

Making stories count

Using stories to show
the impact of your home
improvement services

A Good Home Network briefing



Introduction – Making stories count

Stories can help you to achieve change. They can support the work of home improvement services in many ways. They will bring your work to life and show partners how working alongside your service can improve people's lives, help to demonstrate the value of your work to commissioners and persuade potential users of your service the benefits of engaging with you.

This briefing is based on the sixth meeting of the Good Home Network. It presents ideas on collecting and telling stories and includes quotes and tips from network members.

What is the Good Home Network?

The Good Home Network is a hub for active learning connecting professionals across England who are exploring ways to improve poor quality homes in their area. The Centre for Ageing Better set up the Good Home Network, in partnership with **Foundations**, to help local authorities ensure people in their communities can live independently, safely and with dignity in their own homes.

Find out more:

Visit ageing-better.org.uk/good-home-network or email goodhomenetwork@ageing-better.org.uk



The value of stories or “How do we get the stats to sing?”

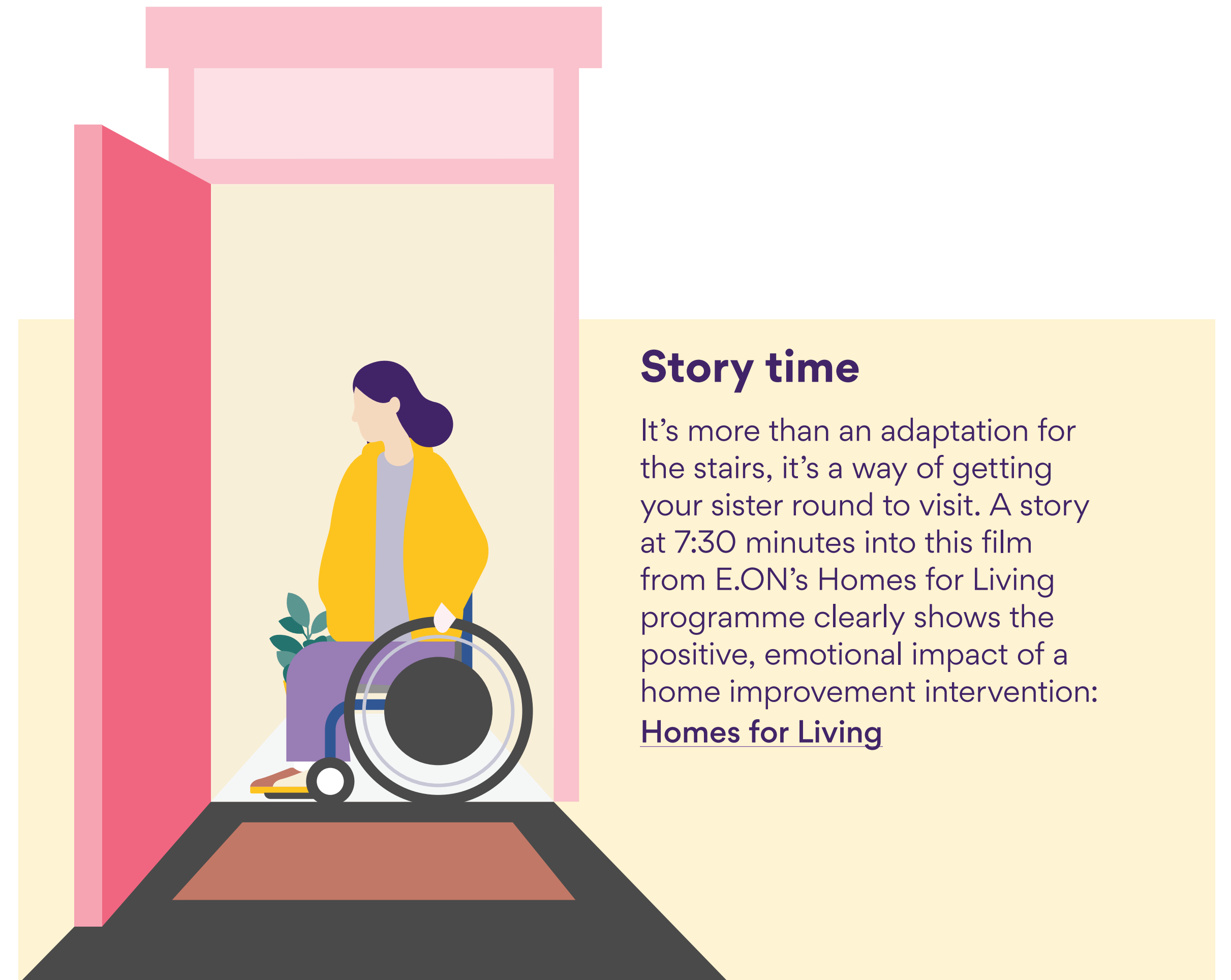
Stories can be very powerful. They can help you to achieve change as they bring the work you do alive.

