

Activity 1.16 The Story of My Shoes

Module: 1. Identity and Culture

Duration: 45 Minutes

Social Development Themes: Arts, Core

Summary

A simple but potentially powerful activity that uses storytelling to support people to share some of who they are and the experiences they've had. This exercise is especially useful with groups that may not know each other very well or may feel uncomfortable talking directly about their personal lives, such as survivors of violence.

Learning Outcomes:

Self Confidence

Self-Awareness

Understand how Identities and Cultures form, are expressed, change and are connected.

Approach:

1. Get the group into pairs and ask them to find their own space in the room.
2. Each person is going to have five minutes to tell their partner the story of their shoes in as much detail as they can. This may sound like an impossible task but encourage the storyteller to go in to as much detail as they can. Where did the shoes come from? Who bought them? Where did they buy them? Have the shoes been anywhere interesting? Are you fond of them? What's the most exciting thing they have done or the furthest they've been?
3. Encourage the storyteller to not block anything, to go where the story goes and to enjoy the telling of the story. Be detailed, be creative, be curious and don't be afraid of silences if they happen.
4. The listener should just listen, without interruption or any comments – ideally they should remain silent for the duration of the story. This can be hard, our natural instinct is to ask questions, or want to know more information but as much as possible, the listener should do just that – listen.

5. Once the five minutes are over, the pair should swap roles and repeat the process.

Debrief:

These are questions to ask the group: did you learn anything about your partner? Did anything surprise you about the direction the story went? Does the story of our shoes tell us anything about our communities, culture or identity? What did we learn from the differences in the stories?

How did it feel when you were just listening? Was it frustrating not being able to respond or comment? Why might it be useful skill to practise listening?

How could storytelling help us and our communities at different stages of the Active Citizens learning journey? For example stories could support dialogue within and between communities. They can also help us to learn more about the needs, opportunities and challenges within the community.

Facilitators could choose to build on the metaphor of the shoes throughout the workshop – think about the journeys that participants have come on to arrive at the workshops this morning, this week. What have they been like? Have you had to sacrifice anything to be here? Also the journey participants have had getting to where they are now in their lives.

Each of us has stories to share. These stories are a great resource for understanding ourselves, each other and the communities we are part of. Storytelling is also a vital skill that can be used to encourage people to understand and support our social action projects.