

'We will succeed in changing this world only if we can think and work together in new ways. We don't have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes.'

Margaret J Wheatley



Storycatching for Changing Organisations

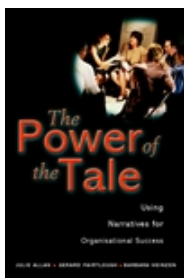
Current times remind us that organisational life can be not only complicated but truly complex and even chaotic. Successfully navigating change requires that we work well both with what is known and tangible and what is hidden and seeking to emerge.

Stories and narratives offer a powerful yet simple approach for the age of intricacy we live in. They add value in a variety of ways including:

- Making sense of where we are and how we come to be here
- Creating a vision of where we need to be
- Supporting leaders to tell truthful and compelling stories about where the organisation is heading and how it will get there
- Better understanding our current strengths, so we can ensure the best of now is carried forward in to the future
- Generating meaningful metrics to demonstrate clearly what's involved in delivering great service or performance

Helping Families through Tales that Tell

Our recent work with a London Borough reveals how creative use of story can support smart, appropriate and meaningful evaluation of service delivery. **Read our case study on the following pages** or visit www.irvingallan.com/case_studies to learn more.



To learn more about narrative read:

'The Power of the Tale: Using Narratives for Organisational Success'

by Julie Allan, Gerard Fairtlough and Barbara Heinzen

'Tales, of the sort described in this book, are a powerful antidote to the overly analytical culture that afflicts many organisations today . . . This book develops a new way to use stories to create the elusive competitive edge - a must for managers in our increasingly complex world.' DeAnne Julius

'Stories are the sharing of intricate knowledge . . . They help us to work through complex situations in ways that may be based on logic, but may also be based on experience, emotion, metaphor and allegory. They are in that sense the perfect tool for the age of intricacy we live in.'

In: Allan, Fairtlough and Heinzen (2002) *The Power of the Tale*

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- A practical introduction to Managed Change™ - a simple, proven and robust approach to managing change, with and through people
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'Lots of epiphanies'

'Very professional course - high quality and valuable, practical content'

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To learn more or to book your place at one of our events contact us:

Call +44(0)1832 732 554

Email enquiries@irvingallan.com

Success story: A London borough delivers for families through tales that tell

A story is like water
that you heat in your bath.

It takes messages between the fire
and your skin. It lets them meet,
and it cleans you!

Rumi
Translator Coleman Barks

Overview

Our client is responsible for the operation and performance of the Children's Centres of a large London borough. Her goal was to develop and deliver a truly smart approach to measuring service performance, ensuring appropriate and meaningful evaluation. Irving Allan partner, Julie, has been working with her during the past year to create an innovative evaluation approach sympathetic to the values of the centre staff and able to fully meet a range of inter-related objectives. The approach, now being embedded with Julie's support, combines appreciative inquiry and narrative to complement and cohere with the borough's existing methods.

Organisational Context

- The purpose of the Children's Centres is to give all young children the best possible start, of lasting benefit to them, their families, communities and wider society.
- The borough has in the region of 21,000 children under the age of five.
- In the year to 2007, the borough provided for more than 8,000 attendances from children across its range of services and more than 1,000 adult attendances.
- Children's Centres are characterised by:
 - **Multi agency** working – the success of any centre depends on developing effective **networks** in their area. Examples include the pre-school learning alliance, health visitors, community nurses, special needs co-ordinators, schools, domestic violence support, housing, Jobcentre Plus, adult education institutes, and childminders.
 - **Multiple professions** are involved – some employed by the centres and some through allied or related organisations. They include: teachers, nursery workers, family support, speech & language therapists, psychologists, linguists/ translators, social services, legal advisors, career development advisors and skills trainers.
 - Delivering to **local priorities** in the context of **national/governmental requirements**.
- The Children's Centres have **32 different points of provision**, including 10 dedicated full-service children's centres, nurseries, extended hours provision in partnering schools and play centres.

What did our client want to achieve?

Truly smart, appropriate and meaningful evaluation of service performance, to know: "How much we have been doing, how well we have been doing it, and if anyone was better off at an individual or family level; to help us understand what it is we are doing well, and how." (Head of Centres, 2008 report)

This included needs to:

- **Help maximise impact for budget**
- **Have a human and humane way of capturing information**, retaining the important and informative texture of the lives of those accessing and providing services
- **Understand and grow the best of everything being done**
- **Integrate and rationalise data gathering and reporting requirements** (e.g. for internal appraisals, Ofsted inspection, governmental measures)

For a more detailed overview, including benefits achieved, see page 2.

Success story: A London borough delivers for families through tales that tell cont'd

Who or what was helping?

- Many talented and capable staff in the centres and elsewhere
- Many excellent and beneficial relationships between staff, other agencies and families/individuals accessing the centres and services
- A central team with a vision for the future and a systemic view

Who or what was getting in the way?

- Overextended staff owing to client demand, and inclination to always go far further than just the one extra mile, combined with some sickness and understaffing
- Time consuming unpredictability in some client populations
- Adverse perception of evaluation
- Adverse reaction to quantitative targets and those governmental requirements held to indicate a lack of understanding of the needs of families and therefore the activities of centres

Our contribution **Phase 1**

Working collaboratively with centre staff over a period of time, Julie created an evaluation process for the Children's Centres that combined three elements:

- **Creating a storycatching framework**, based on her expertise in narrative
- **Taking an appreciative stance**, drawing on the evidence base of positive psychology
- **Aligning with the service's approach for measuring performance**, to ensure good connections through all parts of the system

The process enabled rich, qualitative information to be gathered about the services being provided to children and their families. As a result of this first phase, the 'caught' stories were included as part of the borough's annual report, linked to service priorities and desired outcomes.

Ap-pre'ci-ate (verb)

The act of recognising the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems

Phase 2

We have an ethos of building internal capability, and Julie was invited to develop the approach in a form that could be used to **equip all centre staff and allied professionals to 'storycatch'**. This involved preparing a briefing pack with examples and running half day training sessions. Our work continues with the Head to consider how management practice and daily routines needed to be worked and developed to support successful adoption of the approach.

"Working collaboratively with Julie has been a very positive experience, and one that will enable Early Years Childcare and Play develop staff skill and embed this reflective approach in our practice" Head of Children's Centres

Benefits

Using a single consistent approach, the Children's Centres now have the foundation for capturing and sharing complex and richly textured information in a way that has real meaning for the providers and recipients of the service. This provides a basis for:

- **New insight and learning** about what it means to deliver high quality support for children and their families
- **Sophisticated management information** to more effectively target resources for maximum benefit while appreciating the uniqueness of each situation
- **Efficient data capture** and evidence building so that one storycatching effort can be adapted to meet multiple needs: assisting families, evidence for formal appraisals, information for Ofsted, enabling families to tell their own tales, and information for borough reviews.

If you're interested to learn more about how narrative and appreciative approaches might make a difference in your organisation, please contact julie@irvingallan.com