

*Our vision is a world where all care homes are great places to live, die, visit and work.*

## Facilitating Appreciative Dialogue – Guidance on How to Choose and Work with Tools

My Home Life (MHL) aims to promote and enhance quality of life for older people living and dying in care homes, and for those visiting and working in them. The My Home Life Scotland webpage has several tools to promote appreciative dialogue and relationship centred practice, as part of the Caring Conversations Framework.<sup>1,2</sup> Participants are encouraged to try these out with their colleagues, relatives, residents and others and to adapt them to make them work in their particular health and social care setting. These are often creative and playful methods that explore language and use imagery, metaphor and stories to deepen inquiry, explore values, acknowledge and express emotion and talk about issues that may be tricky to speak openly about or simply difficult to put into words:



There are many other practice development, reflection and group process tools and toolkits publicly available, which contain useful activities and tools that can also be used to promote appreciative dialogue. This briefing paper sets out some of the ways that practitioners might make choices about

whether and how to use specific tools, to help them develop a repertoire of approaches, to be able to improvise and invent, not as instructors or directors, but as facilitators of appreciative dialogue, individual and collaborative learning.

### Work with people, not on or for them – the principles and practices of appreciative dialogue

Many tools are intended for use with groups, however most can also be used in one-to-one situations or as individual aids to reflection. Many tools can be readily adapted, and the pointers below will help you to make good choices, that align explicitly with appreciative dialogue. We can't know in advance how particular tools will work in each situation, so choices must be made alongside a willingness to give something new a try.

### Core principles of appreciative inquiry – how do these relate to the methods used?

A good touchstone for making judgements about the use and adaptation of any tools for appreciative dialogue is the principle of 'working with people, not on them or for them.' In developing this briefing note, we tested out these principles on a few selected tools; the best ones helped us to 'forefront inquiry' by generating questions about and amongst ourselves, rather than eliciting factual information about the topic or encouraging us to label or talk about people who were not there.

- Appreciation, generativity and reframing problems
- To what extent is the tool focusing on what works well and why, what is valued and what matters? To what extent does the tool help us to see old things in new ways? If it is focused on the negative, how can we reframe it to ask positive focused questions? What phrasing of the stem or starter questions will encourage a focus on appreciation? With the

<sup>1</sup> <http://myhomelife.uws.ac.uk/scotland/2016-briefing-papers/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://myhomelife.uws.ac.uk/scotland/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/3-Overview-of-My-Home-Life-conceptual-framework1.pdf>



positive inquiry tool the questions asked are what is working well and what can we do more of together to enhance the experience? Note the second questions has an emphasis on future possibilities and co-creation.

- Questions, Conversations, Stories and Language matter

What questions and dialogue do we have when using the tool? Do the questions focus on how people feel, enable consideration of other perspectives and tap into what we are curious or wondering about? Does it help people to talk about their real experience and feelings rather than what they think others want to hear? How does it help people to use their own everyday language? Does it clearly give a message that touches hearts and minds, engages with people? What place do stories have when using the tool? Will it generate more questions than it answers? (If yes, it sounds good!) Emotional touchpoint stories ask people to select emotional words about how they feel about a particular point in their experience and to share why they feel that way. If they choose a negative emotion they can be asked to choose an emotion that expresses how they would like to feel.

- Playful provocation

When using the tool does it stretch and surprise or provoke playful new ideas? Does it promote imaginative thinking and conjure up images or metaphors, sayings or phrases that challenge or shift ways of thinking or behaving? How can it be adapted to do so? How does it support people to say what they really know, to share tacit knowledge and things that might be tricky or 'unsayable' in ways that are 'safe'? Example statements in the unfolding story tool are let's start, I would be upset if, imagine if. These are playful and provocative.

- Knowledge creation is a relational process

How are we using this tool to consider the perspectives of all, including those of the facilitator? How much are we working with people as opposed to on people? Can we use it to build the relationships amongst us? Does the tool seem to seek a 'right answer' or encourage a listing of responses? If so, it's a test, not an approach to dialogue.

- We are one expert among many

Who are the people who have the experience of what this tool focuses on? How might we include them in the inquiry process? How might it be adapted so that it can be used by all?

- Participation, collaboration and experimentation

How are we enhancing the participatory and collaborative inquiry process when using the tool? Is there scope for experimentation, improvisation and adaptation? How do we check in about the process of using the tool? Can it be altered to be shorter and more fun?

- Real time application and feedback

Does the tool encourage provoke sharing or examples or stories of actions that feel credible and trustworthy? For example, 'Beliefs and Values' are best elicited through active and concrete stories and sharing of examples that show beliefs and values in action, rather than talk about them. What does it capture in practice? Who might it have meaning for? Can the tool be adapted and woven into everyday practice, not just in a workshop or meeting?