Having stories interwoven in your work ensures that the most important voices are at the heart of what you do.

Providing that connection to people – to lived experience – through stories, can help to personalise an issue or problem and help show tangible ways you are facilitating change. They also allow big, often abstract issues – ageing, ageism, othering, loneliness – to be understood in terms of how they relate to and impact on people.

“Numbers are great but they tell a really small part of the story. For all of us working with real life people in real life houses, it’s the difference that it makes for them that’s the important thing.”

Member quote



Story time

It’s more than an adaptation for the stairs, it’s a way of getting your sister round to visit. A story at 7:30 minutes into this film from E.ON’s Homes for Living programme clearly shows the positive, emotional impact of a home improvement intervention: [Homes for Living](#)

Planning your story

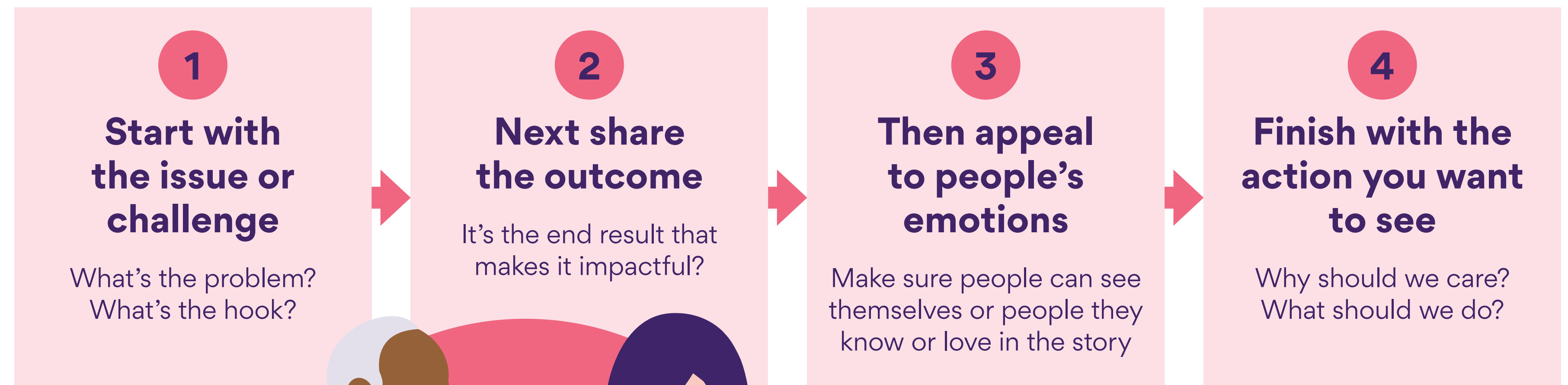
Think about what the intention of collecting and telling the story is.

Do you want to show how your service can benefit people in their own home?

Do you want to engage with commissioners on an emotional level rather than through numbers?

Do you want more people to use your service having heard your story?

This will help you to think about how to frame your story. Here is one simple example of a framing, the stages to consider and the order they should be presented in for maximum impact:



Or to put it another way...
it's conventional storytelling in reverse
with the 'happily ever after' coming
before the action.

Who are you telling stories to?

– part one

You will probably want to tell stories to a range of people. While different audiences may want a different focus, the framework you use will be the same – as will the emotional impact of a good story. These audiences could include:

Funders: Using stories can support the case you make to funders by complementing numerical data. They can help show health partners, non-housing partners or other funders the direct impact that your work has had on people.

Partners: Not all stories need to be shared publicly. A powerful narrative can be useful for internal promotion too. Quotes from service users or stories of changes made to people's home can help animate conversations with other local authority departments or contractors.

Stories can also be useful for more senior leaders in the council, and can be really useful in raising the profile of the purpose and value of your team's work, when presenting to other teams or externally.



