

Telling and Sharing Community Stories

Bay of Plenty Regional CLD Network Forum, 28 February 2011, Eastbay REAP, 27 Pyne Street, Whakatane



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Co-hosted by **Inspiring Communities** along with highly experienced communicator, Anna Kominik from **Ideas Shop**, the Forum was also sponsored by **Pou Whakaaro, BayTrust, Air New Zealand and Eastbay REAP**. The Forum was organised as a result of interest expressed at a 2010 BoP CLD Network Forum and had been rescheduled from December when presenters' travel was disrupted. Barbara MacLennan, Bay of Plenty Convenor for Inspiring Communities said the purposes were threefold:

- ∞ To help communities tell and share their stories of local action and change
- ∞ To share effective story telling techniques and tools
- ∞ To encourage and inspire more community-led stories that communicate and demonstrate progress and change

Thirty-seven people participated, drawn from Gisborne, Torere, Opotiki, Ohiwa, Ohope, Rotorua, Te Teko and Whakatane. They represented a diverse range of groups and networks including Iwi, non government organisations, local and central government agencies, community development networks, businesses and Trusts.

Stories are a powerful tool

Anna's first clear message was that 'we are all storytellers in our own way'. It is how we frame and structure a story to get the interest of others that makes it memorable. This applies whether it is a story for media, or a story to help demonstrate change in communities to funders or others who we want to become involved in locally led community change.

This forum was co-created by:



ideas shop



Tools for Memorable Stories

Intention

Clarify why we are telling the story. What is the hook? (Most media stories fit a formula e.g. "first"/bizarre/conflict or people)

Observation

Make stories vibrant by using all five senses – colour, flavour, sound, sight, feeling – and making the unconscious, conscious

Striking a chord

Being mindful of the audience and their current or emerging interest – what will impact or connect and draw them in? E.g. families/environment/nature – where's the harmony and balance?

Juxtaposition

Use contrasts and comparisons. What stands out? What's unusual? What will people remember?

Transformation

Focus stories on the change and show how people have ended up somewhere different from where they started

Data and Statistics

To strengthen a story use relevant numbers and counting to demonstrate need or change

Images

Use visuals such as graphics or photos to illustrate the story

“Stories are recognised as a powerful tool to communicate beyond a factual level to engage the audience in a compelling way. To create a memorable story we must be aware of the purpose – are we wanting the audience to feel something? Learn something? What are the patterns and connections the story makes? What rises to the surface in the telling of the story?” Anna Kominik

Being clear about who we are telling a particular story to, and why, was emphasised strongly. To get the best impact we may need to change the way the story is told when we focus on a different audience.

Anna emphasised that community stories are often ongoing and that once we have sparked an interest (e.g. through the media) we need to keep moving with the emerging developments, and keep refreshing how we tell the story, and linking it back to the changes emerging. Frequently, local community newspapers are an initial target for local community stories, but Anna encouraged us to explore different avenues both locally, regionally and nationally. She said we should “send it out to get it back in”, and noted the power of outsiders recognising and valuing a story as a way of encouraging local recognition and engagement. In terms of local level targets, Council and community newsletters, church and school newsletters and publications are all commonly seeking local stories. At the regional level, explore regional TV and radio, and at the national level main TV channels, and magazines, are all possibilities.



Channels for capturing and telling stories.

Anna encouraged us to learn about and use different channels for capturing and telling stories. For example telling stories orally, through music or poetry, performance, murals, or digitally are all options. Written storytelling – both print and on-line is still very common – and Anna noted the growing pressure on journalists because of the huge volume of stories available. “This creates a real opportunity – if you can send journalists a good pre-prepared and memorable story, it is likely to be picked up”.

Finally the use of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and Pod Casts were discussed and a high level of interest resulted in most Forum participants staying on for an extended session. While there are challenges with using social media, social media enables direct connection with your market or audience and harnesses the power of others sending pictures and stories to you as well. Learning how to use these media especially to reach new audiences and engage people in our stories is another opportunity for further exploration.

Group story creation exercise

A focus on how to create learning stories was demonstrated through a practical exercise during the forum, focussed around Neighbours Day. Working in small groups with a choice of photos from Neighbours Day in 2009 participants were asked 'What's the Story?' Their task was to select a photo (from photos provided) and write a creative story around the photo for a community newspaper, identifying the results to the local community. The groups then had to use the information and results to present this story to a funder. Entertaining stories of dogs with cut paws, solving land ownership, children and communities working together were the result (see below).

Anna noted that all groups had selected the same photo to work with, and encouraged us to reflect on why.

Exercise: What's the Neighbours Day Story here??

Workshop Participants were asked to select a photo and work in small groups to apply the skills and approaches Anna had shared. Here's one group's creative effort!



Task 1: Write the first two paragraphs for a community newspaper article

One Man's Rubbish is Another Man's Treasure Discovery settles 150 year land dispute

Local residents from Te Tokawhata came together to clean up their local environment. They had hopes of winning the coveted "Cleanest, Greenest Suburb Award".

Huia Duff, one of the local residents was amazed when she found a heap of documents that turned out to be important historically. These documents will help settle an ongoing dispute currently before the Land Court.

Local archaeologist and Museum Curator, Theodore Baldarack verified the documents as being original and 150 years old. Local Iwi are very excited as the documents prove the land was gifted back from the Grace family to the local Iwi. So in this case, one man's rubbish turned out to be a whole Iwi's treasure.



Task 2: Use this information to think about the "results" this project helped achieve – describe these results to a funder.

- Cleaner neighbourhood
- Community coming together (they also had a BBQ)
- Learning about recycling, reducing and reusing and talking about waste
- Local history/Iwi history shared as a result
- Discovery of treasure – local knowledge
- Resources shared.

Participant feedback on the Forum was very positive, and planning for further BoP events is underway.



Forum organiser Barbara MacLennan, Inspiring Communities, and speaker Anna Kominik, Ideas Shop