prior to it being shared and organisations must make arrangements available to ensure clients are able to withdraw their story at any time.
- *Provide appropriate support.* While the experience of involvement can have positive benefits for clients, for some people, re-living an experience can trigger painful or difficult emotions or previous trauma. It is imperative that those that choose to participate are provided with support and assistance if its needed. Most Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) provide support to clients who share their information. Make sure clients are aware of, and able to, make use of these services if needed.
- *Close the loop.* Let clients know where their story was shared, what people have learnt, and the impact on any changes or improvements.

**Additional Resources**

Here are some additional resources available to help collect client stories:

**Collecting Patient and Carer Stories – A guide for Frontline Health Service Staff who wish to understand and improve patient and carer experience**

**WA Health A toolkit for Collecting and Using Patient Stories**

**New Zealand Patient Stories Toolkit**

**NHS Discovery Interview: Hints and Tips – The Power of Stories**

There is also information available to help clients share their stories. When sharing advice to clients, it can be useful to remind people that there's no 'right way' to share their experiences; we just want to listen.

**Speaking Our Minds: A guide to how we use our stories**