OPENSTORYTELLERS: STORYSHARING IN SCHOOLS.
Funded by the PAUL HAMLYN FOUNDATION
FINAL REPORT

'Freedom, respect, giving them a voice.' - a teacher describing Storysharing

THE PROJECT
Personnel.
Storysharing in schools, a three-year education based intervention, was funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and delivered by Openstorytellers in partnership with Three Ways School, Bath.
Project evaluation was carried out by Dr. Karen Bunning of the University of East Anglia with support from Dr. Nicola Grove.
Project leader was Jane Harwood (Openstorytellers) and link person was Judy Dumont (Three Ways School).

The funding.
The publisher Paul Hamlyn's motto was 'there must be a better way'.

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) believe that their grants should enable transformation at three levels:

1. For individuals and society: the work should have a positive impact on the people involved.
2. For organisations: the project should challenge the organisation to reflect on, consolidate and/or change the way it operates.
3. For policy and practice: we want the work we fund to be exemplary and to have the potential to influence practice beyond the scope of the organisation applying for support, whether within their art form, their region or both.

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation grant we received was for targeted work in developing speaking and listening skills (oracy) in young people aged 11-18.

We said we would work with young people who have profound and multiple disabilities and complex communication needs. In this context, the terms

"speaking and listening" need to be broadly interpreted as direct face-to-face communication.

The outcome would be that these young people could lead and contribute to positive change in their communities.

Another outcome would be that we would increase the capacity of our organization to market services and train the workforce.

We said we would publish and share our findings. This final report forms a part of this.

STORYSHARING: A DEFINITION
Storysharing is a communication method, developed and defined by the founder of Openstorytellers Dr. Nicola Grove, using research and observation of conversational narrative through 15 years practice in adult day care & special schools.
It is a framework for the identification and sharing of personal experience narratives.
 The stories shared are defined as personal empathetic discourse – stories of everyday life, the little events we share with each other, that define our commonality.
The starting point is that we all have these stories to tell, but some people need support to tell them.

Storysharing empowers individuals with communication support needs by providing them with effective communication partners.
It also empowers professionals who become more confident communicators through adopting this method.

We wanted our spheres of change to be:
   a. Social – enabling participation, advocacy, friendships and inclusion
   b. Educational - offering an alternative model to the ethnocentric, literacy based narrative perspective, which has tended to dominate in schools, disadvantaging some pupils. Storysharing emphasises co-construction, empathetic listening, and personal identity.
We also said that communities would benefit through discovering that it is possible to include people with severe communication skills in public meetings, consultations and activities.

A teacher at the school defines Storysharing as 'A way of expressing stories, understanding one another more – social acceptance.'

We would work within Three Ways School running interventions to train staff and embed the methods of Storysharing.

WHY WE NEEDED TO DO THIS.

A teacher at the school saw that Storysharing *'gives young people a confidence to talk and chat'*. For teenagers with complex communication needs, this is the first step to becoming an active citizen – a self-advocate.

We said Storysharing was innovative for education because ' It represents a radical challenge to the way in which narrative is conceptualised and taught in school settings – emphasising the key importance of oral empathetic discourse that is socially constructed and collaboratively delivered. '
After our project, the head of English in primary recognised that using personal narrative as a learning platform had been an opportunity to innovate in the classroom. : *'I think probably the whole idea of personal narrative has ... given me the opportunity to innovate. I've taught in the mainstream for a long time and you do a lot of news sharing, don't you? Some children here find that really challenging, they either can't remember or they can't communicate it, so I think storysharing has allowed us to think about how it's important.'*

When we applied for our grant we saw that the Speaking and Listening Programme of Study had hardly any mention of oral narrative (once at KS1, otherwise narrative is mentioned in written contexts), and only one mention of feelings – with emotion discussed only in the context of appropriate management for pupils with SENs.
Of course, subsequently, Speaking and Listening was nearly lost from the curriculum altogether in the government education reforms. The formal curriculum confines personal oral narratives to early years and KS1/2 (Grove 2014).

