STORYTELLING FOR CHANGE

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Everyone needs an affordable, stable place to call home.

That’s why we unite 160+ organizations across Illinois in protecting and expanding access to affordable housing.

housingactionil.org
WHY, WHAT, HOW

SHAPING STORIES

STORIES IN ACTION
WHY, WHAT, HOW
Why tell stories?

- They help people understand what you do and why
- They compel people to act
- People remember things better
- People empathize when they hear stories
Stories help explain....

• Who you are
• How you see the world
• Challenges you have encountered
• Lessons you have learned
• What changes you want to see in the world
  • Specific, local problems
  • Broader, systemic issues
What is a story that has stuck with you?

What is a story that changed the way you thought about something or someone?
What is a story?
• Not always a full-fledged narrative with a beginning, middle, and end

• Elements of storytelling
  • Quotes
  • Visuals
  • Details
"I've never been evicted.
I've never even been served an eviction notice. But my application was denied."

- John, Tenant

Prejudged: The Stigma of Eviction Records
"I felt tainted, diminished. Limited, like I had no options."

- Janet, Tenant

*Prejudged: The Stigma of Eviction Records*
Jaquella Smith, 32, has been living at the YMCA shelter in Bridgeport since September. Until the summer, she had her own apartment, where she lived with her son, Mi. But when Mi got sick, she could no longer pay her rent and started moving from place to place, sleeping on friends’ couches. Eventually, on the advice of her aunt, she moved into the own place again. “It’s been hard in the shelter,” she said. “Some days are rough, but you get over it.”

The YMCA shelter in Bridgeport houses about 17 families, including men, women, and children. Families have their own rooms, but they share bathrooms, and personal space is limited. Jaquella says the best thing about having her own apartment will be having her own space and being able to give Michael his own room.

In 2016, around 17 percent of Connecticut’s homeless population, including 17 percent of homeless children in families, could be found in greater Bridgeport. The area is home to 17 percent of the state’s population. Bridgeport was once the state’s manufacturing center, and its postindustrial economy is still emerging. Twenty-three percent of the city’s 145,000 residents live in poverty, and only 17 percent hold a bachelor’s degree or higher.
Because of you, Bridge families accomplished these following successes:

- **April** purchased a condo
- **Cashmere** now makes more than $18.50/hour
- **Jen** moved to daytime shifts at her job and got a raise
- **Rafael** was promoted from temporary to full-time permanent at his job
- **Ivy** moved into her Habitat for Humanity home
- **Maribel** is on track for U.S. citizenship
- **Tatiana** obtained a patient care representative job at a hospital
- **Siomara** started nursing school
- **Gabi** purchased a new house
- **Cynthia** earned her associate’s degree and is now working toward her bachelors
- **Connie** got a job in customer care
- **Kate** was accepted into the Habitat for Humanity program

- **Buba** accepted a full-time position working at a hospital
- **Tonya** purchased a townhouse
- **Maria** got a 20% raise at work

Congratulations to Bridge kid M, whose tornado project earned him a medal at his school’s science fair!
Storytelling Programs
Faces of Homelessness
Speak Up!
Community Writing Project

STARTING A WRITING GROUP: THE BASICS
Writing groups can take place in any welcoming community setting that can provide a quiet room with table and chairs. Usually when a writing group is initiated, participants and the hosting organization arrange for the group to meet weekly for around eight to twelve weeks in order for participants to engage in a process of...

READ MORE

BECOMING A WORKSHOP FACILITATOR
Writing workshops can be taught by anyone who has had experience participating in a writing workshop and is committed to popular education. The key to being an effective writing workshop teacher is a deep respect for the dignity and experience of those participating in the workshop, the desire to learn from the writers as much...

READ MORE

DEVELOPING WRITING PROMPTS
At each session the group members have conversations about topics that are important to their lives, and in the course of discussion ideas for writing topics emerge. When it comes time to write, the teacher suggests one or two writing prompts based on particularly compelling issues the group has discussed, and also solicits writing prompt...

READ MORE
How are you telling stories?
Who are you telling stories to?

- Family
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Communities
- Legislators
- Organizations
- Media
SHAPING STORIES
Effective Storytelling

Qualities that make an idea “stick”:

• **Simple**
  Know the core of your message; be focused

• **Unexpected**
  Includes a break from the ordinary

• **Concrete**
  Includes sensory information

• **Credible**
  Personal experience, statistics

• **Emotions**
  Give people a reason to care; build associations

• **Stories**
  Create a **narrative framework**
Quick storytelling!
Elevator Pitch

tell the story of who you are in 60 seconds
In groups of two...

Hello, my name is ______________________________

I am from/work for/with ______________________________

You know how... (state the problem)

Well, what we need is... (describe a change you want)

So that... (community benefit)
In groups of two…

Hello, my name is Kristin Ginger,

I work for/with Housing Action Illinois

You know how everywhere in Illinois, families are struggling between paying rent and buying groceries?

