



— Your Life Talks —

Training Guide





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All information and resources provided by 'Your Life Talks' and 'Your Life Assist' for the purpose of Autobiographical Storytelling or Advance Care Planning, are strictly informative and should not be considered as legal advice or legally binding.

Additionally, none of the information and resources provided by 'Your Life Talks' or 'Your Life Assist' for the purpose of this Training Guide, should be considered as a substitute for the recommended advice of your legal and/or health professional or services in your State or Territory. We do make every effort to ensure the quality of information provided, however we will not be liable for any loss or damage suffered by any person arising in connection with any information provided.

All information provided is of a general nature. For additional information relating to Advance Care Planning, Wills and Estates, Powers of Attorney etc, please speak to your legal and/or health professional for advice about your specific circumstances, including the legislative requirements in your State or Territory.

Similar action should be taken by readers in other countries and jurisdictions.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Why we created Your Life Talks

Life's short...so let's talk.

We talk about the weather, our weekend, sports and our holidays with ease....so why is it so difficult to talk about our life's journey and future plans?

Bringing these topics out into the open by having meaningful discussions with our loved ones is half the battle. Having everything accurately documented so that it can be easily found and actioned when needed, is the other.

What most people need is a reason, or a little bit of encouragement to kick-start these conversations.

We created 'Your Life Talks' with a mission to raise community awareness of the importance of initiating meaningful conversations within families, to recognize our intrinsic need to remember and celebrate our life achievements, and share our plans for the future.

When my husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer, I became his full time carer for seventeen months. Our family overcame many difficulties in providing both physical and emotional care during this time, and in having to initiate conversations with David about his end of life wishes.

With the first hand experiences I gained during this time and my career background as a Funeral Director, I created the community information websites, Your Life Assist and Your Life Talks, and became a passionate advocate to encourage people to take the first important step in having these conversations.

Our goal is to provide people with an engaging and simple way to share their life stories, and a 'non-confrontational' way of having those sometimes challenging conversations about their plans for their future health and lifestyle choices.

The innovative tools we developed with 'Your Life Talks' Conversation Cards and Booklets provide a face-to-face, tactile and sharing experience with another person, who's actively involved as the supportive listener and a true participator in the conversation experience.

Sharing your life story encourages families to have conversations about life and what matters most. It is a wonderful way for us to reaffirm to our loved ones how much they have impacted our lives, and how much they have meant to us.

And by having and documenting discussions about our future health and lifestyle choices, we

have lessened the burden on our family when it comes to making difficult decisions if life changing circumstances arise.

These meaningful conversations should be started as early as possible, when we are fit and healthy and can make clear minded decisions.

The Emergency Department is not the place to have these conversations.

Our Speakers facilitate Community and Carer Support Groups with fun and laughter, engaging their audiences with truly 'interactive' story telling discussions, using our cards. Our presentations are suitable for a range of Community organisations, such as Over 55's Groups, Senior's Clubs, CWA, Men's Sheds, Retirement Villages, Aged Care Facilities, Hospices, and Carer Support Groups such as Alzheimer's, Stroke, Cancer, Parkinson's etc, who want to complement their existing programs and services.

Right now is the best time to have these conversations recalling our life story and how we want to live out the final stages of our life, including how we would like to be remembered.

I hope that by using our guide, that you encourage many more people to take the step, and sit down with their family and friends and kick-start these important conversations.

1.2 What is Autobiographical Storytelling?

Biographical storytelling is not a new phenomenon.

A person's own personal story is how they make meaning and construct a sense of 'self awareness'. Our memories are integral and important to us, as memories and emotions are inextricably intertwined. Throughout history individuals and communities defined themselves by receiving, holding and telling stories about themselves.

Autobiographical storytelling is a doorway into exploring and making sense of our life's experiences and inner life. A Biographer can assist a person with crafting memories into stories, and thus encourage a natural way to consider the significance of their life's experiences.

Basically, taking on the role of a 'Biographer' involves being a sensitive, empathetic listener and sitting with a person to ask them a number of questions about their life journey, and recording the details. The process is enjoyable and interesting, and can provide rewarding opportunities to develop skills in personal and community engagement.

The Participant's reflections can be recorded in many ways, with the result that it is unique to them and their experiences. It can be an audio recording, video or a physical book containing just words, or they can choose to add photos, drawings, sayings, quotes or advice.

Above all, the Participant must be treated with respect and non-judgemental empathy, and hopefully the biography process will be a wonderful experience for both parties.

We are also aware of more formal therapies such as 'Dignity Therapy' and 'Narrative Therapy', that use a specialised form of storytelling conducted by qualified therapists or counsellors to achieve specific therapeutic outcomes. This is not the intent of our suggested program. Please see our 3.5 Acknowledgements section for further information on these therapies.

1.3 What is Advance Care Planning?

'Advance Care Planning' is all about having conversations and planning for your future health and lifestyle choices so that you, your family, friends, carers and doctors know what your values and preferences truly are.

If you were very unwell and not able to communicate your preferences to others, who would you want to speak for you? What would you want them to say?

Advance Care Planning helps to ensure that your loved ones and your doctors are fully aware of your healthcare and personal preferences.

Your Life Talks has extended the subject matter covered by our 'Your Life Wishes' cards to include conversations surrounding equally important matters such as the preparation of a Will, various Powers of Attorney, senior's accommodation choices as one becomes older, funeral arrangements and memorialisation preferences etc.

These are also topics that once discussed and documented, can also lead to peace of mind for all family members concerned, especially the Participant.

1.4 Our Objective

The first objective is to encourage individuals and families of the value of kick-starting these important conversations using our Conversation Starter Cards. A secondary objective is to document the Participant's life story in the 'My Life Journal' booklet, and their Advance Care Planning in the 'Memo of Wishes' booklet.

'Your Life Story' – is all about sharing life's stories and creating a legacy which is a 'Celebration of Life' for generations to come.

The process of autobiographical storytelling is a perfect segue into Advance Care Planning. Reflecting on our past life often flows naturally into thinking about our future.

'Your Life Wishes' – helping to break-the-ice and discuss the sometimes more challenging topics, such as healthcare preferences, preparation of a Will and Powers of Attorney, documenting a Healthcare Directive, funeral arrangements and memorialisation preferences etc.

Both sets of cards can be used to create a less confronting way of conducting these conversations, especially with those people who may still believe that talking about topics such as 'death, dying and funerals' is still very much a taboo subject.

In pursuing the above objectives we also wish to broaden the contextual horizon, with regard to when it might be appropriate to have these meaningful discussions. Should we only do this when someone is approaching a 'palliative care or end of life' situation, or does it make more sense to engage with our families long before such life critical circumstances arise?

1.5 Our Audience

We have created this Training Guide for the following groups:

'Your Life Story' Audience:

- Professionals in the field: Social Workers, Aged and Home Care Staff, Palliative/Hospice Care Staff, Occupational Therapists, Diversional Therapists.
- Carers and Volunteers: Family and Volunteer Carers for aged, ill and disability clients
- Senior Citizens – Over 55's Club members, Men's Sheds, CWA Ladies, Probus Club, View Club, National Seniors etc.
- Funeral Celebrants (Preparation of a Eulogy)
- Individual Families

'Your Life Wishes' Audience:

- Professionals in the field: GP's in Medical Clinics, Social Workers, Aged and Home Care Staff, Palliative/Hospice Care Staff, Occupational Therapists, Diversional Therapists, Community Health Centres etc.
- Carers and Volunteers: Family and Volunteer Carers for aged, ill and disability clients.
- Senior Citizens – Over 60's Club members, Men's Sheds, CWA Ladies, Probus Club, View Club, National Seniors etc.
- Individual Families


1.6 Our Guidelines

The primary beneficiary of this Training Guide will be the individual Participants involved and their immediate family, in knowing that these important conversations have been held, and the results documented for all to acknowledge.

We have documented suggestions as to how best to conduct each of the sessions as outlined.

These are Conversation Starter cards, and their intent is to initiate conversations that by their very nature may veer off onto various tangents, and that may or may not follow each specific session's preferred outline and timeframe.

We suggest that Biographers/Facilitators be flexible and adaptable to their Participant and their family's needs, when using these conversation starter cards.

 **Tip:** We don't want to be prescriptive about how to conduct these sessions, but do recommend you use the suggestions in the Guide as best suits your organisation and your Participant's personal situation.



2. Benefits

2.1 Autobiographical Storytelling

The process of reflecting on a life is not only a meaningful activity to be undertaken by an organisation, it is also personally beneficial for the Participants and their families as follows:

Leave a legacy – your story

You may think you have lived an ordinary life, but future generations will be interested in hearing about you and your generation. What you consider mundane may be fascinating to them. We rely on written or recorded information much more than verbal histories, and writing your own story for your descendants will ensure they know the truth of your life.

You may inspire someone else

Remember those challenges you conquered, the hardships you endured and the problems you solved? Your story could prove to be an inspiration for your descendants.

Reconcile past issues

Reflection can help you accept unresolved past issues, and possibly provide an avenue to reconciliation with family and friends.

