

A stylized illustration of a woman with brown hair, wearing a light blue t-shirt and a dark blue skirt, standing with her back to the viewer. She is holding a piece of white chalk and writing on a large black chalkboard. The chalkboard is framed in a light brown color and contains the title of the handbook in white, handwritten-style text.

Telling a New Story of the World's Youth

A Handbook for Youth-Serving Organizations

Writing Effective Youth Stories
Empowering Youth as Storytellers

International Youth Foundation

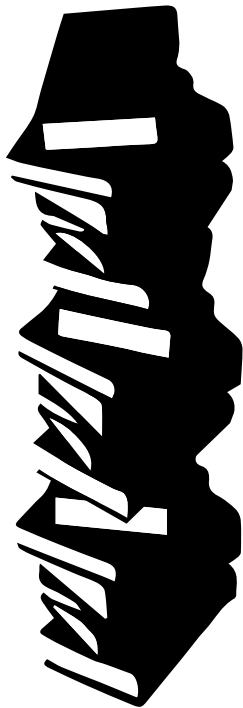


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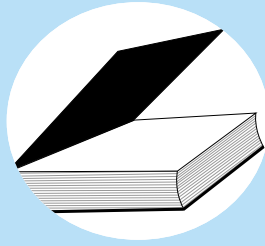
“Every new reality begins with a new story.”

—Jurriaan Kamp, *Magazine Editor/Writer*

“Forget about PowerPoints and statistics.
To involve people at the deepest level,
you need stories.”

—Robert Mckee, *Writer/Professor*

Written by Sheila Kinkade, Communications & Marketing Manager, International Youth Foundation. Sheila captures the stories of young people served by IYF and its partners—in print, online, and through video. A graduate of the Columbia School of Journalism, she is co-author of *Our Time is Now: Young People Changing the World*, and the author of four nonfiction children's books, numerous publications, articles, and blogs.



INTRODUCTION

Stories change the world. For more than two decades, the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and its partners have collectively communicated a new story of the world’s youth.

Rather than focus on young people as ‘problems to be solved,’ this meta story upholds the promise and potential of youth, while educating audiences about the all too real challenges that young people, particularly those growing up in marginalized circumstances, face in their journey to a productive adulthood. Central to this new narrative has been demonstrating the role of youth as valuable assets with much to contribute to their societies if given essential support and access to opportunities.

Today, as a result of the cumulative efforts of many dedicated organizations and individuals around the world, there are signs that this emerging story is gaining ground. Increasingly, the international donor community is recognizing the importance of investing in youth, with more youth-friendly policies in place at the local, national, and international level. That said, much more work remains to be done in supporting and giving voice to the largest generation of youth the world has ever known.

“Stories are the secret reservoirs of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations.”

—Ben Okri, *Poet/Novelist*

In recognition of the power of stories to transform our world, we offer you and other youth-serving organizations this storytelling handbook. Here you will find information and tips on how to write effective stories about your work and its impact on youth—as well as tools for engaging young people in telling their own stories.

As we continue to ‘make the case’ for the positive role of youth in society—and advocate for greater investment in proven programs to meet their needs—our collective storytelling ability is more important than ever before. We hope this handbook will inspire and inform readers to think creatively and strategically about the role of story in spotlighting young people’s needs, their contributions, and the role of many committed organizations in offering support and solutions.



WHY TELL STORIES

Effective storytelling supports the work of youth-serving organizations in myriad ways—from fundraising to communications, program delivery to evaluation. With the proper strategy in place, such stories can be repurposed through a range of communications channels to address diverse audiences and needs. A profile about a particular employer, for example, who embraced the hiring of youth trained through a given program intervention can have multiple ‘lives’—posted on websites; spotlighted on Facebook and Twitter; highlighted in donor reports, proposals, and marketing materials; and pushed out to select journalists to reinforce a program’s impact. While the repurposing of content requires time, foresight, and skill, the plethora of communications channels available in today’s world offers many opportunities to fully leverage content for maximum exposure.

Below are various ways in which effective storytelling can contribute to broader programmatic and institutional goals:

- **Communications**—Successful storytelling creates the foundation for communications outreach as a whole, providing testimonials and case studies that can be used in newsletters, social media outreach, marketing materials, and press packets to update important constituencies (e.g., donors, the media, NGOs, academic institutions) about the nature of your work and its impact.

- **Program Delivery**—Storytelling can strengthen program delivery, for example, through serving as a tool for recruiting youth, engaging employers, strengthening the capacity of implementing organizations, and teaching program beneficiaries valuable skills (e.g., effective communication and the use of technology, as is the case in capturing video).
- **Advocacy**—Consistent and persuasive storytelling can be used over the long term to inform and influence policies, particularly when used to educate and influence policymakers about critical issues such as education reform or employment training.
- **Donor Relations**—Effective storytelling not only gives a ‘human face’ to those you seek to reach, but can convey important lessons learned. Such stories can be used in reports to donors, and conversely by donors to communicate to broader audiences the impact of their support.
- **Monitoring/Evaluation**—When collected strategically as part of a larger evaluation framework, stories can help demonstrate qualitative impact and reflect lessons learned through the collection of anecdotal information.