Well, what we do is advocate for high-quality, affordable housing

So that no one ever has to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table
In groups of two...

Hello, my name is ____________________________

I am from/work for/with ____________________________

You know how... (state the problem)

Well, what we need is... (describe a change you want)

So that... (community benefit)
Now let’s take our time.
What makes a good story?

• Someone to root for
• Conflict
• Journey
• Framing/call to action
Protagonist

Someone to root for
Everyday life
Connecting value

Conflict

What’s in the way?
Build tension

Tanya knows she’ll be cold no matter what she wears, but she does what she can: she pulls on two pairs of pants and two pairs of socks, then layers on two hoodie sweatshirts.

At the warehouse, she buttons up a white lab coat over all of this, winds a scarf around her neck, and covers her head with both a knit hat and a hairnet. Next come plastic sleeves, a mouth mask, an apron, and two pairs of plastic gloves. Finally ready, Tanya braces herself against the frigidity of 35-degree air, and opens the door to the assembly line room.

She takes her place along the line, where she and her coworkers combine chopped lettuce, croutons, and parmesan for Caesar salads and tuck chicken into tortilla wraps. They work for hours, mostly in silence, arms and hands moving with mechanic repetition as they create the grab’n’go foods destined for display cases in Starbucks, Costco, and Wal-Mart.

Tanya never knows much in advance which days she’ll work, which hours, or how long her shift will last. Sometimes she’s scheduled for an eight-hour shift, but works just four because her assembly line’s order is completed early. Other times, she stands for twelve hours on her aching feet and heads home late at night. The unpredictability of her schedule makes it impossible to go back to school, since she can’t commit to any class schedule. She can’t plan a budget for rent, food, or transportation since she never knows how much money she’ll make.

Tanya’s heart sinks as she removes her mask and gloves for the day: it’s only been five hours, but her line has finished their order. As she’s punching out, her supervisor says, “We don’t need you tomorrow.”

It’s the last thing Tanya wants to hear. She only worked 25 hours last week and needs more hours to be able to pay this month’s rent. Tanya earns just $9.25 per hour.
As she’s punching out, her supervisor says, “We don’t need you tomorrow.”

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Because Tanya’s mother died when she was just a baby, her father raised Tanya and her four older siblings on his own. Now, the roles have been reversed: Tanya does everything she can to help care for him. He’s 84 and is battling prostate cancer.

Since she doesn’t earn paid sick days—like 80 percent of low-wage workers—she has had to forgo work to take her dad to his doctor’s appointments, something she can ill afford to do. But Tanya’s father was there when she needed him, and she won’t let him down now.
Journey

What happened?

How did it happen?

Detail the change(s)
Implied journey

Tanya knows she’s good at taking care of him, and it’s inspired her to change her life. She wants to break out of the food industry by training to become a certified nursing assistant, and then go on to become a licensed practical nurse.
Meaning

What is our takeaway?

What’s the way forward? A lesson learned or a change that can happen?

For Tanya and millions of women like her, a good job—with a living wage, paid sick days, a stable schedule, and opportunities to advance—is a distant dream. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Women working in jobs that we all depend on deserve fair working conditions and wages.

Women Employed’s fight for workplace practices and public policies that “raise the floor” for low-paid workers is part of a growing movement for change—one inspired by the hard work and dreams of women like Tanya.
Call to action

Clear, specific, ideally immediate thing your audience should do
STORIES IN ACTION
Your turn

Who is your protagonist?

Daily life or connecting value

Conflict (+ more conflict!)

Journey

Meaning

Call to action
RESOURCES

housingactionil.org/storytelling

Storytelling

Storytelling Presentations:
- Strategic Storytelling, Metro East Coalition (Collinsville, Illinois) on July 10, 2018
- Telling the Continuum of Care Story, HUD Homeless Programs Institute (Decatur, Illinois) on June 27, 2018

Storytelling Projects & Programs:
- National Coalition for the Homeless' Faces of Homelessness Speakers' Bureau
- Bonus: NCH has an organizing manual to help start your own speakers' bureau!
- CSH Speak Up! Program
- Community Writing Project

Narrative Strategy:
- The Opportunity Agenda
- Visions, Values and Voice: A Social Justice Communications Toolkit
- A Window Of Opportunity II: An Analysis of Public Opinion on Poverty
- Frameworks Institute
- Reframing Affordable Housing
- "You Don't Have to Live Here" Why Housing Messages are Backfiring and 10 Things We Can Do About It
- Negating Doesn't: The Downsides of Refutation
- Stories Worth Telling: A Guide to Strategic and

Helpful (FREE) Tools:
- Design: Canva
- Social Media: Hootsuite
- Transcription: Transcribe
- Video Editing: Free Software
- Audio Editing: Audacity
- Photo Editing: GIMP & Pixlr
- Stock Photos: Pixabay, Pexels, Negative Space, Unsplash
- Trainings: Storytelling for Good, StoryCenter
- Pro Bono Project Assistance: Taproot+
THANK YOU

QUESTIONS?

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