Strengthens your sense of purpose

As you reflect on your past, you may remember unfinished business or new goals to achieve, which can give you renewed purpose for the remainder of your life.

Increased self awareness and understanding

Life reflections help you to establish who you really have been, are and want to be. It helps you understand yourself.

Renewed sense of well being

As you tell your story, you realize that your life had and has meaning and that some, if not all of it, was well lived. As a result, you increase your own self esteem, and accept yourself as a valuable member of the human race.

Autobiographical storytelling can lead you to finding understanding, acceptance and forgiveness. It creates a space to reminisce, to connect a sense of meaning to the past and make sense of life. It can work towards a holistic sense of healing.

Sometimes certain aspects of your story become secondary in the process, and it is what happens to you during the telling of the story that becomes the most important part. Often stories that have the greatest therapeutic effect and are told to a Biographer in confidence, are never written down, at the Participant's request and respect for their privacy.

Also spending time sharing autobiographical stories can prepare you for the more difficult, and possibly more confronting, conversations regarding your healthcare preferences towards the end of life. Discussing and recording your advance planning wishes can give 'peace of mind' to both you and your family.

What are others saying?

- a) Psychology Today – Sherry Hamby Ph.D. – "I have been surprised at the power of emotional, autobiographical storytelling".

Four Benefits to Sharing Your Story

- Finding your voice
- Realising that sharing your story can help others
- Re-affirming your values
- Finding peace...finding hope

“Emotional, autobiographical story telling means writing about events and people that have mattered to you in your own life - not just describing the facts of your life”.

- b) **In the Lancet Oncology** - Canadian researchers revealed around 70% of terminally ill patients reported higher quality of life and a greater will to live after participating in ‘dignity therapy’ – a conversation about their life, feelings, memories and hopes, resulting in a lasting memento they could share with their families.
- c) **Life Biography Writing** - From Hibiscus Hospice, New Zealand. “An often therapeutic experience involves the confidential recording of a patient’s life story. This can help redress issues from the past and reinforce the value and significance of a life’s journey. The recording of each life story in the patient’s own words, is then produced as a lasting memento”.
- d) **The Biography Service** - From Te Omanga Hospice, New Zealand. “Reflecting, reviewing and recording one’s life experience is seen as having a ‘therapeutic’ effect, whether that is raising the patient’s self-esteem, or merely being an enjoyable way for them to spend some time doing something that they can do, when often there is so much that they can’t do”.

2.2 Advance Care Planning

Decisions about Advance Care Planning are deeply personal, and are based on your values and beliefs.

What are the benefits of Advance Care Planning?

Advance care planning benefits everyone...the person, their family, carers, health professionals and associated organisations:

It ensures you receive the care you actually want.

It improves ongoing and end of life care, as well as personal and family satisfaction.

Families of people who have an Advance Care Plan usually have less anxiety, depression, stress and are more satisfied with the care provided.

For healthcare professionals and organisations, it may reduce unnecessary transfers to acute care and unwanted treatment.

It is important to make your wishes known to your family and healthcare provider, while you are mentally competent, active and in good health. It relieves your family members of the need to guess what you would want, particularly if you are facing a medical crisis.

Ultimately, knowing your wishes can be an invaluable gift to those you love, and those providing for your medical care. It will give both yourself and your family, ‘peace of mind’ knowing that your healthcare preferences have been discussed and documented.

Australian status regarding Advance Care Planning

In Australia, like so many other countries around the world, the statistics on preparing and planning for the end of life are not that impressive:

- It is estimated that only 14 % of Australians have an Advance Care Plan or Health Directive in place.
- 45% of people die without a Will.

- Around 50% of Australians will not be able to make or express their own decisions when they are near death.
- Around 70% of Australians indicate a preference for dying at home, yet only about 14 per cent do so.

REFERENCES

Australian Senate, (2012), Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, Palliative Care in Australia, Canberra

Grattan Institute, (2014), Dying Well, Report No. 2014-10, September 2014 viewed at grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/815-dying-well.pdf

King, C., Wainer, J., Lowndes, G., Darzins, P. and Owada, K. (2011), For love or money (intergenerational management of older Victorians' asset: Protecting Elders Assets), Melbourne : Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University.

NSW Trustee and Guardian, Attorney General and Justice, What is a Will?, viewed at tag.nsw.gov.au/what-is-a-will.html
myagedcare.gov.au

In summary, our intention is that in using our 'Your Life Wishes' cards, they will prove to be a very useful non-confrontational resource for health professionals, families and Volunteers to address this imbalance when discussing and planning for the future.

3. Our Approach

3.1 Why Use These Cards?

- Our cards are 'tactile' - handling cards is a very familiar experience for most people.
- By actually having a card in their hands, it gives the card holder the psychological 'Permission to Speak'.
- The simple subconscious 'power' of this cannot be overstated...it simply 'empowers' them far more, than being asked the same question from a form or a prepared list of questions, for example.
- Using our cards is a non-confronting way of 'kick-starting' these meaningful conversations.
- Using our cards requires an active, empathetic, 'listening' facilitator – resulting in a truly 'quasi-therapeutic' sharing experience.



3.2 Why not develop an App?

This is a question we are sometimes asked. Our response is quite simple...Our point of difference is that our approach is to foster a sharing experience based on human interaction via face-to-face storytelling with another person(s) present – not an isolated one, between you and your laptop.

3.3 Why Two Sets of Conversation Starter Cards?

We have deliberately split our Conversation Starter question cards into two separate 'Conversation' approaches.

The 'Your Life Story' cards are designed to initiate conversations with the Participant about their life story. Everyone has a story to tell about their life's journey, and the cards are easy and engaging to use.

The most common question of “Where do I start?” is easily solved by simply picking a card... any card. The Participant’s stories do not have to follow a timeline if they find this difficult, as the Biographer can do this at a later time. It is more important to encourage ‘storytelling’, and by selecting a random card and letting the conversation flow, long forgotten memories are remembered.

The questions on these cards cover many aspects of a person’s life - from childhood and teenage years, to adult and family life, with the accomplishments and disappointments along the way.

- Describe the neighbourhood you grew up in.
- What influenced your choice of career?
- Thinking of all your accomplishments, of which are you most proud?

The role of a Biographer usually only encompasses documenting the Participant’s life story.

We designed the ‘Your Life Wishes’ cards to encourage discussion with Participants about their wishes for their future, and these conversations are usually initiated by a family member or a health professional. This is not to say that a Biographer cannot enter into these conversations as well. It would depend on a number of factors, and in particular the guidelines of an organisation.

The ‘Your Life Story’ deck of cards do not include anything specifically related to Advance Care Planning, preparation of a Will, Health Directives or funeral preferences etc. Whereas the ‘Your Life Wishes’ question cards are designed specifically for this purpose, within an overall context of encouraging discussions about the Participant’s wishes for their future.

These questions can sometimes be more challenging to answer, and the Conversation Starter Cards provide a less confronting approach:



- Do you have an Advanced Healthcare Plan and where is it located?
- Are there any medical treatments that are inconsistent with your personal preferences?
- Do you want a 'traditional funeral', or would you prefer a 'memorial service only' or a 'home funeral'?

Using the 'Your Life Story' cards to encourage reminiscing on a Participant's life journey, provides a natural segue into conversations about their future using the 'Your Life Wishes' cards.

If during these conversations, the Participant states that they actually want to complete specific documentation, for example, the preparation of a Will, Power of Attorney or Health Directive, this should be referred to the organisation's supervisor for appropriate discussions with family members.

In the hands of an aware and empathetic Facilitator, the Conversation Starter cards can result in the most rewarding interactive conversations, that can potentially alter lives and future plans.

3.4 Other Uses of Your Life Story cards

There are many scenarios in which the 'Your Life Story' conversation starter cards are now being used.

For example, some secondary colleges have extra-curriculum buddy programs, whereby their students visit Aged Care Homes to engage in conversation with the residents. The students sometimes have some difficulty in knowing how to initiate these conversations...not knowing what questions are appropriate to be asking.

Our cards are a perfect solution for this problem, as they take the students through a step by step process of initiating these 'life story' conversations. Our companion booklets allow the students to record the answers, so they can present the booklet back to their buddy resident for their family to keep as a memento.

Similarly, in this modern age of video games, social media and infrequent opportunities for conversation around the dinner table, the 'art of conversation', especially between younger and older generations is becoming an ever increasing hurdle to overcome.

Further uses of the 'Your Life Story' Conversation Starter Cards:

- Corporate Bonding Sessions and Staff Team Meetings - To better staff engagement with each other in a safe environment, and to provide the opportunity to talk about who they actually are, and what some of the influences have been on how they chose their career path etc.
- Community and Social Groups – Rotary, Probus, CWA, Men's Sheds, Sporting, Social. Using two or three of our 'Your Life Story' cards to open or finish a meeting, provides an engaging activity to help members get to know each other better.
- Similarly, Carer Support Groups use the cards at their meetings to help members get to know each other better, and encourage meaningful conversations.
- Various counselling services have reported that they have found our cards a useful resource when conducting different forms of therapy with their clients, such as Relationship and Family Therapy.
- Newly married couples – Wedding Celebrants are using our cards, prior to the ceremony, as a fun way for the couples to find out more about each other's lives.