Another teacher points out that there is little leeway in the profession, and perhaps little opportunity for true autonomy. She says that *'you've got these targets and things to get through. Without giving things long enough to embed ... Because we've not been given a chance have we? You know, governments change and education ministers change and suddenly everything's changing again. And then you've almost built a culture ...everything is just rushed...'* She identifies that for Storysharing to take hold, it needs time. *'I think the biggest is time. And Storysharing is not quick. But it's something that they need to recognise as being valuable and worth giving that time up, because the end result will make a difference. But that's quite difficult for teachers, you know, to do that.'*

WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO: OUR OBJECTIVES.

How did the project go?
We needed to spread communication confidence and explain our methods. Key elements were identified as training: for staff, pupils, families, transition support workers and community leaders.
Perhaps unusually for Openstorytellers, this was a project that was more about 'I show you how' rather than 'I do this with you.' Most interactions took place in situations with no learning disabled representatives present.

The other salient point is that this was in many ways a pilot project. Our previous Storysharing project had been in adult services across Somerset, where a very different set of challenges and outcomes were presented.
We did not know at the outset quite what the project in the school would look like.
Neither did the school: the project link worker says she *'couldn't quite work out what it was going to look like – and how we were going to do it. Just thought it was a really nice idea. Thought it would be quite low key, and that someone was just going to pop in and do a bit of Storysharing – 'Yeah! Lovely!' and I'll go along with being that sort of person's link. Yeah.*
And then it's just grown into this huge project, which has been absolutely magnificent, in many ways, but – very – not time consuming – but a big presence in school, I think is really how I can look at it. It's always there in the back ground which is not such a bad thing for me, for managing people and time and things.'
Another teacher, who later became an advocate for the work, was concerned at first: *'I guess I thought it was going to be more around using stories or literature and working from that. And so it quite surprised me I suppose at the beginning that it was so much based on the young people's own experience and their own stories. And at the beginning I think I found it really slow...'*

Working effectively over three years in one school meant that in some ways the project needed to be subsumed into school practices, with the adoption of more a class based, educational approach, before it could operate effectively. And it was recognised that change takes time: a staff quote embodies this. *'... I've always said that it takes time in school to embed things. And if you want to start to be able to use the right strategies, the right language and teaching young people to develop these skills, you need to embed it. And I think it will take 3 years. And more.'*

The project had a very detailed timeline that was possibly over prescriptive. Targets were ambitious and our approach had to change to reflect the every-day realities and set backs (which could be expected over any three year period of working as an outside agent in a SEN setting).

This often worked as a positive agent for change and progress. We developed an accountability system where the project leader reported and presented quarterly:

1. Charity director and trustees
2. Project management group – charity staff and school senior management team
3. Steering group – interested parties and stakeholders both from within and without the school and charity.

We took these meetings as our benchmarks, and as forums for discussing change and eliciting suggestions.

At one stage we produced an internal report for the school and charity that helped us define issues in a 'difficult period'.

The PHF were supportive of dialogue and we kept them informed through annual reports and discussions. They visited the project in year three to see evidence, which was very useful.

Targets

The target group aimed to reach 60 pupils aged 11-19 with complex communication needs attending Three Ways School in Bath.

We also said the project would aim to benefit all the children in the school, through staff training and peer mentoring for younger pupils.

We said we'd work with 8-10 families.

We also aimed to have a group of 10 'storysharing ambassadors' form within the school.

Actual figures.

We exceeded our targets but also went outside the age range, partly as a response to a request from the steering group, but also as a result of Storysharing being embedded across the whole school, from reception to sixth form. (5 – 19)

We reduced the number of target families to 6, mostly because of time constraints and the issues raised by attrition and lone working (the project leader had no support).

The Storysharing ambassadors were a group of 6 school leavers; many students shared stories with their peers through one-off events such as school assemblies and the school council.

In years one and two we worked with

- **6 whole classes** (1 primary, 3 secondary, 2 6th form)
- **65 students (**plus 5 slightly below the PHF target age)
- **29 staff** (including teaching assistants)
- **6 families**
- **36 students** who have used technology for Storysharing
- **18 students and 4 staff** were involved with a peripheral initiative trialing Storysharing with the school council

- **10 students** working as **peer mentors** within their class.

