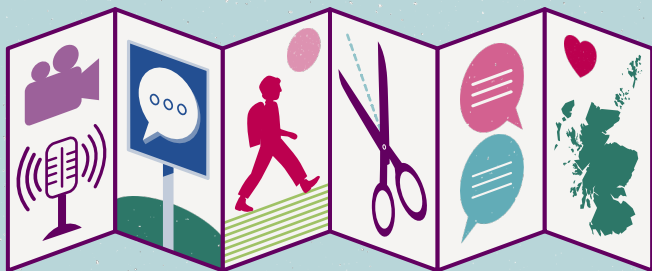


Pocket guide to creative methods in

tackling stigma



About this guide

This guide actions one of the recommendations from the The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) Reducing Stigma, Emphasising Humanity (RSEH) report and its call for more inclusive, rights based and power sharing approaches for tackling stigma.

Informed by ALLIANCE research, **“Developing a picture of creative engagement in anti-stigma work”¹**, the guide responds to the RSEH report by exhibiting how creative methods can be used to help tackle stigma. It explores how creative methods can support inclusive communication, reach those too often left out and rebalance power between professionals and communities.

Designed to be practical and accessible, this guide shares the benefits of creative approaches, tips for using them well, and ways to think about how to measure their impact in challenging stigma.

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**Creative
engagement
can provide
people the tools
to share their
stories in the
way they want
to share them -
(Interviewee)²**

Stigma and health

Stigma is a powerful social process which disqualifies people from full social acceptance.³ It has been defined as the co-occurrence of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination all in the context of power imbalances.⁴ Stigma is experienced by individuals and perpetuated at different societal levels.

Stigma and stigma-related discrimination affect health in several ways, including as a barrier to people receiving adequate healthcare, health-seeking behaviour,⁵ and engagement in care⁶ and treatment.⁷ Stigma and discrimination can restrict people's access to resources that underpin good health, such as housing, employment and social cohesion.⁸



Employment



Social

cohesion



What are creative methods?

Creative methods use arts-based activities to help people share their lived experiences in inclusive and engaging ways. Instead of relying only on written or spoken accounts, people take part in creating engaging artwork such as films, photography, zines, theatre, games, or other creative outputs.



These projects are usually collaborative, valuing lived experience, sharing power, and promoting human rights principles through meaningful participation and accessibility.

The process of creating can help build confidence, connection, and a sense of empowerment, while the finished work helps audiences better understand others' experiences in ways that information alone often cannot.

In this manner, creative methods provide a multi-dimensional account which helps capture how stigma is perpetuated at different societal levels.



Empowerment, self-esteem and hope



Creative methods can build self-esteem and help challenge self-stigma by placing control in the hands of participants. Our research found that feeling empowered was a consistent outcome, when people were able to shape the creative process themselves – choosing what to explore, what to share, and how their experiences were represented. This shift in power, from facilitators to participants, can increase confidence, create peer support and foster a sense of ownership and connection.



Creative methods can generate empowerment and hope which extends beyond the participants themselves by challenging public stigma. Artistic outputs can shift how audiences see and understand stigma through encouraging empathy and offering more hopeful narratives.

“

If you change how you speak about things. It changes how you think about things, which changes ultimately how people approach policies - (Interviewee)⁹

Meaning and belonging

Creative approaches can help cultivate a shared sense of meaning and belonging. Through collective creative engagement, people often experience benefits similar to peer support – finding connection, understanding and solidarity with others. Creative approaches have long been used to help people explore difficult feelings and experiences, both individually and together.

Artistic practices also play an important role in collective social action. When used to challenge stigma and the inequalities it drives, creative method can become a form of social resistance, bringing people together around shared experiences and a common purpose.

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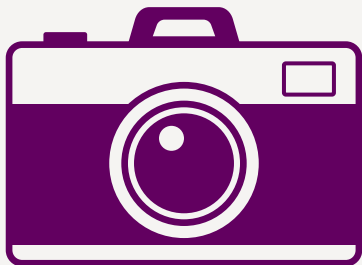
When stigmatised marks become collective, people derive a number of psychological and social resources that can buffer them from some of the negative health consequences of stigma - (Interviewee)¹⁰

Try a Method

Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory research method which involves participants taking photographs to capture aspects of their environment and experiences to highlight specific issues or topics. The aim is to use the power of visual imagery to communicate about these issues more effectively.


