



The Climate Action Fund Learning Signposts #12

Storytelling

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behalf of The National Lottery Community Fund

Contents

Storytelling	3
Project 1: A Green and Healthy Future for Frome	6
Project 2: Resilient Bude – Protecting our Future	9
Project 3: Artitude: Climate, Culture, Circularity	12
Other resources	14

Storytelling

Who is this for?

This learning signpost is primarily intended for people involved in Climate Action Fund projects that relate storytelling as well as other climate action projects that involve storytelling. It shares some of the early learnings from Climate Action Fund (CAF) projects that are working in this area.

Introduction

Stories help us to make sense of complex problems. Sharing personal experiences helps people to understand how a particular theme, topic or phenomenon is relevant to their lives. A storyteller provides context through their experience and the audience each interpret the story their own way; listening differently, making their own inferences to make sense of the story their own way, to the listener it is a non-passive experience. Stories often change each time they are re-told because listeners create new meaning. They are a mechanism for connecting people through shared experience or as a way of bringing people around to a new way of thinking.

Storytelling often uses metaphors as a means of personal reflection, where people find new ways of envisaging an experience. Metaphors provide an indirect way of recounting a personal experience and making it accessible for the wider public. It is also used to describe the ways in which people tell and structure stories.

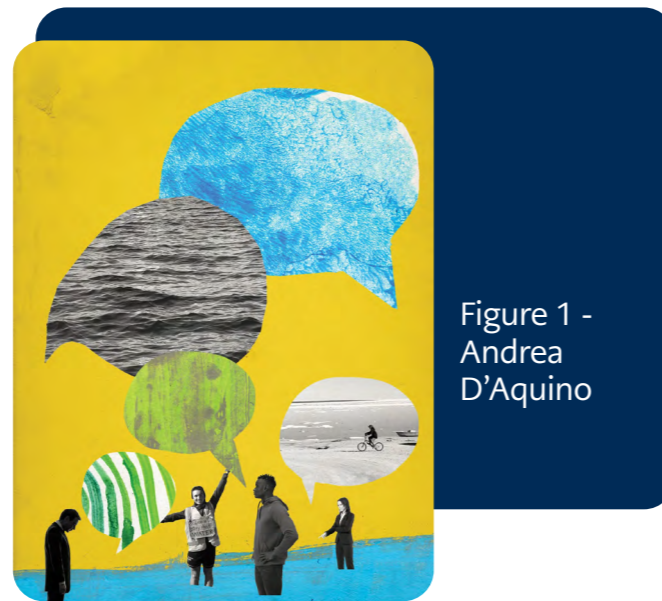


Figure 1 -
Andrea
D'Aquino

Where many consider the construction of a story to have a beginning, middle and end, writer and environmental activist Ursula Le Guin¹ focuses on the space within stories and compares the art of storytelling to a house – something we enter, can be guided through, or left to roam. The house analogy places less emphasis on the ending being a climax or revelation and instead centres around the journey through the story.

Storytelling for climate action can help connect people to each other and climate change. Restorative Storytelling² draws upon ecological principles to restore systemic breakdown and shifts mindsets towards individuals and organisations as part of a living system, and that builds resilience and inspires action. Restorative Storytelling can help people imagine a new, sustainable future. This signpost outlines how three CAF projects use storytelling as a way to engage audiences, share learnings and inspire action.

¹ ursulakleguin.com

² Claire Scobie borrows Regenerative Storytelling from Regenerative Theory

Some lessons emerging from the projects we highlight in this resource are:



Do:

- **Use stories to talk around the nuance of climate change.** Common themes such as carbon footprint, climate justice, anxiety, waste/recycling, food, climate impacts, energy, etc. can be challenging topics to address. Connecting the community to place is an effective way to demonstrate the importance of the environment as a source of health and wellbeing.
- **Take time to develop stories.** The process of storyboarding, deciding a medium for sharing stories, planning, and capturing stories is intensive. Allow adequate time for planning within the partnership so that partners can prepare. Dedicate time for promotion as well as creation of stories.
- **Think about effective ways you will share stories;** it will save you a lot of time and effort. If using film, the shorter the final cut, the more difficult it is to capture a compelling story. Bear in mind short stories for social media (1-2 minutes) might mean more editing time.
- **Make interviewees comfortable.** When invited to talk through stories, people are often sharing personal experiences and feelings. Take time to build trust and make them feel comfortable.
- **Work to understand your community.** Cast your net wide. Gather background information, (e.g., climate outreach data, semiotics, archive photographs, articles, and footage), speak to them, seek their views.





