

# TELLING YOUR STORY



ON OUR  
**RADAR**

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[www.onourradar.org](http://www.onourradar.org)

**THE JO COX FOUNDATION**



## WHY TELL YOUR STORY?

We believe that those with **lived experience** have **stories** that can facilitate **change** and improve **society**.

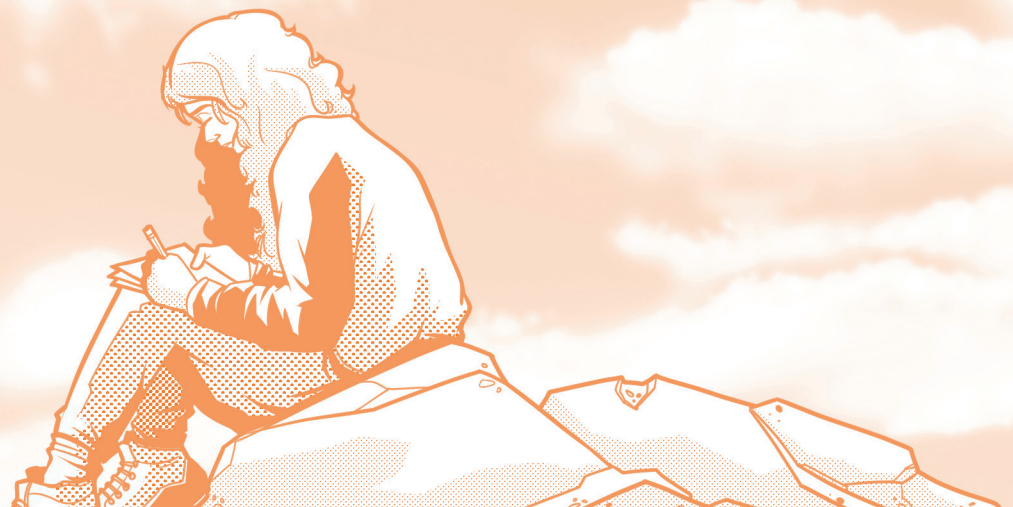
**YOU ARE THE EXPERTS IN YOUR LIVED EXPERIENCE.**

Stories are not just for children. They are powerful communication tools. They build understanding, trust and wisdom. They can bring communities together and create new connections.

Consider the power of storytelling as part of Jo's work in bringing people together and in changing discourses about people whose stories are untold. Think about the potential of storytelling for facilitating greater understanding as part of the Great Get Together or any other community organising/activism.

### ACTIVITY 1

What is your favourite story? Write it down on one side of your paper.



## WHAT IS YOUR STORY?

The idea of an origin story comes from comics. It is the account or backstory of a particular character or community. It normally explains further details to the story but isn't explicitly outlined at the beginning of the narration. It isn't perceived to be essential to understand the story, but it adds additional flavour and depth. Often it explains why characters make certain decisions or why they have particular personality traits or desires.