In short, storytelling is an essential part of any youth-serving organization’s work, providing a potent means to share the stories—not only of those youth impacted by a particular program—but the individuals and organizations who have joined with you to achieve shared goals.



WRITING YOUTH STORIES

To write good stories, you need to read—and be on the lookout for—good stories. Reading helps nurture your understanding of quality writing and your ability to write memorable prose. You might begin by combing your local/national newspaper and respected magazines for articles that focus on people or issues related to your work with youth (e.g., stories about a young person, a teacher, a mentor, or a celebrity who is engaged with youth). When you find a story you like, ask yourself why? What is it about the characters and the way they are described that resonate with you? Reading quality nonfiction and fiction helps train the mind in creative uses of language and how to use words sparingly to achieve impactful results. Take time also to read and study the success stories posted on the IYF and related websites. Pay attention to the articles you find most interesting and why.

- Was it the way a particular individual was described?
- Was it a conflict that was presented and later resolved?
- Was it something new that you learned?

Also essential to effective storytelling is cultivating expertise around your subject matter. For those in the youth development field, this means reading essays and books describing trends and analyzing relevant issues related to, for example, youth employment, education, youth volunteerism, or factors contributing to the resiliency of youth at risk. To reinforce

“Long before I wrote stories, I listened for stories.”

—*Eudora Welty, Author*

key points, it's helpful to maintain a list of data points (e.g., the percentage of a given country's population that are youth, are unemployed, graduated from secondary school) related to the topic(s) you will be exploring, along with relevant studies and resource materials.

What Makes a Great Story?

Great stories...

- Take readers on a journey; present a conflict that gets resolved (or not)
- Touch the emotions
- Present material in an unusual, provocative way
- Provide visual cues/details; paint a picture in the mind of the reader
- Teach your audience something they didn't know about the world or themselves

Most importantly, be on the lookout in your work for inspiring stories. Meet regularly with colleagues/program staff to get updates on

“Read a thousand books and your words will flow like a river.”

—*Lisa See, Author*

activities and individuals of interest—both young people and adults (e.g., parents, trainers, employers, NGO staff) who can speak to youth issues and the impact of your work. Maintain a running list of stories to pursue and think carefully about your communications goals and the audiences you seek to reach (e.g., the general public, youth program practitioners, donors).

While youth profiles offer a powerful means of demonstrating the impact of your work on young lives, it's important to vary your stories to maintain readers' interest and demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of your program and activities to diverse audience groups. For example, if your program has placed a number of trained youth in hospitality sector jobs, you may want to focus your story on a hotel manager and his/her reflections on 'why' hire youth. Similarly, a story about the importance of equipping youth with life skills might focus on a 'day in the life' of a life skills trainer. In Jordan, IYF's *Youth for the Future* program developed a 'Story Roadmap' to emphasize different aspects of the program over its evolution (see next page).

Storytelling Roadmap

Below are story ideas identified by *Youth for the Future*, a five-year program of IYF carried out in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Government of Jordan. The goal of this 'roadmap' was to diversify the program's storytelling over time to reflect its comprehensive approach.

Phase 1—Focus on life skills, technical, on-the-job, and volunteerism training:

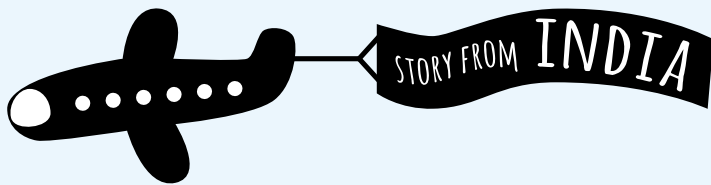
- Youth profiles
- “Day in the life” of a volunteerism activity
- Career planning
- Building a cadre of life skills trainers

Phase 2—Focus on capacity-building of youth-serving organizations, strengthening services, and career guidance/job placement:

- Capacity building of community-based organizations (CBOs), youth-worker certification, transformation of CBOs into local youth hubs
- Delivery of psycho-social support services
- Creation of youth-friendly spaces/services
- Career guidance, mentoring, job placement assistance
- Parent training/engagement
- Employer perspectives
- Entrepreneurship training

Phase 3—Focus on identifying/influencing key policy issues and supporting youth employment:

- Employee success stories
- Employer perspectives
- Volunteer project profiles
- Partnerships with public sector/advocacy activities
- Expert commentaries/interviews re: key policy issues



A Young Entrepreneur Designs Her Own Future

Maya, age 23, had always dreamed of having a job and supporting her family after she completed her education. But she was forced to quit her studies early due to her parents' financial hardships. Even though she had no experience in the job market, she got a job working at a cloth export company near her home in New Delhi, and managed to gain basic tailoring skills. Maya's salary, however, did not cover her daily travel and food expenses. When the business slowed down, she was forced to leave her job.

Undaunted, Maya and another 23-year-old, Saheb, who was working in the same export enterprise, decided to start a tailoring enterprise of their own. By pooling their resources—Saheb's meager savings and Maya's work experience—they were able to rent a small space and open their new business.