Photovoice is particularly valuable in giving marginalised groups a platform to express their perspectives and contribute directly to the discourse on issues affecting their lives.¹¹





Top tips

Develop a working plan with a steering group of people with lived experience to co-produce the whole process, including the planning stages. For example, discuss the format of creative sessions.



Exploring intersectional experiences

Creative methods can provide a safe and supportive way to explore difficult topics, particularly where people experience multiple, overlapping forms of stigma. Our findings highlighted how creative engagement can open conversations and allow them to deepen over time.

Using characters and objects can help people talk about personal experiences at a comfortable distance, making it easier to share complex or sensitive stories. By offering time, space and a creative option, these methods allow people to highlight the aspects of their lives that matter most to them and how they have experience stigma and exclusion.

“

Being occupied on something creatively, can then become this really comfortable space for kind of sharing whatever you choose to -

(Interviewee)¹²

Try a Method

Zine making


Zine making involves creating small, self published booklets that often feature a mix of text and images. They are typically produced using low cost methods. Zines serve as a medium for personal expression or grassroots activism, allowing creators to explore niche topics, share unique perspectives, and reach a specialised audience.¹³





Top tips

**Collaborate with
cause specific
organisations on
work that tackles
intersectional
experiences of
stigma using
creative methods.**



Inclusivity

Creative methods can support inclusive engagement, particularly for groups who do not share a common or dominant language. They offer ways to share experiences and meaning beyond words, helping people connect without needing to communicate in the same language.

Creative approaches also align strongly with human rights principles – supporting participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and accountability (PANEL)¹⁴. While creative spaces are often seen as elite or exclusionary, opening them up can be a powerful way to challenge stigma. Taking creative work into prestigious or public spaces can disrupt assumptions about who creativity is ‘for’ and expand access to expressive tools that help people share their experiences.

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It [a picture] told me something even though we didn't have a shared language - (Interviewee)¹⁵

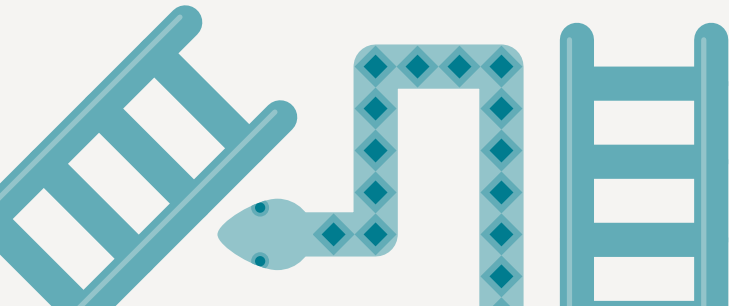


Try a Method

Snakes and ladders

Think outside the box. Try using a simple snakes-and-ladder style game to explore how language can reinforce stigma.

Through a co-production process, game cards are created using words and scenarios that people with lived experience have identified as stigmatising. Some cards prompt players to suggest more helpful alternatives. As participants play, they are encouraged to reflect on how the words and situation make them feel and how these may impact on other people.¹⁶



Top tips

Reduce practical barriers to participation by covering travel costs, choosing accessible venues, offering childcare where needed and providing food and regular breaks.

Creating a safe space for doing creative methods

Creative approaches can open up powerful conversations and reveal key insights, but they work best when people feel safe, respected and valued. Our findings highlighted that trust, transparency and skilled facilitation are essential when using creative approaches to explore sensitive or stigmatising experiences.



Top tips on how to create a safe space;



Be transparent about the purpose of the project, the process and how any outputs will be used.

Work with skilled, trauma-informed facilitators who can respond sensitively to difficult situations, provide appropriate signposting and ensure all voices are heard throughout.

Build trust through flexibility by being open to adapting the project as it develops.

Co-develop shared expectations for how the group will work together.

Offer clear options to opt out of sharing or displaying creative work.

Recommendations for funders and decision makers

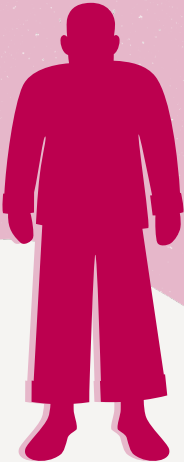
Look to create equal opportunities for longer term creative engagement projects as well as shorter ones.

Do not place too stringent requirements on the format/criteria of a creative output but instead detail what the objective of it is (e.g. challenging stigma, as opposed to an infographic showing XYZ).

