



A simple approach to preparing life story books

1. The person with a disability chooses a partner to work with – someone who knows him or her well and they agree on a regular time to meet.
2. They purchase an attractive acid-free album with moveable pages, so a chronology can be arrived at later. (Acid-free materials will keep pictures from discolouring.)
3. Together, they write a letter to friends and family, asking them to send photos and write letters sharing memories and describing the person's gifts. (Enclose acid-free paper.)
4. They record stories that the person with a disability may be able to tell himself or herself. Together, they interview family members about childhood high points.
5. As letters arrive, they read them aloud, record other memories the letters may evoke, and place them in the book. They mount photos and add captions to augment the letters. Special photo trimming templates can be used and the person whose book it is may add artwork to embellish the pages.
6. They visit old friends and tape their memories. They may visit family graves and sites that were important in the person's past, for instance, a childhood house or neighbourhood, and take photos and record memories.
7. When the book is complete, they plan a celebration with friends and perhaps a blessing of the book. The book becomes an enjoyable resource for further reflection and integration.

When Helen was in a nursing home with dementia, we wanted the care-givers to know what a wonderful person she was and what a rich life she had led. We felt this would increase their respect for her and their sense that they were caring for a real person, even though Helen was mostly unresponsive at that point. Besides making a photo collage for her wall, we placed her life story book in her room so nurses and visitors could look at it with her and learn about her life.