As they struggled to keep their tailoring enterprise open—made more difficult due to their limited knowledge of the market and increased operational costs—Maya heard about a new program called *Young Entrepreneurs*. An initiative of IYF, the Community Collective Society

for Integrated Development (CCFID), and MasterCard Worldwide, the program is designed to support young people in India who want to start their own businesses.

Maya, seeing an exciting opportunity to learn more about the business world, immediately enrolled. In the beginning, Maya gained basic "life skills" that, among other things, helped her gain new confidence in herself and set her goals to become a successful entrepreneur. She then underwent CCFID's 12-session business and entrepreneurial skills training that included classes in market research, client targeting, product customization, new design, and entrepreneurship management.

As part of her training, Maya learned how to prepare a business plan, which she says really opened her eyes to the potential of scaling up her small company. One of the first things she did after she graduated and returned to her tailoring business was to focus on customer selection. As a result, the business, whose sales had been declining for the last few months, started to pick up new customers. She became more innovative in her design after the training—introducing block printing and

embroidery in her materials. In the meanwhile, CCFID linked her to a mentor from Fabindia, one of the nation's largest garment companies, which helped her tap into more retail orders.

Today, Maya and Saheb run a successful tailoring and designing business that supplies orders to a range of showrooms and customers. Already

employing five young people, and seeing the potential for her business to continue to grow, Maya applied for financial support from CCFID's revolving loan fund, supported by MasterCard Worldwide to help young entrepreneurs access financing that is otherwise difficult to obtain. Perhaps most importantly, Maya realized a life-long dream: to support her family.

Reporting Your Story: The Interview

Once you have identified the topic you plan to explore and the interviewee(s) you plan to approach [see Appendix A for sample questions for use in interviewing youth], outline your questions, thinking carefully about your ultimate goal (e.g., recruiting more youth to join a program, demonstrating your program's impact to key stakeholders), the audiences(s) you seek to reach, and how this story will help achieve your communications objectives. Consider also whether you would benefit from tape recording your interviews. While transcribing notes can be cumbersome, this allows you to focus your energy on the conversation.

Always try to arrive at an interview a few minutes early. You can use the extra time to write down notes or take photographs that you can use later to capture a sense of 'place' in your writing. Be on the lookout for any environmental cues such as wall decorations or photographs that may reinforce your subject's character or key themes in your story.



After your interview, while the information is still fresh, review your notes with a highlighter pen, identifying key points and the most compelling statements made by your subject to use as potential quotes in your story. Think about what made the interview most memorable. Record your observations to help frame your story when you sit down to write. If possible, try not to let too much time pass between your reporting and writing your story as you may forget important details.

Plan to spend at least an hour with your interview subject(s). While you may not need it, you want to avoid being rushed.

Be careful to inform your subject about why you are there and how your story will be

used. Before formally beginning your interview, you will want him/her to fill out a release form (see Appendix B for sample release). All IYF stories require that subjects sign an authorization form. Such forms make it clear how the story and any photos or videos may be used. All this is done to ensure that the youth (and his/her parents if under the age of 18) is aware and comfortable with our ultimate aim of sharing stories publicly through diverse channels.

“Writing is hard work. Generating stories that catch people’s attention and holding it are very difficult.”

—David Ogden Stiers, *Writer/Actor*



A Rising Journalist Inspires Others to Join Her

A 21-year-old senior at the Russian–Slavic University in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Anna was already passionate about journalism through her work as a political reporter for an online newspaper. Her participation in a week-long youth leadership training event inspired her to take an exciting next step in her career. Perhaps more importantly, she found her voice as an active citizen in her community.

In 2011, Anna attended the Summer School of Democracy, held in Bishkek, where she was joined by more than 40 other young people

from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. They spent the week participating in a series of lectures and workshops devoted to democracy, civic education, leadership, critical thinking, and analytical writing. The School was sponsored by *Jasa.kg* (Youth:Create in English), a four-year initiative of the International Youth Foundation, supported through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), that seeks to engage a new generation of young people in building a stable, prosperous, and democratic society in Central Asia.

As part of the training, participants were encouraged to identify persistent problems facing youth in their communities, and then to develop projects that would help address those issues. Eight of the 20 proposals developed throughout the course of the program received small grants to support the projects.

Anna's proposal—to establish a training program for young journalists—was one of them. “I believe that the Summer School of Democracy armed me with three important things—the ability to listen, to think, and to act,” said Anna. “I started thinking of how to apply the knowledge I gained, and also tried to take steps toward the realization of my plans. Particularly helpful were the sessions on how to identify social problems and suggest realistic action plans to resolve them. That helped me a lot when I was developing my own project.”

It took Anna six months to design and implement her plan to set up her “School of Analytical Journalism”—designed to improve the analytical and writing skills of young journalists, ages 18 to 25, by working under the mentorship of experienced journalists. Nineteen young people attended the weekly classes, working on practical assignments that ultimately produced articles on topics ranging from the economy and religion to politics. The young journalists made real progress. By the end of the training, eight of them had

published their articles on various online media outlets. When asked what motivated her to organize the project, Anna explains: “I noticed that most newspaper articles are written in very complicated language and lack good analysis of the issues. It is necessary to understand that an analytical article is not exactly a scientific product, but a way of communicating big problems in a clear and simple way to your audience. I believe that my project will be of some help in filling this gap.”