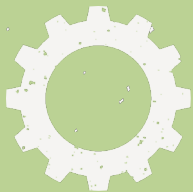
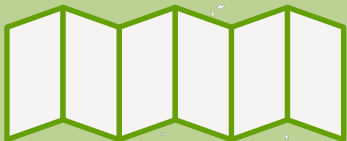
Fund user led groups to self manage creative projects tackling stigma.

Embed creative engagement into awareness raising efforts.

Broaden evidence of outcomes recognising that outcomes can take a long time to be realised.







¹ The Health and Social Care Alliance, 'Developing a picture of creative engagement in anti-stigma work' (2024). Available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/developing-a-picture-of-creative-engagement-in-anti-stigma-work/>

² The Health and Social Care Alliance, 'Developing a picture of creative engagement in anti-stigma work' (2024). Available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/developing-a-picture-of-creative-engagement-in-anti-stigma-work/>

³ Irving Goffman, 'Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity' (1990)

⁴ Bruce Link and Jo Phelan, 'Conceptualizing Stigma', Annual Review of Sociology (2001)

⁵ Nicola Scott and others 'Stigma as a barrier to diagnosis of lung cancer: patient

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⁶ Patrick Corrigan, 'How stigma interferes
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⁷ Anish Mahajan and others., 'Stigma in the
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⁸ Clara Bolster-Foucault and others
'Structural determinants of stigma across
health and social conditions: a rapid review
and conceptual framework to guide future
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and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada :
Research, Policy and Practice (2021)

⁹ The Health and Social Care Alliance,
'Developing a picture of creative
engagement in anti-stigma work' (2024).
Available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.>

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¹⁰ The Health and Social Care Alliance, 'Developing a picture of creative engagement in anti-stigma work' (2024). Available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/developing-a-picture-of-creative-engagement-in-anti-stigma-work/>

¹¹ The Health and Social Care Alliance, 'Developing a picture of creative engagement in anti-stigma work' (2024). Available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/developing-a-picture-of-creative-engagement-in-anti-stigma-work/>

¹² The Health and Social Care Alliance, 'Developing a picture of creative engagement in anti-stigma work' (2024). Available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/developing-a-picture-of-creative-engagement-in-anti-stigma-work/>

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¹³ The Health and Social Care Alliance, 'Developing a picture of creative engagement in anti-stigma work' (2024). Available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/developing-a-picture-of-creative-engagement-in-anti-stigma-work/>

¹⁴ Scottish Human Rights Commission, 'Human Rights Based Approach.' Available at: <https://www.scottishhumanrights.com/projects-and-programmes/human-rights-based-approach/>

¹⁵ The Health and Social Care Alliance, 'Developing a picture of creative engagement in anti-stigma work' (2024). Available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/developing-a-picture-of-creative-engagement-in-anti-stigma-work/>

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¹⁶ The Health and Social Care Alliance, 'Developing a picture of creative engagement in anti-stigma work' (2024). Available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/developing-a-picture-of-creative-engagement-in-anti-stigma-work/>

About the ALLIANCE

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) is the national third sector membership organisation for the health and social care sector. We bring together over 3,500 people and organisations dedicated to achieving our vision of a Scotland where everyone has a strong voice and enjoys the right to live well, with dignity and respect. Our members are essential in creating a society in which we all can thrive, and we believe that by working together, our voice is stronger.

We work to improve the wellbeing of people and communities across Scotland by supporting change in health, social care and other public services so they better meet the needs of everyone in Scotland. We do this by bringing together the expertise of people with lived experience, the third sector, and organisations across health and social care to shape better services and support positive change.

The ALLIANCE has three core aims.

We seek to:

- Empower people with lived experience: we ensure disabled people, people with long term conditions, and unpaid carers are heard and that their needs remain at the heart of the services and communities.
- Support positive change: we work within communities to promote co-production, self management, human rights, and independent living.
- Champion the third sector: we work with, support and encourage co-operation between the third sector and health and social care organisations.

The ALLIANCE is committed to upholding human rights. We embed lived experience in our work and aim to ensure people are meaningfully involved at every level of decision-making. Working together creates positive, long-lasting impact. We work in

partnership with the Scottish Government, NHS Boards, universities, and other key organisations within health, social care, housing, and digital technology to manage funding and develop successful projects. Together, our voice is stronger, and we can create meaningful change.