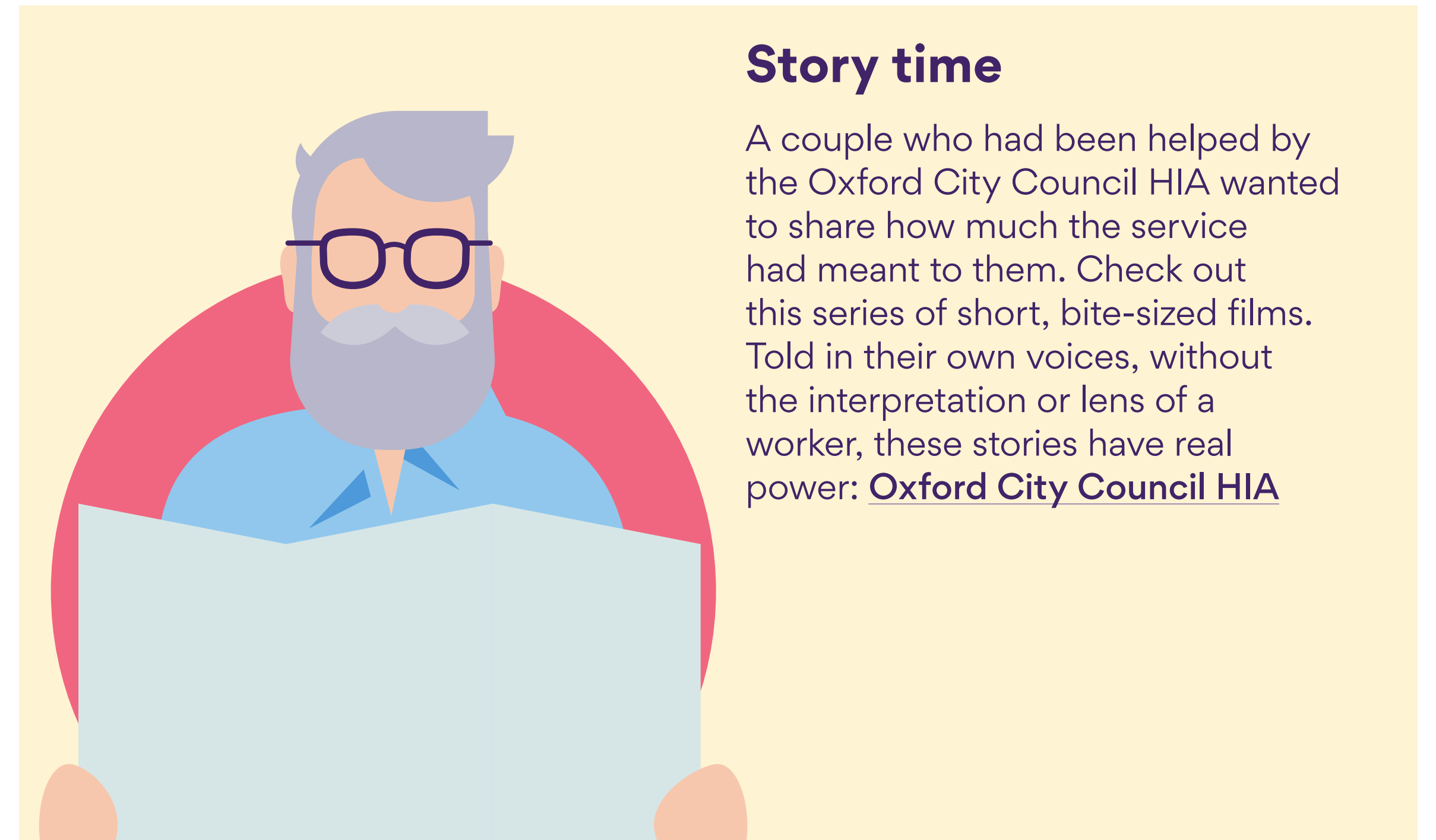
Who are you telling stories to?

– part two

People using services: Stories are key to showcasing your service to potential users. They can also help to advertise that the service is there and explain the process of using it. Seeing someone who's been through it can be very empowering.

Member tips

- ✓ In places where services might not be available across the whole locality, be careful when sharing stories about interventions that some services users might not be able to access.
- ✓ Don't forget, stories can get your service noticed by statutory services and referral partners. Are you ready for this? It might mean a surge in referrals.