Her journalism class also served a more practical purpose. From her experience as a university student, Anna was well aware that many graduates face real challenges finding jobs within their majors. One significant obstacle is that employers are not willing to hire young specialists who have little or no work experience. Giving university students the chance to enjoy professional experiences in their chosen field before graduation was another powerful motivation for Anna to launch her journalism training initiative.

Anna believes it is important for young people to focus their energy and potential on bringing about positive change in their communities. Through her experience with *Jasa.kg*, she discovered an exciting new way to use her skills to support democracy and civic engagement in her country—by helping to develop and inspire the next generation of journalists.

When you begin to ask your questions, listen carefully while taking notes. You will want to ask follow up questions to clarify anything that was unclear, or to pursue new lines of inquiry.

Be as comprehensive in your note taking as possible, especially capturing good quotes word-for-word so that you can use them later in your writing.

“A great lasting story is about everyone or it will not last.”

—John Steinbeck, *Novelist*

Prior to concluding the interview, review your questions and ask yourself: what’s the most interesting theme that emerged? Sometimes you discover new points of interest in the process of an interview that are different from what you had intended as your focus. Ask yourself, do I have everything I need to write a compelling story, and if not, continue to gather information. Conclude the interview by thanking your subject and collecting contact information (phone/address/email) in the event you need to follow up and so you can share your finished product.

Writing Your Story: Putting the Reader First

Good writing combines both head and heart. Your writing should be clear, logical, and informative, while drawing your reader into the story through developing your character(s) and a compelling narrative that explores human emotion and fosters empathy.

Begin by creating a basic outline of your story. Identify key points you want to make and the best way of presenting them so your story meets the objectives you have set (e.g., describing a program’s impact on a beneficiary(ies), demonstrating its value add to an employer, presenting the value of a particular program intervention such as a training). Be mindful of the expected length of your piece and plan accordingly. A typical IYF success story runs 350-600 words. Your article will consist of three basic parts: The lead, or opening; the body; and the conclusion.

TIP

- Say “no” to jargon/cliches!
- Beware of development speak (e.g., capacity building, sustainability, multi-sector partnerships)
- Seek out the authentic, the original
- Avoid the predictable (e.g., my has life changed... I’m so grateful to XX organization)

The Lead—The most important part of your story is the opening paragraph or two, known as “the lead,” for if your reader is not hooked here, he or she will be unlikely to read further. Leads can take a variety of forms. Review your notes and determine how best to engage your reader—whether it be through describing your main character, ‘painting a picture’ of the setting where the story takes place, presenting a conflict, or introducing a surprising fact or statistic. Your lead should grab your audience’s attention and entice them to keep reading.

Creating a “Hot Start:” Sample Leads

- **Descriptive:** “Standing behind the counter of his motorcycle repair shop, Wuttichai beams with pride. Carefully displayed on shelves behind him is an assortment of motorcycle accessories and spare parts – plastic flags, chrome wheel rims, and neon stickers boasting popular brand names.”
- **Source of inspiration:** “At 16, Khalida began her social change journey, writing poetry and articles against the practice of honor killing in her community.”
- **Startling statistic:** “Nearly one in five school children in India use some form of tobacco.”
- **Cite poll/survey:** Eighty-three percent of Egyptian women say they don’t feel safe in the street, according to a recent survey.

The Body—The main body of your story should elaborate on key points you want to make as illustrated by the person or event you are describing. You will want to make sure you answer the five “W’s:” Who, What, Where, When, and Why. For example, if describing the impact of a program on an individual young person, you would elaborate on:

- **Who** he/she is, including name, age, family and educational background
- **What** the individual(s) in the story is/are doing (e.g., participating in a training or internship)
- **Where** your story takes place, for example, offer a description of a young person’s neighborhood or the community-based organization where he/she is engaged in a program
- **When** your story takes place, including the duration of a given intervention
- **Why** the story should be of interest (e.g., the need for the program/intervention)

You will also want to include a quote(s) from those being described to emphasize key points, develop your subjects more fully, and add greater authenticity to your story. Be discriminating in the quotes you use. Quotes should be highlighted only if they elaborate on an element of your story and shed light on a person's character/personality. Avoid predictable or clichéd statements like "Now I am ready to reach for my dreams." Look for the unusual quote e.g., "I couldn't keep waiting for success, so I decided to walk toward it."

The body of your article—anywhere from 3-6 paragraphs in a typical IYF success story—should give the reader a basic understanding of a given program/intervention and its impact. You may want to consider adding information on the program's projected reach and impact to date. To fully develop your theme, you may also want to include the comments and observations of secondary spokespeople—e.g., parents, trainers, teachers, recognized youth experts, or employers. Mostly, remember that readers will identify with characters that exhibit emotions, conflicts, and interpersonal situations that they can relate to. Think about what and who in your story your reader is mostly likely to empathize with, for storytelling at its heart is about fostering human connections.

