

Inspiration Report: *Storytelling & Seniors*

Lorraine Sandoval, Spring 2025



Objective

Convince the Library Director **that by** implementing a Senior Storytelling program **they will** enhance the organization's relationship with senior members, **which will** allow them to feel visible in the community **because** their stories will be accessible throughout the organization's space and the new Digital Storybook for other members to read and become familiar with.

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Technology extends human reach
but participation requires
engaged participants who feel
welcome, comfortable, and
valued.

Michael Stephens
The Heart of Librarianship

Executive Summary

The Senior Storytelling program is one which will increase senior-use within our space and allow the organization to embrace emerging technologies, such as the Digital Storybook. Storytelling is a major element of humanness. Humans come from stories, hence, the significance of sharing stories. Seniors, in particular, have a lot to share! The Senior Storytelling program won't just encourage a senior to visit the library and interact with another in our community room, but will also encourage them to use our computers or other digital services because the proper training is available.

Senior stories will be valued for what they're worth.



Introduction

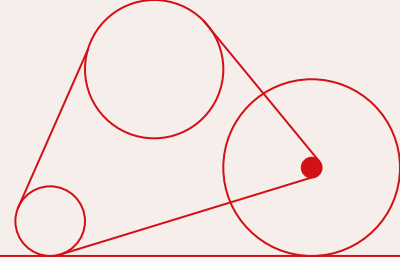
Libraries have been defined “as places for people to find information and as places where people learn” (Wentz, 2013). In addition to collection development, we are also responsible for creating programs which mirror our member’s information needs. Seniors are frequent library users who shouldn’t be overlooked. This specific program will highlight the lives and experiences of our senior members. We must reaffirm to our community that our organization is for all! The Senior Storytime program will also allow community members in different age groups, such as children or teens, to feel more connected with seniors who can often feel unheard.



Seniors with Alzheimer’s or Dementia

The Senior Storytime program is also meant to support seniors with Alzheimer’s or dementia, who have expressed the need for communicating and socializing (Parsons et al., 2013) with other people suffering from memory loss. When seniors with Alzheimer’s or dementia share their experiences with one another, living with such an overwhelming illness can feel less isolating over time.

The Project



The Senior Storytime program enables senior members of the community to share their stories with one another, as well as the rest of the community. There are two Senior Storytime events in one month to accommodate the needs of seniors with Alzheimer's or dementia. Depending on the qualitative outcome of the program, there is potential for additional events scheduled throughout the month.

Senior Storytime will bring seniors together in the community room to address a question such as *"Share your favorite vacation when you were a child"* or *"Share your worst job"* or *"Share your favorite memory from your own wedding or another."* Conversations like these motivate a member to bounce off someone else's answer and encourage stimulation. While our senior members converse with each other, our program librarian will collect responses and push the conversation in another direction if needed.

The program librarian will later choose a "Senior of the Month" to be highlighted in the library space and in the Digital Storybook where a small biography of the senior and their responses will be available to read! To prevent potential security risks, no sensitive information will be included in the biography. Through the Digital Storybook, community members of all age groups can learn more about the seniors who visit their library. The program librarian will also provide how-to guides for seniors who wish to access the Digital Storybook.

Librarians in the organization will be able to teach senior members how to access the Digital Storybook as well.

Background of Digital Storytelling

Storytelling is an act of the past and will continue to be an act of the future. Storytelling in the 21st Century, however, has changed how we search for and listen to stories.

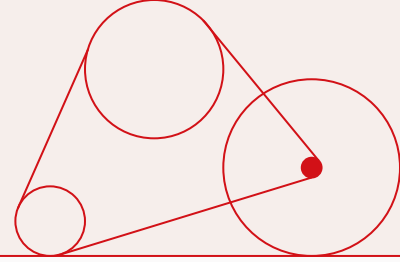
The American Library Association (2025) expresses that digital storytelling “can draw on and generate new forms of literacy—information, visual, digital, experiential—and expand our understanding of what literacy means.” Essentially, we are enhancing the stories we’ve heard or read through audiovisual media. This is not to suggest that traditional storytelling is vanishing—it’s not! We are merely preserving these stories.

In the context of libraries, information professionals should embrace emerging technologies to preserve who our community members are. Storytelling in this manner will allow our members to keep living on in the digital world forever. Like libraries, communities change over time. Storytelling in the 21st Century allows us to look back at who we once were and helps us understand who we are now.