## Practical pointers for facilitation

With individuals and groups, it may be useful to think of facilitation as less about someone's role and more about being a process of 'animation', which gives life and brings forth qualities and ideas that are already existing within the person or group. The most effective animation will help all the participants in a process to become co-facilitators of their own and each other's learning.<sup>3</sup>

### *a) What is my intention or purpose?*

It is important to be clear about what you are trying to accomplish. Use the tool that meets your purposes best. You might want people to get to know each other better to support team work; explore what people value about some aspect of care; hear different perspectives about an issue; encourage people to be more open about a practice issue or speak up about something that feels difficult.

### *b) How much preparation do I need to do?*

It is good to have a purpose and a plan, but it is best to proceed in the knowledge that inevitably you will change course as more perspectives come into play. Having a few options and other ideas is generally a good strategy and it is wise not to expect to achieve too much in one go.

### *c) What will make it safe for people to take part, but also to stretch and grow?*

Part of the task of choosing and using tools is to think about the context and space in which they will be used. Developing some agreed ways of working with a group as they are about to embark on their work together will help them to consider what will enable them to take part as fully as possible. Ask them to be quite specific about what behaviours they will expect to see if they are adhering to their aspirations, so that everyone hears a few examples of desired behaviours rather than assuming that everyone already knows what is meant, for instance, by 'confidentiality'. Co-creating an agreement about ways of working sets the tone of mutual responsibility, contribution and care.

### *d) How do I encourage the fullest participation?*

In any one-to-one or group process, pay attention to the many layers of inter-personal dynamics, emotions and

<sup>3</sup>Dewar, B. & Sharp, C. (2013). Appreciative dialogue for co-facilitation in action research and practice development. International Practice Development Journal, 3(2, 7).

language, including the way people talk as well as what they say and their body language. People may be self-conscious or anxious, confident or excited. It's important to support people to contribute when they're ready, let them 'pass' if they wish, and in a group, give them another chance at the end, but keep this light. Try to avoid telling people what their experience will or should be; too much comment or interpretation from any one individual, especially one in a more powerful position can silence people. It may seem democratic for managers who are present not to take an active part themselves, but this can make the rest of the group feel they are being 'studied' or appraised. It can set a different tone for the session for the facilitator to 'model' the activity by going first.

### *e) What else will help the group process?*

Lots of tools can be adapted simply by paying attention to how they are used, and many tools can be combined; for example, use images and written forms. For example, asking people to write things down anonymously on post-its creates a different dynamic to asking people to share verbally in a group. The act of writing might encourage a fairly quick

'first response', whereas use of images or other creative approaches might elicit less rehearsed or more surprising comments, whether written or verbal. When taking turns to respond in a group, rather than going around the group in a sequence allowing people to respond when they feel it is most appropriate, what we call 'popcorn', enables them to build on what's already been said. This also helps each person to listen to what's being said, instead of thinking about what they're going to say themselves and enables greater spontaneity rather than overly considered responses. Be creative and playful and occasionally do something fresh or mix things up a bit, because it's more fun and will help people share their tacit knowledge, perhaps even surprising themselves. And continue to learn and grow – ask for feedback about the process of using the tool and ask about its application to other situations:

## Summary – learn by doing

The Caring Conversations Framework helps people to engage in an appreciative dialogue. These principles will help people to develop the skills of facilitating learning and action.

Courage	Collaborate
Be prepared to try something different and to make mistakes	Work with others to towards a common understanding, not necessarily a consensus
Make it fun and light, seek to create positive energy and liveliness rather than a specific outcome	Be an active collaborator yourself
Take chances, go with the flow, rather than sticking to the plan	Be open to the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions
Trust that the answers will emerge	Share roles, ask for help
Celebrate	Consider other perspectives
Search for the positives and the strengths in other perspectives	Seek to enlarge and be open to change your point of view
Submit your best thinking, in the expectation that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it	Don't feel you have to defend your position
Find the common ground that is mutually valued	Explore taken for granted and previously undiscussed assumptions
Be curious	Compromise
Model and encourage an attitude of inquiry, not inquisition or judgement	Be open to at least suspending your beliefs and cherished ideas
Reflect on your own position	Help people to articulate what they need and want and share what is possible
Listen to understand and find meaning, rather than to seek flaws	Talk together about ways to get the best experience for all
Ask questions of others, especially when you think you know the answer	Seek solutions that no-one had thought of before
Resist the pressure to come to spurious or premature conclusions	
Connect emotionally	
Attend to safety and creating the conditions for people to express their feelings authentically	
Acknowledge and explore feelings, don't dispute them or depreciate your own or those of others	