



# Can I use oral history to support family learning?

## What is oral history?

Oral history is spoken history. It enables us to learn about the past through the first hand accounts of the people who actually experienced it. Oral accounts can take different forms, from stories, songs and edited recordings, to interviewing people directly to find out about their experiences of a particular time or event.

This sheet will:

- Explain what oral history is.
- Give some examples of oral history appropriate to family learning.
- Explain how you can use oral history as part of a range of family learning activities.

## Can we use it to support family learning?

The memories of older people are an ideal way of involving different generations of the family in learning together. Here are a few examples from our recordings:

### Houses

'I was born in 1905... there was ten cottages. They were small... No taps inside, no toilet, out the back yard you'd just got a kind of a sink and a bowl'.

'Toilets were outside, no inside toilets. You had to go up to the yard & sit in the toilet there & all share... '.

'It was a biggish house and it still wasn't big enough for a family of eight. We had to sleep top to toe, the four lads did'.

### Games

'Games them days were hopscotch, shuttlecock & battledore... snobs, whip & top, bowling along with a hoop'.

'You'd play in the streets. You see the streets weren't very wide. You'd get an old shoe polish tin & you'd get a bit of lead and put it in & hammer it - called tin-high hockey'.

'In those days in India the games weren't as now. We would improvise and make games, or people would come round and sell games that they themselves had made. For example, balls made from mud' (Asian Elders project, University of Leicester <http://www.le.ac.uk/so/ethnic/research/elderians/>)

### School

'This was before the days of school milk, and all the mothers used to come down to the school at playtime with a cup of cocoa and shove it through the school gate because the gates were locked'.

'The nit nurse they called her... Some kids or mothers would not believe they had nits. The nurse would comb a child's hair onto a paper, then put paper and moving contents into an envelope, seal it, then write "For the attention of Mrs..."'. The child would then take it home to Mum'.

## Some ideas for family learning



The memories and experiences of older people are a wonderful resource for learning about History – but by using these as a starting point, children can also be encouraged to develop knowledge and skills in other areas such as:

- Information Technology
- Literacy
- Communication skills such as speaking and listening
- Citizenship

Children – and other members of the family – may simply enjoy hearing the ‘stories’ of older people, but you can also encourage them to:

- think of more questions to ask, and help them to write these down
- make comparisons with their own experiences, or with other periods of time, or different social groups or cultures
- record an interview onto tape, if you have access to an audio cassette recorder or similar equipment. You could get different generations of the family to interview each other.
- make a family album or scrapbook which includes photographs, drawings, family memories, and perhaps a family ‘tree’
- explore other sources of information on subjects that interest them, like toys and games, schooldays, what their village or neighbourhood was like in the past, and what else was happening in the world at a particular time. You could do this by:



- ⇒ using the internet with them (or let them teach you how to use it)
- ⇒ going to the library with them and helping them to choose some relevant books
- ⇒ reading together
- ⇒ using old photographs as a starting point for telling or writing stories
- ⇒ visiting a museum together to look at old toys, household implements, clothes, vehicles...

These are just a few suggestions. You can probably think of many others...

## Can I find out more about oral history?

If you would like any more information or advice, contact Sarah Ferrier, our Education Officer at the East Midlands Oral History Archive, Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, University Road, Leicester, LE1 7RH, tel. 0116 252 5065; email [emoha@le.ac.uk](mailto:emoha@le.ac.uk), or visit our website at [www.le.ac.uk/emoha](http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha). Our free Information Sheets can also be downloaded from the website.

Pictures provided by <http://www.usda.gov/oc/photo/opchomea.htm>