Don't:

- **Prescribe stories to the tellers.** A blank canvas can be daunting but trust the process. Stories should emerge through conversation, and there's a danger of becoming too strategic about delivery. Trust your community, listen and be led by their experiences. Remember to have authenticity, the teller needs agency – this is their story.
- **Overcomplicate things.** If you're capturing someone else's story, keep it simple. Have a few questions to act as prompts to keep the story flowing but encourage them to follow their train of thought.
- **Leave out co-creation.** Co-creation is key to building engagement when creating and reciting stories. It is a process that operates similarly to ecological systems and emergent 'living' frameworks because they adapt and respond to their environment, i.e., local, and specific priorities and challenges. Well-practiced co-creation is a participatory, multi-stakeholder creative process and is inextricably linked to community engagement.
- Forget to have a contingency plan. Things pop up that can delay recording (e.g., poor weather). Make sure you plan and allow time to repeat or supplement with additional material and take cost into account.

Project 1: A Green and Healthy Future for Frome

A Green and Healthy Future for Frome is a partnership programme between Edventure Frome, Frome Medical Practice and Frome Town Council. Their mission is to achieve health and climate win-wins for their community by exploring ways they can help local people to live lives which are good for their health and the planet. This community-led initiative is based on the fact that these issues are firmly linked – if we improve one, we'll also improve the other, enabling everyone to share in a better future. The Green and Healthy Future for Frome partnership is working together to ensure there are many ways to live greener and healthier lives in their town.

How Green and Healthy Future for Frome use storytelling

Storytelling helps raise awareness, invite participation and to share impact and inspire action. Green and Health Future for Frome uses storytelling across all six of their themes (Future Shed Frome, Choosing Wisely, Green Community Connectors, Healthy Homes, Cycle Together and Storytelling) and describe storytelling as “sharing our learning – how we have taken action, what has happened and the changes we have seen. It is also about listening, conversation and participation from all parts of our community”. They create stories using commissioned short films and organic content that they distribute via social media, as well as local press and printed media. They also create toolkits to demonstrate their impact and learning, and to provide a blueprint for other projects who are looking to adopt new ways of engaging with their communities. Storytelling is led by a dedicated Green and Healthy Communications Lead at Edventure who collaborates with comms staff at partner organisations to plan, share ideas and coordinate content across the programme.



Learning so far



Build relationships and communicate well with contractors

Working with people outside of an organisation can be time consuming, but it's worth it if there are insufficient resources or skills in-house. Green and Healthy Future for Frome commissioned some parts of their storytelling work. They took time to make sure they communicated a clear brief and built a good relationship with the contractor to help them understand what they were trying to achieve. They identified someone who understands their community and whose work aligns with their project. "We commissioned a local filmmaker who had worked on environmental and health related topics before. It was important that they could convey the project both to our local community, and to national audiences". Green and Healthy Future for Frome co-ordinated a storyboarding exercise with the filmmaker and theme leads to talk through examples and think about the key messages they want to share.

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Storytelling has many functions both within the community and the partnership

Storytelling within a partnership has strengths as well as limitations – joining together to combine skills and resources can create meaningful outputs. However, it also means there are multiple perspectives to consider, and partnerships that include public and social organisations can sometimes have different priorities and levels of agency. Green and Healthy Future for Frome wanted to make sure that they understood and represented the numerous voices, opinions, and experiences of their community. Storytelling isn't just about promoting good work, it is also an effective mechanism for generating a shared voice within a partnership and community and they decided to create dedicated social media channels, "after relying on each partner to generate their own content for the first year, we decided to set up dedicated channels for the programme to unite our voices and reach shared audiences".

Successes so far

• Health and Climate Conference:

In July 2022, Green and Healthy Future for Frome organised a conference which attracted 150 people from 40+ community, charity, public and private sector organisations, including healthcare professionals and energy sector specialists. The purpose of the event was to share their learning experiences and tell the story behind the unique partnership of the programme. When planning and inviting speakers, they thought of ways to showcase a wider context of climate change by working to create a diverse and inclusive event that involved people of colour and younger voices who spoke on climate-related issues such as politics, inequality, and justice. This encouraged people to think about the bigger picture and connect it to new ways of taking action in their communities and organisations. The event sold out and amplified the global context of Green and Healthy Future for Frome and recognised that climate change isn't a future problem – it's reality for many communities around the world.



Figure 2 - Green and Healthy Future for Frome, Health & Climate Conference, July 2022

• **Town Newsletter Takeover:** During COP26, Green and Healthy Future for Frome collaborated with their town's local newspaper to create a fake newspaper set in 2030. Members of the community were invited to submit articles, advertisements, illustrations, and poems that spoke to the theme of climate change and imagine what it would be like living in Frome in 2030. The articles covered topics across social, environmental, and economic domains, such as health and wellbeing, the environment and ecology, and circular economy. This aimed to create an inspiring vision for how our town and world could look, if we worked together to ensure climate change was averted and our health and wellbeing prioritised. The newspaper was delivered to around 13,000 households, extending Green and Healthy Future for Frome's reach significantly, engaging and encouraging residents to think about the longer-term effects climate change would have in their community.

