



Sharing Your Impact Resource Series

ANALYZING & SHARING STORIES OF IMPACT

In this resource you will learn how to analyze, theme, and share the information you've collected. **The resource includes the following sections:**

Step 1: Prepare and get familiar with the information: Read the stories, remove identifying details, and note interesting ideas.

Step 2: Sort the information: Use short phrases to categorize the topics people talked about.

Step 3: Identify common themes: Write a meaningful sentence that summarizes each idea that came up multiple times.

Step 4: Review the themes: Make sure your themes make sense and represent diverse perspectives.

Step 5: Share the information you've gathered: Communicate your findings clearly, ethically, and with background context.

Click to jump to the section



About the series:

An important part of community projects is **sharing their impact**, or the change they create in the community. Sharing impact celebrates your hard work, gets people excited about your project, and shows funders the outcomes you achieved. **Evaluation** is the process of measuring the impacts of your project. [Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta Division](#) and [Centre for Suicide Prevention](#) and [PolicyWise for Children & Families](#) collaborated to create a resource series to support rural community members in evaluating their mental health projects. To see the entire series, check out its [web page](#).

ANALYZING & SHARING STORIES OF IMPACT

As a part of exploring the impact of your community mental health project, you may collect stories about the changes people have noticed in themselves and the community because of your work. At the end of your project, you might be left with a lot of information! How do you make sense of all the stories you have? How do you present them in a way that's organized and understandable for different audiences?

To understand deeper meanings behind stories, you will need to analyze the information you've gathered using a process called **theming**.

Theming involves finding patterns in what people said in a collection of personal stories. This strategy makes sense of large amounts of information by identifying responses to a question that your project is trying to answer. It is a flexible method that you can use to explore open-ended responses or understand complex issues, such as feelings, opinions, beliefs, or behaviours.



Step 1: Prepare and get familiar with the information

Once you've collected stories from participants, your data will be in the form of detailed notes, transcripts from audio recordings, or a series of written survey responses. You'll need to prepare the data for analysis by fixing major spelling and grammatical errors and removing information that reveals participants' identities, such as names, ages, and job titles.

Having a large amount of information can be overwhelming, so take time getting acquainted with the data. You can do this by reading the stories and noting key quotes that say something interesting or meaningful about your project. You can notice quotes that speak to your project's desired outcomes, or the changes you hope to see in your community as a result of your project.

Example

Project leaders wanted to learn if their Colour Your Calm: Art & Mental Health program had an impact on participants' understanding of mental health. They organized six one-on-one conversations with participants over Zoom.

They asked about how the program impacted participants' mental health and what their takeaways were. They used built-in functions in Zoom to record the conversations and generate written records of what participants said. After finishing the interviews, the project leaders read the conversation transcripts, highlighting important quotes. They also made notes in the margins if a quote stood out to them to help them identify patterns later.

The project leaders highlighted the following quotes in the conversation transcripts:

"I mean, I'm not really an artsy person, so when I signed up for 'Colour Your Calm,' I was like, 'This is probably gonna be awkward.' But it wasn't. They talked about how, like, art can help with stress, and they had this, like, list of local resources for mental health, which was super handy. So, it wasn't just painting — it was kinda like this space where you could be real and, uh, not feel judged, you know?"

- Participant #1

"Like, people were just sitting around painting, and some folks started sharing their stories — like, about how hard it's been dealing with loneliness or feeling stuck in a small town. I even ended up, like, talking about my own stuff a bit, which I wasn't planning on."

- Participant #2

"People started talking about what anxiety feels like for them and how they deal with it. It wasn't heavy or anything, but it made me realize how different everyone's experiences are. Someone mentioned how they get physical symptoms, like their chest tightening, while someone else said they can't stop overthinking. It really opened my eyes and made me feel like this is way more common than I thought."


- Participant #3




Step 2: Sort the information

After you read your stories, you can categorize the information by labelling it with short words or phrases that summarize a topic or idea. For example, if a participant mentions discovering new mental health resources in their community, you might write down ‘increased awareness of supports’ or ‘access to local supports’. Keep the labels you assign brief but specific enough to capture what was said. Labels might answer the question, “What is this person talking about?”

Analyzing participants’ stories can be tough. It takes a lot of time to read each story and our findings depend on our interpretation. It can feel overwhelming to manage large amounts of information. Here are some ways to stay organized:

 **Create a clear structure for sorting the information.** You can break the stories down into quotes in a spreadsheet, then add a column for each step in your analysis, sorting the data as you go.

