

The Co-Created Story: Tools and Guidelines for Co-Creating Stories with your Clients

Acknowledgments

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The Co-created Story Project aimed at creating an opportunity for Options Community Services (OCS) Society's frontline Immigrant Services (IS) staff to collaborate with newcomer clients in a safe space where clients could tell their stories about their migration journey or their newcomer experience in Canada.

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Introduction

“Tell me the facts and I’ll learn. Tell me the truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.”

Indigenous Proverb

The Co-Created Story project for Options Community Services is an initiative of the Immigrant Services Department. Its primary aim is to support staff in sharing stories about their clients for multiple purposes, including marketing services for newcomer clients, success stories for funders, and raising awareness for the general public about the strength, diversity and resilience of immigrants and refugees settling in communities across Canada. Co-created stories are developed by staff *together with* their clients. By doing so, important stories are told in compelling, authentic and purposeful ways. Through a process of identifying the particular stories that can be shared and working with a client to ensure that the story is accurate and represents a story the client wants to tell, staff refine the story, and contextualize it in the broader landscape of settlement and integration issues and the services that OCS provides.

Different kinds of stories can be created for different purposes. For example, after identifying the intention to increase the general public’s awareness about how refugees are finding strength amidst the challenges they are facing and then developing an inspiring story with a client, a staff may choose to develop a podcast series to showcase the story. Or a staff member may be asked to provide a written story for the OCS website to highlight a particular program, and then work with a client to develop a story that illustrates their success in having attended that program.

The Co-Created Story: Tools and Guidelines for Co-Creating Stories with your Clients

is a resource that can guide you through the process. You start with identifying the intention and primary audience for your story, and then, building on the relationship you already have in place with a client, together develop the story you want to tell. Ethical considerations such as consent and ensuring you are doing no harm in having the client explore and share their story are crucial to this process and are covered in the Foundations for Co-Creating Stories section of this resource. The Story Building Process is first introduced, and then delineated in four different Presentation Formats: Writing an Article; Creating a Video or Podcast; doing an Art-Based Project; and Creating a Storyboard. Templates for organizing the story ideas in a way that is clear and captivating and several Guidelines for media and technology, writing, arts-based projects and other tools for developing and showcasing stories are also provided.

As well as the practical tools you may need to develop a co-created client story, we are also hopeful that you will find this a growth-oriented and inspiring experience. Developing stories with your clients provides the client with the opportunity to share their story in a safe way, and know that their story is important. Owning a personal story is not only empowering in allowing for reflection, but also offers an opportunity to contribute to helping other newcomers. Further, as you create the time and space to understand the story, you may find that you reconnect with your sense of purpose and passion, and why you went into this work in the first place.

Foundations for Co-Creating Stories

The foundations for co-creating stories asks you to initiate a storytelling process and recognize the importance of finding that honest and heartfelt story your client wants to tell. Your client may not be able or interested in telling their story in a way you prefer, but in order to maintain the integrity of your client's voice, ensure that the story is accurate and your client is comfortable with the details shared. Co-creating stories together with your client offers an opportunity to work towards facilitating a deeper relationship between you and your client; it allows for discussion about experiences of adversity, success, pain and joy.

The stories shared can also add a level of richness to the sometimes-dull technical writing required for proposals and reports. They will also provide readers with inspiration which may prove to be invaluable in terms of providing important perspectives, gaining funding support and even shifting mindsets. This is a unique opportunity for you as a service provider to work in solidarity with your client and provide a safe space for your client to share their story. It also offers you an opportunity to engage, learn, and grow in your work, and highlights the impact you and OCS are making in empowering newcomers to engage and connect.

Consent

When embarking on a storytelling process, it's very important that you are aware of OCS' policies and procedures as they relate to consent, confidentiality and privacy. For the purpose of this project, you will need to ask your client to read and sign Consent for Use of Personal Photographs Stories and Videos. Have consent documents translated if necessary, and ensure your client understands them. A signed copy of [Consent for Use of Personal Photographs Stories and Videos](#) should be sent to the OCS Digital Coordinator prior to starting the co-creating story process.

Ethical Data-gathering and Story-sharing Practices

There are additional guidelines for ethical data-gathering and story sharing practices that you need to keep in mind throughout this project:

1 From the onset, create a shared understanding of the purpose for sharing the story. For example, if you want to highlight the importance of a particular program and the services it delivers, be sure the client understands what the purpose is for sharing their story and how it can help develop additional services for the community. Emphasize that the client's story is helpful not only because their story is an act of self-expression, but their story may further help in building awareness of issues faced by newcomers and achieving more funding for programs that can offer support for people with similar challenges and concerns.

That said, do not pressure a client to share their story. It is imperative that, no matter how intriguing or helpful the story may be to your organization, your client maintains ownership over their own decisions to tell a story or not. Moreover, recognize that you are in a position of authority and thus there is the possibility that your client feels they have to share their story, even if they are not comfortable doing so. Nobody needs to tell their story for the sake of others. We all have a choice to share experiences, but only if we want to, not because others have told us we should.

2 Be aware that people from different cultures tell stories differently. Storytelling is at the heart of culture, history, and community and how stories are told varies from culture to culture. For example, in Anglo cultures storytelling is often told with an efficiency of time, and getting to the point of the story is the main focus. In other cultures, stories meander more and unfold at a slower pace with more details. Therefore, try to be flexible with how the story unfolds, and allow time to linger over details so the client does not feel rushed into completing the story based on your own timeline. Allow time for the creative process to flow.

3 The storytelling process will likely demonstrate the needs and challenges of clients; it should also provide the storyteller with an opportunity to reflect and examine their own accomplishments throughout their settlement process in Canada, thereby resulting in a greater sense of empowerment and confidence. The stories you co-create with clients can illuminate the strengths and skills that newcomers bring to Canada, and be helpful for society at large to better understand both the benefits of newcomers' contributions and struggles through their settlement process. The storytelling project is an opportunity to highlight the contributions, strengths and resilience of clients and better understand how society can support and benefit.

4

All story gathering and story-sharing practices must be guided by “do no harm” practices. It is vital that you understand that part of your job in community work is to not cause additional harm by triggering a client to relive upsetting past traumatic experiences just so you can get that compelling story. Don’t assume that anyone who has experienced traumatic events is traumatized, and, equally important, do not assume someone who displays great resilience is in no need of support.

If your client is displaying distress and agitation as a result of sharing their story with you, then you need to determine whether moving forward with this client’s story is appropriate. At all times, make sure your client is well supported and is in complete control of how much and what they feel comfortable sharing with you.

Empathy

Empathy is often described as the ability to understand and in some way relate to a person’s feelings. It is the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes and recognize within yourself what they are feeling. People can sometimes confuse empathy with sympathy. While feeling sad for someone else’s suffering is a common and honest response, it is less than helpful when we are listening to other people’s stories of adversity and struggle. Rather than sympathy, show empathy by presenting a non-judgemental attitude and actively listening to understand your client’s experiences and feelings. Regard the experience as an opportunity to work together from a sense of common humanity, building a relationship of mutual trust, understanding and respect, rather than as you being a savior that is trying to “fix” someone’s life.



Brené Brown on Empathy (Kid Friendly!)

Watch the following Brene Brown video for additional information on empathy:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HznVuCVQd10>

Trauma-informed Practices

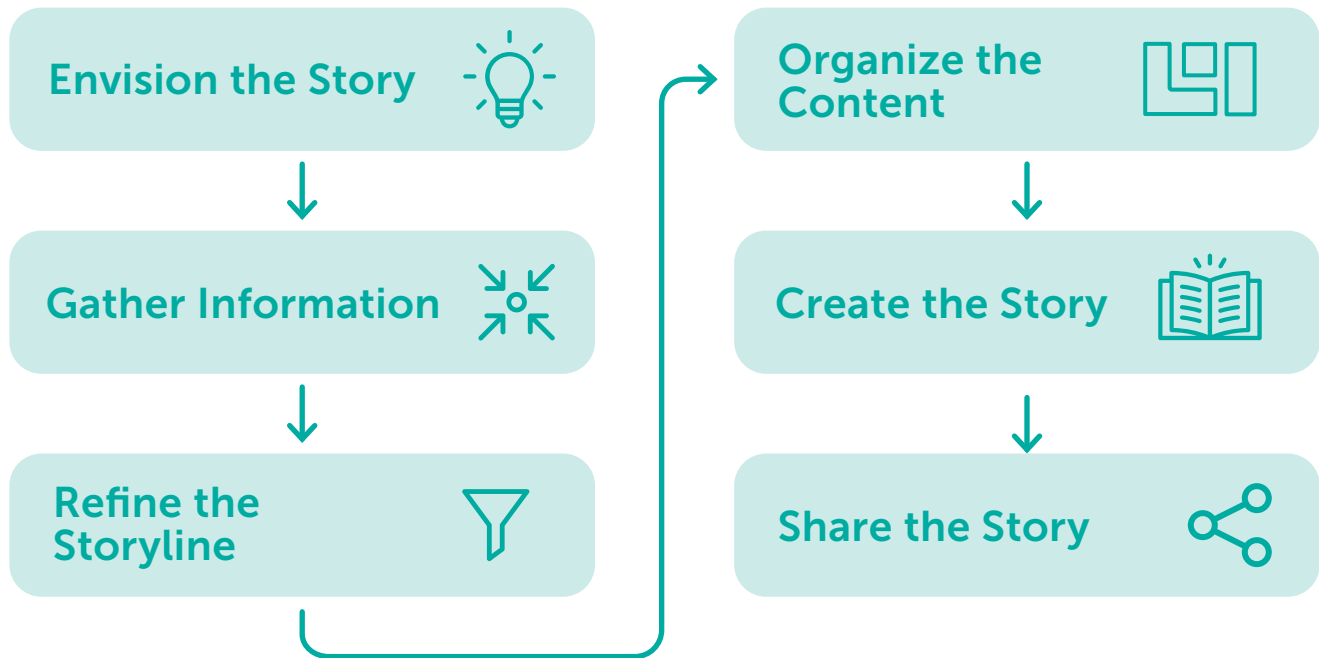
Many of us have within us pockets of agitation that are organized around our own traumatic experiences, and people experience trauma differently. Traumas such as illness, loss of loved ones, poverty, racism, dispossession, etc. can affect an individual's ability to tell their own story.

Your client, particularly if they have experienced forced migration, may live with traumas in their day-to-day life. Therefore, it is important that you are well informed about the possibility of triggers and know the warning signs that a storyteller may be showing. It is important that you are able to assess whether it is safe to continue with the project or if by doing so, you are causing further harm to their wellbeing.

The consequences of trauma can show up without you realizing that trauma may be an issue. If the storyteller is irritable, angry, unable to focus, stares into space, cries easily, has a sense of shame or guilt, cannot express feelings, or over-shares with you, then you can suspect that they are being triggered by their traumatic memories. At this point, you will need to rethink whether the storytelling is suitable, and find the resources to continue to support your client appropriately.

Ethics, empathy, and trauma informed practices require approaches, strategies, and procedures that are crucial to the Co-created Story project. It is imperative that you keep this front of mind at all stages of the project, ensuring that your practice is ethical, does no harm, and is empowering for your client.

The Story Building Process



1 Envision the Story

What story needs to be told? Consult with your manager and/or co-worker to help you determine what story would be most useful and impactful at this time. From there, start to identify an intention for developing a specific story: Why do you want to tell this story? Who is your primary audience? And what theme related to a client's immigration and settlement experience are you focusing on? Is the story you want to talk about clients' loneliness and isolation during the Covid pandemic, or is it a story about resilience and self-discovery? Is it about an OCS program that really helped make personal aspirations a reality? Or is your story to provide helpful information about how services are integrated with other community providers.