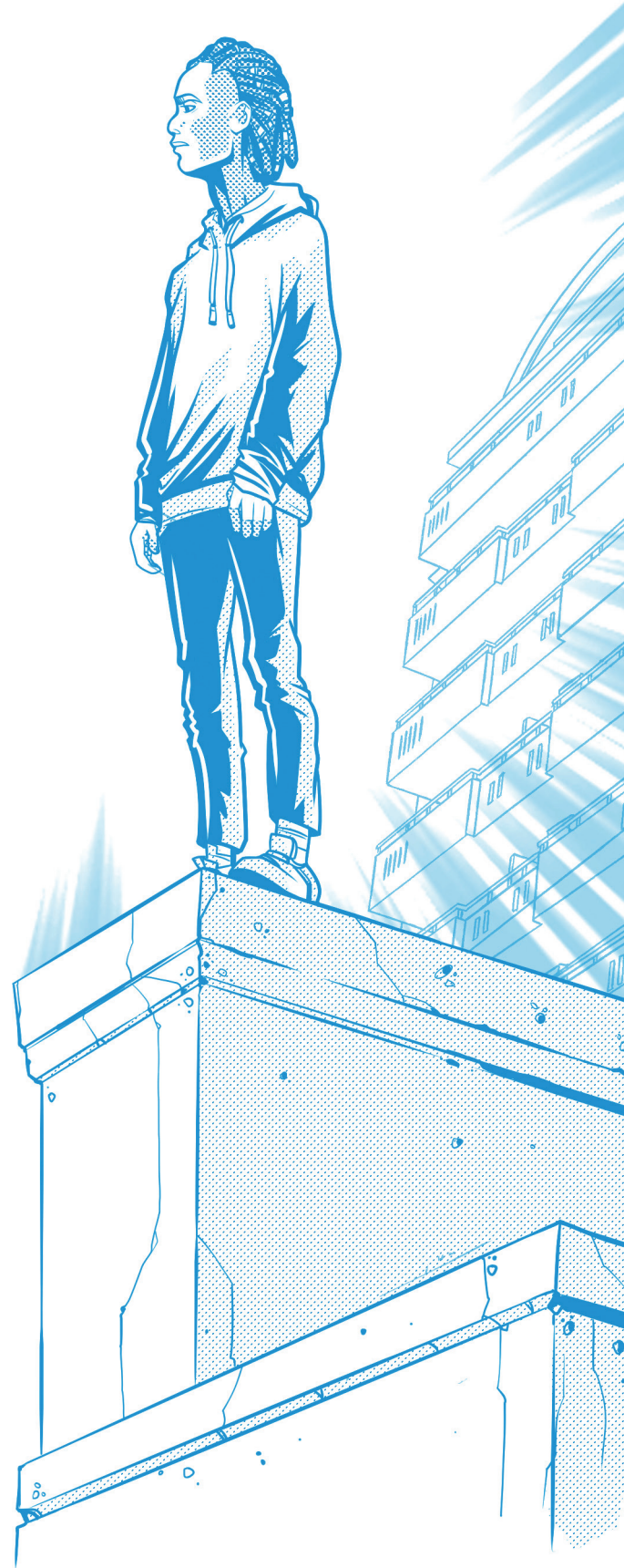
Think of any superhero, and then do some googling and you'll find out more than you saw in the film or read about in the comic - that's the background, the origin story.

### EACH OF US HAS AN ORIGIN STORY.

Some people have it at the forefront of their mind at all times - it's their guiding light and their soft core. Some people have never thought about it before.

Whichever you are, take the time to **discover**, **re-discover** or **re-affirm** your origin story.

Listening to other people's origin stories help us understand more about them and their actions. Consider the stories you read about refugees in the news, and how they more often than not focus on the story only from the point where the refugee arrived in the UK, maybe including some information about their journey to get there. The missing part of these narratives is the origin story of the refugee. Consider how the perception of migrants and refugees might be affected if the focus was on the struggles the individual faced living in poverty, the oppression they faced due to discrimination, or the fear they felt growing up in the midst of civil conflict. Origin stories provide important context, and help create a greater understanding of actions of individuals.



## ACTIVITY 2

Do this by asking yourself or discussing with a friend/colleague/partner/family the following questions:

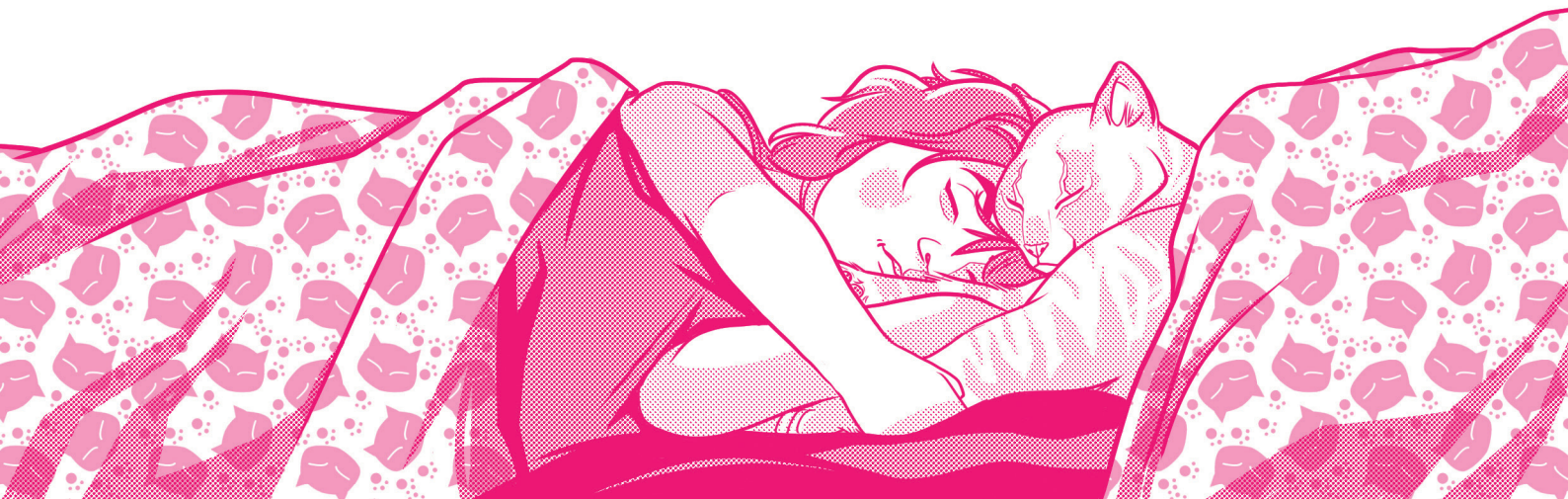
1. Where do you **come from**?
2. How did you get **here**?
3. What inputs contributed to your **journey**?
4. What is your **superpower**?