In year three, all the school students and all staff benefitted from Storysharing, through the Inset training, the focus term and the SIP. Also:

- **37** students received direct benefit, working with project leader (secondary and 6th form)
- **19 staff were trained directly,** reaching level one Storysharing
- **4 Speech and Language Therapists** received dedicated support, training and equipment.
- Outside training and events helped us to reach **64 professionals** and **60 self advocates.**

IMPLEMENTING THE CHANGE: REFLECTIONS ON OUR METHODS.

In the school

The majority of the work was through class-based interventions. In an ideal situation, this would translate as:

- Gathering relevant information about the class, pen portraits and educational profiles
- Dedicated training for the teacher and teaching assistants
- One term of weekly group sessions with the project leader
- A mid-term review
- Additional sessions for one to one work and targeted curriculum overlaps such as resource making, IT, art based sessions
- Staff teams gather and develop systems for recording stories
- Each students has one 'key' story to bring to their annual review
- End of term review
- Project leader then moves on to another class, but is available for long-term support and consultation.

It was much more about a holistic approach than 'just English'. We fitted Storysharing across the curriculum as the need and opportunity developed. This was a bit of a 'two birds with one stone' approach, which gained us time in the classroom. Making story records enabled us to work in the art curriculum, and use literacy and computer skills. Friendship groups crossed over into PSHE. iPads and videos were used for peer-to-peer work in ICT lessons. Storysharing was actively used for plenaries at the outdoor learning project and on trips.

One to one work was often iPad based, learning to recall, sequence, and practice skills. This was also a chance to give teaching staff some dedicated personal training.

Sharing, modeling and peer mentoring happened across year groups and in assemblies.

Families

This work was done through a series of meetings in the students' home. The project leader would explain the programme and demonstrate simple Storysharing techniques; with the aid of an easy read 'how to' booklet and story gathering sheets some basic ways of gathering and sharing at home were proposed.

Subsequent visits would just get the feel of how it was going, more of a listening process.

Some families were loaned flipcams and an iPad to help them gather stories.

What we found was that the families needed to share their own stories more than they wanted help with beginning to communicate differently with their children.

Visits were fascinating but had a life of their own – one Mum was very clear about the benefits to her son: *'He shows it's fun. And it's their communication isn't it – it's like us saying '– hey, guess what I did last night' or whatever....*

Our kids don't speak – they don't communicate - it's all on computer – they don't know how to have a conversation! – the next generation are going to grow up mute! They're not even going to know how to talk.'

Another Mum reported regularly on communication change. Her son, L., went off to residential college: Storysharing became a way of keeping in touch. He was feeling homesick. The college set him up with Skype.

They have been skyping each other every night, and L. has been sharing stories with his Mum.

'Something always breaks in our stories! – he uses sound effects too.' The microwave blew up because it had cleaning fluid in it.

'We have started doing this every night now.' It is meaningful, effective and L. can do it without support.

E. enjoyed Storysharing with her daughter. Of all the parents, she understood that we were offering to support a new approach to communicating. She says that *'I recognize that I am a storyteller. I love to tell a story. You change it as well – not that you change the actual truth of a story – but you change the way you tell it, according to the audience, don't you?'*

Some tales were complex, personal problems were discussed, and obviously the project worker could not offer solutions. Sometimes she was seen as a representative of the school – which obviously, she was not.

Some visits felt a bit unpredictable. For safety we withdrew from lone visits in year three and would recommend always having a back up system in place, such two project workers available to do home visits together.

Training

We moved from informal to formalized training opportunities across the project, as we consolidated our evidence base and working methods.

We convened a school-based focus group (teachers, teaching assistants, therapists) and worked with them to refine the programme.

We ended up with a clear ten-point plan of Storysharing, and delivered level one Certification.

We also delivered staff briefings, a half-day Inset session, and a full day Inset day at another school.

Was there a 'light bulb moment' for staff? The project link worker says '*some people, they just get it immediately. And they have a natural confidence. Are able to step out of their teacher mode, and that's about a confidence thing in many ways. Realising that there are alternative ways of working and speaking.*

But no I don't know that there is necessarily a light bulb moment. I think with some people it's still a real struggle.'