See the [Co-Created Story Outline Template](#) for helping you decide on the intention, audience and client theme of a story. It is also included in each of the Presentation Formats below.

See [Guidelines for Media and Technology](#) and engage the OSC Digital Coordinator early in the story building process so that you know what technology resources and support is available to you.

② Gather Information for the Story

Once you have a clear intention, audience and idea of the story you want to tell, start to think about which client story would be most suitable to co-create and how you will gather the information. You may decide to work with one client, or a group of program participants. Build on the strong relationships that you already have with your clients, and the information that you know.

You may want to interview your client for an article or a video or podcast, or if you're working with a translator, collaborate with them on gathering the client information. If your clients have low English language levels, you could invite program participants to do an art project; a collage could be a really unique and interesting way to tell a group story visually. To create a video or podcast as a story-sharing format, be sure to call upon the

OCS Digital Coordinator early in the process to find out what information you need prior to the recording. Using [Canva](#) to create a storyboard is another way to work with your client to represent their story visually.

[Guidelines for Conducting Interviews](#) and other guidelines and templates for data-gathering are provided in links within the four Presentation Formats below. Whatever way you choose to collect the information for a story, make sure that you have developed a trusting and respectful relationship with the storyteller(s) so that they feel comfortable with the process. As you proceed, continue to check in to ensure that they are ready and able to share their story in a way that will make it compelling to the audience, and that you are guided by ethical and trauma informed guidelines.

③ Refine the Storyline

Once you have co-created a body of information with your client, now is the time to refine the storyline. While your client's story is the heart of your project, you will also likely need to develop a more contextualized story, beyond the basic narrative. At this point in your story development, you may decide you need to gather additional details from your client, or background information about the challenges your client is facing, and the resources available to address the issue.

Keep the main storyline focused on your client(s), their background (only as pertinent to the story), a challenge, and a conclusion. The story does not need to have a happily ever after ending, but it does need to have a clear point of view. The reader should leave with a sense of optimism, inspiration, and a will to help; or perhaps with a sense of frustration, anger, and a call to action.

4 Organize the Content

Once you have gathered all your information and started to refine the specific story you want to tell, you can start to work with the key pieces of information you will be sharing, and organize them for the Presentation Format you are working toward e.g., a written article, a podcast, or an art-based story, or a digital narrative storyboard. Be sure to set aside time and space to do this thoughtfully. You might use a big piece of paper and write events on sticky notes, place them in the order that tells a clear story, and then fill in the details, impactful or inspiring quotes, and background information.

5 Create the Story

In the Presentation Formats below, you will find specific guidelines and templates to help you further develop and finalize the story. They include suggestions specific to particular projects such as [Guidelines for Art Based Project](#), and also more general suggestions such as [Guidelines for the Writing Process](#), and [Guidelines for Taking Photographs](#) that can be helpful for any co-created project. Remember that story creation is an ongoing process, and that your client should be as much a part of it as possible. When you feel you are close to

6 Share the Story

Once you and your client have a completed story, you will need to ask your client to sign off on the project in terms of consent to share. You should already have some idea of how the story can be shared with specific audiences. Perhaps it will be shared with the OCS communications team for the website or other media releases. It may go into the OCS story bank and be included in proposal applications. A video may be shown at a community event or to open a conference, or an art project can be featured at

Be very clear to tell one specific story and not get thrown off by other events that may be happening at the same time. For example, if you are writing a story about a woman fleeing from war, try to keep the focus on the woman's details, even though you may refer generally to others that are affected by the same experience. It's more effective to tell a specific story than to generalize. Writing templates such as [Podcast Template: Writing an Outline](#) are linked into the various Presentation Formats below and can be used to help you organize your content.

finishing the project, ask a co-worker, your manager, the OCS Digital Coordinator or another staff member to look over the story and help with editing and revising. This can feel like a burden but it is an important and necessary step in the development of storytelling. Have them check that you have stayed true to your intention, and with mechanics like grammar and punctuation. They can also help you choose a good title and write captions, etc. A second set of eyes is important in ensuring that you have a compelling and complete story.

a celebration. In any case, find the most appropriate and impactful places to share, making sure you have full consent from the storyteller. Be sure to inform your storyteller where the story is going and most importantly, thank them for participating in this project. You literally couldn't have done it without them. Arrange with your manager to provide a gift card for your client as an acknowledgment of your appreciation for their story.

Co-Created Stories

These are developed by staff together with their clients. Important stories are told in compelling, authentic and purposeful ways.

Different kinds of stories can be created for different purposes. For example, after identifying the intention to increase the general public's awareness about how refugees are finding strength amidst the challenges they are facing and then developing an inspiring story with a client, a staff may choose to develop a podcast series to showcase the story. Or a staff member may be asked to provide a written story for the OCS website to highlight a particular program, and then work with a client to develop a story that illustrates their success in having attended that program.

Writing an Article



Draws on client narrative to highlight a program or client/worker relationship, ensuring that the client's perspective is represented. Articles can be featured in OCS' internal and external publications, as well as used to bring a more humanized perspective to report writing and proposals.

Creating a Video or Podcast



These bring your client's voice to the story. They can be shared on Options Intranet, website, and social media platforms. They can also be shared at upcoming online or in person events and celebrations.

Doing an Art Based Project



The use of storytelling through art may be a way to describe a story in a unique and creative way, giving the client an opportunity to enjoy the creative process. An art project can also be used as an end product (e.g., a poster) to illustrate a need or celebrate a program.

Creating a Storyboard



The use of storytelling through a storyboard is a way to depict specific events relevant to your client's migration journey in several frames using visuals and short captions. Focusing on a specific event, will allow you to tell a purposeful story in a unique way, and can easily be shared on OCS' website, social media and in written publications.

Start your story co-creation with:

[Co-Created Story Outline Template](#)
[Guidelines for Media and Technology](#)

Writing an Article



Envision the Story



Consider the type of story that you want to co-create and for what purpose; consult with your manager and/or co-workers to help you determine what stories need to be told. Fine-tune your intention for telling the story you want to tell, and primary audience for sharing it. Decide on a theme for the client story. Consider what client(s) you might work with. Build on the relationship that you have with your clients and be sure to create a shared understanding between you and your client(s) of the purpose for sharing the story. For example, if you and your client want to highlight the importance of a particular program and the services it delivers, be sure the client understands how sharing their story can help develop additional services for

the community. If the client wants to share their personal story of overcoming challenges through their immigration experience, be sure you and your client know how this story can help to build understanding of the immigrant and refugee experiences.

Complete this [Outline for a Co-Created Story](#) to help you identify your intention, key audience, and the theme of the client story you want to develop. This is also a good time to look at [Guidelines for Media and Technology](#) and consult with the OCS Digital Coordinator so you know what format options are available to you for sharing the story (e.g., podcast, digital storyboard etc.).

Gather Information



For writing an article, consider carefully the information you already know about your client(s), and build from there.

Here is the consent form you will need to get your client to sign before you start to talk to them in detail about their story: [OCS Consent for Use of Personal Stories, Photographs and Videos](#).

When conducting interviews, think about the main topics that you want to develop and create open-ended questions that address these. Then

think of sub-topics that you may want to ask about, depending on where your client takes the story. Here are [Guidelines for Conducting Interviews](#), including sample questions for a semi-structured interview.

You may also want to gather recent data to provide context for the story, for example statistics or evidence of trends relating to your client demographic, recent uptake in your program, etc.

Refine the Storyline

Once you have finished gathering your data, refine your story by highlighting the points that most effectively support the intention of the story you want to tell and taking out what is not directly relevant. For example, if you are writing an article to illuminate how Covid-19 has affected newly arrived refugees, you will want to focus on parts of the client story that tell the

unexpected obstacles your client faced, and how they dealt with them. Details about their journey to Canada may be less relevant.

Arrange a follow-up conversation with your client to add any details you are missing, and to make sure they are comfortable with the story they have shared.

Organize the Content

Organize your story in an article-format. Here are 2 different article templates that you can use to help you organize the main ideas:

Writing Template: [An article that draws on client narrative to highlight a program or client/worker relationship](#)

Writing Template: [A Q & A style article based on an interview with client](#)

Whichever template you choose, the article should include the following:

- An opening that describes something personal to connect the client to the reader (a poem, an object, a key moment) e.g., Today is an important day for...
- The client's background and current challenges, being sure to use a lens of strength amidst the challenges
- Context within a broader landscape e.g., of immigrants, program delivery etc.
- Relevant ideas about the program or relationship you are highlighting e.g., the more intensive supports that MAP provides, or the importance of Case Managers to provide tailored services to employment clients
- A clearly articulated connection between your client and broader context you are providing e.g., how MAP services made an important difference for your client
- At the end, a return to the personal device that you opened with, highlighting a call to action, a change in the client and/or a message of hope.

Create the Story

Write a draft of the article. Refer to [Guidelines for the Writing Process](#) to help guide you through the writing process, and for some general suggestions for effective paragraph and sentence development, word choice, using illustrative examples, etc. Edit your writing, including asking someone to review it to a) provide suggestions for content, staying within your intention and having impact; b) mechanics (spelling, punctuation etc.).

Work with OCS Digital Coordinator and see [Guidelines for Taking Photographs](#) for adding photos and graphics to your article.

Check back with your client when you have a final draft, ask them to read the story, and sign off with final consent in an email to you and the OCS Digital Coordinator.

Share the Story

Submit your final draft to OCS Digital Coordinator for sharing on OCS' intra-web, website, and social media platforms. Be sure to send a final copy to your client, and keep a copy for yourself to include with funder's reports, community presentations etc.

Sample Articles

Rahma's Journey of Hope and Resilience

Co-Created by Cindy Lee, Program Manager at OCS and Rahma

Simple Acts of Kindness and Friendship Make a World of Difference for Refugees

Co-Created by Jessica Castillo Bondanza, Outreach Case Worker at OCS and Darlyng

Thinking about the assumptions we make, stepping back and being present with understanding and warmth

Co-Created by Nadine Graham, Employment Specialist at OCS and Susan

Take the time to listen and help the client see what is possible

Co-Created by Nadine Graham, Employment Specialist at OCS and Juan

A newcomer senior's journey: adjusting to life in Canada through learning English

Co-Created by Tesni Leung, Community Connections Worker at OCS and Eunice

A newcomer woman learns to embrace challenges and discover courage, hope and resilience

Co-Created by Tesni Leung, Community Connections Worker at OCS and Yvonne

Rahma's Journey of Hope and Resilience

Co-Created by Cindy Lee, Program Manager at OCS and Rahma

"In Niger, I learned from struggle, in Canada, I learn from services." said Rahma who has been enrolled in the Options English language program since she arrived in Canada and where she is learning English in both virtual and in-person classes. Having gained digital skills required for Zoom classes, Rahma attends virtual English class three times a week. Once a week, she goes in-person for additional support in digital literacy as well as for much needed in-person social connections with her classmates and teachers.

Rahma experienced great hardships in her migration journey to Canada after she was forced to flee her home and sought refuge here in Surrey. Refugees like Rahma arrive in Canada with mixed feelings of fear of the unknown and great hope for a better life. When refugees like Rahma arrive, they are often exhausted, not only from the journey, but also with the memories of traumatic experiences fresh in their minds. Often refugees carry these traumatic memories but there is no respite for them as they face many challenges when they arrive in Canada. Everything is new and different and they have to navigate a totally foreign environment, a new language, and all without friends and extended family that they perhaps relied on in their home country.

