Notes from web-based Peer Sharing Session Engaging the Power of Story
February 11, 2014 facilitated by Robyn Kalda and Gillian Kranias, HC Link www.hclinkontario.ca

Event Description (from publicity):
Storytelling and the use of narrative approaches are on the rise in the non-profit sector. We are rediscovering and revaluing the power of story in our lives, work and communities. You are invited to join in a conversation among peers to… learn about how others are applying storytelling and narrative approaches in their healthy communities work; share your experiences with using stories; explore with others the benefits and challenges and next steps.

Story and narrative can be used in a variety of ways. They help us feel engaged, learn with and from others, strengthen communities, motivate action, communicate impacts to funders and government, reflect on our learnings. You may have developed skills and experience from a mentor in your own community, from resources on the internet, from teachers within indigenous communities, or from emerging communities of practice and practitioners (e.g. in the field of digital storytelling). We can also learn from each other, and that is the purpose of this peer sharing event.

Who participated? 35 participants (from across Ontario and beyond)

Discussion notes:
1. What has drawn you to storytelling and narrative approaches?
   - First Nations traditions
   - South Asian culture - common to share stories, culturally comfortable
   - Opportunity for the audience to relate - unspoken emotional bond
   - Appreciation of the unfolding of people’s lives and projects--common interest for many

2. How have you used them in the communities where you live, work, or play?
   - Worked with newspaper to do a series on food & agriculture - bringing the issue to life, everything from access to farmland to succession planning -- made it human, made the connection to people in the community, made it tangible through the personal element. Created new opportunity for people to become involved.
   - Community-engaged arts organization exploring the role of story-telling in health promotion
   - Video & presentation of personal story about a journey towards recovery/healing after a family death from lung cancer- introducing the story in schools across Sudbury area and as speakers at conferences. Interactive approach. Encourages people to quit smoking.
   - As a cancer survivor - hearing stories from peer survivors was very helpful. Later on, was able to share own story.
   - Intergenerational community building - in context of a community planning process - used to be consultants come in and be experts/give advice, but this process (after the consultants had their say) added subtleties, relationships, etc. via story. Stories and parallels were shared by elders (in their 80s, 90s) about when they were young; stories shared with youth now. Kids could imagine what it was like before and could compare/reimagine how things are done now. Much more immediate and connected, vibrant, alive, to hear from actual elders than from history. Done mostly in libraries – a very interesting/promising setting (helps libraries be more visible; libraries are welcoming and less institutional-feeling). Done in rural area but could also be interesting in an urban environment to help build relationships.
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- To learn what worked and didn't re tobacco cessation and youth. Started with 4 sessions with specific questions (e.g. "what was your earliest experience with smoking?"); offered smoothies & pizza for youth participants as an incentive. When 4 sessions were done, they wanted more! Had some come back again. Several discussed interest in quitting smoking even though the subject was not raised in the discussions; it got them thinking about it. Shared format with other high school nurses who are offering several more sets of sessions this semester. More impactful than directly giving them tools to quit smoking. Challenge was to craft good questions to get them to tell their story well around tobacco. Generated a different impact since they can give back instead of just having things imposed - opens the dialog both ways.

- Using arts and story to convey what is a healthy community – mixed media including oral stories, arts, photovoice (community-based research process that uses photography to elicit the experiences of participants). In working with youth, used the process to understand the root causes of health issues (e.g. food security). Youth would take pictures of their community and then would develop narratives to better understand the underlying reasons that a particular situation was occurring in their community.

- Photovoice – with youth from 5 public health units - touching on issues of mental health, injury prevention, drug use, and a variety of other topics. Lots of photovoice projects happened during youth week - using different mediums (photography, video) to help tell the stories.

- Getting children to make art telling what a healthy school meant to them - shared as placemats with adults to help share the story at the event.

- Journey mapping for schools to share their stories with other schools, acknowledge successes and the bumps in the road.

- Used photovoice to give middle school aged children a chance to identify school hazards through photography. These photos were then used to identify how changes could be made. The photos were reviewed and the best options were chosen. Funding was provided to address the hazards at those schools.

- During advocacy for a community-based trail. Captured the process as it happened to be able to knowledge-share that piece, and also to be able to show roles (who did what) and the importance of community groups to move community initiatives forward. Story was a helpful part of building the case for continued investment - shows what benefits have been, and the roles of different players.

- Used story to tell the impact of arthritis research - other stories dealt with individuals but this one used narrative to cover the wider, overall picture of the impact of arthritis research. Also created a "book" of stories to tell the impact of research – now doing an evaluation of the impact stories.

- Story to introduce the idea of working upstream – one paragraph narrative of how Medical Officer of Health used health equity lens for research around large-scale shale gas development proposal (looking at socioeconomic impacts of boom and bust industries). Narrative was an attempt to tell the research story starting from the point of view of the problem, to draw some interest to the wider work so people could follow up further with it.

3. What benefits have you gained and what challenges did you face?
   - Sharing personal stories can be unusual and/or challenging
   - Learning from peers sharing stories is unique
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- Timing has to be right and you have to go with how you feel when telling your own story - need to be ready emotionally to open to the public. Can be healing; can also be difficult.
- Useful to be aware of possible reception (readiness, needs assessment, etc.).
- Product needs to be ~10 minutes only for use in schools.
- Personal connection, creating support system and links makes an impact. Getting participants to contribute in some way is key to connecting with people - it's an exchange.
- How does the medium affect the audience one wants to reach? Different media affect audiences in different ways. Choosing the right medium is important.
- After surviving cancer, shared own story hoping to be as helpful to others as she found others were to her. Satisfying to be able to help others. Some are not ready to listen, but when there is the right time and place, it matters.

4. What do you hope to learn (and do) in the future, engaging the power of story?
- Write books!
- Explore more how people are using story in healthy communities work
- Ongoing learning circles such as this event and other opportunities

Resources shared among participants during the session:

Monica Nunes: re: mentors... I completed one MPH practicum at Jumblies Theatre, a community-engaged arts organization. They provided a wonderful opportunity to explore the role of story-telling in health promotion practice. http://www.jumliestheatre.org/

Chris Coulombe and Denise Chaumont: To see more videos related to the chaumontandsons story, visit http://www.youtube.com/user/chaumontandsons search Denise Chaumont on YouTube

Heather Thoma: The community arts/community building work I am doing on Manitoulin Island (and in other communities) is with 4elements Living Arts. www.4elementslivingarts.org

Linda Ward: This model [telling org stories] is a good example of how we used storytelling to share the impact of arthritis research http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WTGHMqDyxM&feature=youtu.be We www.arthritisnetwork.ca also created a "book" of stories to tell the impact of research. We are doing an evaluation of the impact stories. I will be happy to share our evaluation results.

Check-out re: what would be helpful in the future?
- Ongoing learning circles such as this event and other opportunities are helpful.
- Please send the links to the waterloo guide and public narrative.
- Look more at using elders stories to spark visioning about community futures
- This information and resources shared will be useful as we move forward with more client related stories
- Seeing a summary of the various ways that stories were told today to share with everyone to review more closely.
- The links will be really helpful in learning more about the different resources available.
- I would like to have some evidence to legitimize storytelling as an evaluation method.