Links

To find out more see:

- Watch the Green and Healthy Future for Frome short films [here](#)
- Request access to Green and Healthy Future Frome toolkits (including Storytelling Toolkit) [here](#)

Project 2: Resilient Bude – Protecting our Future

Resilient Bude Partnership is a group of environmental and community organisations based in Bude, Cornwall. The Partnership works together to develop positive community-led climate change responses in a coastal community already impacted by climate change.

How Resilient Bude Partnership uses storytelling

The Resilient Bude Partnership came to storytelling by accident when trying to find new ways to engage their community to work together to mitigate the devastating effects of climate change. The project spent two years under development before launch, during which the team worked behind the scenes to establish baseline data to understand their community representation and behavioural patterns that could help them to understand the best way to engage their community. Recognising that a disproportionate amount of the population is made up of people over 60 (who tend to have the largest carbon footprint of any age range due to lifestyle preferences i.e., retirement, travelling to dispersed families etc.), the Partnership set to work establishing the best ways to engage their community in a way that promoted sharing of memories in their changing landscape. Climate Outreach research (by Exeter University, funded by the National Lottery) indicated what some of the cultural values of their community might be; one that celebrates tradition, heritage, relationships

with key members of the community, and to place and landmarks.

When they started thinking about storytelling as a mechanism for engaging their community and building resilience, one organisation, Storylines, caught their eye. Storylines specialises in Digital Storytelling. “They had a unique way of getting people to talk about their experiences, leading into conversations on how the community has changed in their lifetime”. Digital storytelling is a non-intrusive method of capturing stories that doesn’t rely on cameras at all, but on audio recordings to which images are later added. Interviewees are invited to share artefacts, such as photographs or articles, and talk through their experiences and interpretation of different events. Resilient Bude Partnership identified a broad range of potential interviewees that were representative of and recognised by the wider community. The Resilient Bude Partnership call these people ‘cultural gatekeepers’ – people who stood out as pillars of the community and therefore had the ability to captivate and influence an audience. Coincidentally, the interviewees spoke around cultural touch points (heritage, place) to frame climate change which led to an increase in engagement and reach within their community.



Figure 3 - Resilient Bude, Vicko’s beach hut from ‘Vicko’s Story’

Learning so far



The best engagement is giving people an opportunity to interact

Giving people a platform to share their experiences is a powerful tool to engage members of the community; arguably more so than external facilitation because they understand social norms. “Stories told by familiar people resonate, supports, gives agency, and possibly challenge people’s way of thinking”. It is difficult to engage communities on topics such as climate change, but giving people an opportunity to share their stories has meant that the Bude community has resonated with climate change and how it will impact the town in their lifetime, and for future generations.

Use the community’s cultural values to frame conversations

Sitting people down in front of an audio recorder and asking them to talk about a project or climate change can be daunting for the interviewee and ineffective. The Resilient Bude Partnership leaned into the cultural values of their community and identified something that the interviewee was passionate about, which guided the conversation. The Partnership explored what would happen and how community members would feel if the subject of their passion was no longer accessible, available, or existed. This meant that the stories had a natural flow that enabled people to understand and connect to perspectives and interpret how climate change will impact their lives.

Successes so far

- **Engaging with new members of the community:** As with a lot of rural places, it can be difficult to engage difficult-to-reach community members who have a very deep-rooted relationship with tradition, heritage, and place. Resilient Bude Partnership has been able to connect to new people by talking through their respective relationships with place.
- **Building on past and ongoing activity:** Resilient Bude Partnership utilised their networks, created through their other initiatives such as the repair café, to identify their cultural gatekeepers and begin their storytelling journey.
- **The community has learned more about the impacts of climate change:** The Resilient Bude Partnership regularly conducts research to monitor its reach and impact, including shifts in opinion and behaviour within the community. They've found that there has been a 25-30% increase in community members' understanding of the impacts of climate change. This is captured in an engagement film they created.
- **Storytelling informed Resilient Bude Partnership's approach to engagement and outreach:** Developing the digital stories shaped their overall message about resilience and adaptation, which has supported their Climate Action Fund funding application process. It helped to shape their narrative around what they are doing, why, how and with who, and gave them a tool to reflect back on how far they have come.

Links

To find out more see:

- Resilient Bude Partnership Engagement Film. Click [here](#).
- Resilient Bude Partnership: Our Bude, Our Stories. Click [here](#).
- Storylines. Click [here](#).