When COVID 19 hit in March 2020, Options was able to offer virtual language classes to their students. Initially however, newcomer refugees, like Rahma, were left out of language classes because of their low or no digital literacy skills and their lack of technology devices. However, Somali Settlement Workers at Options began as soon as possible, to offer digital support which



gave low literacy and digital students, like Rahma, the opportunity to access online Zoom classes and get technical support in first language. By December, 2020, those literacy learners like Rahma, who had very low English and digital literacy skills, were able to access the services they needed with online learning. Options has been able to offer these English classes, to the Somali community in particular, because Options has provided a Somali speaking classroom teaching assistant for both digital and language support for online and in-person classroom instruction.

Rahma said, "Canada is a multicultural country and that makes me feel like I can try anything. I feel that this English class at Options has opened my eyes to a new world. People in Canada are nice to me and respect my way of dressing and my way of life" Her advice to other refugees is to stay optimistic and follows the rules of the new country. She suggested, "If you are not living in your country of birth, just know that the country that accepted you is your country now. Be ready to be part of the new country. They will provide you with the supports you need." Rahma hopes to study to become a doctor in the future. "I am lucky to have a place to call home. I want to contribute to my new country," she added.

Simple Acts of Kindness and Friendship Make a World of Difference for Refugees

Co-Created by Jessica Castillo Bondanza,
Outreach Case Worker at OCS and Darlyng

Darlyng is a Government-Assisted Refugee in her early forties, a single mother of a teenage-daughter, and determined to re-establish herself in Canada. As her Case Worker, I have been working with Darlyng for 6 months. Like many refugees, she is striving for a fulfilling life where she can provide for herself and her daughter, and for a sense of belonging and meaning in her new community. She needs a helping hand - through supportive programming and through simple acts of kindness and friendship.

Darlyng was very active in her home country of Colombia, advocating for the rights of vulnerable people. Her educational background is Nursing. She came to Canada because her life was in danger for being an activist for human rights. She initially arrived in Quebec, but after a few months of experiencing a cold winter and finding a lack of support, she started experiencing depression. Encouraged by a family friend living in Vancouver, Darlyng and her daughter moved to BC.

For any of us, moving to a new home and community is challenging; though we may first experience euphoria, reality soon hits and with it the anxiety that comes with uncertainty. For refugees, it is this roller coaster of emotions, complicated by many challenges. Though in a safer place, refugees may, ironically, experience increased insecurity due to dealing with many changes such as a language barrier, unemployment, cultural adaptation, and lack of social support. For some it may be mild, and for others it is severe. The latter is the case for

Darlyng. When she first moved to BC, she started to feel better. She fell in love with the weather and soon found support from Options Community Services and started to build friendships. However, Darlyng soon began to be overwhelmed with her reality and started experiencing depression again. Her health condition deteriorated to the extent that she found herself visiting Emergency at Surrey Memorial Hospital. Through the Moving Ahead Program at Options and the friends she was making there, she was encouraged to keep accessing help.



The Moving Ahead Program (MAP) at Options Community Services is a response to those newcomers, like Darlyng who need more intensive support. Funding is provided by IRCC (Immigration Refugees Citizenship Canada) for clients with multiple barriers. Support workers become their first source of contact and they are provided with tailored supports that significantly decrease the amount of stress they are experiencing, and help them with each stage of their transition. In the case of Darlyng, she has been experiencing multiple changes in her life, to the extent that she has developed concerning mental health issues. Through MAP, she has received support in her first language, including the important benefit of having a translator on each physicians' visit. Further, she

is receiving one-on-one counselling support, as well as support from a wellness group that is tailored to this multi-barriered population. It is wonderful to see how the participants empathize with one another, identifying with one another and the situations they are in. Because some of the participants have been in Canada longer than others, they are able to guide one another through the most challenging times, and to encourage, motivate and find strength in one another.



THE MAP program has also been able to support Darlyng in another of her major challenges: lack of proper housing. More than 70 percent of her income was going towards paying rent. As her Case Worker, I helped Darlyng to file the application and apply to different non profit buildings, as well as make several follow up

calls. Recently, Darlyng got offered a two bedroom apartment suit in Surrey. She was beyond excited as was her daughter. For Darlyng, it meant living affordably, which was a huge stress reliever. Housing was certainly not her only challenge, but it will allow her to start taking other steps, such as learning English. Darlyng looks forward to becoming involved in the community and finding a stable job that allows her to use her education and pays above a minimum wage.

The journey of migrants to adapt to a new culture is more difficult than most people can perceive. It takes between 3-5 years to adapt. Speaking from all that I have experienced - both as a teenage daughter within a refugee family, as well as in my years as a Case Worker, I believe that any caring individual can play a vital role in that transition of life for a new refugee. If someone is there to help - volunteering as a buddy in a settlement program, guiding someone to a bus stop, or taking a moment to give some friendly advice to their daughter's newcomer friend - that someone is making the journey a little smoother, and sending a message that none of us are alone. That someone can be you; your simple act of kindness or friendship can make the world of difference. And with each of those acts, we are strengthening our own communities as we see refugees and other newcomers flourish in their new lives in Canada.

Thinking about the assumptions we make, stepping back and being present with understanding and warmth

Co-Created by Nadine Graham, Employment Specialist at OCS and Susan

Susan has been through a lot of job interviews, a mountain of resumes and a mountain of interviews. Looking for a job, putting our lives on paper and in concise answers is an emotional process. In an interview, we are presenting the best of ourselves in the hope that we receive that fateful call or email with the coveted words "We would like to offer you...". Our knowledge, experience and skills often come shining through. However, we can rarely tell the full story of what we went through, what got us to that moment and the impact of the words we hear while navigating this journey. This is key because, just a few words or a few sentences can make all the difference. Susan had a key memorable moment when she heard, "Wow, you have a lot of experience, you are amazing, I'm pretty sure that you're going to find something in Canada, of course, we want you. Of course, our company will take you." While she did not actually get the position, those words touched her. To have her experience validated and praised helped keep her going in her journey back to her professional career

In her country, Honduras, Susan excelled in not just one but two careers as a Human Resources professional and a Chemical Engineer. She had a significant amount of experience and education and as a result, had many offers. She did not have to look for a job in her country. However, Susan and her husband made the decision to come to Canada, to run for their lives and to be secure. After the decision was made, it was not

even possible to say goodbye to their family. Without knowing whether their status would be approved and with their things back in Honduras, they came to Canada to claim refugee status. Coming to Canada and going through the refugee claimant process was arduous. Susan describes, "Especially, if you come as a refugee, you are dealing with a lawyer, dealing with your story, dealing with the paperwork at the same time. It was so hard." She emphasizes that, "As a person, you are not complete, like 100%." The job search process in Canada, it felt very new to her. Thinking back, Susan describes, "I knew I had to start from zero, I don't have a problem with that but I didn't know that, I feel like all my professional career doesn't count and it really hurts, it really feels really, for me, it's been overwhelming. I haven't overcome yet, I will say because I study so much in my life." To go through the process where your work experience and education doesn't mean what it used to, that suddenly, it means much less, is an emotional process. In a way, it is its own form of grief when you have to create a new path forward that looks very different from the path you leave behind.

Building that path has been no easy task but Susan built one with perseverance, strength, creativity and hard work. After receiving a booklet that described services available in Canada at the border and researching the information provided, she was able to access a variety of services. While these services fulfill an

important need, it can seem a bit like navigating a maze. She was able to access income assistance while waiting for a work permit in addition to receiving help understanding Canadian resume standards and benefiting from English classes. From Options Community Services, she further learned about tailoring her resume and what a path back to her professional career might look like. In all of her experiences in navigating support from a variety of organizations, the library and the government, what stood out to her was the assumptions that service workers made or importantly, the impact of when they did not make assumptions. She mentions a very positive experience when applying for income assistance. Susan highlighted that "...because he was like, are you suffering from, do you need any medication at some moment? Do you have all of the food you need to eat for this week?" This person started by treating her with warmth and ensuring her basic needs were met.

"The refugees, they are new, they don't know too much, they may be confused, they maybe say yes but they are really confused."

Clients needs vary. Client's experiences vary. To provide warm and considerate services that help elevate a client's condition and help them towards their goal begins with ensuring basic needs are met and continues with going on their employment journey with them, step-by-step and making sure services are tailored to the support client needs. Once it is established that basic needs are met, then, the client can see what is possible with employment support. As an Employment Specialist, you become one part of a team, helping your client see the possible pathways ahead and to make sure that they have the information they need to decide

which path to take. Importantly, it is not just the information they need but it is information delivered in a clear and concise way. However, with acting as a guide and becoming part of a team, one must also have the thought in the back of their head, that while it is essential to be realistic, it is also crucial to be tender and hopeful. Susan emphasizes, "The refugees, they are new, they don't know too much. They may be confused; they maybe say yes but they are really confused. [It helps] to give an extra, just not to treat us like normal clients. It's a delicate situation, especially at the beginning." Helping a client to thrive and not just survive, starts with no assumptions and ends with understanding, kindness and hope.

After all of her experiences, she emphasizes, "I just have the value for life. If I'm secure, if I have peace, it's okay. I hope that my experience will help someone or will help to improve all these organizations that for me are amazing. They're really good. Obviously, there are good and bad but I hope that with my feedback, we can make something different or we can make a better service." We are here to help clients but we are also here to listen so that we can continue to adapt and change. In order to ensure our services are not only flexible and responsive, but also successful, we must celebrate what works and change what does not. Susan is currently completing a Human Resources program at Simon Fraser University and hopes to choose a future career path where she can put 100% of her efforts there. She hopes for a career in a job that she loves and to help other immigrants, particularly in mental health.

Take the time to listen and help the client see what is possible

Co-Created by Nadine Graham, Employment Specialist at OCS and Juan

As a client navigates the job search process, they are not alone. Their employment specialist is there with them, helping them see not just the next step but beyond that as well as each possible pathway ahead. The experience of coming to Canada is an emotional one, especially when coming as a refugee claimant, coming to Canada for safety and leaving behind not just family but also possible futures. Suddenly, your education and experience doesn't quite mean what it used to as it did in your country of origin. Finding a way back to a career or to a new one is complex with mountainous barriers and a sea of information. The job of an employment specialist is to highlight the possible pathways, pull out every piece of necessary information, provide tools the client can utilize for their chosen path and then to take that path with them.

Juan Carlos is from Colombia and comes from a big family with 7 siblings total but he had to leave all of his family and a career as an Electrician behind to save his life. He arrived in Canada and became a refugee claimant. The act of choosing to come to Canada is essential to acknowledge as not every newcomer makes it as a free choice. Coming to Canada for safety and for life is not a choice made independently, it is a constrained choice. Before coming, he thought of Canada as somewhere where your life is safe, people are friendly, a place where you can have a higher quality of life but that it is a little bit cold. He knew a little about Vancouver before arriving as he had heard about the city from his sister, who sadly passed away 3 years ago, that there is something special about the

city of Vancouver. He thought he could have a safe and good life in Canada with a good job and living on his own.

Juan Carlos had wanted to return to his career as an electrician but didn't know where to start. He described the feeling of not being able to see because he did not know where to start. He didn't know where to go for work or that the process of applying and preparing to take the challenge exam would be so difficult. He tried to do it on his own but couldn't find a way. He heard about Options Community Services from some friends who said if he explained his story that he could receive help. He became a client of the BCSIS program which provides critically needed settlement and employment support to refugee claimants, international students, temporary foreign workers, those on open work permits and naturalized citizens. Suddenly, he was able to learn about applying for a work permit, provincial ID and how to apply for income assistance. This was an important part of meeting his basic needs while his work permit was processing. Meeting basic needs is essential beyond the obvious of satisfying what is needed

"My expectations for living in Canada were to have a good life, live safe, have a good job to live by myself."

for daily life as it helps allow the client to look to the future. He was able to benefit from income assistance for around 4 months and once he received his work permit, he was able to find work after about a month. A part of meeting basic needs can come from the client's own community. A community can be such an incredible source of information and support. Support from a client's community can run alongside assistance from non-profit organizations but can also be intricately intertwined with it as well. With Juan Carlos, he was able to find out about Options through

friends as well as hear about work opportunities within his community. Through information from friends within his community, he was able to find a job in construction labour. It was a difficult job but he was able to handle it.