The beneficial scenarios listed above may be only as limited as our imaginations.

3.5 Acknowledgments

The Biography Service first developed by Ivan Lichter at [Te Omanga Hospice](#) was established in the mid 1980's to meet the perceived needs of their patients. It was established first and foremost for the benefit of the patient and that remains their focus today. "Reflecting, reviewing and recording one's life experience is seen as having a 'therapeutic' effect, whether that is raising the patient's self-

esteem, or merely being an enjoyable way for them to spend some time doing something that they can do, when often there is so much that they can't do".

Beyond Words has been set up by [Eastern Palliative Care](#) based in Melbourne to further promote 'Biography' to a wider audience, ie beyond an immediate end of life context. Volunteers receive training to act as Biographers "allowing our clients to record their reflections on life's journey". For the Biographer, "opportunities are created to have fun, to use and develop skills in a meaningful way and to hear interesting stories of the older persons in their community".

Formal evaluations of the original biography service introduced at Eastern Palliative Care, has found the service to strengthen the quality of critical human relationships. This research has been presented at professional conferences:

- [Summary of Evaluation of Biography Service](#)
- [2008 Evaluation of Client Biography Service for palliative care](#)

In particular, we acknowledge Jenny Kearney OAM who has developed the Client Biography Service for Eastern Palliative Care which has enjoyed much success, including receiving a United Nation's Award for innovation in Volunteering.

Narrative Therapy was developed by Michael White and his colleague and friend, David Epston. It is based on the view that people are separate from their problems. Narrative therapy contends that people are skilled and able to improve their lives and that therapy is a collaborative effort between therapist and client. See here for [Narrative Therapy Explained](#)

Dignity Therapy was developed starting in 2002 by [Dr. Harvey Max Chochinov](#) (Canada) to assist people dealing with the imminent end of their lives. This brief intervention can help conserve the dying patient's sense of dignity by addressing sources of psychosocial and existential distress. "It gives patients a chance to record the meaningful aspects of their lives and leave something behind that can benefit their loved ones in the future". See here for [Dignity Care Explained](#)

3.6 Aged Care Quality Standards

Australia is moving towards a single set of quality standards – the Aged Care Quality Standards to be introduced on July 1, 2019. The transition towards these new Standards has already commenced.

New Residential Aged Care Quality Standards: agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/standards/standard-4

Regarding Quality Standard No 4, here's where we think that 'Your Life Talks' can be of assistance to all Aged Care and Home Care providers, namely:

"The organisation demonstrates the following:

- 4.1 Each consumer gets safe and effective services and supports for daily living that meet the consumer's needs, goals and preferences and optimise their independence, health, well-being and quality of life.
- 4.2 Services and supports for daily living promote each consumer's emotional, spiritual and psychological well-being. (via our 'Life Story telling' program – this guide.)
- 4.3 Services and supports for daily living assist each consumer to:
 - a. participate in their community within and outside the organisation's service environment; and
 - b. have social and personal relationships; and
 - c. do the things of interest to them

Here's additional 'relevance' from Standard No 1: agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/standards/standard-1

"The organisation demonstrates the following:

- 1.1 Each consumer is treated with dignity and respect, with their identity, culture and diversity valued.
- 1.2 Care and services are culturally safe.
- 1.3 Each consumer is supported to exercise choice and independence, including to:
 - a. make decisions about their own care and the way care and services are delivered; and
 - b. make decisions about when family, friends, carers or others should be involved in their care; and
 - c. communicate their decisions; and
 - d. make connections with others and maintain relationships of choice, including intimate relationships.
- 1.4 Each consumer is supported to take risks to enable them to live the best life they can.
- 1.5 Information provided to each consumer is current, accurate and timely, and communicated in a way that is clear, easy to understand and enables them to exercise choice.
- 1.6 Each consumer's privacy is respected and personal information kept confidential".

Our Conversation Starter cards are culturally sensitive and appropriate, and promote dignity and respect. Our 'Your Life Wishes' cards, in particular, re-affirm personal decision making, as stated in 1.3 a,b, c and d above.

4. Program Setup

4.1 Our Aim

Autobiographical Storytelling is the process where people take time to look back on family, friends and past events, to recall memories and to capture the emotions that went with them. It can be an opportunity for people to share their memories with others, including the lessons that they've learned, and adding value to these memories. This is fundamentally about encouraging a person to reflect on their life journey and to share stories, which creates a natural segue into discussing their wishes for their future.

The main purpose of the **Advance Care Planning** conversations is to use the 'Your Life Wishes' question cards to engage in conversations about Advance Care Planning. Topics covered include the preparation of a Will, Powers of Attorney, Advance Health Directives, Funeral Arrangements and Memorialisation etc.

In this program Staff/Volunteer are matched with a Participant, for weekly visits over a 2 to 3 month period. The Biographer asks questions about the person's past, and encourages them to reflect and talk about their life journey. Their stories and reflections can be used to produce a keepsake journal, as a celebration of the person's life, which is then presented back to the Participant at the end of the sessions.

However, some organisations are finding that the process of simply having these conversations (without producing a keepsake booklet) has many benefits in its own right.

During these 'story telling' sessions, there can be great value in using physical objects to prompt a person's memory. For example photographs, music, sound recordings and special personal possessions from the past, can prompt memories that may have been forgotten.

It is also recommended that each session be audio recorded, with the Participant's permission, to facilitate the documentation of their responses within the booklets provided.

This program is suitable for introduction into various settings such as Aged Care Facilities, Hospices, Home Care, Respite Centres, Palliative Care Units, Retirement Villages and within Community Centres and Support Groups.

4.2 The Process

1. Start by training your Staff/Volunteers via the methods outlined in this Training Guide.
2. Then 'link' the Participant with the Biographer (Autobiographical Storytelling sessions) and/or the Facilitator (Advance Care Planning sessions).
3. Set up an initial session where the two people meet, the program is explained and written consent is obtained.
4. Conduct weekly sessions of approximately 1 hour, where the Biographer/Facilitator helps the Participant record their Life Story and/or Advance Care Planning wishes.
5. The Biographer/Facilitator transcribes a draft of the conversations. See the Appendices for Instructions for Downloading the Companion Booklets.
6. Editing of the drafts is always at the direction of the Participant.
7. Insert any photos, mementos, artwork, poetry etc into the booklet 'My Life Journal'.
8. Print and bind the biography 'My Life Journal' and/or, the Advance Care Planning 'Memo of Wishes' booklet, once the final draft has been approved by the Participant. Present the finished journal to the Participant.

4.3 Program Supervision

We recommend that a qualified Nurse or Social Worker is trained to act as a Supervisor/Mentor of the Biographers/Facilitators involved in this program. This person should be prepared to become the single point of contact, should any issues arise between the Participant, family and the Biographer/Facilitator.

They will be required to attend review meetings with the Biographer/Facilitators on a regular basis to discuss the progress made and help resolve any issues. These should initially be weekly at the start of the program, then less frequently if all is going well.

We also recommend that Biographers/Facilitators attend regular monthly catch-up meetings with supervisors present, to share and discuss experiences.

4.4 Selection of Biographers

Your organisation may decide to use Aged Care Staff, Diversional Therapists, Activity Coordinators or Volunteers from the community to train as Biographers under this program. You should be able to assess and link the chosen Biographer with suitable Participants in your organisation, and together, they will undertake the process of discussing and writing a Life Story Biography.

This is a process whereby potential Biographers are invited to submit an application form, which encourages them to thoroughly reflect on why they want to be a part of such a program, and what they anticipate they might gain from their involvement. This process should assist the Supervisor in making an informed choice in assigning an applicant to a role as a potential Biographer.

Ideally, potential Biographers should possess the empathy, patience and sensitivity necessary to engage a person in these conversations, and be able to respond appropriately should difficult or emotional moments arise.

There should also be some recognition that the program may result in an ongoing commitment over an extended period of time up to 3 months, until such time as the documentation is finalised and presented back to the Participant.

A sample application form can be found in the Appendices.

4.5 Selection of Facilitators

For Advanced Care Planning discussions, some extra care will be required in the selection of suitable Facilitators, as the subject matter covered is of a more deeply personal nature, which may result in the need for a greater level of emotional support during the sessions. Suitable candidates may come from existing roles such as Social Workers, Counsellors, Registered Nurses and Occupational Therapists.

The role of a Biographer usually only encompasses documenting the Participant's life story. This is not to say that a Biographer cannot enter into these conversations as well. It would depend on a number of factors, and in particular, the guidelines of your organisation.

You should be able to assess and link the chosen Facilitators with suitable Participants in your organisation, and together, they will undertake the process of discussing and documenting their Advance Care Planning preferences.

The process is the same as the selection for Biographers, whereby applicants are invited to submit an application form, which encourages them to thoroughly reflect on why they want to be a part of such a program.