### HERE IS AN EXAMPLE:

Hana was born in a small rural town in Romania. She has four brothers and her mother died when she was only 5 years old. She came to the UK to study and stayed on for her first few jobs after college. Her brothers and fathers have always showered her with love and affection and she was the first person from her town to study abroad. From a young age she has had a soft spot for abandoned or suffering

animals. Her family and then flatmates have put up with many stray and wild animals living with them at various points. She vividly remembers one particular skinny cat crawling into bed with her in the middle of the night shaking - she held it gently until it stopped shaking and fell asleep. Hana's superpower is her live understanding of the power of love - both being loved and giving love.







## ACTIVITY 3

Share your origin story with someone (not the person you discussed it with above). Disclose as much or little of it as you are comfortable with, but see how it sounds when you say it out loud.

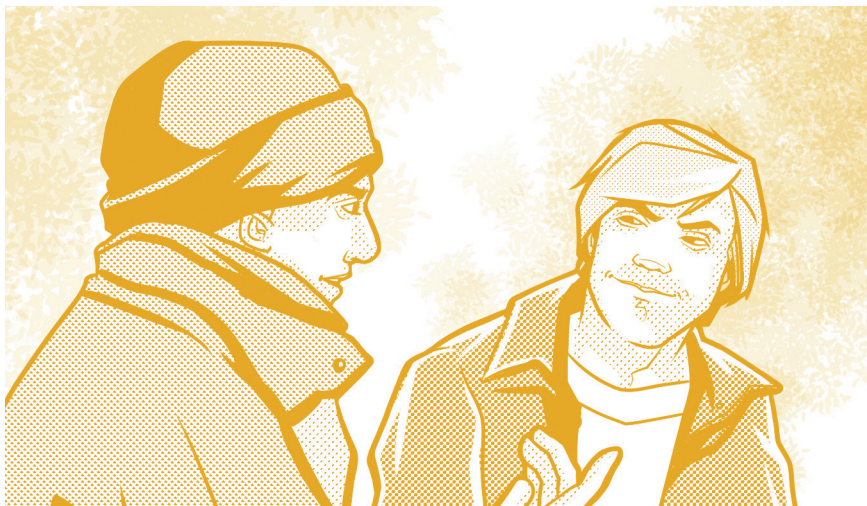
### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY A

Explain the concept of an origin story to someone new, and ask them to tell you theirs. Listen carefully and only talk when they need help understanding the exercise or seeing their superpower

### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY A

Reflect about what you learned from exchanging origin stories. Are there any similarities between your own story and the person who shared theirs with you? Did you learn something about them that surprised you? Has your perception of this person changed after learning their origin story?

When we listen to others we may be surprised what we learn from them. We may share things in common that we would never have guessed, or we may be able to relate to something they say. Listening to others helps us find similarities we may be surprised exist!





## HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY?

Whenever you are asked to or are preparing to tell your story, there are two essential things to consider PURPOSE and AUDIENCE.

**Purpose:** Why are you telling your story? What are you trying to achieve? What is your objective for this particular occasion?