Juan Carlos also faced a struggle common to many newcomers, that of the language. He described being able to understand quite a bit but struggled to speak and with understanding the variety of accents and when the person would speak quite quickly. However, the opportunity to work with others that could speak English each day helped him become accustomed to their way of speaking.

Thus, Juan Carlos was in a position where he was working and improving his ability to speak English. However, he had the desire to return to his career as an Electrician but had no idea where to begin. After speaking with a settlement worker and asking for support, he was able to learn about the support of a Newcomer Employment Specialist. After an initial appointment, he could see what kind of support was possible. He described feeling quite good after seeing he could receive support with applying for the challenge exam. Returning to a previous career is incredibly complex and it takes a significant amount of research skills. Trying to find the necessary information, find study materials, understanding the process and knowing what questions to ask can be incredibly difficult. This is one example where flexible and accessible services become quite helpful. It allows the employment specialist to meet client needs as they are. This involved helping the client research and even calling with the client to ITA to ask clarification questions. With this, the employment specialist is able to hear information from the source in question and assess the level of client understanding. Sometimes, translation and interpretation between languages is necessary, but at other times, it is essential to translate jargon filled and

complex language into information that is clearer and more accessible.

Just taking the time to listen to the client, show them what is possible and be there for what they decide can make all the difference. Often the language of support and assistance is used when providing services to newcomers but it is also important to highlight that the employment specialist and client are a team. I often tell my clients that we are a team and it is up to them to decide what each next step is. My role is to provide information and to describe what each pathway looks like as well as potential consequences and then, we navigate the chosen path together. It is easy in this role to assume we know best and to help clients to that conclusion. However, in reality, each client knows what is best for them and we perform best when we are there as a navigation tool and support. Stereotypes and assumptions permeate society such as receiving support from your community equals being stuck and not integrating into Canadian life. However, whether or not, the decision to come to Canada is freely made, clients do not leave their identities and past behind. Community support can be a wonderful entry into work and life in Canada and can work well alongside or within non-profit support. Juan Carlos was not initially sure what support he could receive but through the act of listening and consideration, he has been able to take the next step towards his dream of being an Electrician again.

Recently, Juan Carlos is looking into entry level positions that will allow him to gain experience related to being an Electrician while he going through the Challenge application process. He has been referred to WorkBC services and hopes to take advantage of their Wage Subsidy program at a company where he could work as an Electrician Helper. He is hopeful for the future and excited about the possibility of being an Electrician again.

A newcomer senior's journey: adjusting to life in Canada through learning English

Co-Created by Tesni Leung, Community Connections Worker at OCS and Eunice

Many young people decide to move to a different country to broaden their horizons or follow their dreams. They come to Canada with their hopes, belongings, and families. It can be a wondrous journey for young adults, but it can be a nightmare for newcomer seniors.

Seniors face unique challenges including a language barrier, new environment and a completely new culture – It is understandable for seniors to be apprehensive when they embark on a migration journey to Canada. The challenges are immense for anyone, but learning to adapt to a new culture, language, and environment at an older age can be even harder.

“Although I’m in my 70s and my memory and reaction is no longer as good as when I was young, I’ll keep learning — I can improve and help other newcomer seniors get involved in the community.”

Eunice who is 75 years old now immigrated to Canada in 2010 to be with her daughter. In the first and second year, she enjoyed the novelty of travelling around Canada. However, as times went by, Eunice realized that it was impossible to keep travelling as the novelty started to wear off. If she wasn't travelling, then she was forced to stay home with her husband while her daughter was busy at work. Social isolation and loneliness hit her hard and she worried about spiraling into emotional distress.



Nightmares turned into blessings when Eunice enrolled in an English language class at Options.

She shares with us her English learning journey and how it has helped her adjust to life in Canada.

“My English learning journey began...”

When I first came to Canada, I could only speak a few words in English, so I felt dumb and deaf. For instance, I couldn't communicate with cashiers at the stores, bus drivers, or my neighbours. I felt bored and lonely. One of my friends suggested that I go to school and learn English. I had never thought that I could go back to school at nearly 70 years old! With my friend's encouragement, I came to the Delta Community College (DCC) and started in the LINC level 3 class in 2014 and reached LINC level 6 in 2017. I became a competent English language speaker! I was lucky to meet very nice teachers who were patient and earnest. My classmates were from different countries such as China, India, Somalia, Iran, and Thailand. I got a lot of support from them. I not only learned the language, I also learned a lot about Canada's history, geography and famous Canadians.

Advanced English during the pandemic through Options Online classes

In 2020, school closed for all in-person classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, Options offered English online classes. Options helped us learn how to use the video-calling application: Zoom, and I became more tech-savvy, now I can continue to learn English. And I never imagined that I could make an English presentation in a public speaking class.

Keep Learning and Getting Active in the Community

Since my English speaking and listening ability has progressed, I have become more confident and independent. I don't need to always rely on my daughter. Now I can communicate with doctors, cashiers, and other community members in English and even handle the PR card renewal process and other important forms and applications by myself. I'm very happy to help other Chinese Seniors solve similar problems and so I became a volunteer.

Travelling abroad independently is not an easy task for Chinese Seniors because most of us don't speak English very well. In 2017 and 2018, I led over ten seniors travelling to Alaska and Mexico.

Thanks to Canada and the BC Government for giving all immigrants free English learning opportunities! Also, thanks to the teachers and staff of DCC and Options for their hard works."

Eunice now is still learning English at Options and plans to be a lifelong learner. Her story demonstrates a good example of resilience, perseverance and a great attitude for learning at any age. No matter how old we are, everyone can keep learning, and moving forward!



A newcomer woman learns to embrace challenges and discover courage, hope and resilience

Co-Created by Tesni Leung, Community Connections Worker at OCS and Yvonne

Yvonne is a newcomer and also a brave mother of two. She went through a lot of hard work, sacrifices and struggles to get to where she is now. Today, the family of four is living a better life in Canada.

"Life is full of miracles. So far, I feel that the most meaningful thing I have done is immigrate to Canada. It has allowed me and my family to embark on a new life journey. Like many immigrants, I have experienced disappointment, hesitation, and even pain, but now I feel the experience has made me stronger, and I cherish my current life more."

When Yvonne's son was four years old, he was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome in China. All of a sudden, so much of her life changed. She decided to take her son and daughter to Vancouver despite the fact that her husband had to stay in China to secure a stable income. "After my son had various interventions, the doctor advised me that Canada is a better place for treatment and societal acceptance," she said.

Resilience and self-learning

Upon arriving in Canada in 2012, the hard times had only just begun. Missing family, language barriers, physical discomfort, and inability to integrate into the community made her suffer from insomnia and depression. The anxiety she experienced as a result of the changes in her new life, Yvonne remembered. "Financial burden and expensive treatment fees made the situation



worse. I even stopped therapies for my son. And it seemed impossible to find a job here."

Nevertheless, difficulties could not easily defeat a strong mother. She strived to remind herself that she came here for a better living environment for her son. This motivation helped her stay positive. She started to step out of her comfort zone – made friends, learned English, looked for resources and help in the community and school. One year later, her son was diagnosed with autism by the Children's Hospital. From then on, the government began to provide autism funding for treatment and many other resources. "I know that two treatments once a week was not enough. Family is the child's greatest support. To implement the treatment plans at home with the therapists, I insisted on self-learning about autism and participating in different courses to educate myself on the topic. My son's condition has slowly been improving day by day," she explained.

Advance English at Options

While her child settled down, she didn't stop improving herself. She completed ESL English level 7 and also got a bookkeeping and basic accounting certificate with the help of WorkBC. Even though she wanted to find a full-time job, she quickly realized that she needed to take care of her children and she didn't have any local work experience so then she contacted Options Community Services.

"At Options, I had the opportunity to participate in various activities, which enriched my life, allowed me to understand Canadian culture and history, and improved my English level, especially my speaking ability. Among all the English programs, my favourite classes were Learning English through Songs, Learning English through the Media, and Public Speaking."



Gaining experience as a volunteer

In addition to English programs and community activities, Options also offered employment services to support newcomers. "An employment counselor advised me to gain some relevant theoretical knowledge and experience in caring for special needs children,

and I could consider becoming a behaviour interventionist. However, I thought my English was not good enough, so I didn't follow up. However, I considered his advice, and started volunteering at the local school instead," she added. With the continuous improvement of her English and accumulation of the two-year volunteer experience at school, Yvonne eventually got her first job in Canada!

Opening the door to Behaviour Interventionist (BI) work

The Delta Education Bureau hired Yvonne as a noon supervisor. The job gave her good experience and determined her career in Behaviour Interventionist (BI) work. After completing the relevant training and the Career Exploration Workshop provided by Options, she learned more about her strengths and weakness and obtained a BI certificate. She got a job as a Behaviorist Interventionist (BI) and she likes the job very much. It allows her to experience the joy of helping special needs children.

In the third year Yvonne came to Canada, her husband also reunited with them. They learned English together and participated in the pre-employment workshops of both WorkBC and Options. Her husband found a professional job after six months and has been permanently employed ever since.

A story of hope, Yvonne's story demonstrates the resilience and strength of a newcomer woman.



Creating a Video or Podcast



Envision the Story



Consider the type of story that you want to co-create and for what purpose; consult with your manager and/or co-workers to help you determine what stories need to be told. Fine-tune your intention for telling the story you want to tell, and primary audience for sharing it. Decide on a theme for the client story. Consider what client(s) you might work with. Build on the relationship that you have with your clients and be sure to create a shared understanding between you and your client(s) of the purpose for telling this story through an audio podcast or a video. For example, if you and your client want to highlight the importance of a particular program, and the services it delivers, be sure the client understands how sharing their story in this

medium can help develop additional services to the community. If the client wants to share their personal story of overcoming challenges through their immigration experience, be sure you and your client know how this story is can help to build understanding of immigrant and refugee experiences.

Complete this [Outline for a Co-Created Story](#) to help you identify your intention, key audience, and the theme of the client story you want to develop. It is important that you look at [Guidelines for Media and Technology](#) and consult with the OCS Digital Coordinator at this time so you know what technology is available to you for creating and sharing content.

Gather Information



For creating a video or podcast, consider carefully the information you already know about your client(s) and build from there. Consider whether you want different perspectives to be represented. For example, you might want to reflect the different experiences of 2 clients, or the client perspective and staff perspective.

Here is the consent form you will need to get your client to sign before you start to talk to them in detail about their story: [OCS Consent for Use of Personal Stories, Photographs and Videos](#). You will need to conduct an information-gathering interview prior to actually recording a podcast or video. When conducting interviews, think about the main topics that you

want to develop and create open-ended questions that address these. Then think of sub-topics that you may want to ask about, depending on where your client takes the story. Here are [Guidelines for Conducting Interviews](#), including sample questions for a semi-structured interview. Follow the same process for any additional perspectives you want to include, interviewing staff etc. prior to the actual recording.

You may also want to gather recent data to provide context for the story, for example statistics or evidence of trends relating to your client demographic, recent uptake in your program etc.

Refine the Storyline



Once you have completed your interviews, with your intention and audience front of mind, start to highlight the most compelling and illustrative information and take out what is not directly relevant. Consider how the different perspectives can be used to contrast or

complement one another to best highlight the issue(s) you are addressing. Share your ideas with the OCS Digital Coordinator or your Manager and co-workers to help create the most compelling and important details for your video or podcast.

