



Warm Welcome Storytelling Guide and Checklist



Introduction

We have designed this storytelling guide and checklist for Warm Welcome Spaces of every shape and size. Many Warm Welcome Spaces have asked us to develop a range of resources to help promote their services, including help with writing press releases and reaching new audiences. A lot of spaces also said that they need help with writing guest and volunteer stories to support their fundraising and to encourage more people to explore their local warm Welcome Space.

We have divided this resource into sections to help you navigate it. For example, you might just want to jump to the section that interests you. Inside this guide you will find the following information:

Section 1: Introduction to Storytelling

Section 2: Storytelling Checklist

Section 3: Gathering Stories

Section 4: Appendices (Case Study Template/Story Example)

If you would like to share any feedback about this resource, please email us at info@warmwelcome.uk

To find out more about the Warm Welcome Campaign visit www.warmwelcome.uk

Section 1: Introduction to Storytelling



Why we tell stories

We all love a good story; they transport us to another world. Stories are like gold dust and help us move into the emotional space and engage the reader. There's no better way to communicate your message, connect with your audiences, and share the amazing work you deliver in Warm Welcome Spaces. We all need to tell stories to communicate what we do and why we do it and to show the impact of our work.

Whether you are fundraising or trying to reach out to people and encourage them to explore your Warm Welcome Space, stories and photographs are far more compelling than facts and figures. The truth well told will help you connect with your audience.

Stories don't need to be long to get your message across, like this famous six-word story.

"For sale: baby shoes, never worn."

Belief is the most valuable currency to inspire

Stories take your audience on a journey; they have the ability to give the audience real understanding and belief in what you are doing. Belief is the most important thing that can inspire your audience.

Stories help you to articulate why your service is so valuable, how you are overcoming the challenges that your guests face, and how others can engage with you to make sure you can help even more people.

How do you tell a great story? Who is the audience?

Think about the audience before you get started.

Is it a story to:

- Support your fundraising?
- Encourage more people to visit your space?
- Illustrate a specific campaign?
- Show your impact?

It's important to think about this before you get started. You may want to communicate or emphasise different things and ask different questions, depending on the purpose. You might use different language, and the tone may be different too.

- A story for fundraising might use more emotive language to show the impact of your space on people's lives. It would probably emphasise how their life has changed for the better as a result of your work, for example, feeling less lonely.
- If you are wanting to reach your local community and encourage people to visit, you'll have a softer tone. You'll use language that is designed to remove any barriers to people exploring your space. You might use words like "vulnerable people" when talking to a funder. But using words like "vulnerable," "lonely," or "struggling to make ends meet" could be really off-putting to the people you want to help.

What's the message you are trying to convey?

Before you put pen to paper or have a conversation with a guest or volunteer to generate a story, think about the message you want to get across.

What do you want your audience to do?

- Come along to a coffee morning
- Make a donation
- Become a volunteer.

Being clear on the message and call to action will help you structure the story and keep it short.

What channels are you using?

Before writing a story or taking images or recording video, think about the different channels you plan to use.

You might initially want something for an impact report or fundraising campaign.

However, you will want to make good use of your stories, so start by thinking about the different channels you'll want to use.

- Will it be easy to adapt the story into a short social media post?
- Have you got the right photo dimensions for your website and social media channels?
- Is there a compelling quote you can pull out for a press release?
- Are the photos high resolution (good enough quality) for large-scale projects, like presentations or posters?

Section 2: Storytelling Checklist

Top tips for writing stories

- ✓ **Words matter:** Think about your audience. Some words could be off-putting to your audience.
- ✓ **Keep it simple:** Focus on the messages you want to communicate and your call to action.
- ✓ **Use plain language:** Avoid jargon, complex words, and acronyms.
- ✓ **Keep your sentences short:** an average of 15 to 20 words is ideal.
- ✓ **Use 'you' and 'we'** to make it more personal and human.
- ✓ **Use an active rather than passive voice**
An active voice means the subject of the sentence performs the action. A passive voice means the subject receives the action. Active voice is generally preferred for its clarity and directness. For example:
Active voice: Hanna writes a letter.
Passive voice: A letter written by Hanna
- ✓ **Break up the text**
Use compelling subheadings, quotes or images to draw the reader in and make it easy to read and digest.
- ✓ **Audience and calls to action**
What is the purpose of the story? Is it to attract volunteers, guests, or fundraising focused? Before you start writing, think about the audience and the message you want to get across. What do you want the audience to feel or do? For example, become a volunteer or make a donation. Check that you are using the right language for your audience.
- ✓ **Inclusivity**
Do your stories represent the diversity of your guests and volunteers?
Ensure your stories are representative. Doing this will help more people to identify with your space and will help to amplify the voices of marginalized or underrepresented groups and challenge harmful stereotypes.
- ✓ **Encourage co-production**
Writing a personal story or working closely with a guest or volunteer to write a story can be incredibly powerful for the individual. Although not everyone will want to get involved in this way, it's good to explore the possibility first.
- ✓ **Be authentic and don't sensationalise**
You want to inspire belief. Consider the potential impact of a sensational narrative on the people involved and those who may be touched by it. Focus on individual experiences. This helps the reader see the nuance and complexity of people's lives and can create a deeper connection with them.