Example: [Goin’ North: Stories from the First Great Migration to Philadelphia](#)



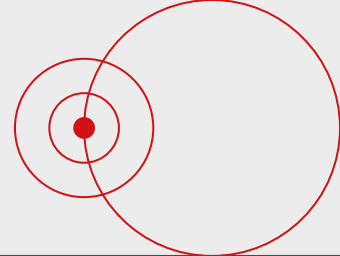
The Inspiration



The Senior Storytelling program is inspired by Memory Cafés designed for people with Alzheimer's or dementia. Memory Cafés are facilitated programs which bring people with memory loss together and "have fun together, talk with others who understand what you're going through, and try something new!" (Dementia Friendly America, n.d.). These gatherings allow people with fading memories to share their struggles (or not) and interact with others enduring similar experiences. Storytelling is a popular program within Memory Cafés, as it's interactive in nature. Additionally, family members and caregivers are encouraged to sit in and listen to members share their stories. Memory Cafés serve as a space where senior members can feel safe and accepted, just like libraries push to be.



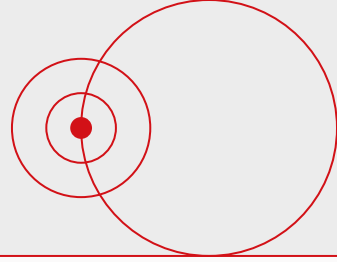
Teaming Up



As expressed earlier, there will be two Senior Storytelling program events to account for senior members with Alzheimer's or dementia. It's important to include senior members with memory loss so we can make their living situation less isolating. Memory loss is a battle that doesn't have to be fought alone. Those with Alzheimer's or dementia possess a wide range of information-seeking behaviors and information needs, hence the necessity for our senior members to team up. The word "team" is being used in comparison to "group," as being called a team is more personal and reminds members the purpose of Senior Storytelling: sharing stories with one another! While the goal is the same, there are differences between the two teams of seniors attending Senior Storytime.

The following slides will address how each team will be organized.

Caterpillar Team

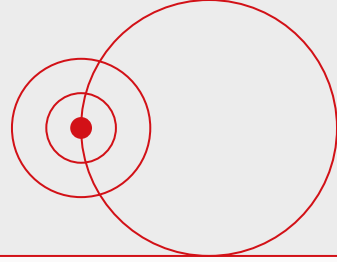


The Caterpillar Team's Senior Storytime will be a community-led program, in which the team manages the discussion themselves—not the program librarian. Senior members will feel encouraged to take control of the conversation and be able to evaluate what is or isn't working. As librarians, we "should not try to impose a rigid set of steps or schedule, because the community determines how the process will progress" (Lenstra & Barbakoff, 2024). Senior members will know how to improve the program in order to fulfill their needs. We must remember we are not the user!

The Caterpillar Team's discussions will be flexible and should branch into other themes.



Butterfly Team



The Butterfly Team will be composed of senior members living with memory loss. A diagnosis will not be required to attend. In comparison to the Caterpillar Team, the Butterfly Team's program will be managed by the team themselves + the program librarian, and an outside coordinator who specializes in senior care. Storytelling does not have to be focused on memory loss itself, but will be intended to support the needs of those dealing with memory loss. With the help of the outside coordinator, the

Butterfly Team will be encouraged to socialize with one another. Additionally, family members, friends, and caregivers of members in the Butterfly Team will be able to engage with storytelling and build connections with other community members.

The Butterfly Team's Senior Storytime will allow people across all stages of memory loss to feel uplifted and included in our community.



Promotion of Senior Stories

By the end of the month when the Caterpillar Team and Butterfly Team have held their programs, the program librarian will choose a senior from either team to be highlighted as the library's "Senior of the Month."

Through the Digital Storybook on WordPress, the program librarian will create a post showcasing our senior (with permission, of course). The post will include a brief biography, indication of what team they're in, and a response they shared at the last program event.

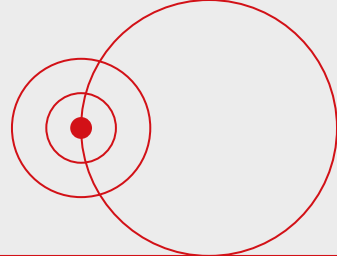
Additionally, a "Senior of the Month" poster will be displayed in the library with a URL/QR Code of the Digital Storybook on the bottom for community members to view.