Organize the Content



Once you are very clear on the content you will include in your recorded podcast or video, start to organize your content. If you are doing a podcast, you need to decide if you are doing one podcast or, perhaps, a series of 3 short podcasts featuring the same guest(s) but covering different topics. Here is a [Podcast Template: Writing an Outline](#) you can use to help organize your ideas for a podcast.

Start your podcast with a clear summary that includes the main idea, and an introduction of your guests being featured. If you are doing a series, you will need to write a brief introduction for each segment, as well as a one for the entire series. Your introduction can be similar to a synopsis that you may need to write for the description of a video. See [Guidelines for Writing Titles, Captions and Synopses](#) to help you write a podcast introduction or a video description.

For podcasts and videos, write questions to ask your clients prior to recording. You can use some of the questions from your original

interview, though they should now be selected specifically for the information you want to focus on, and may be written in a way that is more conversational.

Provide your guest with the questions well ahead of the recording, advising them to think about how they will answer the questions but not script them. Ideally, you can work on your client's answers together, so that you get at the most important, illuminating and compelling information. After developing the content together, you can run through the questions and answers with your client, but scripting and over-rehearsing will take away from the authentic feel of your video or podcast.

For the conclusion of the video or podcast, write a short paragraph highlighting the 1 or 2 main points of the interview along with a message of hope, aspiration, or a call to action. Create a draft of the conclusion and be prepared to refine and rewrite it once the recording is complete.

Create the Content



Using the [Guidelines for Media and Technology](#), work with OCS Digital Coordinator to record your video or podcast. Continue to work with OCS Digital Coordinator to edit the recording, add graphics, etc. Check back with your clients/guests when you have a final version and ask them to listen and sign off with final consent in an email to you and the OCS Digital Coordinator.

Share the Story



Submit your final version to OCS Digital Coordinator for sharing on Options Intra-web, website, and social media platforms. Be sure that you share the link with your clients/guests, and you may also consider sharing on your own social media channels to highlight the work that you do, and the issues that are important to you. Also consider upcoming online or in person events and celebrations for which a video could be viewed.

Doing an Art Based Project



Envision the Story



Consider the type of story that you want to co-create and for what purpose; consult with your manager and/or co-workers to help you determine what stories need to be told. Fine-tune your intention for telling the story you want to tell, and primary audience for sharing it. Decide on a theme for the client story. Consider what client(s) you might work with. Build on the relationship that you have with your clients and be sure to create a shared understanding between you and your client(s) of the purpose for telling this story through an art project. For example, if you and your client want to highlight the importance of a particular program and the services it delivers, be sure the client understands how sharing their story in this medium can help develop additional services to the community. If the client wants to share their personal story of overcoming challenges

through their immigration experience, be sure you and your client know how this story can help to build understanding of immigrant and refugee experiences.

The use of storytelling through art may be a way to describe a story in a unique and creative way, giving the client an opportunity to enjoy the creative process. An art project can also be used as an end product (e.g., a poster) to show a need or celebrate a program.

Complete this [Outline for a Co-Created Story](#) to help you identify your intention, key audience, and the theme of the client story you want to develop. This is also a good time to look at [Guidelines for Media and Technology](#) and consult with the OCS Digital Coordinator so you know what technology is available to you for creating and sharing an art project.

Gather Information



Consider which art project would be most suitable for your clients. There are many possibilities such as collage, mask making, puppet making, painting, sketching, storyboards, posters, etc. but it will be up to you to find the best project that will be interesting to your clients and be most effective at capturing the story you think your client would like to share.

Art projects can be done individually or as a whole group, such as in an English class, or a senior's program. The process of doing the art project can be a way for clients to start thinking about a story they want to tell. You will need to

have your theme in mind for the project. For example, a self-actualization collage and how they as individuals have changed through their migrations and settlement experience in Canada. Alternatively, you can ask a question and ask the client or group to base their art piece around the answer to that question. For example, how has OCS employment department helped get your client(s) on the right path to sustainable employment?

See [Guidelines for Arts-based Project](#) and [Instructions for 2 Art Projects](#) for some suggestions and ideas for doing art projects.

Refine the Storyline

Once you have introduced the idea of the art project to your clients and perhaps started working on it, consider how the different perspectives represented by each client can be used to contrast or complement the story. Consider how to best highlight the issue(s) you want to focus on specifically. For example, if you are working on a group collage project, make sure that the collage has images that are telling a similar story to each other. Perhaps there will be some contrasting ideas in the images but make sure the images also portray a

similar theme. This is also important if you are doing an individualized art project with a client. Maybe you want to do a visual representation of a migration journey to Canada. Consider what is most important to focus on. Is it the experience in your client's home country before coming to Canada? Is it the experience of traveling through various countries before coming to Canada? Or is it the actual settlement experience once arriving in Canada? Be very specific about which story you want to tell so that the art work best reflects a unique story.

Organize the Content

Determine if there is any additional information you can bring to the art project that will help the viewer understand the overall theme of the story and the issue that is being represented. You might write captions or short descriptions of what is depicted or what each image represents.

Or you could write a description of the overall intention of the art work, or a description of the art project process itself. This can be particularly helpful if it is a collective group project. See [Guidelines for Writing Titles, Captions & Synopses](#).

Create the Artwork

Continue to work on the art project with your client(s) towards a finished art piece. Be sure to check back regularly on the [Guidelines for Arts-based Project](#) for useful tips such as ways to set up a safe, social environment to create art together, and the [Instructions for 2 Art Projects](#) for practical tips such as putting a finish on a group mural. Once you and your clients feel the artwork is complete, have them sign off with final consent in an email to you and the OCS Digital Coordinator.

Share the Story

Submit your final version to OCS Digital Coordinator, for sharing on Options Intra-web, website, social media platforms. Also consider upcoming celebrations and events that your co-created artwork can be shared at. Be sure that you share any links to postings or events with your clients/guests. You may also consider sharing on your own social media channels to highlight the work that you do, the artwork that was created, and what the artwork speaks to in terms of the issues that are important to you

Sample Artwork



My name is Marlene, and together with my husband, Jesse, are very thankful for your help with the food basket almost every week. I am a health care assistant and with your help I have been able to prepare more meals at home, always

bringing lunch to work, because of your help. Thank you. I have been able to prepare new dishes of food and also old things. I feel better healthwise since I am having more veggies & meats, more energetic and I thank you for that.
- Marlene & Jesse



Options Community Services Taste of Home Food Hub



Background

The COVID-19 pandemic left many of Options Community Services (OCS) clients unemployed, under-employed or precariously employed. Receiving supports from **OCS Taste of Home Food Hub** allowed clients to have access to food and allocate their limited funds towards other basic needs.



OCS Taste of Home Food Hub

- Provided support to **943** individuals of which **397** were *children*
- Provided **75** hampers to Temporary residents including *international students* and *temporary foreign workers*



Food Insecurity in Canada

One in seven Canadians experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic



BC Settlement & Integration Services (BCSIS)

had a 15.5% increase in service participants compared to the previous contract year – they continue to need food supports.



International Students and Food Services

International students who arrived in early 2020 and again in the summer of 2020 experienced difficulties securing part-time jobs in customer service retail, food services and other jobs most suited to a student's schedule due to Covid-19 related economic downturn.



Supply and Demand

The demand for Taste of Home Food Hub supports exceeded the number of we could serve



Created by Atieh Razavi Yekta, UBC PhD student and Shelley Dhaliwal, Temporary Resident Specialist at OCS

Creating a Storyboard

Envision the Story



Consider the type of story that you want to co-create and for what purpose; consult with your manager and/or co-workers to help you determine what stories need to be told. Fine-tune your intention for telling the story you want to tell, and primary audience for sharing it. Decide on a theme for the client story. Consider what client(s) you might work with. Build on the relationship that you have with your clients and be sure to create a shared understanding between you and your client(s) of the purpose for telling this story through a storyboard. For example, if you and your client want to highlight the importance of a particular program and the services it delivers, be sure the client understands how sharing their story in this medium can help develop additional services to the community. If the client wants to share their personal story of overcoming challenges through their immigration experience, be sure you and your client know how this story can help to build understanding of the immigrant and refugee experience.

The use of storytelling through a storyboard is a way to depict specific events relevant to your client's migration journey in several frames using visuals and short captions. Storyboards often describe a fragment of the client migration journey. Focusing on a specific event, will allow you to tell a purposeful story in a unique minimalist way. See [Guidelines for Creating a Storyboard](#) for a more detailed introduction to this project and suggestions on developing a storyline.

Complete this [Outline for a Co-Created Story](#) to help you identify your intention, key audience, and the theme of the client story you want to develop. It is important that you look at [Guidelines for Media and Technology](#) and consult with the OCS Digital Coordinator at this time so you know what technology is available to you for creating and sharing a storyboard.

Gather Information



To gather data for your storyboard, consider which platform would be most accessible to you and your client to create your storyboard (e.g., [Canva](#), [Storyboardthat.com](#)). Having decided on a theme for the client's story, you can work with the client to collect images or texts that chronologically map the story's main events. Your images or texts don't have to be complicated. Using simple visuals and basic text, and then building a specific scenario is sufficient

to create a compelling storyboard. The visuals can be sketches, illustrations or photos. By this stage, you should have defined a specific scenario and have gathered some visuals and text that represent the story your client wants to tell. While you may continue to gather images and as you refine and organize the story, it is important to have the client's input at this stage of gathering data for the story.

Refine the Storyline



Once you have gathered some storyboard elements (i.e., visuals), consider how to best highlight the issue(s) you want to focus on specifically. For example, if you want to do a storyboard of a migration journey to Canada, consider what event is most important to focus on. Is it better to focus on the experience of

traveling through various countries before coming to Canada? Or is it more interesting to focus on the actual settlement experience once arriving in Canada? Be very specific about which story you want to tell so that the storyboard work best reflects the specific story.

Organize the Content



At this stage, you need to write a short text description of the story. The description of the story must be clear enough that anyone could understand what is depicted before looking at visuals. For example, A single mother refugee, Safia, is seeking help to access a food bank. After the description of your story, review the visuals and captions you have gathered and order them in a way that best tells the story. Add

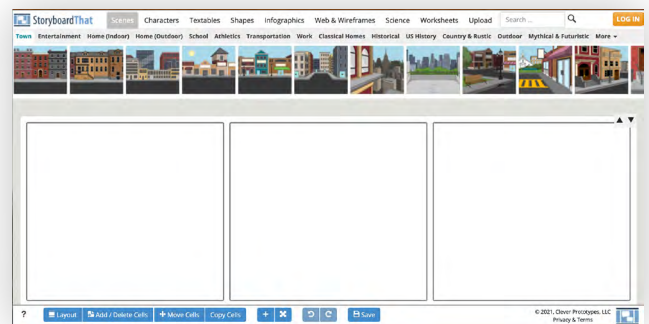
details to your visuals that are relevant to your story, such as speech bubbles with quotes from your client. For each visual, include a corresponding caption. Since the image is the primary content in your storyboard, captions must be concise and shouldn't exceed two bullet points. See [Guidelines for Writing Titles, Captions and Synopses](#) to help you write your description and the captions.

Create the Storyboard



Using the platform you have chosen (e.g., [Canva](#)), start creating the storyboard. Refer back to Guidelines for Creating a Storyboard for a step-by-step guide to using Canva to create a storyboard.

You can work on the Canva storyboard on the basis of previous conversations with your client, or your client may want to work on digitizing the story with you. You may also be able to work with OCS Digital Coordinator for additional support in using Canva.