 **You can copy quotes into a spreadsheet** (like Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets) and label the quotes in an adjacent column, like in the table on the right. You can also print the transcripts and highlight phrases or make notes in the margins or highlight and comment in a word processor document (like Microsoft Word or Google Docs).

After you label the data, you can sort the labels into rough categories, putting similar labels together.

Example

After reading the transcripts on feedback for Colour Your Calm, the project leaders labeled their data with words and phrases related to improved understanding of mental health. They began highlighting key labels and grouping them into categories based on the project’s expected outcomes. These categories helped organize the feedback in a way that aligns with the project’s goals.

Category	Quote
Resources & Supports	“I mean, I’m not really an artsy person, so when I signed up for ‘Colour Your Calm,’ I was like, ‘This is probably gonna be awkward.’ But it wasn’t. They talked about how art can help with stress , and they had a of list of local resources for mental health, which was super handy.”
Non-judgmental spaces	“So, yeah, it wasn’t just painting — it was kinda like this space where you could be real and, uh, not feel judged , you know?”
Sharing stories	“Like, people were just sitting around painting, and some folks started sharing their stories — like, about how hard it’s been dealing with loneliness or feeling stuck in a small town. I even ended up, like, talking about my own stuff a bit, which I wasn’t planning on.”
Sharing mental health experience	“But it made me feel less alone and should open up to people more about what I’m going through.”
Awareness of mental health	“People started talking about what anxiety feels like for them and how they deal with it. It wasn’t heavy or anything, but it made me realize how different everyone’s experiences are.”
Awareness of mental health	“Someone mentioned how they get physical symptoms, like their chest tightening, while someone else said they can’t stop overthinking. It really opened my eyes and made me feel like this is way more common than I thought. ”

Step 3: Identify common themes

Once you've sorted the responses by their labels, you can search for any ideas that show up multiple times. These patterns, or themes, will answer your project questions and provide insight into participants' experiences.

Themes are statements that contain specific meaning. They make sense on their own, without the additional context of the quote. Themes might answer the question, "What ideas does this group of people have about this topic?"

Example

Project leaders started grouping categories into themes in the table below.

Category	Quote	Theme
Resources & Supports	"I mean, I'm not really an artsy person, so when I signed up for 'Colour Your Calm,' I was like, 'This is probably gonna be awkward.' But it wasn't. They talked about how art can help with stress , and they had a list of local resources for mental health, which was super handy."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art can help reduce stress • There is a local resource to support mental health • Art can help people make connections
Non-judgmental spaces	"So, yeah, it wasn't just painting — it was kinda like this space where you could be real and, uh, not feel judged , you know?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colour Your Calm was a supportive and non-judgmental space
Sharing stories	"Like, people were just sitting around painting, and some folks started sharing their stories — like, about how hard it's been dealing with loneliness or feeling stuck in a small town. I even ended up, like, talking about my own stuff a bit, which I wasn't planning on."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are lonely • Sharing and hearing stories makes you feel less alone
Sharing your mental health experience	"But it made me feel less alone and should open up to people more about what I'm going through."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing and hearing stories makes you feel less alone • Talking about mental health has a positive impact
Awareness of mental health	"People started talking about what anxiety feels like for them and how they deal with it. It wasn't heavy or anything, but it made me realize how different everyone's experiences are."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to stories helps people learn about mental health • People's mental health experiences are different
Awareness of mental health	"Someone mentioned how they get physical symptoms, like their chest tightening, while someone else said they can't stop overthinking. It really opened my eyes and made me feel like this is way more common than I thought. "	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to stories helps people learn about mental health • People's mental health experiences are different

Step 4: Review the themes

After identifying themes, read through each one and the quotes associated with it. Do the themes make sense? Are there clear differences between each theme? Each theme should stand on its own and accurately describe patterns. Some of your themes might contradict each other, for example if people disagree about an idea. That's okay, you want to capture the diversity of what people are saying.

Represent diverse perspectives: when interpreting the information you've gathered, it's important to make sure that you're representing diverse perspectives accurately. You can do this by:

- Being aware of your own beliefs, biases, or opinions, and how they play into your interpretations of the stories.
- Comparing what you've found in your analysis with information from different sources, such as surveys. If you notice differences between your surveys and the themes from your analysis, you can investigate why that might have occurred.
- Asking other people, such as other project leaders, volunteers, or community members, to help you interpret the stories or to check over your analysis so you're getting multiple perspectives.