Communities

Community participation was the main aim of the project.

All sorts of barriers were presented, significantly including the following:

- Students were not able to understand the abstract concepts of 'community'. This was a barrier to the student-led approach necessary for true participation.
- Personal care and support needs were complex, making off site work a real issue. Even finding enough hands to push wheelchairs and parking the big bus we needed was problematic.
- We struggled to build relationships with outside agencies: though we had no hard evidence, there was a suggestion that people may have found the challenge of communication too much for them.
- Interested agencies made promises but tended to let us down at the last minute.

Positive work was done on 'access to the arts', responding to the fact that one of our ambassadors had a picture in an exhibition. Visits to the exhibition were not plain sailing and the work was hung too high for her to see it in from her wheelchair.

This story led to Storysharing ambassadors becoming 'art detectives', with their own art audit, generating feedback and dialogues with arts organisations and galleries.

We would have liked to curate our own 'accessible exhibition'. Time constraints intervened but some interesting work was done. The local hospital did stage an exhibition of students' work as a result of our visit, and we contacted the architects of the local art gallery to share our art audit. Stephen, a community artist, came and worked with us to create accessible 3 dimensional art.

We were a long way from the aims we'd anticipated at the start of the project. Beyond school based work (such as the school council) and on-board stakeholders such as the steering group, we did not succeed in making impact on our local communities beyond the art based work.

However, there is another angle to this.

We see that being enabled to share stories may have a direct impact on the individuals' community.

Peer to peer communication is fostered. Families are drawn in. There is a move away from the static dynamic of 'teacher/student' or 'carer/cared-for' interaction.

A Mum was talking about her daughters' new skills '..... *the wonderful thing about it was whilst she had so much fun, remembering the story, and particularly the emotion around the story – the laughter – being frightened, whatever the emotions are – when she met people she hadn't seen for a while but felt comfortable with, she would suddenly – when she was chatting with them – she would suddenly say 'mouse!' – would say 'mouse!' and 'cat!'. And that's because she wanted to share with this person.'*

There is suddenly a way in. Strangers or even family members now have a way to communicate. The glass wall that surrounds young people with complex communication needs suddenly disappears.

We would suggest that having the toolkit to communicate, to converse on your own terms with peers, family, and significant others – including strangers – is also a toolkit for community participation: to initiate, to take the lead, to make friendships, to show that we all share experiences.

EVALUATING THE IMPACT

Individuals

We needed to show what we were doing was making a difference. Gathering data was something we worked on throughout the project. How best to capture the many instances of change and engagement evidenced by the students?

It was essential to understand starting points – educational and communication profiles. Regrettably, this information was not always easy to access.

When running class based interventions, we made our own ongoing observations of levels of engagement, and recorded unexpected change. We often used video to capture Storysharing episodes and mark progress.

Progress was measured against stated individual targets that were set by the school. For example, T., (verbal but socially isolated, prone to incoherent monologues, can be echolalic, finds closure difficult) had targets that included *'initiating conversation with his peers'*. He worked on one story about going fishing, and used this story to initiate interaction between his peers - who 'fished' together with props suggested by another student. He also created beautiful collages about his story and incorporated these into his sharing, which diverted attention away from the challenges of one to one interaction whilst keeping listeners on track.

We also looked to teachers to identify changes. B. (11) likes to be reminded of boundaries (this made him feel safe). He needed choosing time, and lots of physical and verbal reminders to wait quietly, and someone with him when

moving round the school. He has a speech impediment and fluctuating hearing loss. He relies on adult interactions and can be seen as isolated. Storysharing became a very important part of his week and he would always sign 'share stories' whenever he saw the project leader. One felt he enjoyed being listened to, and understood.