Screenshot of [Storyboardthat.com](#)

Once you and your client feel the storyboard is complete, have them sign off on the final version by sending an email to you and the OCS Digital Coordinator.



Submit your final version to OCS Digital Coordinator, for sharing on Options Intra-web, website, and social media platforms. Be sure that you share any links with your clients/guests, and you may also consider sharing on your own social media channels to highlight the work that you do.

Sample Storyboard

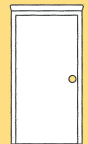
From Isolation to Community Bushra Finds Support

BY SHELLEY & BUSHRA



Lacked opportunity
and freedom as a
woman.

Bushra left her country
to seek asylum, freedom,
and opportunities for
herself and her three
children.



Bushra faced
challenges securing
housing and food for
her family of four.



Covid-19 : Isolation

Government offices
shut down;
couldn't obtain
documents needed to
secure employment;
financial hardship.



Bushra learned of BCSIS
at Options Community
Services and the
programs that support
refugee claimants.



Bushra accessed much
needed support through
Taste of Home Food
Hub & continues to
work with her
Employment Support
Specialist for Refugee
claimants at BCSIS .



Created by Atieh Razavi Yekta, UBC PhD student and
Shelley Dhaliwal, Temporary Resident Specialist at OCS

Appendix

Guidelines

- Guidelines for Media & Technology
- Guidelines for Conducting Interviews
- Guidelines for the Writing Process
- Guidelines for Creating a Podcast
- Guidelines for Taking Photographs
- Guidelines for Art-based Projects
- Guidelines for Creating a Storyboard

Templates and Instructions

- Co-Created Story Outline Template
- Instructions for 2 Art Projects
- Podcast Template
- Writing Template: Relationship Narrative
- Writing Template: A Q & A style
- Guidelines for Writing Titles, Captions and Synopses

CLIENT FORMS
Consent for Use of
Personal Photographs Stories
and Videos



I hereby give my consent to Options Community Services (OCS) to publish videos, images, photographs, and stories I have shared with OCS of and about myself _____ and/or my minor child(ren) _____ for educational, promotional and other reasons, by the above stated non-profit organization. I hereby indemnify OCS' personnel, volunteers and others from any liability that could arise from a disagreement.

Specifically, I consent to these videos, images, photographs and/or stories to be shared publicly via:

- hard copies for use **within the _____ program only**
- hard copies for use within OCS's reports and documents
- public printed material (e.g. magazines, newsletters, posters, pamphlets, videos)
- Options websites and social media sites
- all of the above

- I consent to having my name used alongside my story/photograph/video, YES NO
- I understand that the organization requires copyright ownership and the right to assign rights to publish, broadcast and distribute these videos, images, and stories. I grant all the necessary rights for publication, broadcasting and distribution worldwide and in perpetuity to OCS. YES NO
- I have been advised of potential risks or consequences associated with sharing my information as outlined above. YES NO

Client's Name

Witness Name

Client's Signature
Date

Witness Signature
Date

3. What's the theme of the client story that will best support your intention? Choose one from the list or write one that isn't listed here.

- Migration journey experience
- Settling in Canada experience
- Finding support from settlement service agencies
- Changes in family dynamics
- Loneliness challenges
- Experiencing Covid-19 as a newcomer to Canada
- Highlighting the impact of a program
- Reinventing the self
- Letting go of past hopes and aspirations
- Making new friends
- Adapting to a new culture
- Learning English
- Missing home

Other Themes

4. What presentation format do you feel will best showcase this story? Audio podcasts, videos, art projects, a written article, a visual storyboard or poster are all formats included in this Toolkit. See [Guidelines for Media and Technology](#) and check in with the OSC Digital Coordinator in these early stages of your planning to find out what help is available for gathering, creating and sharing your story. Write here what format you think will best elevate the story to make it interesting and accessible for your intended audience, given the resources available to you.

Guidelines for Conducting Interviews

Conducting interviews with a client is an excellent way to gather information for a story. Though you will likely already know a lot about your client, the interview allows you to think about the specific information you need to tell a coherent, compelling story, and, importantly, creates a special space to sit down with your client and listen to their story. Though you will want to prepare questions for your interview, it should feel like a genuine conversation, and one that you are fully engaged in and interested in having. It is our hope (and in our experience very likely) that your client and you will both gain a great deal, both professionally and personally, from the interview.

Interviews can be used to gather data for a written article, or as preparation for a recorded interview for a podcast or video. (Note these questions are not recommended for an actual recorded podcast or video, which would come after the initial interview, be less structured, and be more focused on the details you have decided are most appropriate to share with your audience.)

Suggested Steps

1. Design Interviews so that they are generative and adaptive; questions are meant to guide but adapt them as relevant to the context of the client, and as information emerges throughout the interview (see Samples Questions and Prompts below).
2. Obtain written consent from the client before you start the interview; translate, if necessary. Include consent forms for youth and family members where applicable.
3. Use first language as appropriate and as circumstances permit, recognizing that some nuances can only be captured in clients' first language; check in with OCS Digital Coordinator prior to the interview for feasibility of translation support.
4. Take time to reflect on your role and responsibility in this relationship. What is the power dynamic? How can you bring yourself to the interview process in a way that addresses the power dynamic? Your genuine curiosity and respect for your client's story is a good place to start.
5. Set aside enough time (ideally 1.5-2 hours) for a relaxed conversation-style exchange, a sharing of space and a generosity of spirit.
6. Ask to record the interview; online conversations can be recorded through Zoom; in person conversations can be recorded with a hand-held voice recorder or iPad. See Guidelines for Media and Technology and consult with OCS Digital Coordinator to find out what equipment is available to you.
7. During the interview, have tea and take breaks.
8. Follow the threads: Use open-ended WH questions like *"Where do you go to find out about what's happening in your community?"* Possible follow-up questions like *"Oh that's interesting ... What kind of information can you find at your daughter's preschool?"*; general prompts like *"tell me*

more about that,"; or specific prompts like "What about libraries?"

9. Finish the interview with broad questions like "Of everything we've talked about today, what is the most important thing to you? Is there anything we haven't talked about that you would like to add?"
10. Build in time and opportunities to fact check (at a time and date after the interview) and make sure the client is comfortable with what they have shared.

Sample Questions and Prompts

Sample questions and prompt to highlight what **programs & supports are needed for newcomers**

1. *What programs have you taken in Canada?*

Follow up questions: *What did you find most helpful about <the program>? What did you not find helpful?*

2. *What kind of support was most useful in <program>?*

- Prompts: *childcare, transportation, financial support, language, safe space, addressed wellness*

- Follow up questions: *Why was that important for you? How did it help?*

3. *What other kinds of support have been important in Canada?*

4. *What support have you needed that you haven't found?*

Sample questions and prompt to explore how **Role as an immigrant woman - understanding what affects their economic and community participation.**

1. *Can you tell me a bit more about your family?*

-Prompts: *Who is in Canada? Who is back home?*

2. *How is being a <woman/mother/wife> in Canada the same/different than being a <...> in your home country?*

-Follow up questions: *In what ways is it different to <raise a child/be in the workplace as a ...>?*

Can you tell me more about that?

3. *What makes you a good <wife/mother>?*

Follow up question: *Do you look at this in the same way in Canada as your home country?*

4. *How does your responsibility as <woman/mother/wife> affect your ability to participate <in the community/at work>?*

-Prompts: *time, opportunity, experience, confidence, skills*

-Follow-up question: *What would you want to change so that you could ...*

Writing Template: Relationship Narrative

Heading: *A quote from an interview, a phrase that captures the most compelling information, or a call to action*

Subheading (optional): *One sentence introducing your client and the main message of the article (e.g., **Sara is a ... who wants you to know**)*

Co-created by <your first and last name>, <your title, Options Community Services> and <your client's first name>



Photo of your
client, you or you
and your client

Opening paragraph: Write a description of something personal or tangible so that the reader can connect to your client (a poem, an object, a key moment in your client's journey).

One or two paragraphs: Describe your client's background, current situation, and challenge, being sure to include a strength-based perspective of your client.

One or two paragraphs: From your perspective, provide 1) some background information on what you see as the issue, trend etc; 2) introduction of OCS, your program or your role; 3) why this is important. You can use the first person here if it is more about your role, or third person for reporting factually, on trends, Options, the program, etc.

One or two paragraphs: Return to your client's story in relation to accessing OCS, your program or your role. You can use quotes from the client here.

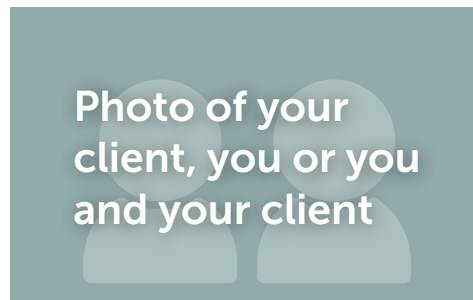
Closing paragraph: Return to the personal or tangible object you opened with. Highlight a need, a call to action and/or a message of hope.

Writing Template: A Q & A style

Heading: *A quote from an interview, a phrase that captures the most compelling information, or a call to action (eg. **“Nothing could prepare me for the challenges, and yet this where I found my strength.”**)*

Subheading (optional): *One sentence introducing your client and the main message of the article (eg. **Nasrin is a newcomer, navigating the steep learning curve of navigating Canadian systems, up-grading her skills, and finding quality, affordable childcare.**)*

Co-created by <your first and last name>, <your title, Options Community Services> and <your client’s first name>



Opening paragraph: *Write a description of something personal or tangible so that the reader can connect to your client (a poem, an object, a key moment in your client’s journey).*

e.g., Nasrin sits at the breakfast table sipping a cup of coffee, enjoying the silence and solitude before her busy day begins. Before long, her 18-month-old daughter will awaken, and she will begin the routine that both challenges and sustains her as a newcomer to Canada. Life has changed drastically since she left Turkey 6 months ago.

One paragraph: *Describe your client’s background, current situation, and challenge, being sure to include a strength-based perspective of your client.*

One paragraph: *From your perspective, provide some background information on what you see as the issue, trend etc., as it relates to your client.*

Write a series of questions and answers from an interview that you recently conducted with your client. (See **Guidelines for Conducting Interviews**). Edit the questions and answers for relevant details and order in a logical way (e.g., chronological, or going increasingly deeper into a topic, or one topic leading to another, or leading to a realization/learning that is the main point of the article).

I recently spoke with <name> and this was a summary of our conversation (Q: ... A:)

Guidelines for the Writing Process

The following guidelines can be used to help with any writing you are doing, whether it is for an article, or for writing a paragraph to introduce your podcast. They outline steps from getting clear on the purpose of your writing through to making final edits, as well as provide some general suggestions for effective paragraph and sentence development, word choice, using illustrative examples, and other considerations.

Clear purpose and specific audience

- Be very clear on the purpose, central theme and main points that you are building your story around.
- Write with a specific audience in mind.

Outline 4-6 main points or ideas that you will develop or illustrate in your story.

Developing Content

- Good content teaches, conveys meaning, makes people understand; engage your audience with good content.
- Human interest is one of the best ways to draw a reader in - recount an event, set the stage, unfold a plot.
- In focusing the content ask yourself: What do you want people to know about this situation? What is something about this that people often overlook? What does your writing or idea add to the conversation?
- Stories can be the article, open the article or illustrate your point (e.g., a need for services)
- Start your story with something that connects the reader to your client: a quote, an object, an intriguing or compelling situation.
- Regardless of format, stories start with an incident or situation, built to a climax, and ultimately settle into a resolution (resolution can be baby steps, hope, or a shift in thinking).
- Show, then tell: show something in action (for example a newcomer client's experience trying to catch a bus), then explain what it means and why it matters.
- Embrace conflict; compelling stories are built on conflict; your reader needs to see the struggles and obstacles in order to appreciate the growth, strength or hope the story later conveys.
- Narrow the scope of the story and provide only the details that support the intention and main points.
- Conclude your story by returning to the opening object, situation or sentiment in a way that is hopeful; or highlight an insight for moving forward.