There should also be some recognition that the program may result in an ongoing commitment over an extended period of time up to 3 months, until such time as the documentation is finalised.

A sample application form can also be found in the Appendices.

4.6 Selection of Participants

Another critical factor for the overall success of the program, includes the selection of suitable Participants, and preparing them appropriately for their involvement.

Senior care staff should be consulted, as they should have a good sense of both the overall health of the person and their capacity to engage with Biographers/Facilitators over the course of the program for up to three months.

The selection of a Participant who has made significant achievements in life, or who has a gift for storytelling, usually makes for an interesting initial candidate to kick-start the Autobiographical Storytelling Program. However, the value of having lived a so called 'ordinary life' should not be underestimated, as it provides an invaluable opportunity for Biographers to recognise the inherent value in every person's life and stories.

It is important that all possible candidates be given the opportunity to decide whether they want to be part of the program, and that if they decline, their decision will be respected.

Having a signed consent letter is a way to ensure that both the Participant and their family are aware of how the program works, and it must clearly state their agreement to be a Participant.

An example letter has been included in the Appendices, which can be amended to suit your organisation as required.

4.7 Privacy Policy

It is imperative to develop, document and communicate any necessary extra features to your Privacy Policy to cover the introduction of the Autobiographical Storytelling Program and/or Advance Care Planning Program to your organisation's service offerings.

Our recommendation would be that the cornerstone to any such Policy addition/amendments should include wording to the effect that the 'ownership of all content' derived from Autobiographical Storytelling sessions and/or Advanced Care Planning sessions is to remain solely the property of the Participant.

Specifically, they will have full control over which parts of their conversations are included in the final documentation that is presented to them at the end of the sessions.

The importance of these policy changes must be fully explained to your Biographers/Facilitators before they are accepted into the program.

4.8 Training Period/Coverage

We recommend a two hour training session to introduce Staff/Volunteers to the subject matter in this Training Guide as follows -

- Introduction/Background
- Program Set Up
- Conducting Autobiographical Storytelling Sessions
- Conducting Advance Care Planning Sessions
- Preparation of the journals/booklets
- Support from Supervisors
- Organisational Policy Briefing

Each attendee should bring a notebook and pen, their copy of the Training Guide, and have access to the appropriate set of Conversation Starter Cards and Companion Booklet.

5. Session Outlines

This Training Guide has been written to assist both Health Professionals and Biographers/Facilitators within an organization, and also individual family members wanting to have meaningful conversations with their loved ones. The conversations are to focus upon the Participant's life story, and/or wishes for their future.



Tip: Each of the Sections numbered 6 through to 8 are self-standing sections, and can be referenced individually as needed, or omitted entirely if they are not to be utilised by your organisation/family.

There are three basic scenarios under which our cards can be put to beneficial use -

a) Section 6 – Program Information Session

For Supervisors - How to present an interactive session on the benefits and processes of both an Autobiographical Storytelling Program and/or an Advance Care Planning Program to clients and their families.

b) Section 7 – Conducting 'Life Story Biography' Sessions

For Biographers - How to conduct a series of conversations, to talk about and record a person's life story for a family keepsake, using the 'Your Life Story' cards only.

c) Section 8 – Conducting 'Advance Care Planning' Sessions

For Facilitators - How to conduct a series of conversations to discuss and record a person's Advance Care Planning wishes - including topics such Senior Accommodation Choices, Preparation of a Will, Power of Attorney, Healthcare Directive, Funeral and Memorialisation preferences, using the 'Your Life Wishes' cards only.



6. Program Information Session

6.1 Introduction

You have two options for introducing the Autobiographical Storytelling Program and/or the Advance Care Planning Program to your clients and their families as below. This session outline can also be used to conduct an introductory workshop for Staff/Volunteers to commence the program in your organisation.

- a) A written communication explaining the details, aims and benefits for introducing these types of programs...or
- b) Inviting your clients and their families to an information session

This suggested format below can be applied to either option.

Introduce yourself and your workplace role within your organisation

Present some outline information about both programs including the Background, Benefits, Administration and Requirements. Further information regarding expected 'Benefits and Outcomes' can also be found on the websites listed in section 6.8 Suggested Research..

6.2 Program Outline

The programs are designed for Biographers/Facilitators to work one-on-one with the Participant, allowing them to tell their life story and/or advance care preferences. The process of Autobiographical Storytelling encourages stories, precious memories, values, beliefs, culture and messages to be passed from one person to the next and recorded for future generations. Research has shown that many Participants experience a reduction in depression, anxiety, loneliness and pain, and a boost to their morale as a result. Advance Care Planning sessions can give comfort to both the Participant and their family, in having the Participant's wishes for their future discussed and documented.

For Autobiographical Storytelling, we will be using the 'Your Life Story' 50 Conversation Starter Cards as they provide an easy conversation style format. The playing type cards provide a tactile experience, which is a very familiar experience for most people.

By actually having a card in their hands, it gives the card holder the (psychological) 'Permission to Speak'.

The simple subconscious 'power' of this cannot be overstated...it simply 'empowers' them far more, than being asked the same question from a form or a prepared list of questions, for example.

Using the cards is a non-confronting way of encouraging these meaningful conversations.

The process requires an active, empathetic, listening Biographer/Facilitator, resulting in a truly 'quasi-therapeutic' sharing experience.

The Participant's responses will be recorded in the companion booklets, 'My Life Journal' (Life Story) or 'Memo of Wishes' (Life Wishes).

6.3 Program Benefits

The power of telling our own story cannot be underestimated, and the empathy that develops through listening to a person's story can only serve us better to truly respect that person as an individual, to be cherished and cared for, connecting the human spirit of a life well lived.

An Autobiographical Storytelling Program can make a valuable contribution to the quality of life of all Participants. Qualitative analysis (by Eastern Palliative Care) has established that the biography process can amplify the many benefits associated with life review and personal growth eg reintegration/resolution of one's experiences etc.

The material benefit for families is that they will have a lasting keepsake of their loved one's life story. The intangible benefits for them may be that the biography process will provide deeper insights, enhance communication and possibly heal relationships with their loved one.

If the process includes Advance Care Planning conversations, it can also provide 'peace of mind' for both the Participant and their family, knowing their future healthcare, accommodation and funeral wishes have been discussed and documented.

6.4 Program Administration

The implementation and supervision of these programs will be overseen by our senior staff member (insert name).

They will conduct regular review meetings with our Biographers/Facilitators to discuss the progress made and any issues that need to be addressed.

Our Biographers/Facilitators will be selected on their skill level to engage in conversation with a Participant with sensitivity and empathy, and their ability to respond appropriately should difficult or emotional moments arise.

It is important that we give all of our clients the opportunity to participate in these programs. It is equally important that if they do not wish to participate, their decision will be respected. This also applies should one of our clients decide during a program that they do not wish to continue.

6.5 Program Requirements

(Insert organisation's name) have updated our Privacy Policy to importantly state that ownership of all content derived from either the Autobiographical Storytelling Program and/or the Advance Care Planning Program, will remain solely the property of the Participant.

Specifically, they will have full control of which parts of their conversations are included in the final journals that are presented to them at the end of the programs.

We will provide a consent form, to be signed by the Participant and a family member. It will have the option of having an audio recording of the conversations to assist the Biographer/Facilitator with documenting the Participant's responses.

(Optional – If your organisation wants to provide equipment to video the sessions this can be added as well).



Tip: It can be of great value when reminiscing on their life story, to have physical objects to prompt memories that may have been forgotten. For example, photographs, music, special personal possessions and sound recordings. We hope that family members would assist with locating and providing all such material to our Biographers/Facilitators.



Tip: Your Life Talks also has two PowerPoint Presentations freely available to use for your presentations. Please email info@yourlifetalks.com.

- Autobiographical Storytelling Program Only
- Autobiographical Storytelling and Advance Planning Programs combined



Tip: If you are not using a PowerPoint in your information session, you can simply print it out for yourself, so you can use some of the quotes and statistics in your presentation.

6.6 Interactive Option 1 – Using the ‘Your Life Story’ cards

If you have chosen to have an information session with your clients and their families, you can make the session interactive by passing out 4 or 5 pre-selected cards to attendees. Make sure that the attendees are comfortable with this task.

Then, one at a time, ask them to read the question on their card out aloud to the group, and then share their answer. Encourage attendees to join the conversation and discuss their stories with the rest of the group, before moving onto the next attendee with a card.

You will find that the others very quickly become involved in telling their own stories and talking about the things that matter most to them.

This is an innovative way to ‘showcase’ the Autobiographical Storytelling program.

Start with simple questions like -

- Do you have a nickname, and how did it come about?
- What was your first job?
- During your childhood, what did you want to be when you grew up...and why?
- Tell me about your most loved pets.
- Tell me three words that best describe you.

Keep a few more pre-selected cards in your hand, ready to give out, if your need to extend the time being taken for the session. You’ll also have to be mindful of the fact that the conversations might ‘go off’ on various tangents, and it is important to give everyone a chance to join the conversation. Sometimes you may need to ‘gently’ intervene if a particular attendee is dominating the conversation, to bring the focus back onto the next question.