His teacher saw that he '... *loves to come in and tell all the adults exactly what he's done at playtime and what he's seen (particularly if it's a helicopter or an aeroplane) and having those skills to figure out what it is that your saying, ' oh you're trying to tell me you saw an aeroplane' - and being able to support him in a really dramatic re-enactment and really general day to day things.....(it has) been really great for him... for those children who really want to tell everyone about something that's just happened but find it really difficult because they haven't got the words or they can't string it together in their head particularly well. That's been a real highlight actually, knowing that we can support them in telling everyone those things.'*

Often we saw what could be called 'corridor events' – Storysharing related benefits that spontaneously happened – these were hard to evidence but could not be ignored. Peer to peer interaction, which can be the exception rather than the rule, showed us that stories built self-esteem, and that having an interested listener was important. D and M were 6th form students with communication support needs (SLD) who had worked with Jane (the project leader). A conversation between them was overheard in the corridor. M was discussing how he wanted to share a personal success story.

M: '... *Jane. Good work.'*
D: '...*you did good work?'*
M: '*Yes, Logs, sawing. Jane.'*
D...'*Yeah, right.'*
M:....'*Jane. Sawing logs. Good.'*

Evaluation methods
We also used more rigorous methods to evaluate interactions between a target group of support staff and students. We wanted to have an independent evaluation of the work, and to know what impact of the Storysharing intervention is associated with the co-construction of narrative.

Dr. Karen Bunning from the University of East Anglia led on the evaluation. The school supported us on the ethics protocols. Each student had to give permission to use the data at each stage of the evaluation process. All data was anonymised.

The processes we used reflected the fact that this was a busy school – we had to make the best use of space and staff available at time. This may have had some bearing on the overall findings.

We paired up more able students with those with more complex needs (to alleviate possible anxiety). Participants were invited to share a recent

personal narrative with each other plus a naïve listener, which was then captured on video.

Each interaction was filmed as a baseline encounter (i.e. pre intervention), and then repeated post-intervention.

Evaluation findings

Changes were evidenced, despite the constraints of the research. We saw that changes included

- Reduced reliance on Q-A sequences
- Increase in supporter scaffolding - use of sentence prompting by supporters
- More sustained narratives – fewer episodes
- More complete narratives – expansion in structural components
- Greater investment by supporters in the evaluative elements of Storytelling

Overall, the finding was that the intervention would benefit from further research on a larger scale using multiple sites.

BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES

We knew from the outset that there would be challenges. We told the Paul Hamlyn Foundation that 'We are focusing on one target school because all of these pupils have high support needs. This means that any intervention programme has to take account of the need to take enough time to get to know the pupils; proceed at a pace that allows them to learn and permits repetition, review and adaptation; allows for unexpected events (e.g. medical emergencies, episodes of challenging behaviour). Pupils' learning rate is very gradual; it takes several exposures to a new experience for them to engage, develop memory, anticipation, and then begin to adapt their existing skill set to the new demands.'

What we didn't necessarily anticipate was the amount of input, time and strategic support it would take to raise a culture of Storysharing in the school teaching staff.

The project link worker was tireless in her practical and developmental support. The project took a lot of her time: nominally she was seconded on one day a week but dealt with issues on most days, over three years, including lesson planning and direct delivery. Without her, this project simply would not have happened.

A significant issue that arose over the three years was continuity of access to the students. Obviously, a large SEN school is a busy place, and teachers are flat-out delivering the national and school curriculums. Our target group

needed lots of physical support and time; work needed to be consistent in terms of delivery and staffing.

However, we never really achieved this in the school. Some staff were better organized than others, but the sheer number of unexpected or uncommunicated events that interfered with consistent delivery did not diminish over the three years.

The project leader felt constrained by the pure fact of being an outside worker. Not being part of school systems, information exchange could be poor.

Finding the right 'pitch' for classes and staff was a challenge.

We tried working over longer periods with one class but this was unpopular, possibly feeling too intrusive or repetitive to the staff. The teacher identified that her class were '*Very mixed SLD and very severe autism so it was a very mixed ability wise so it was hard to meet all their needs. That's what I think I found, because we did a Monday session. A double session and we just sat round for quite a long time and it didn't work for our class, really, that part of it. So we did change it and shortened it, because my people couldn't just sit there for all that long, they didn't really engage for all that long.*' This may also be true of some staff. She goes on to say '*for my team, really, they're quite hands on, , so for us, I think we found that we didn't really need all the training so much. We didn't really need as much input as what we got, but it's nice to have it. '* But ultimately she recognises that '*it's good for the pupils, obviously. So yeah, we've really enjoyed doing it. It's been really useful, I think particularly for some of our pupils. They've really come out of their shells. It's really helped them.*'

More links with transition services would have fitted well with the work.