Developing paragraphs

- Develop each point or idea into a paragraph; for longer stories, you may need 2 paragraphs to illustrate a point, but even those 2 paragraphs should be distinct in how they are supporting the point or idea.
- Write a short opening paragraph (1-3 sentences) - something that the reader can engage with easily.
- Keep other paragraphs short too; they are easier to read and keep the reader drawn to the next paragraph; give the reader space between ideas.
- Short means strong, precise and potent - like a shot of espresso instead of a lukewarm cup of coffee.
- Give enough context for people to understand the magnitude or seriousness of the situation you want to highlight.

Sentences & Words

- Start each paragraph with an "anchoring" sentence that guides the reader to the next idea e.g., When Serah first walked into my office, I sensed the weariness and distress caused by her long journey, (the journey being what you talked about in the previous paragraph).
- All sentences within a paragraph should take the reader closer to what you want them to understand.
- Tell your reader something, imagine them asking you "why" and then answer that question.
- Write sentences of varying lengths.
- Consider using bullet points as a time-saver, to break up long paragraphs, and to convey meaning easily.
- Replace 'ly adverb and adjectives with power verbs and nouns. Replace: He approached the room quickly with: He stormed into the room.
- Use illustrative, dynamic language. Replace: Each time Josef called the Immigration office, he got a different answer with: There's nothing we can do - you'll have to wait 6 months before filing your application - Josef's confusion grew and hope diminished with each visit to the immigration office.

Consider research

- Consider whether your story would be strengthened by some research about an issue, for example some information about the current rise in anti-Asian hate crimes when sharing a story about a client who has experienced racism.
- Be as specific as you can in your search terms; if you aren't finding the support you're looking for, you may have to re-frame the focus of your story, or the angle.

Consider length

- Be concise and to the point.
- A word limit of 500- 600 is a good idea to hold the reader's attention.

Editing

- Writing and editing are 2 distinct and separate processes.
- Once you've got your content, paragraphs and sentences, go back and focus on writing the perfect first line, sharpening your first paragraph, and tying things together more clearly.
- Edit again to take out any information or words that don't support the main points or ideas.
- Edit again for spelling, sentence structure, word choice, punctuation.
- Edit again for overall clarity.
- Ask your Manager or a co-worker to read your work for clarity and accuracy.

Adding a title

See [Guidelines for Writing Titles, Captions and Synopses](#)

Guidelines for Creating a Podcast

A podcast is one or a series of digital audio files that a user can download to a personal device for easy listening. Creating a podcast may be a great opportunity to highlight a client's personal story in an engaging way. Discussion and content within a podcast can range from carefully scripted to completely improvised; it is highly recommended that for the Co-Created Story project you find a balance by interviewing your client prior to recording to gather the information that you will then pair down and organize for a recorded podcast. Your recorded podcast can be a paired down second interview of your client, or you can include yourself as part of the story along with your client and have another host interview you. Below are guidelines to prepare a podcast. Also refer to the [Template for Developing a Podcast](#) to help you with the structure and organization of your podcast.

1. Make sure your client has a compelling story to tell and they feel very comfortable speaking English on an audio recording. Be sure your storyteller understands that this will be an audio recording and they have signed the consent form.
2. Plan each podcast segment to be 10 to 20 minutes, edited.
3. Write a short introduction about your storyteller so that you can introduce your client at the very beginning of the podcast. Welcoming remarks are always important to get the interview started. Your introduction should also include some background information about issues relevant to your client's experience.
4. Based on a prior interview, create the questions you want to ask your client. The questions should be semi-structured with open questions that help the client tell the story in a linear path. For example: *Tell me a bit about yourself and why you came to Canada?* Followed by: *What were your first impressions when you arrived, and how were they different from your expectations?* Follow a linear trajectory so it makes sense to the listener. Keep your questions clear, concise, and direct.
5. Make sure you provide your client with the list of questions you plan to ask them well before the interview. Encourage them to think about what they are going to say and perhaps write a few notes, but not to script every word they will say. Give your guest the opportunity to ask you any questions they might have before you start recording the podcast. Nothing should come as a surprise to the client.
6. During the interview, you can ask some additional probing questions to give more clarity and detail for the listener. For example, *so you said you arrived first in Montreal in 2009, so why did you choose to come to BC?* Sometimes those extra details make a more compelling story for the listener and you might come up with additional unanticipated questions during the interview. That is okay as long as they are providing additional details and clarity and not broaching a new topic.
7. Be flexible with your questions. Encourage the storyteller to speak openly which will make the interview flow.

8. Make sure you are also making some sounds such as mmm, interesting, I see, wow, etc. That encourages the storyteller to keep talking and also lets the listening audience know that you as the interviewer are engaged.
9. Try not to interrupt. However, if the storyteller is getting tangled in the story, you can help them get back on track by paraphrasing what they have said so far.
10. At the end of the interview, after you have asked the storyteller the questions, wrap up the podcast with a short conclusion. For example: *Thank you _____ for joining us today. It has been so interesting for us to hear your story. We are so grateful that you were willing to share your experiences with us and I wish you much success in your new life here. It has been such a privilege to work with you and we at Options are here to support you with any of your future goals.*
11. If you make mistakes, pause, or ask the wrong question at the wrong time, or if your interview goes on too long, don't worry about it. These things can be fixed in the edited version. Just keep the interview flowing.
12. Refer to the [Guidelines for Media and Technology](#) and work with the OCS Digital Coordinator to record and share your podcast.

Podcast Template

Topics of the Podcast or Podcast Series

Expected date(s) for recording the podcast (to be negotiated with OCS Digital Coordinator)

Introduction: Podcast host opens with an attention-getting statement, or a strong clip from the recording of the guest speaking. Podcast host provides background info on issue being discussed, and introduces guest (name and a the most relevant background info):

e.g., 2020 has not been an easy year for any one of us. However, newcomers, especially asylum seekers and refugee claimants, have had an especially hard time navigating the systems of a new country. To understand the unique challenges, they face during COVID-19, we are joined by Mina Naikmal and Wazhma, professionals from Afghanistan who entered Canada a week prior to the first lockdown in 2020. They remind us not only of our different experiences of this pandemic, but of what we have in common: a need for support, respect and solidarity.

Write a series of Questions based on a prior interview with your client (see Guidelines for Conducting an Interview). Edit your original questions for the most relevant details and order in a logical way (e.g., chronological, or going increasingly deeper into a topic, or one topic leading to another, or leading to a realization/learning that is the main point you want to share).

1. *What brought you to Canada? What expectations did you have before you left your homeland?*
2. *What were your first impressions when you arrived? In those early days, what gave you the courage and strength you needed?*
3. *What was it like to navigate your way in a new city during a lockdown? What was most challenging? Where did you go for help? ...*
4. ...
5. ...
6. ...

In a second podcast, you might refer to the prior podcast:

1. ...
2. ...
3. *In our previous podcast, you spoke about the importance of connection - do you see yourself in a role of helping other newcomers find that sense of connection?*
4. ...
5. ...
6. ...

Make notes of additional information to highlight

Write closing scripted comments: Thank the guest, and close by re-iterating a few key points, why they're important, and a call to action for the listener.

Thank you so much _____ for joining me today. I really appreciate you coming and sharing your story with us....

Notes for edits

Guidelines for Media & Technology

Introduction

Whatever story-gathering methods and story-sharing formats you are using, you will need to consider technology. You may be adding a photograph to an article, thinking about what social media platforms a story can be shared on, or perhaps creating a digital story that combines a variety of communicative elements (photographs, art, digital images, writing). Media may include any combination of text, images, video, audio, social media elements (like tweets), or interactive elements. You can work with the OCS Digital Coordinator to develop and share your story in creative and impactful ways; the following guidelines and suggestions offer you some initial ideas of the technology and platforms that may be available to you.

Please consult with your manager for approval and the IT department for software license and installation.

Presentation Platforms

Once you have chosen the format of your story-sharing (e.g., written article, video, digital storyboard, collage), you can start to think about various platforms that your story can be shared on. How you end up sharing your story must be decided in consultation with the OCS Digital Coordinator; here are some ideas:

- Video: YouTube
- Stories for Social Media: OCS Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn
- OCS Website & Intranet
- OCS Compilation: eMagazine, Flipbook, OCS annual e-book

Software for Editing

Various software is available for editing photographs, digital images and videos. Consider these, but ensure that any licenses and installation are approved by your Manager and the OCS IT Department.

- Adobe Creative Suite (license required)
 - Photoshop (image editing)
 - Illustrator (vector graphics)
 - Premier Pro (video editing)
- Social media applications (e.g., Instagram)
- Powerpoint
- Canva (free)

Hardware for Recording

If you are creating a video or podcast, check with the OCS Digital Coordinator to find out what recording devices are available to you. Options include:

- Tablet
- Smartphone
- Digital/DSLR Camera (if available)
- Audio Recorder (if available)

Recommended Formats

Please save your videos, audio and images in the following recommended formats:

Video - .mov / .mp4 / .avi

Audio - .mp3 / .m4a / .aac

Image - .jpeg / .png / .tiff / .bmp

Photography

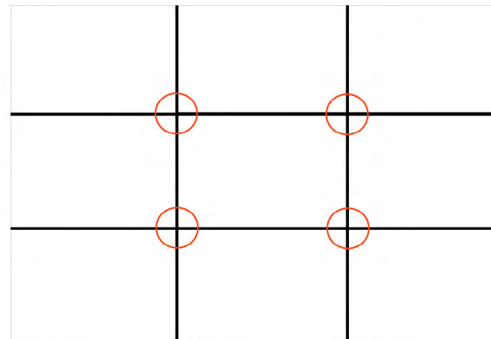
Recommended Minimum Resolution: 1280 x 720 px

See [Guidelines for Taking Photographs](#) in this Toolkit.

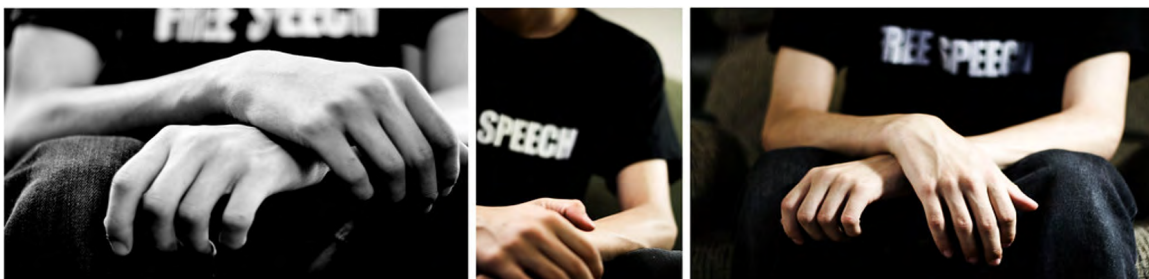
Guidelines for Taking Photographs

Having a photo to go with your article, to feature your podcast on the OCS website, or to include in your art project is really helpful for sharing stories. Below are some guidelines for taking the best pictures, and helping your clients feel more at ease. Some clients may not want to have their picture taken, but creative alternatives such as using a side profile, silhouette, their hands, or an object that may best represent the story can also be used, and are offered in the guidelines below.