Tip: To encourage participation from the group, we have found it effective if we join the conversation by answering some of the questions ourselves. For example, if you have a story about your own nickname, or when you got into trouble as a teenager. People will enjoy listening to your own stories, and it gives them time to think more about what they would like to say, regarding the question on their card.

6.7 Interactive Option 2 – Using the ‘Your Life Wishes’ cards

It is a natural progression after reflecting on their life’s journey to talk about their future plans. ‘Your Life Wishes’ card deck helps to ‘break the ice’ on talking about the sometimes more difficult topics, such as healthcare issues, preparation of a Will and Power of Attorney, and preferred Funeral Arrangements and Memorialisation.

Suitable questions to hand out may include -

- Do you have a Health Directive / Advance Care Plan, and where is it located?
- Would you want to be informed of your life expectancy, if you are terminally ill?
- Under what circumstances (if any), would you not want to continue on life support?
- Do you wish to donate your organs/body, and if so, where is your consenting documentation located?
- If cremated, what would you wish to be done with your ashes? eg stored in an urn, wall niche, scattered or buried?

6.8 Suggested Research

Suggested websites for further research can be found below.



Tip: For Supervisors, please note that if you are giving Staff/Volunteers a hard copy only of this Guide, you may wish to print material from these website links to assist them in their research.

REFERENCES FOR AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STORYTELLING:

- Your Life Talks - yourlifetalks.com
- 9 Great Reasons To Write Your Life Story - mindbodygreen.com/0-13902/9-great-reasons-to-write-your-life-story.html indbodygreen.com
- Telling Your Life Story is Good For Your Health - yourlifestorywritten.com/health-benefits.html ourlifestorywritten.com
- Benefits of Writing Your Autobiography - familymoneyvalues.com/2012/11/10-benefits-of-writing-your-autobiography/ amily-moneyvalues.com
- Why Tell Your Life Story? - your-life-your-story.com
- Benefits To Owning and Sharing Your Life Story - [denise-pelletier.com/benefits-to-owning-and-sharing-your-personal-story/benefits to Owning and Telling Your Life Story](http://denise-pelletier.com/benefits-to-owning-and-sharing-your-personal-story/benefits-to-owning-and-telling-your-life-story)

REFERENCES FOR ADVANCE CARE PLANNING:

- Your Life Assist - yourlifeassist.com.au
- The Groundswell Project - thegroundswellproject.com
- Advance Care Planning Australia - advancecareplanningaustralia.org.au
- Dying Matters - dyingmatters.org
- The Conversation Project - theconversationproject.org
- Start2Talk - dementia.org.au

7. Conducting Autobiographical Storytelling Sessions

7.1 Starting the Conversations

These conversations are an opportunity to reflect on the past and to celebrate a life well lived. This is fundamentally about creating a history of the Participant's life, which has a focus on their thoughts and feelings around their life experiences – not just the facts and figures regarding a chronological history of their life.

Ultimately, it can give a deeper understanding of them and what was important to them. This is especially powerful for their children and grandchildren to gain a deeper insight of them as a person.

The questions on the cards are designed to encourage the Participant to talk about their life journey in more detail – sharing memories, anecdotes, funny stories, achievements and disappointments along the way.

A good place to start is where and when they were born, early school years and the neighbourhood where they grew up.

Some people may need a little more time to think, so be patient. You don't have to steer the conversation, so much as just let it happen. For example, the question may be about their favourite subjects at school, and they answer by relating a story about how they could collect apples from the orchard behind the school to take home to the family. You should encourage them to elaborate further on this, and ask, "What other fruit did you enjoy eating as a child"? You can come back to the original question at a later time, and pose it in a slightly different way. eg "What was the activity you enjoyed the most at school"?

It is important to remember that the Conversation Starter Cards are designed to initiate a conversation. When a Participant answers a question, the Biographer should encourage further discussion by asking follow-up questions and maybe discussing their own experiences about the topic.

Sometimes discussing family photos or treasured items can bring memories flooding back and start a conversation. The conversations should feel relaxed and natural, so if you mention a topic that the Participant is uncomfortable discussing, respect their wishes and move on.

During the conversations, they may wish to discuss something they have never shared before, or that you hadn't thought to ask them. Be a good listener with an open mind and heart, and avoid passing judgement.

Remember...nothing is set in stone. You and your Participants can change your minds as circumstances change.



TIP: Given that conversations can veer off onto many tangents when memories are aroused, it is very helpful to audio record these sessions to assist with later transcription into the journal.

7.2 Objective

Every one of us has a story to tell and deep down most of us want to know that we, in some way, have made a difference in this world.

These conversations should be both a celebration of the Participant's life journey and achievements, and a sharing of their disappointments and the hurdles they faced along the way.

This is a wonderful way to create a family keepsake which can be handed down from generation to generation, and can sometimes help family members reacquaint themselves with their loved one and get to know them in new and different ways.

7.3 Instructions

There are no formal instructions on how to use the Your Life Story Conversation Starter cards. However, here are some tips that may help you to get started on the process.

1. Choose which cards you would like to use for a session in advance, based on previous conversations and whether you want to continue on a specific path, or have a change in direction.
2. Simply place the card deck on a table and turn them up one at a time, in the chronological order that they appear – straight out of the box.
3. Shuffle the cards well first, then place them on the table – the cards are numbered, so that recording the corresponding responses in our downloadable 'My Life Journal' booklet is easy.
4. Spread the cards out with the images facing upwards across the table, and let the Participant randomly select which card to pick up next.

Our recommendation is for one session per week for continuity purposes, of approximately one hour's duration. The length of each session will depend on the level of engagement from the Participant, and their ability to focus on reminiscing for an extended period. The Biographer should be closely monitoring how well, or otherwise, each Participant is coping as each session progresses.

You want the conversations to be enjoyable for both of you, so if you sense the Participant is tiring, it's best to finish the session. You can return to the topic of discussion in your next session.



Tip: Aim to use 5 to 7 question cards per session, though once again, this is entirely dependent on the Participant and their ability and desire to remain engaged.

7.4 Documenting a 'My Life Journal' Booklet

Our recommendation is to make an audio recording of your conversations, as this frees you up from having to write down the Participant's responses, which can often be distracting and interfere with the flow of the conversations. An audio recording also has the advantage of capturing the conversations in their entirety, which will assist with transcribing them at a later time either into the online or printed journal.

There is also the option of using a video to capture each session. This will depend on your organisation's policy, and the consent of the Participant and their family.

Choose whichever method best suits your Participant and organization's circumstances, and that feels the most comfortable for everyone concerned.

When completed the journal can be printed and the pages inserted into a presentation folder. There are four blank pages within the journal for photographs or mementos to be added, and if desired more pages can be added.



Tip: Please remember that all notes, audio or video recordings remain the sole property of the Participant, and the Participant has full control over which parts of their conversations are included in the final keepsake journal.

8. Conducting Advance Care Planning Sessions

8.1 Starting the Conversations

These conversations should feel relaxed and natural, so if you mention a topic that the Participant is uncomfortable discussing, respect their wishes and move on. Some people may need a little more time to think, so be patient.

During the conversations, they may wish to discuss something they have never shared before, or that you hadn't thought to ask them. Be a good listener with an open mind and heart, and avoid passing judgement.

Given that there are 50 question cards in the 'Your Life Wishes' Conversation Starter card deck, these sessions have been divided into 7 sessions. Of course, the duration of each session will depend on the engagement level of the Participant. The Facilitator should be closely monitoring how well, or otherwise, each Participant is coping as the sessions progress.

8.2 Our Approach

The main purpose of these sessions is to use the 'Your Life Wishes' cards to engage in conversations about Advance Care Planning. Our approach to the topic of Advance Care Planning goes beyond documenting a person's healthcare preferences only. It extends to discussions such as the preparation of a Will, Powers of Attorney, Seniors' Accommodation Choices, Home & Respite Care preferences, Funeral Arrangements and Memorialisation etc.

Our aim is to start conversations to ensure quality of life in all areas of everyday living, as well as healthcare and end of life preferences.

Our 'Your Life Wishes' Conversation Starter Cards cover a much broader range of topics about:

- Wills & Estates / Powers of Attorney
- Health Directives / Statement of Choices / Advance Care Planning
- Preparing a list of key contacts eg Health Professionals, Solicitor and Accountant
- Providing details of a family tree/ancestry
- Preparing a 'bucket list' of things still to do
- Discuss future accommodation choices eg house downsizing, home and respite care, retirement and aged care facilities
- End of life treatment options and preferences
- Documentation to consent to organ/body donation
- Funeral arrangements including personalisation eg location, eulogy, music, refreshments etc
- Burial or cremation including memorialisation preferences eg headstone, storage or scattering of ashes etc
- Preparing a list of social media and email accounts to be closed, and a 'Who To Notify' after death list

8.3 Objective

The overall aim at the end of these sessions is to be able to present to the Participant and their family, the completed 'Memo of Wishes' booklet documenting the Participant's wishes for their future. The detail captured in this document can be used to prepare more official documents such as a Will, Power of Attorney or Advance Health Directive.