Conclusion—The last paragraph or two of your story should leave the reader feeling satisfied, as though they have just enjoyed a nutritious and delicious meal. You might conclude your piece with a look at your subject's aspirations and the program's long-term goals and the number of young lives it has reached to date. Sometimes, just the right quote will emerge from your notes to help you wrap up your story in a meaningful and memorable way.

When finished with your first draft, the real work begins! You will want to re-read your story several times, if not more, to tighten sentences, clarify points, and remove extraneous material.



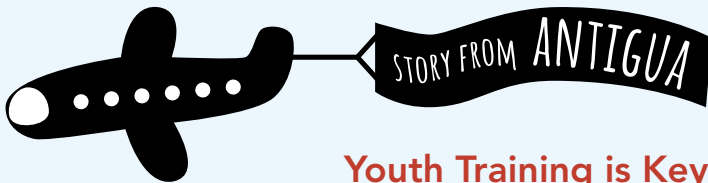
TIP

- Trace the problem; use statistics as needed to underscore key points
- Describe your program intervention and the process of transformation
- Introduce other 'characters' (parents, employers, trainers, NGO representatives) as necessary
- Point to remaining obstacles; stories are more believable and realistic when all is not perfect at the end

A common mistake among writers is the use of passive voice (e.g., “Juan Carlos was hoping to use his new skills to get a job” vs. “With his new skills, Juan Carlos hopes to get a job”).

Storytelling Checklist

- Have you verified the facts presented in your story to ensure they are accurate?
- Have you read and re-read your story, taking care to remove excess words, jargon, and passive voice?
- Does your story include material that is new and compelling?
- Do you have a high-quality photo(s) to accompany your article?
- Have you obtained a signed release form from all subjects featured in your story?
- Have you thought through a dissemination strategy to ensure your story reaches its intended audience?



Youth Training is Key for Catering Company

To succeed in today’s competitive, fast-changing marketplace, companies are demanding well-trained employees with a range of skills relevant to their needs. Deborah Barthley-Francis, Quality Systems/H.R. Officer at the Goddard Catering Group in Antigua, knows exactly what qualifications she is looking for: basic literacy skills, a positive attitude, and strong work ethic.

“We expect simple things,” she explains, “like telling us early enough if you are unable to show up for work. Many workers feel that sick days are a right; they are not a right.” Another challenge is lack of motivation. “Youth sometimes settle for anything and don’t push themselves forward and grasp opportunities for upward mobility.”

With a workforce of just under 50 employees, Goddard Catering (Antigua) Ltd, has been in the business of servicing global and regional airlines in the Caribbean region for over 35 years, with a client list that includes British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, Caribbean Star, and Delta Airlines. Looking to expand her staff, Mrs. Barthley-Francis recently hired three graduates of the *Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program* (CYEP), an initiative of the International Youth Foundation, funded through the U.S. Agency for International Development, that equips the region's vulnerable youth with the technical, vocational, and life skills needed to secure and sustain decent jobs.

The CYEP-trained youth—Kashief, Bakari, and Ackeem—are employed by Goddard Catering Ltd as operations assistants. Weldon Jarvis, Operations Supervisor, who oversees the three young men, describes them as respectful and well-mannered. “They have grasped the concepts well, including health and safety guidelines,” he says. Mr. Jarvis also notes improvements in performance. “They have a very good working relationship with their peers, which further enhances the operation process,” he adds.

According to Mr. Jarvis, the new employees demonstrate the benefits of the CYEP training. “We have several levels of operation and they are always willing to move to the next level.” He adds that the CYEP graduates ensure flights are serviced in a timely manner to specifications. “They are assisting the company in achieving customer satisfaction; complaints have been little to none.”

When asked if the company would hire CYEP graduates in the future, Mrs. Barthley-Francis responds: “Yes, surely, if a position is available. Hiring CYEP graduates has been a good thing. As a manager, if you get an opportunity to develop someone, you should take it.” She adds that companies have a responsibility to support youth in launching their careers. “If you hire them, you need to guide them along the path you would like them to take.”

Goddard Catering Ltd is one of over a hundred companies that have hired CYEP graduates in the Caribbean region. CYEP trained employees work in tourism, banking, government, construction, and telecommunications, among other sectors.



YOUTH AS STORYTELLERS

One of the most powerful ways of communicating the impact of a program or intervention on young people’s lives is equipping youth beneficiaries to tell their own stories—through articles, blogs, vlogs (video diaries) or podcasts, photo essays, or even poetry.

Stories created by youth have the benefit of being authentic and, if done well, heartfelt, original, and inspiring. Youth storytelling can also be incorporated into a program’s design, thereby contributing to the achievement of desired outcomes, for example, self-esteem and the capacity for self-reflection and effective communication—all key life skills. Youth stories can also contribute to overall evaluation efforts through the capturing of qualitative results.

These benefits aside, youth-led storytelling can be challenging to execute well as it often requires dedicated staff time (e.g., selecting and, if needed, training youth, ensuring deadlines are met, editing copy) to achieve quality results. These challenges can be compounded in marginalized communities where program beneficiaries have limited educations.