Parents identified that transition is a stressful time: '*Well it's so big. One minute they're at school, being looked after – and then - all right! The big wide world! But it's like what every mother goes through, isn't it?*'

Throughout the project we worked with leavers, helping to reflect on, prepare for and understand their journeys. We helped students develop powerful, relevant stories for annual reviews.

In effect, some students used personal stories in annual reviews but not as many we had hoped: we wanted to see this as a platform for a school-wide person centered approach. The truth is that there was not a culture of this, and it needed story gathering, resource making, and staff preparation time to be effective. A member of staff noted that this was perhaps because '*it's not being pro-actively – strategically – planned forward, into those reviews. And that – all sorts of reasons – that would be about the senior leadership team not necessarily worrying too much about pushing it forward in the teams, and hoping that it would just – kind of – evolve, and work it through that way.*'

But also, '*with the annual reviews, they're so short, we have so many – we have 116 – went up to 118 – to get through in a year, that to give time for*

Storysharing, which one would say is the most important thing, but actually you have the legal requirements as well to get through, um – it almost feels that there needs to be a separate event for it'.

There was a lot of potential for Storysharing in transition, and some 6th form teachers saw this: however, not once were we approached by transition support services. A suggestion would be to see this as an area for a separate piece of work.

The cohort of nominated staff benefitting from the project was an ever-changing situation. Several people who received dedicated one to one support either retired, left, or became long term sick. Teaching assistants were often delegated to the work but were not perhaps the best people to become advocates for the work. A lot of the time we felt the co-ordination of this could benefit from more top down support.
Introducing reflective practice based training was a major step towards skills building. This resulted in a formal certification process.

It is true that at a certain point the project fell into the doldrums: a difficult combination of being too long, too detailed, too heavily outcome led and yet not – somehow – powerful, or directive, enough.
Perhaps this could be said of many three-year projects that reiterate the same processes. So much was dependent on the skills and enthusiasm of the workforce.

Balancing this were the students. Again and again the project leader was stopped in the corridor by excited young people excitedly communicating: signing, gesticulating and remembering their new stories. One student proudly shared the story of a major organ transplant with other classes. Leavers shared memories – some going back years - and wrote songs together. One girl spoke about her father who had recently died. Two 6th formers, both with complex speech and language needs, rolled on the floor, literally doubled up with joy, remembering a bike crash they'd had. Friends shared what they valued about each other. The stories kept rolling in from home, of picnics, holidays, pets, fishing trips, little things, big life changing events. Teachers got lifted up with enthusiasm, making 'ice skates' out roller blades, delving in cupboards to find props and objects of reference.

Storysharing worked best when approached with humour, energy, enthusiasm and creativity.

We conclude that Storysharing is most successful when
- A whole school approach is adopted, with support from the SMT
- Staff are open to changing their interactive style
- There is good home-school communication

- Time is allocated to prepare, and gather resources
- The curriculum is flexibly implemented
- Everyone is alert for story opportunities
- The young people can take an active role in the process

OUTPUTS

To sum up some useful things that have come out of this school based work:

- Storysharing is good when used in annual reviews. Comic book style resources, iPads and story boxes help the student have a valid voice, rather than being spoken for.
- Project management group brought the inner circle together and helped with accountability.
- Being embedded in the School Improvement Plan added clout.
- Being embedded in the PMLD curriculum was a big output for sustainability.
- Leading an Inset day was key to progress. '*I think it really was a turning point'* – project link worker.
- The certification process was a useful focus and outcome.
- Bringing in new technologies enhanced the project .
- Having a supporting team who published articles and chapters helped with dissemination.
- The evaluation findings added weight.
- Family work is specialized and interesting but needs additional input and better planning.

LEGACIES

Evidence of change

We do have evaluation findings that evidence a shift in the way narrative is used in the school. Dr. Karen Bunning presented a paper on this at the IASSIDD conference in Vienna 2014.

Culture – or individual?