**Audience:** Who will be listening? Why are they listening? What do you want them to do as a result of hearing your story?

To help you work through these things, you can use a simple messaging matrix. Similar formats are used by expert communicators, advertisers and campaigners to plan and prepare their work. You will see how you can use it for any conversation, meeting, speech, or social media post.

1	Audience	
2	Think	
3	Feel	
4	Do (Call to Action)	
5	Message	

To use this matrix, start by writing as much as you know about the audience in the top box (1). Then fill in the following three boxes (2-4) with how you want them to think and feel, and what you want them to do after you finish.



## HERE IS A FICTIONAL EXAMPLE:

1	<b>Audience</b>	Kiran is going to meet an old school friend who he hasn't seen for years, Adan. The friend saw from facebook that Kiran was organising a Great Get Together this June in his part of Swansea. Adan said he wants to hear all about it as he's just moved back to the city and is feeling lonely. Adan is now living on the other side of the city to Kiran. Kiran remembers how Adan, tall and handsome, was always very popular at school but according to rumours really struggled when he moved to Manchester for a job.
2	<b>Think</b>	That life in Swansea doesn't need to be lonely That he can play an active role in his community here
3	<b>Feel</b>	More confident about his return to the city Inspired, but not intimidated, by Kiran's story
4	<b>Do (Call to Action)</b>	Decide to organise a Great Get Together in his part of the city!
5	<b>Message</b>	

THE  
GREAT  
GET  
TOGETHER

## ACTIVITY 4

Think of a meeting, a coffee/lunch, a social media post or a catch-up with a friend/family member during which you could share your origin story. Fill in the first four boxes of the messaging matrix for this opportunity.

1	<b>Audience</b>	
2	<b>Think</b>	
3	<b>Feel</b>	
4	<b>Do</b> (Call to Action)	
5	<b>Message</b>	

And what about box number 5, I hear you wondering...

This is where you summarise your purpose in the format of a message. Based on the information collected in the above boxes, decipher what the key message is. What is the one thing that you want the audience to understand? For example, Kiran would like Adan to understand that community organising can be a fulfilling opportunity for men like them.





## ACTIVITY 5

Add to your example captured in the matrix above, the core message that you seek to get across with this meeting.

A completed matrix will help you to refine your story to make sure you really emphasise the key points of relevance and tailor your story to the audience. The messaging matrix, is a simple tool to help us think through the purpose of each opportunity we get to tell our story. You can use it to help prepare for important meetings, for funding proposals, for media interviews, for community meetings, for social media posts or for explaining to your mates why they should help. You don't always need to write it down on a piece of paper, you can even think it through mentally - say on the bus to a meeting:

**Step 1** - Who am I meeting? What is on their mind? What do they care about? What do they already know about me and my project?

**Step 2** - How do I want them to think and feel at the end of this conversation? What do I want them to do - what is the call to action?

**Step 3** - How can I best represent my story to achieve that? And therefore, what is my key message?

### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY B

Share the messaging matrix with your team, friends or community. See if they can fill it in as an example of what they want to achieve during the Great Get Together (or another community moment you are involved in). What do they know about attendees? How do they want participants to think and feel when they leave the event? What do they want participants to do? And so what is the purpose or core message? You may need to fill in a different matrix for each sub-section of the audiences that may be present. For example, if the mayor is attending you may have a different message for him/her than for children from the local primary school. With your team or friends, use this to frame the story you will tell during the event.

### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Think about how you will weave your own origin story into the messaging you have agreed in optional Activity B, or perhaps think honestly about how your superpower will be secretly supporting you from within.





## WHEN AND WHERE?

Telling your story is something you can do whenever and wherever. But your origin story can be very personal.

### ACTIVITY 6

Think through which parts of your origin story you are happy to share with everyone. Think through which parts are private and yours alone. Think again about if there are any audiences who may benefit from you sharing your vulnerabilities - not to make yourself more vulnerable, rather to present a full picture of the realities we all face.

If you are building a campaign, a movement or a group of like-minded people, then it can be helpful to plan when and where you will tell your story.

### ACTIVITY 7

Consider who you need to influence, inspire or engage. Write a list and prioritise those who are most important. Check your list again in a week.