Completing this document should provide both the Participant and their family with 'peace of mind' that everything has been done to openly discuss and document their wishes, regarding their future accommodation and healthcare preferences, and their funeral and memorialisation arrangements.

A person doesn't have to be ill to start Advance Care Planning. Healthy people are encouraged to think about their healthcare preferences and discuss them with their family, friends, carer and/or healthcare professionals.



Tip: Forms and requirements for writing Advance Care Directives and appointing substitute decision-makers vary between States and Territories. Simply select your State or Territory to find Advance Care Planning requirements for your area from one of these websites:

www.advancecareplanning.org.au/resources/advance-care-planning-for-your-state-territory-agedcare.health.gov.au/sites/g/files/net1426/f/documents/05_2017/lgbti_-_advance_care_planning_by_state_and_territory.pdf



Tip: If a person has lost the mental capability of making their own decisions, and a default substitute decision-maker has NOT been appointed, then a substitute decision-maker assigned to the person by the law will be appointed. States have different legislation and considerations for appointing a substitute decision-maker, and may allow for more than one substitute decision-maker. They may be:

- Spouse or De Facto Spouse
- Unpaid Carer
- Nearest relative or friend who has a close personal relationship with the person

More local area information can be found of these websites:

end-of-life.qut.edu.au/stopping-treatment

www.eldac.com.au/Portals/12/Documents/Factsheet/Legal/Toolkit%20-%20Substitute%20decision-making_v3.pdf

8.4 Implementing an Advance Care Planning Program

Our 'Your Life Wishes' cards are Conversation Starter cards only. They introduce the Participant to the importance of talking about such subjects as the preparation of a Will, choosing a Power of Attorney, documenting their healthcare preferences, funeral arrangements etc, if they haven't already done so.

They are not a substitute for professional advice in any of the key areas. Our suggestion would be for a Supervisor to consult with the Participant (and possibly their next of kin if permission is granted), so that appropriate arrangements can be made for qualified personnel to assist with providing further advice and assistance as necessary.

Additionally, if your organisation wishes to introduce its own Advance Care Planning Program, then the following link is to Australian guidelines explaining how to support the implementation of the program within your organisation: advancecareplanning.org.au/docs/default-source/acpa-resource-library/acpa-publications/advance-care-planning-in-aged-care-implementation-guide.pdf

8.5 Instructions

Unlike the Autobiographical Storytelling sessions, where we provided four different ways to use the cards during sessions, we suggest that the Advance Care Planning sessions follow the order of the cards as they are numbered within the card deck.

These questions start with some fairly basic questions at the beginning of the deck, then progressively become more detailed and possibly more confronting, as you progress through the deck.

Undertaking these sessions requires the Facilitator to be fully informed about the topics to be discussed, which may require research beforehand. As a result, we have been more prescriptive as to how best to proceed with these sessions.

Our recommendation is for one session per week for continuity purposes, of approximately one hour's duration. The length of each session will depend on the level of engagement from the Participant, and their ability to focus on discussing the topics and answering the questions for an extended period.

We have set out an outline of suggested content for 7 separate sessions. However, as each Participant will have different requirements, these are to be used as a loose guideline only.



Suggested Research - There are various articles available on our Your Life Assist website, which can assist the Facilitator, Participant and their family with their understanding of the topics involved. These have been included under the above heading within each of the 'Sessions' outlined below.



Tip: For Supervisors, please note that if you are giving Staff/Volunteers a hard copy only of this Guide, you may wish to print material from the website links to assist them in their research.



Tip: During any particular session, if the Participant has indicated their desire to formally enter into discussions regarding the preparation of a Will, Power of Attorney, Health Care Directive etc, then this should be communicated to the Supervisor, who in turn can notify the family concerned of their wishes.

8.6 Session 1

The initial conversation should be aimed at introducing the importance of discussing and documenting the Participant's wishes for their future. You can mention that in doing so, it gives both their family and themselves, comfort in knowing that this sometimes challenging task, has been undertaken via these sessions.

You can also talk about the benefit of having these conversations whilst the Participant is healthy and can make clear minded decisions, in advance of a situation whereby they are required to be made as a matter of urgency.

Start by introducing questions about legal documentation they should consider completing if they haven't already done so, eg preparation of a Will, Power of Attorney, Health Directive etc.

If the Participant hasn't prepared some of these documents, ask if they would like either a family member or their own Solicitor to assist them, outside of these sessions. If all documents have already been prepared by the Participant, then it's mainly an exercise of documenting where/with whom they are currently located.



Tip: If the Participant or their family request information on completing legal documents, you can direct them to your State or Territory's government website, for further information and downloadable forms. The information and forms are different in every State and Territory.



Tip: A Will is a document that states how you would like your assets to be distributed when you die, and the person or organisation you would like to be responsible for carrying out your wishes.

You can find out more from the Public Trustee in your State or Territory here:

australia.gov.au/information-and-services/family-and-community/wills-and-powers-of-attorney/wills



Tip: There are two main options for writing your legally binding Will –

- a) Engage a professional Will writer eg Solicitor or Public Trustee
- b) Use a Do-It-Yourself Kit

If your circumstances are simple and straight forward, then a Do-It-Yourself Kit is an easy and convenient way to write your Will. From the convenience of your home, you can buy a [State Trustees Legal Will Kit online](#) or obtain a hard copy of a Will Kit from Australia Post locations.

If your circumstances are complex, you should take advantage of the expertise of a Solicitor or The Public Trustee, who specialise in Wills and Estates.

The Public Trustee is an office established pursuant to national statute, to act as a Trustee, for estates where either no Executor is named by Will or the Testator elects to name the Public Trustee.



Tip: Basically there are two types of Powers of Attorney:

An Enduring Power of Attorney is a legal document where you appoint a person of your choice to manage your assets and financial affairs if you are unable to do so due to illness, an accident or your absence.

A Medical Power of Attorney allows you to appoint someone to make decisions about your medical treatment if you become mentally or physically incapable of deciding for yourself.

You can find out more from the relevant agency in your State or Territory here:

australia.gov.au/information-and-services/family-and-community/wills-and-powers-of-attorney/powers-of-attorney



- Q1.** Have you prepared a 'legal' Will and where is it located? If not, who do you want to be the Executor' of your Will?
- Q2.** Do you have any treasured possessions that are not listed in your Will, that you wish to leave to family, charities, clubs or trusts etc?
- Q3.** Do you have beneficiaries declared, other than in your Will e.g. Life Insurance Policies, Superannuation Funds etc?
- Q4.** Have you prepared Powers of Attorney for financial, medical and guardianship matters? If not, who would you want to fulfil these important roles?
- Q5.** Do you have a documented Estate Plan and where is it located?
- Q6.** Do you have a Health Directive / Advance Care Plan, and where is it located?

Desired Outcome – The first session is to make the Participant feel at ease and comfortable about what's expected of them. Also to introduce the process of handling the cards and taking the time to discuss and think about their responses.

Ideally, by the end of the session, the Facilitator has managed the conversations to flow in a natural way, and they will be able to gauge the Participant's degree of comfort or discomfort in tackling these types of questions and adjust accordingly.

A secondary outcome would be to introduce the Participant and their family to our website - YourLifeAssist.com.au especially the link to [Useful Organisations](#).



Suggested Research: There are various articles and free resources available on our Your Life Assist website, which will assist with understanding of the topics involved such as the following:

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/what-does-putting-your-affairs-in-order-mean/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/preparing-a-will/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/powers-of-attorney/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/advance-health-directive/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/estate-planning/

8.7 Session 2

This should be a shorter session whereby you could leave the Participants with homework to complete, in between sessions, such as a list of key contact details for their health and financial professionals.



- Q7.** Have you listed key contact details for your Accountant, Solicitor, Financial Planner and Doctors etc, and where is it located?
- Q8.** Have you documented your life experiences including details of your family heritage, and where is it located?
- Q9.** Do you have a 'bucket list' of wishes that you are yet to fulfil?

Desired Outcome – To assist the Participant to complete non-legal documents. The key contacts list should contain a list of personal and professional contacts which they may, or may not, be prepared to share with you, so be mindful of their personal choice in this matter.

Some basic details of their family tree should be collected and/or possibly introduce them to the many family heritage websites that they might wish to research further themselves.

The most challenging and rewarding conversation might centre around encouraging them to consider their own private 'bucket list' of wishes that they would like to fulfil.



Suggested Research: There are various articles and free resources available on our Your Life Assist website, which will assist with understanding of the topics involved such as the following:

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/financial-planning/

yourlifeassist.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Your-Life-Assist-who-to-notify-1.pdf

8.8 Session 3

This session applies to Participants who are still living at home. It covers the possibility of losing their independence, and the resulting need for a change in lifestyle.



- Q10.** Would you consider 'downsizing' from the family home and moving into a smaller home, apartment or retirement village?
- Q11.** Under what circumstances (if any), would you be willing to relinquish your independence?
- Q12.** Would you be prepared to receive Home Care or Respite Support, to continue living independently at home?
- Q13.** Would you prefer that the Home Care or Respite Support be given by family, friends or an external provider?
- Q14.** Under what circumstances (if any), would you be prepared to enter a nursing home or aged care facility?