✓ **Don't overemphasize the 'problem'**

While you will want to show the need for your work/space, for example, mental health, loneliness, or poverty, move swiftly on to the positive impact you are having on people's lives and how others can benefit. You can convey the challenges they face without compromising their dignity.

✓ **Use their language**

We all have our unique phrases that we use to describe something about our work. The people who use your service or volunteers will have their own way of saying things. When talking to or interviewing someone, listen out for those hidden gems and personal phrases that people use. It's these unique elements that make the story authentic and come to life. It can help to connect and inspire the reader. Like this powerful guest quote: *"I first came because of the smell of the soup, and now I come every day."*

✓ **Consent**

Have you got consent to tell their story and use their name, images, and other personal information? Have you got consent to use someone's name? Remember to store consent forms securely on your system. If you have their consent, use their name. If a beneficiary's name cannot be used but they are happy for you to use the story, be sure to change any identifying characteristics in the story. You can add a line to say the name in this story has been changed to protect the identity of the person.

✓ **Personal pronouns**

It can be really tempting to refer to someone as she/he/his/her rather than writing their name in every sentence. But if you don't know their preferred personal pronoun, either use their name where possible or these pronouns: their/they/them/themselves.

✓ **Approval**

When you have written the story, share it with the person you are writing about so they can approve it/change anything they don't like.

✓ **Photos and films:** if you have consent, use images and films to bring the story to life.

✓ **GDPR and Systems**

Ideally you will have a dated consent form for approving use of personal stories and photos. Make sure that you enable the individual to choose where their story and photos will be shared. Include a statement about how long you will keep their personal information, their right to withdraw consent at any time, and how you will store it and later destroy it. For example:

The information that you provide will only be used to contact you about sharing your story in our communications work. We will not pass the details recorded on this form on to any other organisation other than the one stated without your permission. We will not store your data for any longer than three years. You have the right to remove your consent at any point. Once you have removed your consent, or the consent period expires, your personal data and any other content will be destroyed securely. Add a link to your Privacy Policy.

Section 3: Gathering Stories

Small insights and testimonials

Think about how you can collect quotes and insights. We recognise that not all spaces will have the capacity to write in-depth stories or carry out “interviews” with guests or volunteers. Just having a few words can be really powerful.

Guest quotes:

“Arrive as strangers; leave as friends.”

“It’s at the heart of the community. It’s a place to keep up to date with all the news and what’s going on in the community, laughing, joking, and enjoying each other’s company.”

“This space has become the highlight of my week. It is a safe space to talk with others.”

“You go in there, you might be miserable and down, but you come out with a smile on your face.”

Some Warm Welcome Spaces have comment books where guests can record their memories and reflections in, and others have walls where you can write comments on sticky notes and attach them.

One Warm Welcome Space has a ‘friendship book’ where guests can leave a message. Here are a few messages.

- Thank you, chatty Café. Bless you all
- I come here as it gets me out of the house which keeps me sane and keeps my mind busy.
- I like coming to the Café. Very good and friendly.
- Always find something to smile about.
- **Love is all around in this place.**

Third-person stories

If you don’t have time to interview a guest or don’t want to make people feel uncomfortable, you can tell a third-person story based on your interactions with guests.

Here’s an excerpt from one story we published, using a volunteer’s words to tell the story:

“Everyone receives a warm welcome—this year’s age range of guests runs from a ten-month-old baby to a ninety-four-year-old lady. Although targeted towards helping mental health and rural isolation, everyone comes for their own reasons.

“One lady, who previously had not left her own home for four years, is now a regular and is the official soup taster!”

“Everyone, guests and volunteers alike, intermingle—important in the Friendship Café vision is that volunteers sit at tables and chat with everyone, sharing the food and the good company. So much so that lines between hosts and guests are blurring, with many new friendships being formed.”

“One such, perhaps unlikely friendship, is that of a volunteer twenty-year-old young man, who is neurodivergent, with a ninety-one-year-old lady who is visually impaired. They sit together every week, catching up with each other’s news.”

Interviews with guests and volunteers

It’s always helpful to prepare some questions in advance so you can make the most of your time chatting with guests and volunteers. We have created a short “case study template” that you can adapt to guide your conversations. You can find this in the Appendix.



Writing fundraising stories

Here is a simple framework for writing a compelling fundraising story.

- In this approach, **the donor is the hero**.
- You need to communicate that it’s only with their support that you can deliver your transformative work.

The simplest story arc follows this pattern, setting out the **PROBLEM** you need to fix, the **SOLUTION** to the problem, and your long-term **AMBITION**. In this scenario the **Hero** of the story is the **donor**.