Story time

A couple who had been helped by the Oxford City Council HIA wanted to share how much the service had meant to them. Check out this series of short, bite-sized films. Told in their own voices, without the interpretation or lens of a worker, these stories have real power: [Oxford City Council HIA](#)

Telling your story right

It is important to ensure that you are telling the story of an individual rather than a group of people. Recognise that everyone has their own experience – for example, not everyone has the same experience of living in an unsuitable or unsafe home – so be sure not to make assumptions or generalisations.

Avoid perpetuating stereotypes both with your written stories or with images. You can use the Age Without Limits campaign's [Age-positive image library](#) for freely available positive and diverse images of people aged 50+. Also take a look at the Frameworks UK toolkit [How to talk about homes](#) for ways of communicating about homes with impact.

Make sure the storyteller knows how the story will be used and with an indication of for how long. Ideally this should be done at the initial stage of contact to help potential storytellers make an informed decision about whether they want to consent to their story being used.

You also need to make it clear that they can withdraw their consent at any time.

Member tips

- ✓ Your council will have consent forms that you can use / adapt on their website – or your Communications team will be able to help.



Story time

When it isn't right to identify an individual, think about different ways of telling a story with names and voices changed or through animation. Kirklees Council made a series of powerful animations from [people experiencing poverty](#) and changed names and voices to protect people's identities.

Getting your story out into the world

Gathering and telling stories might not be part of your working practice now.

If you want to make sure it is, think about whether to include it in service level agreements or ask your contractors to gather them for you.

For some home improvement services and housing teams, telling stories might require a new way of thinking and you might want a bit of help to do that. Be sure to make links with your local Communications teams, ask them questions and learn from them – they are the experts!

Member tips

- ✓ Don't forget you might need to explain what you do to the Communications team and spend some time getting them on side. Can you identify one person in or out of that team to champion your stories? Is there an elected member or someone else locally who will advocate for you?
- ✓ With escalating costs and tight resources, it's tough to add 'story gathering' to your to do list. But think about who you are already talking to – there's most likely a connection back to real lives and experiences that you can use to demonstrate the impact of your work.

“We take it for granted as practitioners. We're part of the story. The decision makers are going to really miss out on that insight into life.” **Member quote**



Tips for getting your story out

Here are some more member tips on how to get your story out into the world and noticed:

“If we don’t talk to people we don’t co-produce properly.”

Member quote

Member tips

✔ **Co-producing stories gets to the heart of the matter.** Get some inspiration on how to involve people in creating and telling their own stories from Middlesbrough Council’s **Rekindle** digital inclusion service for older people and the Rekindle Research group of current and former participants.

✔ **Small, tangible, low-cost interventions can tell big impact stories.** Don’t just focus on the ‘big ticket’ items (which may well be few and far between).

An example is the huge boost to someone’s quality of life a ‘one cup’ kettle – price tag under £60 – can bring. No longer dependent on a carer to make a cup of tea, the impact of this needs to be shared far and wide.

✔ **Get quotes and short, snappy anecdotes.** Preferably ones that can be remembered by heart. These can be really useful in certain situations, especially if you’re speaking to someone who only has a few minutes to listen.

✔ **Stories on tour!** See if you can get your stories out in your community via a **travelling exhibition** (prints of photos and/or stories to go with them) in libraries, community centres etc.

✔ **DIY.** Can you do it yourself? You could try purchasing a little microphone and a camera – DIY filming. And have a go with simple editing software that’s free to use. (Making sure not to forget your consent forms!)

Resources

Don't forget...

The Centre for Ageing Better can help promote **stories of success** more widely. If you have worked with people to make their home warmer, safer and more accessible and they would like to share their story about making their home better, do let us know on goodhomenetwork@ageing-better.org.uk. We regularly have enquiries from national and local media outlets who would like to speak to someone directly.

- > The **Age Without Limits** campaign hosts the age-positive image library. Access it [here](#)
- > The **Centre for Ageing Better** hosts stories of experience and success. Access them [here](#)
- > **Frameworks UK** have a toolkit with tips and tools for communicating about homes and housing. Access it [here](#)

For more information please visit ageing-better.org.uk/good-home-network or contact goodhomenetwork@ageing-better.org.uk





Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.



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