Following are examples of how IYF and its partners have integrated youth storytelling into their work.

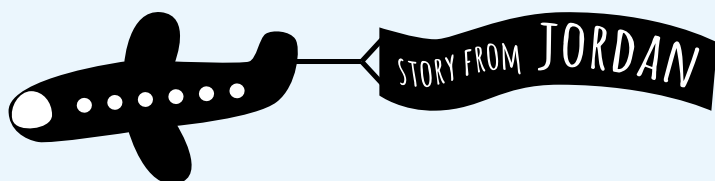
“The ability to see our lives as stories rather than unrelated, random events increases the possibility for significant and purposeful action.”

—Daniel Taylor, Author

Youth-Produced Success Stories

Youth are often the best equipped to write their own “success stories,” combining their personal experience with first-hand reflections on that experience. Such stories written in the first person (e.g., “I love everything about my job”) communicate a direct emotion/experience without the filter of an outside author writing in the third person (e.g., “She loved everything about her job”).

While the majority of success stories posted on the IYF website are written by program and communications staff in the third person, our aim is to have an increasing number in the future produced by youth themselves with guidance from program staff on-the-ground.



Hamza's Story

Hamza is a beneficiary of the Youth for the Future program, an IYF initiative carried out in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Government of Jordan.

My story starts when I failed my final year at school and felt like life had no meaning. My future had failure stamped all over it because of that one simple fact. I began to look for work thinking I would get lucky and find a suitable job in order to support my younger brothers and sisters. Throughout, an inner voice kept saying, “don’t lose hope, Hamza.”

Hope started to appear when I heard from a friend that there was an organization that works with youth who hadn’t finished high school. I rushed to see for myself and enrolled in the *Youth for the Future* (Y4F) program.

My journey with the program began with the workplace success training. I learned how to communicate with others effectively, especially listening to and respecting other people’s opinions. I learned how to write a resume and conduct a successful job interview. I took a computer course and enrolled in an English teaching center,

as I had always hoped to enhance my English language skills.

According to the program's staff, I excelled at these courses due to my passion and strong will. My trainer even chose me to carry out a community mapping study that involved administering as many as 100 surveys a day. Despite the difficult conditions and lack of transportation, I achieved the target, challenged myself, and tested my endurance—all to prove to myself that with persistence and will, I was capable of achieving my goals.

After finishing the Y4F training packages, I got help finding job opportunities that matched my new skill set. I spent my days and nights looking for jobs that suited me, placing my trust in the saying, "he who works will find all that he wants." I found positions in the restaurant trade and worked long hours to help my family and achieve my goal.

After a while, I enrolled in a restaurant competition for the employee who makes the fastest

cappuccino—and won! The prize was a contract to work in the café's branch in Dubai. A new journey was launched beginning with my first plane flight as I travelled to Dubai to explore and learn. During my stay, I saved money so I could return to my beloved Amman carrying gifts and candy for my brothers and friends.

Once the contract was over, I came home armed with experience, determination, and most of all, gratitude to God. I was then offered another work opportunity with a better salary and a position as assistant chef, responsible for a number of employees who are older than me. Most recently, I got accepted as a sales representative for Tamweelcom, a microcredit company. To give back some of what I gained through Y4F, I continue to be active as a volunteer with the Khreibet Al Souq Association every time I get the chance. I am ever more convinced that hope, determination, and persistence are the secrets to success.

Youth Blogs

With the prevalence of the Internet in daily life, blogging has emerged as a popular means for organizations and individuals to distribute content and spark lively discussion around critical issues. The primary difference between a traditional article in the journalistic sense and a blog is reflected in tone and voice. Articles tend to be more formal in tone. A blog,

on the other hand, uses more informal, conversational language, and expresses an individual's point of view. Another key distinction is voice—articles are written in the third person, while blogs are written in the first person.

“The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon.”

—Brandon Sanderson, *Author*

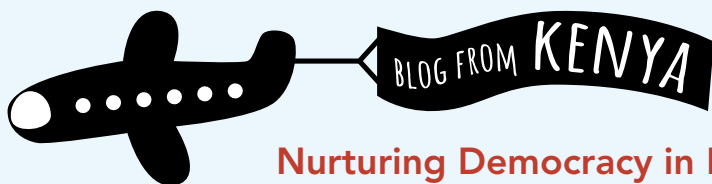
Many organizations have created their own institutional blog or contribute as guest bloggers for peer organizations or media outlets. IYF's institutional blog features commentary from its CEO and staff as well as the perspectives of young leaders. In addition, IYF's *YouthActionNet* program manages a blog targeted specifically to program beneficiaries—now numbering more than 900 young social entrepreneurs in 80-plus countries—as well as other interested youth. The blog informs fellows of one another's work, key trends in the field of youth social entrepreneurship, and opportunities of interest to young leaders. While many of the blogs posted are written specifically for the *YouthActionNet* platform, others are cross-posted from other online sources. Over time, fellows have shared valuable knowledge related to running their organizations (e.g., fundraising, governance, communications, evaluation) as well as insights into the social and political context in which they operate—from the role of the arts in nurturing democracy in Kenya to the active engagement of youth in policy reform in Brazil.