Desired Outcome – Making the Participants fully aware of the personal care and accommodation choices that are available to them, so that they and their family can make informed decisions with confidence. Also to provide them with our checklist of questions, that they should be asking of potential providers before entering into a contract with them. These checklists are freely downloadable on our website YourLifeAssist.com.au. See Suggested Research list below.



Suggested Research: There are various articles and free resources available on our Your Life Assist website, which will assist with understanding of the topics involved such as the following:

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/seniors-accommodation-choices/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/home-support-and-respite/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/home-care-packages/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/residential-aged-care-facilities/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/retirement-villages/

Free Downloadable Checklists:

yourlifeassist.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Your-Life-Assist-retirement-village-1.pdf

yourlifeassist.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Your-Life-Assist-aged-care-facility-1.pdf

yourlifeassist.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Your-Life-Assist-your-moving-checklist.pdf

8.9 Session 4

These questions are designed to initiate discussions about the final stages of life and the possibility of euthanasia.



- Q15.** Which family members, friend/s, or health professionals would you prefer to have end of life care conversations with?
- Q16.** If it comes to a decision, what's more important to you – 'Quality of Life' or 'Length of Life'?
- Q17.** If you are diagnosed with a terminal condition, how much information would you want your family to know?
- Q18.** Would you want to be informed of your life expectancy, if you are terminally ill?
- Q19.** If euthanasia was legally available, would you consider it as an option?
- Q20.** Do you have a preference as to the place of your end of life care and death eg at home, hospital or palliative care facility?
- Q21.** Are there any medical treatments that are inconsistent with your personal preferences?
- Q22.** Under what circumstances (if any), would you consider ceasing medical intervention and entering into palliative care?
- Q23.** Under what circumstances (if any), would you not want to continue on life support?
- Q24.** What are your preferences for any religious, spiritual or emotional support during the end of life stages?
- Q25.** Which family members and friends would you want to visit your bedside, so you can say your final goodbyes?

Desired Outcome – To discuss, determine and document the Participant's end of life wishes, so as to give both them and their family, comfort in knowing that their preferences have been discussed, and will be taken seriously when the time comes.

Also, to ensure that both parties are aware of the many benefits of planning as early as possible, while the Participant is still mentally competent and cognizant of the available options and their resulting decisions.



Suggested Research: There are various articles and free resources available on our Your Life Assist website, which will assist with understanding of the topics involved such as the following:

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/palliativeend-of-life-care/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/end-of-life-care/advance-care-planning/
yourlifeassist.com.au/information-assistance/end-of-life-care/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/plan-early-for-end-of-life-care/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/end-of-life-care/identifying-the-need-for-end-of-life-care/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/end-of-life-care/families-dealing-with-a-terminal-diagnosis/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/end-of-life-care/care-giving-in-the-final-stages-of-life/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/end-of-life-care/end-of-life-care-for-children-teenagers/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/end-of-life-care/support-for-families-carers/

8.10 Session 5

These questions are designed to initiate discussions about the decisions that will be acted on after the Participant has died. These can be difficult topics to discuss for the Participant, and care should be taken by the Facilitator to monitor their body language and tone of voice.

If the questions appear to be causing distress to the Participant, you should stop immediately and revert to discussing how well they have engaged in previous sessions. The Facilitator may want to discuss with their Supervisor and/or the family if these questions should be attempted in another session. This also applies to the following Sessions 6 and 7.



- Q26.** Do you wish to donate your organs/body, and if so, where is your consenting documentation located?
- Q27.** Have you pre-paid for your funeral arrangements or do you have funeral insurance/bonds?...If so, with whom?
- Q28.** Would you prefer?
- A Traditional Funeral
 - A Memorial Service Only
 - A Home Funeral?
- Q29.** Do you want a Death and/or Funeral Notice placed in a newspaper or website?
- Q30.** Would you prefer a burial or cremation, and at what location?
- Q31.** Have you pre-paid for a burial plot, wall niche or remembrance garden and where?
- Q32.** What 'style' of service would you prefer - religious or non-religious?
- Q33.** Where do you wish for your service to be held?

Desired Outcome – To establish the Participant's wishes surrounding their own funeral preferences eg burial or cremation options, payment/cost options of the funeral etc.



Suggested Research: There are various articles and free resources available on our Your Life Assist website, which will assist with understanding of the topics involved such as the following:

yourlifeassist.com.au/information-assistance/arranging-a-funeral/

yourlifeassist.com.au/information-assistance/personalising-a-funeral/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/planning-a-funeral/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/how-much-will-a-funeral-cost/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/burial-or-cremation/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/put-your-affairs-in-order/consider-being-an-organ/

8.11 Session 6

There are many ways of personalising a funeral or memorial service. Answering these questions will assist the Participant's family with arranging their funeral or memorial service, including the writing of a eulogy if required.



- Q34.** After your death, do you want family and friends to be able to spend time with you to say their final farewells?
- Q35.** Who should conduct your service...clergy, celebrant, family member or friend?
- Q36.** Do you have preferences for your service eg eulogy, music, a prepared letter or poem being read?
- Q37.** Do you have a preference for the clothes you wish to be dressed in for your service?
- Q38.** What type of coffin/casket would you prefer eg traditional, eco-friendly or personalised with images/text?
- Q39.** Would you like your service to be personalised in any particular way eg guard of honour, release of doves or the playing of bagpipes?
- Q40.** Would you prefer that people send flowers or donate to your favourite charity to express their condolences?
- Q41.** Would you want there to be a wake/refreshments after your service?

Desired Outcome – To document in greater detail the Participant's wishes for their own funeral or memorial service.



Suggested Research: There are various articles and free resources available on our Your Life Assist website, which will assist with understanding of the topics involved such as the following:

yourlifeassist.com.au/information-assistance/arranging-a-funeral/
yourlifeassist.com.au/information-assistance/personalising-a-funeral/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/funeral-celebrants/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/funeral-flower-choices/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/wake-venues-catering/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/death-and-funeral-notice/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/writing-a-eulogy/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/funeral-proceedings-on-the-day/
yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/preparation-of-the-deceased/

8.12 Session 7

The Participant may have strong preferences regarding the topic of their memorialisation. It is important that the family are aware of their wishes in this regard. It is also important they have documented how to close down social media accounts using their log in settings, how to proceed to settle their estate and who to notify after their death.



- Q42.** Do you want any particular type of memorialisation eg plaque, headstone etc?
- Q43.** If cremated, what would you wish to be done with your ashes eg stored in an urn, wall niche, scattered or buried?
- Q44.** If you die overseas, do you want your family to arrange for your body to be returned home, or your cremated ashes to be returned?
- Q45.** Do you have any objections to your ashes being used in creating memorial jewellery or keepsakes?
- Q46.** Do you have any messages for your loved ones, to help them deal with their grief after you have passed away?
- Q47.** Who should close down your social media / email accounts? Have you documented the details and where are they located?
- Q48.** Do you have a 'Who To Notify' list of people and organisations to be contacted after your death, and where is it located?
- Q49.** Do you have any preferences regarding family and friends contributing to memorial websites in your honour?

Desired Outcome - To more fully explore the options of burial or cremation and what the Participant's preferences are for a headstone or plaque, or the storing or scattering of their ashes.

Provide them with the 'Who to Notify' list which can be freely downloaded from the YourLifeAssist.com.au website (See Suggested Research below), and assist to document their social media accounts and contacts to settle their estate.

Basically, for the Participant to tie up any loose ends in their private affairs to lessen the burden on their family and possibly avoid disagreements.



Suggested Research: There are various articles and free resources available on our Your Life Assist website, which will assist with understanding of the topics involved such as the following:

yourlifeassist.com.au/information-assistance/personalising-a-funeral/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/personalising-a-funeral/top-5-ideas-for-personalising-a-funeral/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/personalising-a-funeral/personal-touches/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/personalising-a-funeral/celebrations-of-life/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/arranging-a-funeral/coffins-and-caskets/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/the-cremation-process/

yourlifeassist.com.au/scattering-of-ashes-options/

yourlifeassist.com.au/burying-or-entombment-of-ashes/

yourlifeassist.com.au/storage-of-ashes/

yourlifeassist.com.au/information-assistance/post-funeral-advice/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/post-funeral-advice/who-to-notify-following-a-death/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/post-funeral-advice/memorial-websites/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/post-funeral-advice/government-assistance/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/post-funeral-advice/settling-deceased-estates/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/post-funeral-advice/valuations-of-deceased-estates/

yourlifeassist.com.au/category/post-funeral-advice/post-funeral-downsizing/

yourlifeassist.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Your-Life-Assist-who-to-notify-1.pdf

8.13 Documenting a 'Memo of Wishes' Booklet

Our recommendation is to make an audio recording of your conversations, as this frees you from having to write down the Participant's responses, which can often be distracting and interfere with the flow of the conversations. An audio recording also has the advantage of capturing the conversations in their entirety, to assist with transcribing them at a later time either into the online or printed booklet.