For a Warm Welcome Space, it could be as follows:

Problem or story set up (The Villain)

The victim [your beneficiaries/guests] encounters a villain [the problem]. The problem could be loneliness, isolation, rising cost-of-living, mental health, homelessness.

Solution

The guide [**your Warm Welcome Space**] helps the hero [**the donor**] help the victim. It’s how your organisation helps them overcome the villain.

Your solution is the lifeline work you deliver in your Warm Welcome Space, giving everyone

human warmth, a place of belonging and connection, a hot cuppa, and a tasty meal. You make sure that everyone leaves with a smile on their face.

But you need the hero's help so that you can reach more people in your community.

Ambition

Call to Action/Ambition: "Can you help us put more smiles on faces?"

This is how the problem can be fixed. It is the plan for our fight against the villain. When a hero steps in, the victim's problem is resolved. For example:

Will you help us be there for people like Juan? You can help us put more smiles on people's faces.

With your help [the hero], you can make sure that anyone feeling lonely in Gipton [your location] can find a place of belonging in our Warm Welcome Space, fuelled by human warmth.

A gift of just £50 could help us give a warm welcome, a hot cuppa, and a friendly chat to 10 people in our community.

Quick guide to the story roles:

- **Victim:** This translates to your guests, the people who benefit from your organisation. It is someone who faces an existing or potential problem, e.g. loneliness.
- **Villain:** A villain is the problem your organisation solves. Your villain is what needs to be overcome. Example: Financial hardship/loneliness
- **Hero:** This is your reader or donor.
- **Guide** The guide is your Warm Welcome Space. You are helping the hero to overcome the villain so they can help the victim.
- **Story setup:** The victim encounters a villain [the problem]
- **Story gap:** What happens if the victim loses and villain wins? This is where you convey what is at stake. The hero can seal the victim's fate and overcome the villain.
- **Call to Action/Ambition:** This is how the problem can be fixed. This is when everything comes together in a successful outcome for the victim, hero, and guide.



Section 4: Appendices

Appendix 1: Case study template for Warm Welcome Space Guests

Question	Answer
Name of person carrying out the interview	
Date	
Name of Guest (Check if they are happy for you to use their name)	
Personal Pronouns What are their preferred pronouns she/he/his/her their/they/them/themselves.	
How long have you been coming to our space?	
How did you find out about the space?	
What inspired you to come here in the first place?	
Were there any barriers to you exploring the place? Did you think it was a place for you?	
Do you live locally? How far do you travel to come to the space?	
Do you come to the space alone or with family/friends?	

Question	Answer
What do you like to do in the space?	
What's the best thing about coming to the space?	
Do you get involved in any of the activities or advice sessions on offer?	
If they have been coming to the space for a while, ask if they now get more involved with volunteering, helping others, welcoming, etc.	
Have you made new friends or met new people at the space?	
What difference has the space made to your life? (if any)	
What would you be doing if the space were closed?	
Would you recommend the space to other people?	
What's the most memorable experience of coming to the space	
Consent Check in about consents for images, quotes, stories using your own consent form.	

Appendix 2: Powerful Warm Welcome Story

We understand that it's hard finding time to interview guests or gather consents. But it's still possible to write a compelling short story to show your impact even if you haven't got any quotes or case studies.

Every woman deserves the chance to feel human again: A lifeline for women in Nottingham

For many women walking through the doors of Nottingham Women's Centre, it's more than just a building - it's a lifeline. Whether they're seeking support, connection, or simply a safe space to rest, the Centre offers a warm, non-judgemental welcome. No intrusive questions - just a first name at sign-in.

Food and essential items are shared freely, thanks to regular donations from Lidl, Sainsbury's, and a network of over 100 women-led social enterprises. From fresh produce to toiletries and clothing, these contributions meet practical needs - and often lift spirits in unexpected ways.

One woman, on receiving a self-care parcel that included lipstick, said she hadn't worn any in five years.

Guests also have access to a kitchen - something many haven't had in years.

One mother, an asylum seeker living in a hotel, was able to cook for her son for the first time in over two years.

Free tea and coffee are available throughout the day, alongside donated food and other supplies. The warm space, beautifully decorated by sponsors John Lewis, offers a sense of comfort and dignity for all who need it.

The Centre is full of these small yet powerful moments. Women can wash and dry their clothes in the on-site laundry room, made possible in part by a tumble dryer donated by staff at a local girls' school. After learning about the need, they pooled their Secret Santa contributions to purchase one, an act of kindness that now allows guests to do their laundry in a single visit.

With over 70% of guests having experienced domestic abuse, access to mental health support is vital. The Centre offers affordable counselling on a sliding scale, delivered by in-house therapists and trainee counsellors. In addition, a range of creative and confidence-building workshops are offered free of charge, including the Thursday Craft Club, career training sessions, and the United Voices Choir.

From supporting women leaving prison to offering a library filled exclusively with books written by women, Nottingham Women's Centre is more than a service provider - it's a community rooted in compassion, dignity, and the belief that every woman deserves the chance to feel human again.