IYF leverages the blog content produced by *YouthActionNet* fellows through social media outreach, electronic news announcements targeted to relevant audiences, and its “What If” youth blog—“a platform for young social entrepreneurs to share their voices, ideas, and hopes for building a better world.” The



Critical to successful blogging is establishing guidelines for prospective writers that clearly define the purpose/goal of the blog and the ideal length of posts, which by their nature are generally shorter (e.g., 200-600 words). Also key is exploring various channels for repurposing blog content via social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), e-newsletters, or peer organizations/the media. You need to also determine whether to create a space for commentary on the blog content to spark a wider discussion.

YouthActionNet blog content represents a 'win-win' for both IYF and fellows with IYF advancing its goal of amplifying youth voices and fellows sharing their experiences for the benefit of their peers, while advocating for the issues they care about. In this way, the blog serves both a capacity-building and advocacy role.



Nurturing Democracy in Kenya through the Arts

Young people all over the world, and especially in Africa, yearn for avenues and opportunities through which they can tell their stories, transform their narratives, and dignify their lives. This is, in part, a response to historic subjugation in some areas and systemic neglect in others.

Rooted in the aspiration of a good life, this yearning is shifting young people's ideas of where they will work, what kind of work they will do, where they will live, whether to join a political party, what to read, and so on. While these are seen as personal decisions, cumulatively they are the most critical political decisions that any individual can make in a democracy.

On one hand, the March 2013 elections in Kenya provide an opportunity for crossing over to a better democratic system as defined in the new constitution. In this new constitution, the citizen and the state have been set on a course to enjoy a mutually-accountable and engaging relationship. On the other hand, we have to nurture and sustain an active civic culture among the young in order to transform these democratic aspirations into meaningful experiences for all citizens.

The arts play a central role in allowing and helping to construct these critical personal decisions. It is through art that we access ongoing reflections on our society. The arts suggest solutions. They grieve and roar in pain and anger. They know when

things aren't fair, and they speak out. And they encourage us to think and feel along with them.

Art persuades us that things can be made right and whole, if even just for a few fleeting moments. We are reminded that the individual can do great things, and much more if individuals act together. The arts can also help unravel the tensions between our need for autonomy as individuals and the responsibilities that come with belonging to a group—including tribes, social classes, countries, or nations.

It is true that democracy and art can only thrive in a condition of freedom—freedom for citizens to create, to self-define, to experiment, and to explore the world of the human mind and spirit, while taking responsibility for their own lives.

For these reasons, together with friends, I co-founded the NEST Arts Company—a cultural organization that serves as a useful playground in which artists and curious minds test new

ideas unconditionally within a context of vigorous debate. We hope that we can stir into action a generation of thinkers, creators, activists, and modern-day prophets who can envision ideas and create that which is not yet created. By doing this, we shall help stimulate a shared civic culture, a shared language, and ultimately, shared values.

We believe that we can become a better democracy because the arts nourish us. We can have a vigorous economy because the arts inspire our creative responses. We can be healthy individuals because of the insights and space for insight that the arts continue to provide. Deep down, we are convinced that the arts are central to the sustenance, renovation, celebration, and re-creation of our life together in Kenya.

2010 *YouthActionNet* Fellow George Gachara co-founded the NEST Arts Company in Nairobi, Kenya as a forum for artists, writers, youth workers, actors, and citizens to express themselves and nurture the creative spirit.

Video Testimonials

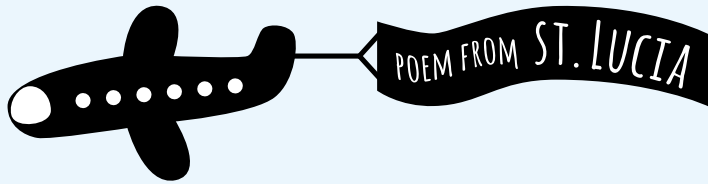
Today's digital video technology offers another powerful means of equipping youth to tell their own stories. While video technology is readily available in the form of cell phones and low-cost video cameras, special care must be taken to ensure goals and expectations are clear, youth are properly trained, and that editing capacity exists to transform raw footage into usable material.

In 2011, IYF, through its *entra21* employability training program, equipped youth beneficiaries to document the work of the *Jóvenes Constructores* project in El Salvador using video-enabled cell phones. The resulting three-minute **video** was posted on the program's YouTube channel and shown at conferences to offer attendees a realistic portrayal of the context in which the program operated and its impact on former gang-involved youth.

Video technology can also be integrated into a program's evaluation framework from the start, with youth equipped to interview one another about a program's impact at set points throughout its delivery and afterwards to trace changes over time. Similarly, youth beneficiaries can be engaged in creating video diaries, or vlogs, through which they share their experiences through a given program.