Project 3: Artitude: Climate, Culture, Circularity

Artitude: Climate, Culture, Circularity is a partnership involving The Derry Playhouse, Zero Waste Northwest, Northern Ireland Resources Network, Queens University Belfast and Derry/Londonderry City and Strabane District Council. The Partnership co-ordinates and delivers a programme of creative activities grounded in the circular economy, using the arts and creative practice to encourage behaviour change and challenge attitudes to waste, consumption, and climate action.



Figure 4 – Artitude, Climate, Culture,

...storytelling creates gentler connections

How Artitude: Climate, Culture, Circularity use storytelling

Artitude works with community groups and climate activists to create stories that reframe climate change narratives and engage the wider community. Storytelling helps groups to find new ways to communicate and interact with each other around climate change, “where other approaches to connecting around climate and consumption can be challenging, storytelling creates gentler connections”.

Artitude uses storytelling as an artform to create a story of movement in Derry/Londonderry to get people thinking about what being part of a movement means and why people join movements. It is about developing a story for them (exploring who they are and what climate change means to them) and creating a story of us (that brings the community together). Artitude runs playful and engaging workshops facilitated by storytellers around topics such as climate, waste and littering, that help to highlight the interconnectedness of humans and nature. This helps to find different ways of articulating a subject that can feel very heavy, bringing more people into the climate change movement that helps to break down anxiety and fear.

Learning so far

Engaging new audiences and established groups requires different approaches

Alongside climate engagement with the general public, Artitude also works with established activist groups. This ranges from one-off, drop-in creative workshops to running six to eight week programmes pairing an artist with community groups. For the latter, they found it took time to invest in building relationships with community groups to make sure any work co-created was meaningful to them and impactful to the wider city.

Placemaking is important

Artitude connects communities and neighbourhoods to language and land, by running zine-making workshops around climate and waste in the Irish language or embed artists in communities over a period of time. They have found focusing on place is a valuable way to build relationships within communities and to make sense of climate change in their context

Successes so far

- **Creativity is cathartic:** Artitude collaborated with the Northern Ireland Science Festival to create Siren, a one-day sustainability festival in Derry/Londonderry where they ran a number of workshops. This included a seed mapping workshop, and as people were creating maps, they were talking about topics such as waste. They also ran a jewellery up-cycling workshop, during which people engaged in conversations about repairing items and thinking critically around zero waste.
- **Engage in multiple forms of storytelling to demonstrate storytelling is for everyone:** Artitude co-create a number of programmes and initiatives simultaneously to demonstrate storytelling is for all. The Artitude Community Garden, working in conjunction with community groups and the Lilliput Theatre Company for adults with learning disabilities, encouraged people to explore topics such as ecology and rewilding. They use this work to connect communities through storytelling; with the Lilliput Theatre Company creating a puppet show for children on the impacts of littering on nature. This creates a shared narrative around a story that connects communities to place and climate conversations.



Links

To find out more see:

- SIREN23 festival of environment and nature. [Click here.](#)
- Artitude. [Click here.](#)

Other resources

- Inspiring Stories and Personal Reflections. Click [here](#).

Further reading resources:

Claire Scobie. Tomorrow is Today: Storytelling for Climate action. Facilitating with Stories: Ethics, Reflective Practice and Philosophies, p275-278. Edited by Andrew Rixon, Cathryn Lloyd. Ursula K. Le Guin. What makes a story available [here](#).

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About the Climate Action Fund

The Climate Action Fund is a ten-year £100 million fund supporting communities across the UK to take action on climate change.

About The National Lottery Community Fund

We are the largest non-statutory community funder in the UK – community is at the heart of our purpose, vision and name. We support activities that create resilient communities that are more inclusive and environmentally sustainable and that will strengthen society and improve lives across the UK. We're proud to award money raised by National Lottery players to communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to work closely with government to distribute vital grants and funding from key Government programmes and initiatives. As well as responding to what communities tell us is important to them, our funding is focused on four key missions, supporting communities to:

1. **Come together**
2. **Be environmentally sustainable**
3. **Help children and young people thrive**
4. **Enable people to live healthier lives.**

Thanks to the support of National Lottery players, we distribute around £500 million a year through 10,000+ grants and plan to invest over £4 billion of funding into communities by 2030. We're privileged to be able to work with the smallest of local groups right up to UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to bring their ambitions to life.

National Lottery players raise over £30 million each week for good causes throughout the UK. Since The National Lottery began in 1994, £47 billion has been raised and more than 670,000 individual grants have been made across the UK – the equivalent of around 240 National Lottery grants in every UK postcode district.

www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk



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