There is also the option of using a video to capture each session. This will depend on your organisation's policy, and the consent of the Participant and their family.

Choose whichever method best suits your Participant and organization's circumstances, and that feels the most comfortable for everyone concerned.

When completed the 'Memo of Wishes' booklet can be printed and given to the Participant and their family.



TIP: Please remember that all notes, audio or video recordings remain the sole property of the Participant, and the Participant has full control over which parts of their conversations are included in the booklet.

9. Summary

Elizabeth MacKinlay, author of *The Spiritual Dimensions of Ageing*, considers listening to be “a vital starting place” when working with older persons, particularly in regards to identity, finding meaning and purpose in life, and for the resolution of past trauma or conflict.

MacKinlay explains the importance of retelling life stories as a “vehicle for carrying meaning” that may assist an individual to reflect and view past events with renewed clarity, leading to the possibility of a re-evaluation of the past that may encourage a change in perception and attitude towards themselves and others.

We hope that all aged and home care providers will see the value of introducing an Autobiographical Storytelling program to their clients, together with encouraging Advance Care Planning conversations.

10. Appendices

If you are an organisation such as an aged care facility, hospice or home care provider and wish to introduce an Autobiographical Storytelling Program and/or an Advanced Care Planning Program for your clients, then these are examples of forms that you may want to tailor to your specific requirements:

- o Participant – Autobiographical Storytelling Consent Form
- o Participant – Advance Care Planning Consent Form
- o Biographer Application Form
- o Facilitator Application Form
- o Instructions for Downloading the Companion Booklets
- o Advance Care Planning Terminology

Advance Care Planning Terminology

The terminology, terms and forms used in Australia, varies between States and Territories:

**Note: the forms considered as being legal documents (if appropriately signed and witnessed) are those listed within the two statutory columns below.*

Other countries should check their local States and Regional bodies for guidance.

Dear [name], _____

Thank you for agreeing to be part of our Autobiographical Storytelling Program. You will be introduced to your Biographer, who will be coming to see you once a week for up to three months. Your Biographer will invite you to share stories of your life, and will gather these stories and any photos and mementos into a journal. At the conclusion of the program, they will make a presentation to you and your family of your personal 'My Life Journal' booklet. Thank you for expressing your interest in being a Participant in this program.

Details of Next of Kin notified of participation.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Contact Phone: _____

Please respond to each of the following questions with as much detail as possible.

1. What are your expectations for the program? _____

2. Has it been made clear to you that you will have full control of the information/details that will be gathered and recorded as part of this program?

2. Do you have any fears or concerns? How might we help you address these? _____

3. What aspects of the process are you particularly looking forward to? _____

4. Are you happy for the sessions to be audio recorded? YES / NO

5. Are you happy for the sessions to be video recorded? YES / NO

[Your Biographer's Supervisor] _____ [Phone] _____

[Participant's Signature] _____ [Date] / /

Dear [name], _____

Thank you for agreeing to be part of our Advance Care Planning Program. You will be introduced to your Facilitator, who will be coming to see you once a week for up to three months. Your Facilitator will invite you to discuss, confirm and document your preferences for your future healthcare, living accommodation choices, funeral arrangements and memorialisation etc. At the conclusion of the program, they will provide you and your family with your 'Memo of Wishes' booklet. Thank you for expressing your interest in being a Participant in this program.

Details of Next of Kin notified of participation.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Contact Phone: _____

Please respond to each of the following questions with as much detail as possible.

1. What are your expectations for the program? _____

2. Has it been made clear to you that you will have full control of the information/details that will be gathered and recorded as part of this program?

2. Do you have any fears or concerns? How might we help you address these? _____

3. What aspects of the process are you particularly looking forward to? _____

4. Are you happy for the sessions to be audio recorded? YES / NO

5. Are you happy for the sessions to be video recorded? YES / NO

[Your Facilitator's Supervisor] _____ [Phone] _____

[Participant's Signature] _____ [Date] / /

Thank you for expressing your interest in the Autobiographical Storytelling Program at [aged care / hospice / home care organisation]. In this program, you will be matched with a Participant to visit regularly over a period of approximately three months. In your time together, you will learn about our organisation, develop your listening skills, and using a series of Conversation Starter question cards, engage with the Participant to share and document meaningful stories from their life.

You will create a keepsake booklet 'My Life Journal' for the Participant and their family, which will be a journal of their life experiences and stories possibly including photographs and mementos etc. This is a role that requires emotional intelligence, sensitivity and respect.

Please respond to each of the following questions with as much detail as possible.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Contact Phone: _____

Address: _____

1. Why would you like to spend such quality time with a Participant? _____

2. What do you anticipate you will gain from your involvement in this program? _____

3. What contribution or benefit do you think this will make to the Participant you will spend time with?

4. What skills, knowledge and attitudes do you think are necessary in working as a Biographer with our Participants?

5. Are you willing to agree to and sign our Privacy Policy regarding the information that you will be collecting from your engagement with the Participant?

6. Do you understand that all content is to remain the property of the Participant? YES / NO

[Signature] _____ [Date] / /

Thank you for expressing your interest in the Advance Care Planning program at [aged care / hospice / home care organisation]. In this program, you will be matched with a Participant to visit regularly over a period of approximately three months. In your time together, you will learn about our organisation, develop your listening skills, and using a series of Conversation Starter question cards, engage with the Participant to discuss, confirm and document their preferences for their future healthcare, living accommodation choices, funeral arrangements and memorialisation etc.

At the conclusion of the program, you will provide your Participant and their family with their 'Memo of Wishes' booklet. This is a role that requires emotional intelligence, sensitivity and respect, and a sound knowledge of the topics involved. Thank you for expressing your interest in being a Facilitator in this program.

Please respond to each of the following questions with as much detail as possible.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Contact Phone: _____

Address: _____

1. Why would you like to spend such quality time with our Participant? _____

2. What do you anticipate you will gain from your involvement in this program? _____

3. What contribution or benefit do you think this is will make to the Participant you will spend time with?

4. What skills, knowledge and attitudes do you think are necessary in working as a Facilitator with our Participant?

5. Are you willing to agree to and sign our Privacy Policy regarding the information that you will be collecting from your engagement with the Participant?

6. Do you understand that all content is to remain the property of the Participant?

[Signature] _____ [Date] / /

ADVANCE CARE PLANNING TERMINOLOGY

The terminology, terms and forms used in Australia, varies between States and Territories:

State or territory	Statutory preferences	Statutory decision-maker	Non-statutory documents	Other documentation
Australian Capital Territory	Health Direction	Enduring Power of Attorney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance Care Directive Advance Care Plan Statement of Choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resuscitation Plan Goals of Care Form Letters from the person
New South Wales	N/A	Enduring Guardian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance Care Directive Advance Care Plan Statement of Values and Wishes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resuscitation Plan Goals of Care Form Letters from the person
Victoria	Advance Care Directive (this may include an instructional directive and/or a values directive) Refusal of Treatment Certificate (Competent) if made before 12 March 2018 Refusal of Treatment Certificate (Non-Competent) if made before 12 March 2018	Medical Treatment Decision Maker. Enduring Power of Attorney (Medical Treatment) or attorney (health care decisions) if made before 12 March 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance Care Plan Statement of Choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resuscitation Plan Goals of Care Form Letters from the person
Queensland	Advance Health Directive	Enduring Power of Attorney for personal matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statement of Choices – persons with decision-making capacity Statement of Choices – persons without decision-making capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resuscitation Plan Goals of Care Form Letters from the person
South Australia	Advance Care Directive Anticipatory Direction (if made before 30 June 2014)	Advance Care Directive – Substitute Decision Maker Appointment Medical Power of Attorney (if made before 30 June 2014) Enduring Power of Guardianship (if made before 1 July 2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance Care Plan Statement of Choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resuscitation Plan Letters from the person 7 Step Pathway
Western Australia	Advance Health Directive	Enduring Guardian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance Care Directive Advance Care Plan Statement of Choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resuscitation Plan Goals of Care Form Letters from the person
Tasmania	N/A	Enduring Guardian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance Care Directive Advance Care Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resuscitation Plan Goals of Care Form Letters from the person
Northern Territory	Advance Personal Plan Direction under Natural Death Act 1998 (NT) (if made before 17 March 2014)	Advance Personal Plan – Decision Maker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance Care Directive Advance Care Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resuscitation Plan Goals of Care Form Letters from the person

Instructions for Downloading the Companion Booklets

Each set of Conversation Starter Cards has an Instruction Card to refer to.

Go to YourLifeTalks.com and select the 'Downloads' tab at the top of our website.

Select the companion booklet that you want to download.

Select your chosen language.

Enter the matching Promocode which can be found on the Instruction Card in your card deck.

Click on 'Get Your Booklet'.

You'll receive a ZIP File with the choice of two files – a Printable version, and an Online (WEB) version which can be completed and saved onto your computer/laptop.