The Digital Storybook will be promoted on the library's website as well.

To access the Digital Storybook, the program librarian will write a step-by-step guide at an Elementary reading level to ensure accessibility. This is especially important for senior members with Alzheimer's or dementia.

The Digital Storybook will be organized by year. In total, there will be 12 "Senior of the Month" entries a year.

Challenges

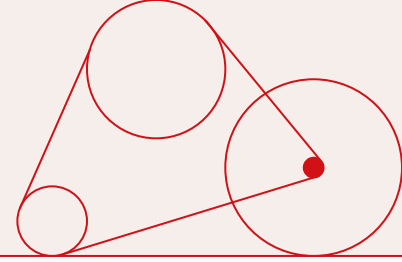


Cost: While there is no cost for our senior members to attend Senior Storytelling, the library still has to pay for an outside coordinator who specializes in senior care with attention to memory loss. Budgets can be a barrier, but it doesn't have to be when we make the effort to prioritize our senior members who have been underrepresented in our services for too long.

Time: It may be difficult for a librarian in our organization to find the time to support the Senior Storytime program in addition to their existing responsibilities. Creating and managing the WordPress blog, for example, could take effort outside of the library space. Attending Senior Storytime and managing the Digital Storybook will need to be scheduled in a proper manner for our librarian's effort to not be overlooked or undervalued.

Accessibility: While our program does aim to include senior members with memory loss, there are still seniors in the community who may not be able to participate in Senior Storytime. Seniors who do not speak English, for example, will not be able to share their stories with other community members due to language barriers. Depending on the qualitative outcome of the program, the library could consider Senior Storytime for Spanish speakers. Additionally, we may have seniors who do not have the means to leave their homes. In this case, the library can also consider designing interactive Memory Kits.

The Impact

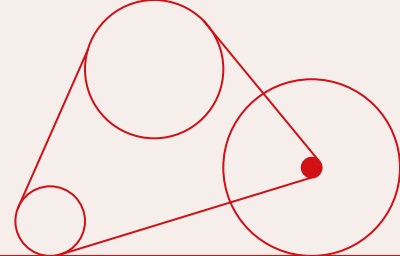


The Senior Storytime program will help accomplish our mission of creating services for all in the community. Additionally, the Senior Storytime program will allow senior members to socialize with one another and feel less alone in their process of aging. This is especially important for our senior members with Alzheimer's or dementia, as being diagnosed is a difficult change to cope with.

The Digital Storybook will let the stories of our senior members be remembered and cherished for years to come!



Conclusion

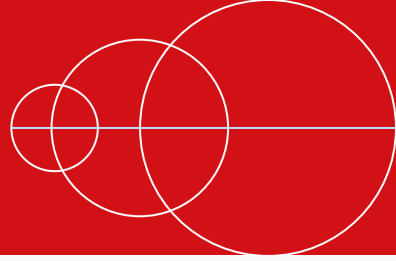


The proposed Senior Storytime will help both our senior members and our organization. Seniors will feel visible in the community and feel valued within the library space. When we listen to people's stories, we're also listening to the experiences which have shaped their lives. Community members can bond with these experiences! Seniors have a lot to contribute to the community and their involvement should be highlighted.

Additionally, the Digital Storybook will allow the library to keep current on emerging technologies. Libraries will continue to evolve, and our members of all age groups should not remain in the dark.

Storytelling is a crucial element of humanness that our organization should continue to support and make room for.

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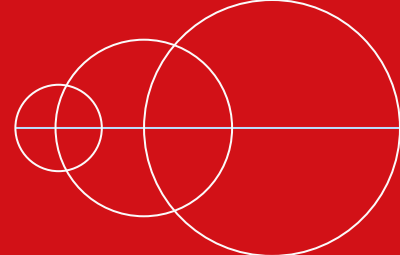
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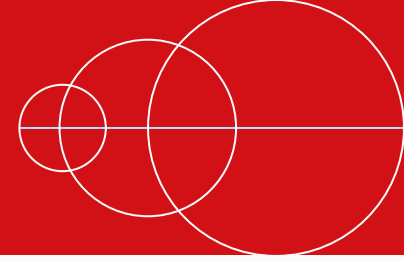
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