1. Use any digital camera on your phone or any camera you have available.
2. Get close but don't zoom in with your camera. Get close to your subject to deliver more detailed photos and create a sense of caring and a closer connection with the subject.
3. If you're taking portraits, try to crop in tight around your main point of focus eliminating the background so all attention falls on your main subject.



4. Use the rule of thirds; you should place the most important element(s) in your shot on one of the lines or where the lines meet. Also, try to avoid unintentionally limb chopping because it can pull attention away from what the viewer should really be looking at.
5. Take multiple shots before deciding on just one photo. People tend to feel more at ease when they get used to the idea of being photographed. Try to move your camera around, look for different angles and also different expressions, as sometimes smiles can look fake or forced.
6. Avoid using your camera flash. The camera flash makes portrait photos look harsh and heavy on shadows, so it's better to avoid it. Try to take your photos outside using natural daylight
7. If the person doesn't want to be photographed. ask them if a photo of their hands, of them walking away, a silhouette, a side shot, or details of their jewelry or clothing can be used instead. Sometimes that photo can deliver an even more powerful message.



Guidelines for Art-based Project

The intention of using art as a way of telling a story is to provide those who may not feel comfortable sharing their stories through a written or spoken form. Instead, your client's art work may best describe their story in a unique and creative way, giving the client an opportunity to enjoy the process of making art at the same time.

An art project can be done by a group or an individual. Perhaps a senior's group or an English language class would benefit collectively from having a unique experience sharing their stories while doing an art project. Alternatively, perhaps you have a client that has an art background, or has lower English language skills and the art may tell the story in and of itself. It will require you as the facilitator to make sure the art-making process feels very comfortable and you feel confident that you can spend the time and focus on helping your client(s) engage with the art process.

The process of creating the art together may become the story you want to share. For example, if you had a group that was making paper lanterns for a winter solstice event, perhaps the story is how this group came together in the shared creative space, learned from each other's creative styles, and built a sense of belonging and friendship within the group. You as a facilitator may write about the art making event.

Whether the art-making process or the product of the art project itself is the story (or a combination of both), the whole experience should be joyful and interesting for your clients. It should give them a sense that they are being listened to and authentically represented through the creative process.

Suggested Process

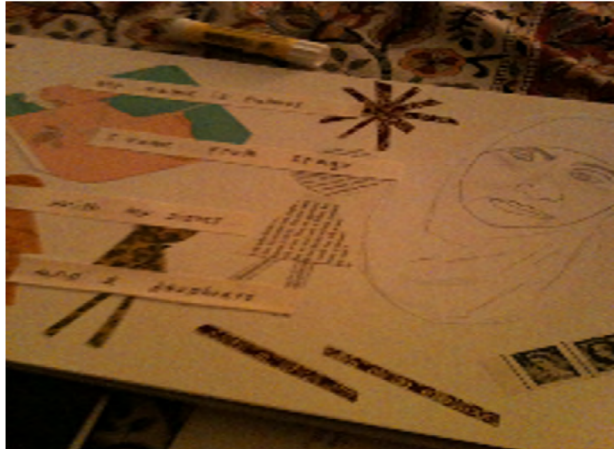
1. Decide on what story theme you want your participant(s) in the art project to focus on. For example, is the story about their migration experience to Canada, or about settling in the community? Or is it depicting other themes such as starting over, isolation during Covid-19, experiences using the food banks, friendships found at Options etc.?
2. Decide on an art project that would best suit the interests and capabilities of your participants in the co-created story project. Possibilities for art projects include murals, portrait drawing, lanterns, and masks. [Instructions for 2 Art Projects: Portrait Drawing and Group Murals.](#)
3. Give a title to the art project so that participants know what they will be doing and if you have any art examples, share them.
4. Articulate to the group or individual your intention of doing the art work. Explain the story that you are wanting to tell with the project and what you intend to do with the art work once it's finished.
5. Obtain written consent from the participant(s) you are working with - translated, if necessary. Include consent forms for youth and family members where applicable.
6. Make sure you have the physical space to do the art project and you have also been given permission to use the space and a safe place, if necessary, to store the art work.

7. Make sure you have the materials and resources available to do the project. Ask for support from your Manager if you need to purchase additional materials.
8. When participants are working on the art project, make sure they have time to socialize with others if they are in a group, and always provide snacks and beverages which help build a sense of belonging and community.
9. Once the participant(s) know what they are doing, be sure to ask guiding questions such as why they choose certain colours for their piece or why they are using certain pictures etc.
10. People are often shy or insecure about art. It is an unfortunate by product of the professionalization and commodification of art in general. It is therefore important that you explain that there is no such thing as "good" or "bad" art and it is merely an expression of something you like, believe in, tell a story about etc. Try to encourage, and work from strengths. Never criticize someone who is brave enough to express themselves.

Instructions for 2 Art Projects

Portrait Drawing & Group Mural

Portrait Drawing



This project is great for clients or students to do on a day when you want something a little low key or they do not have a high enough level of English to write or tell their story. It will give the participants a chance to work in pairs, building peer support as they help each other with their self-portraits. You as a facilitator will help them set up but the drawing, no matter how skilled, will be done by the participants.

Instructions:

1. Take a digital picture of each participant. Pictures should be of the face and shoulders only.
2. Print the picture and then photocopy the picture on to an overhead transparency. You will have the image of the face and shoulders from the picture on the transparency.
3. Stick a piece of paper on to a wall.
4. Put the transparency that has the picture of the client on to the overhead projector. Project the image onto the wall and direct it to the paper on the wall.
5. Have the student then trace in pencil the image onto the paper to make a sketch of their own face.
6. Once the participant has traced the image onto the paper they can shade or color the sketch as they like, or just leave it as a pencil sketch.
7. Cut out the sketch and place it onto a larger thicker art or watercolor paper.
8. Have the participants write about themselves or add collage pieces around the sketch that tells a story about who they are.

What you need:

- Overhead projector
- Pencils for tracing
- Digital camera such as an iPhone
- Overhead transparencies
- Sticky tape
- Art paper such as watercolour paper
- Collage materials (magazines, large text for letters to spell out words etc)

Group Mural



This project is designed to celebrate the diversity of a group and share participants' stories of achievement within a program. They are hopefully able to articulate in the mural something about their multidimensional lives and the experiences they have shared within a program.

Instructions:

1. Take a large piece of cardboard and lay it flat on a large table in a community room. The more participants you have the bigger the cardboard. They are all going to be working at the same time on the mural.
2. Provide materials for collage and ask the group to cut out images that best represent the theme of the mural. For example, in the picture above the sentence for the group to represent was "Some place I find refuge is..." Each individual then writes a word or phrase that best describes where they find refuge. They then cut out images from magazines to illustrate their idea. In this mural the words were written on fabric using black sharpies.
3. Once the collage has been completed and glued on securely, you can go over the whole piece with Modge Podge which will create a nice matte finish to the mural.

What you need:

- Plastic tarp to cover the table
- Large piece of cardboard for the back of the mural - perhaps one side of a refrigerator box. It is also wise to cover the cardboard with masking tape. This will secure and make the cardboard sturdier which will help it not bend out of shape.
- Scissors for each participant
- Magazines and other collage material
- Paint, pens, for writing captions
- Glue and Modge Podge

Guidelines for Creating a Storyboard

Storyboards use a sequence of visuals (i.e., images, icons, elements) to tell a more complete story about people. For example, a client's migration experiences over time, where each image/icon/element in the storyboard represents a particular event. A storyboard can be entirely hand-drawn or digital; images can be photographs, drawings, or digital images that you find on the internet or your own digital resources. Be sure you seek consent for the images from the owner.



A storyboard begins with a template that looks like a blank comic strip that has spaces for writing text. Each box in the template is called a "frame." A simple storyboard about a narrative uses four to six frames. In a six-frame storyboard, the first frame is the exposition, followed by frames with the conflict and rising action. The climax is in the fourth frame, followed by the falling action and the last frame is the resolution.



Guidelines

1. Recommended length: 4-6 frames.
2. Choose a compelling story that highlights the contributions, strengths, and resilience of your client
3. Use clear and concise sentence structure that captures the reader's attention.
4. Develop your plot with a beginning, a climax (arc) and a clear ending
5. Use caption for each of the frames ([Guidelines for Writing Titles, Captions and Synopses](#))
6. Place the storyline text below each frame. This makes it easier for others to follow the story you are telling when they read your storyboard
7. End your story with a clear note that will leave the reader with a sense of optimism, inspiration, or highlighting a need for advocacy

Using a Storyboard Tool Online

1. Sign up for [Canva](#) using your email
2. Search for the “Storyboard” template through the search toolbar
3. Narrow down your search by adding keywords that fit with what you’re looking for (i.e., personal journey)
4. Use images, icons, stickers, illustrations and other graphics to tell a more compelling story
5. Only use fancy/decorative typefaces for titles and headlines
6. It’s vital to choose a typeface that works well in multiple sizes and weights to maintain readability in every size
7. Add more flair to your storyboard by rearranging your layout or mixing and matching elements from Canva’s library.
8. Upload your own photos, images and art to make your design look uniquely yours
9. Share you storyboard design with your manager and/or client, using the collaboration tool
10. Note that you can save and go back to your storyboard anytime.

Other tips

When designing your storyboard keep these tips in mind:

- Use concise and clear language (See [Guidelines for the Writing Process](#))
- Use colours, images, icons and/or elements to make your story more compelling
- It’s okay to have more than a one-page storyboard with two frames on each page
- Avoid using fancy fonts or uppercase text in large bodies of text as it may strain the reader’s eyes

Guidelines for Writing Titles, Captions and Synopses

Coming up with an interesting title, having good captions for a storyboard or art piece, or providing a synopsis of your video, podcast, or art project is key to getting the reader or viewer interested and will provide additional clarity and meaning to the story.

You may find it is easier to come up with a title, the captions, or a synopsis of your project once you are near completion of the co-created story process. Here are some guidelines and suggestions to help you:

Writing Titles

- Nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are the only words to be capitalized in titles. Prepositions, articles, and conjunctions are not capitalized unless they are the first or last word in the title.
- Sometimes a quote from the article you have written can make an impactful title.
- The most memorable titles are short and unique.
- Give some insight into the story, for example, From Isolation to Community – Bushra Finds Support. This title gives the reader an idea of what the story is about, making the reader more intrigued to keep reading.

Writing Captions for Art Projects

- Name the art piece.
- Describe things that are not obvious in the art work and avoid statements such as “In this picture you see...”
- Don’t start captions with the names of people. Start the caption with the place. E.g., “Our first home in Canada”
- Include citations and credits where needed.

Writing a Synopsis

- Write it in the third person and in the present tense.
- Include the name of the project whether it’s a video, podcast, or art project, and name the people involved in making the project so they also get credit for their part of the work.
- Include the central conflict of the story.

- Include a solid explanation of the ending of the story. For example, "Once Ning found a community of support at Options, she felt she could finally call Canada home and look forward to her new future prospects."
- Proofread for grammar, flow, and punctuation.
- See also [Guidelines for the Writing Process](#) for other writing tips.

Watch the following short film

E.g. <https://vimeo.com/192526798>

Below is the synopsis for the film

This short film tells the story of Mohammed Alsaleh, a young Syrian refugee granted asylum in Canada in 2014. After fleeing torture and imprisonment by the Assad regime, he is rebuilding his life. Mohammed counsels newly-arrived Syrian refugee families with the same Vancouver-based NGO that aided him during his own resettlement process. Like Mohammed, these families have left loved ones behind and are struggling to adapt to a new land, finding resilience and hope for a new beginning.

Like thousands of other newly-resettled refugees, Mohammed has been striving to bring his family to safety in Canada. Millions of Syrians are currently displaced within Syria's borders and in neighboring countries.