You could argue the case for the impact falling heavily on either of these sides. The school (and family) culture will evidence change in an effective way if Storysharing is still implemented in two or three years' time. This may be in a managed way, and/or through transferred skills in the workforce.

For the students, we proved individual benefits, but cannot track these over time. We can only hope they are going out into the world being more confident communicators – confident of being heard, and valued, and understood. What we cannot promise them is a general population that knows how to support their discourse.

Openstorytellers

The project has given us data and resources, a training programme and a marketable Inset day. It has given us standing in the educational world and reinforced the power of story, which underpins our mission statement.

SUGGESTIONS
Where this made most benefit: who is it for?

The project link worker: '*I didn't get the feeling it was going to be such an important part of our curriculum, how we speak and approach our students all the time – there was that light bulb moment of thinking, well, this is what we should be doing in every lesson, it's not just the dedicated slot which I suppose is how I'd seen it initially.*'

Several cohorts stood out as being obvious beneficiaries:
- Primary students developing peer awareness and communication confidence: a teacher says '*we've all enjoyed sharing our stories - it really is powerful stuff. I have some ideas for making story sharing part of quiet time, so hope to continue with one group session each week and perhaps a smaller group time for some targeted children.*'
- Students in transition and school leavers: a teacher says '... *supporting each other through change, there's so much change going on amongst the – you know, 16, 18, 19 year olds and also those who are leaving school who are equally anxious lower down the school. And you could help those who then suddenly decide they can't go to college 'cos they're not emotionally ready for it, and who could also benefit from that sort of work.* '
- Families: For B., Storysharing helped her '*develop her communication, and love of her family, which is key to her.*'
- MLD students: a teacher says it's also '*really useful with the young people with MLDs, gratifying that they now recognise the stories they want to share and it just happens spontaneously - funny things happening... which they now have the confidence to do and to share.*'

Where it could go from here.
Storysharing can be powerful for anyone who needs communication support. We often, for example, hear about perpetrators of abuse and the failure of those that manage them, but do not often hear about the unheard voices of victims. Equally, at some point in our lives, we will all need to tell our story effectively, be it to a doctor, policeman or friend. The point here is that speaking and *listening* are equally important. Storysharing invites us to be good communication partners.
Recommendations for further work could include:
- Brining families together.
- Bereavement support.

- Training for more effective self advocacy.
- Training for doctors, social workers, police etc.
- Dissemination and sharing with SEN communication specialist schools and colleges.
- Helping professionals develop effective person centered approaches.

CONCLUSIONS

We can't guess long-term impacts. Storysharing is embedded in the school curriculum and there is an introductory film of students explaining how to do it that will be used by Openstorytellers and for staff induction.

Our training programme is at three levels and could seed a wider culture of Storysharing.

For those involved in the work so far, maybe even just remembering not to ask questions could be a huge progression towards being a sensitive communication partner.

Everyone will take away a different degree of skill, and a differing experience of being heard.

Some staff already felt that they were on track. Training validated this: Storysharing was a '*confirmation of the value of enabling pupil communication*'.

The project link worker says, reflecting on SEND reforms, '*students' voice is going to be more important.*' There is no reason why Storysharing should not roll out to be an essential part of this.

If people have learned how to support the '*understanding when it is appropriate to tell certain stories, active listening and responding to other students*' , then we have done a good job.

Through sharing their stories and listening to their peers, our young people, not always able to self assess, have learned to reflect on their key relationships and skills.

D says: '*I am a good friend because I'm helpful and like to play games with my friends.*'

His friends and peers say: '*D – you make us feel happy.*'

D's left school now. We hope the people he meets will want to take the time to hear his stories.

We know that he progressed from being someone so isolated he could not enter the room for Storysharing sessions, to someone who made face to face films with his friends sharing stories and contributed appropriately to class discourse. His tale of his first visit to the pub started with bravado: after two tellings he managed to say that he felt wobbly on his bike, and finally that, actually he didn't like it that much. We wish D and his entire cohort much luck and good wishes for the future.

Terms used in the report:

SMT = senior management team

TA = teaching assistant

SaLT = speech and language therapist

PMLD = profound and multiple learning disability

SLD = severe learning disability

MLD = moderate learning disability

SIP = school improvement plan