Poetry

Creative writing provides another outlet for youth to express their perspectives on the environment in which they live, their challenges, and hopes for the future. In St. Lucia, youth beneficiaries of the *Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program* (CYEP), carried out by IYF in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development, were encouraged to write poetry as part of the program's life skills intervention. For the beneficiaries, many of whom were incarcerated, poetry was incorporated as a therapeutic tool to enable them to express their feelings, to reflect on difficult emotions such as anger, and to ponder their outlook on life and their futures. More than 200 youth participated in the poetry writing exercise.



Our Future Generation

Where are they heading to?
The answer lies within me and you.
One thing that I know is true,
Is that they carry not one single virtue.
Lying, cheating, stealing, robbing, and killing,
Look, they show no regard for life.
Where did they adapt the concept that
they follow?
In their homes, at schools, no one
really knows.
Everyone seems to follow the things
that are misleading.
It is no time to sit back and relax
And look upon while it grows.
Think about the future generation to come,

And really take a look at where they are
coming from.
Achieving a successful future should be
everyone's goal.
But to do so, we all would have to learn to take
control.
So everything you do and everywhere you go,
Make it your perspective to create a brighter
tomorrow, because time waits for no one and
soon it would be the future.
So just bear in mind that time is the
greatest revealer.

*N.A.J., age 21, participant in the Caribbean Youth
Empowerment Program.*



APPENDIX

Below are questions for use in conducting interviews with program participants.

The goal of these questions is to obtain a combination of facts and moving testimony that will form the basis for a story about the program's impact on a young person's life.

Notes to interviewers:

- The best stories will include a combination of descriptive prose and moving quotes. Try to capture the young person's statements in their own words ("I feel more....") so that quotes can be attributed to them.
- Do your best to ensure your subject feels comfortable, as this will produce the most natural responses to questions. Start by developing an informal rapport before beginning the interview process.
- Avoid clichéd answers. Readers know when they are being fed automatic responses (e.g., "I am now more confident because of my involvement in the program."). Encourage the interviewee to speak from the heart. Try to get them to be specific and provide examples of what they are talking about.
- The questions below are provided as a guideline. Pursue follow up questions as necessary to obtain the best possible story material.

Interview Questions

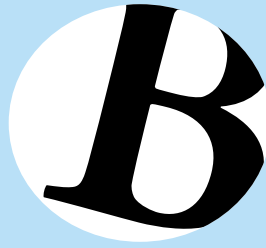
- What is your full name? Age? (Interviewer should also indicate gender of interviewee.)
- Where did you grow up? What is your family like (e.g., number of brothers/sisters, positive/not-so-positive family experience)? What is your current living situation?
- What are some of the broader challenges facing young people in your community, in your country (e.g., high unemployment, drug/alcohol use, alienation)?
- How did you find out about the program? What prompted you to get involved?
- What specific needs do you see <name of local program> addressing within your community/country?
- What have you learned through the program (e.g., concrete skills obtained, knowledge acquired)? What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them? What did you learn about yourself? What surprised you? What was really hard? What was your favorite part?
- How have you changed personally from this experience (e.g., developed greater confidence, better relations with peers, more hope for the future)?
- What are your goals/dreams for the future?
- How do you believe this program will help you to achieve your goals?
- What message would you like to give other young people like yourself who are trying to change their own lives and communities for the better?

Interview ends.

Final Steps

Note to interviewer—Record here your general observations about the young person. What about their story was most compelling?

Write down a few details about the place/site where you held the interview. Include sounds, sights, atmosphere (e.g., small house, busy office, school yard, sounds of chickens in the background, heavy traffic). Always include the name of the neighborhood, town, or city.



APPENDIX

Below is a sample release form. Such forms should be developed to meet your organization's specific needs.

[Name of Organization]

I hereby grant [Name of Organization] and its partners, including but not limited to [insert names] permission to use my likeness in a photograph accompanied by a story and/or quote about me in any and all of its publications, including Web site entries, without payment or any other consideration.

I understand and agree that these materials will become the property of [Name of Organization] and its partners and will not be returned.

I hereby irrevocably authorize [Name of Organization] and its partners to edit, alter, copy, exhibit, publish or distribute this photo, story and/or quote for purposes of publicizing the above agency's programs or for any other lawful purpose. In addition, I waive the right to inspect or approve the finished product, including written or electronic copy, wherein my likeness appears. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising or related to the use of the photograph or story.

I hereby hold harmless and release and forever discharge the above agencies from all claims, demands, and causes of action which I, my heirs, representatives, executors, administrators or any other persons acting on my behalf or on behalf of my estate have or may have by reason of this authorization.

I am 18 years of age and am competent to contract in my own name. I have read this release before signing below and I fully understand the contents, meaning, and impact of this release.

_____ (Signature) _____ (Date)

_____ (Printed Name)

If the person signing is under age 18, there must be consent by a parent or guardian, as follows:
I hereby certify that I am the parent or guardian of _____.

Named above, and do hereby give my consent without reservation to the foregoing on behalf of the person.

_____ (Parent/Guardian Signature)

_____ (Parent/Guardian Printed Name)

_____ (Submitted by)

_____ (Date)



The International Youth Foundation (IYF) invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts of change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities.

To learn more, visit: www.iyfnet.org.