Example

The project leaders began focusing on the theme 'Colour Your Calm is a supportive and non-judgmental space.' Participants described that after the Colour Your Calm sessions, they felt heard by others and more willing to open up. They decided that this theme made sense because it addressed the positive feelings that the sessions brought. It was also distinct from other themes because it described the sense of connection that resulted from the session, which is different than stress relief.

From the quotes we have learned there are three main takeaways from the Colour Your Calm participants:

Increased awareness of supports for mental health

- Colour Your Calm was a supportive and non-judgmental space
- Art can help with stress
- There is a local resource to support mental health

Importance of sharing and hearing experiences of mental health

- Sharing and hearing stories makes you feel less alone
- Talking about mental health has a positive impact

Increased awareness of mental health

- Listening to stories helps people learn about mental health
- People's mental health experiences are different

Step 5: Share the information you've gathered


The last step of the theming process involves describing the patterns you saw and presenting them as a cohesive story. You can choose quotes that capture your themes to back up your points. You can write your results in a summary, report, or visualize them in charts or diagrams.

Presenting your findings intentionally can ensure the community feels heard and can use what you found to make important decisions.

Here are some tips for sharing stories from participants in your project:


Example

In their annual report, the project leaders wrote that participants provided positive feedback from the Colour Your Calm program. Some participants reported feeling relieved of stress, while others said that the sessions helped them to connect with others and feel less alone.

 **Choose the right type of presentation.** Consider what format would best convey the information you've collected. Themes could be combined and shared in a report or document, organized into a spreadsheet, displayed in a presentation, verbally read to an audience, shared on social media, displayed on a poster, or shared during action team debriefs. It's important to consider the reason you're sharing the information, your audience, and what you hope they learn.




After collecting all the feedback, the project leaders created an infographic on participants' feedback on Colour Your Calm. The infographic featured short snippets of quotes for each theme and doodles representing each theme created by a local community member.

 **Provide context for the audience.** In addition to your findings, it helps to provide background information about the topic. You can include things such as statistics about the topic, information about the community, or a description of where the stories came from.




Before presenting their findings, the project leaders shared statistics about art therapy and its impact on participants.

 **Summarize information into broader themes.** This can help protect participants' identities while acknowledging the importance of what they have shared.




A few participants in Colour Your Calm described meeting new people through the sessions, so the project leaders categorized that under a broader theme called 'building social connections'.

 **Use different sources of information.** During your project, you might collect information in multiple ways. For example, you might have data from surveys, event attendance counts, and stories from participants. Presenting multiple types of information can strengthen your findings.




The project leaders had quotes from stories and information from a survey completed during the program. The survey included the question, ‘On a scale of 1-5, how supported did you feel by your peers?’ They decided to feature quotes from the stories with the average score from the survey question.

 **Paraphrase your findings.** Summarize what you found in your own words. This can help you make sense of the material and help you phrase your findings in a way that your audience can understand.




Under each theme, the project leaders included a short explanation of each theme and what they found. For social connections, the project leaders described how the participants formed new relationships at the sessions.

 **Make it easy to understand.** Keep your language and visuals simple. This will help audiences understand your main points without becoming overwhelmed with details. Try to break down the content in a way that makes sense to readers – don’t use technical language or complex terms.



Instead of sharing long paragraphs, project leaders pulled short quotes to show the themes they found about youth mental health. Under the theme social connection, they shared the quote: “I feel like I’m not so alone now that I know other kids feel the same way I do.”

 **Be ethical when presenting.** When talking to participants, make sure they know what their stories will be used for. Make sure you remove any names or identifying information before sharing participants’ stories. When you’re analyzing the stories, make sure you read quotes in context to accurately understand what the person was trying to say.



Project leaders informed participants that the information they provide could be presented to the public. They made sure the participants understood that any information that revealed their identity would be removed. When the project leaders presented quotes from participants, they removed names, ages, workplaces or schools.

In conclusion, analyzing and sharing stories helps you turn information into clear insights that can help you understand a topic more deeply. By looking for common themes across many stories and communicating them, you can identify key elements of a topic, explain how well something is working, and determine strategies for how to improve your project in the future.