Optional Activity D - Think about your network of friends, colleagues, family and peers. It may be that they can support you in telling your story i.e. stand with you. It may be that their story may be more relevant for a specific audience.



## CASE STUDY: LAURA FROM WIDNES

Organising a Great Get Together doesn't have to be intimidating or overly complicated. Just ask Laura from Widnes. She's a busy working mum of two who had never organised anything like a Great Get Together before.

Inspired by Jo's legacy, Laura organised her first event in 2017 and it was such a success that she decided to do it again in 2018. Here's how she made her Get Togethers great (and how you can do the same):



### THE CONCEPT

Laura wanted to plan an outdoor, picnic-style event with free activities – including a bouncy castle, face painting, and live music – where everyone in her community would feel welcome.

### LOCATION

The garden of a local B&B/Pub was the perfect setting for Laura's Great Get Together. She knew the business had supported other charity events in the past and so she approached them about the Great Get Together. They agreed to let her use the space for free and the event was also covered by the venue's insurance.

*Some other ideas for places to hold your Great Get Together*

- *Your local park*
- *Your street*
- *A local community space*
- *A local library*

## SHARING YOUR STORY

Sharing your story can be an empowering experience for yourself, but can also work to inspire others to share theirs.

Consider the matrix given above, and think about how different media platforms change your audience, and how that changes your message. Are you sharing your story with others who may have similar stories, with colleagues, or with a wider audience?

### TIPS FOR SHARING YOUR STORY:

- Think of a creative format to share your story, and challenge others to do the same with their own.
- Format your story to suit the platform you are using – some platforms may be more picture focused, others use video, and others use long bits of text.
- Frame your call to action as a question or prompt that people can respond to on media. Encourage people to comment their stories or thoughts on your post, and to share their own story in a similar way.
- Encourage people to share your story to their own in their own networks
- Start a hashtag that encapsulates the message of your story that others can use to share their thoughts or stories to start a dialogue.
- Make sure you have permission to share the story in the given forum from anyone who is involved in it.
- Make sure to never post personal information about yourself or others in public forums.





## INVITES

To spread the word about her event, Laura utilised social media and also made links with local food banks, who could promote the event as a free fun day out for families who Laura may not have found in her own network. Reaching out to the wider community to invite in people you may not know already is what makes Great Get Togethers truly special.

## FOOD & FUN

In 2017, Laura encouraged families to bring their own picnic and enjoy the free activities. She crowdfunded £100 to provide a bouncy castle on the day and bought some crafts and garden toys.

Building on the success of her first year, Laura was able to solicit small donations from a local church and charity to offer a free BBQ. She also had rocks and prizes donated for a rock painting competition. We recommend reaching out to local businesses or supermarkets if you're looking for donations.

## LOCAL IMPACT

Laura encouraged people to leave their picnic blankets, which she donated to a homeless charity in Liverpool. The venue also brought lots of people into a part of town that they had never been to before, helping to bridge part of the community that didn't normally mix.

## IN LAURA'S WORDS:

*"I had never put on anything like the Great Get Together before and it has changed my life. I've met new people, made new friends and gone on to get involved in other things in the community I would never have dreamt I would before. I think it is such an important and positive message: we need to keep sharing that we really do have more in common."*

## IN SUMMARY

Your story is a powerful resource, it will give you the energy and strength to continue with the important work you are doing. Each of us is part of a wider story that we see in communities around the world.

### **YOUR STORY IS YOURS. IT BELONGS TO YOU.**

But sometimes it is good to share, and often your story will inspire others. It may trigger others to better understand their own origin story, or to get involved in their community, or take action on an issue they care about.

Understanding your origin story is a power: where did you come from; what were the inputs to your journey (good and difficult); what superpower has this given you?

Always protect yourself when sharing personal details, but also in opening up about your story. Make sure you have prepared by thinking carefully about the audience and about your purpose in sharing the story. If you are clear on these two things, then you will make the right decision about when, where and how to share it.





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On Our Radar is a not-for-profit social communications agency for unheard communities. We are a small, specialist group of journalists, software architects, to digital storytellers and development workers. We bring a cross-disciplinary approach to understanding and tackling the causes of voicelessness.

We believe in the value of the insight from daily experience of vulnerability and marginalisation. We collaborate with partners to tackle exclusion, isolation and loneliness.

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