

35TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE  
2022 HOUSING MATTERS

  
35 years  
HOUSING ACTION ILLINOIS

# Storytelling Through Community

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# THE STORY OF THE COW-TAIL SWITCH

**Whose memory do you want to hold onto?  
Whose story inspires you?**



# GOALS FOR TODAY

**Share stories that build connections**

**Explore approaches to collecting and presenting stories**

**Consider how effective storytelling can impact your work**



**STORY**

**“Narrative imagining — *story* — is the fundamental instrument of thought. Rational capacities depend upon it. It is our chief means of looking into the future, or predicting, of planning, and of explaining.”**

*— Mark Turner, cognitive scientist, linguist, and author*

FOUNDATIONS OF STORYTELLING

# HOW STORYTELLING AFFECTS THE BRAIN

## NEURAL COUPLING

A story activates parts in the brain that allows the listener to turn the story in to their own ideas and experience thanks to a process called neural coupling.

## MIRRORING

Listeners will not only experience the similar brain activity to each other, but also to the speaker.



## DOPAMINE

The brain releases dopamine into the system when it experiences an emotionally-charged event, making it easier to remember and with greater accuracy.

## CORTEX ACTIVITY

When processing facts, two areas of the brain are activated (Broca's and Wernicke's area). A well-told story can engage many additional areas, including the motor cortex, sensory cortex and frontal cortex.

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# WHAT IS A STORY?

“Most dictionaries define a story as a narrative account of a real or imagined event or events...Through this sharing of experience we use stories to pass on accumulated wisdom, beliefs, and values. Through stories we explain how things are, why they are, and our role and purpose.

*“Stories are the building blocks of knowledge, the foundation of memory and learning. Stories connect us with our humanness and link past, present, and future by teaching us to anticipate the possible consequences of our actions.”*

— *National Storytelling Association*

# WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

## **Storytelling Is Interactive.**

Storytelling involves a two-way interaction between a storyteller and one or more listeners. The responses of the listeners influence the telling of the story. In fact, storytelling emerges from the interaction and cooperative, coordinated efforts of teller and audience...

**The interactive nature of storytelling partially accounts for its immediacy and impact. At its best, storytelling can directly and tightly connect the teller and audience.**

# WHY NOW?

**"People are aware that they cannot continue in the same old way, but are immobilized because they cannot imagine an alternative. We need a vision that recognizes that we are at one of the great turning points in human history when the survival of our planet and the restoration of our humanity require a great sea change in our ecological, economic, political, and spiritual values."**

— *Grace Lee Boggs*





# OUR UNIQUE STORIES ARE VITAL

**“Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity....When we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.”**

— *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*



# THE HUMMINGBIRD STORY

**How does the phrase “I’m doing the best that I can” resonate with you?**

**Have you ever run towards the challenge/burning fire?  
Did you have what you needed?**



WHAT'S YOUR

STORY

# STORY CONNECTIONS



1. **CONSIDER** an object that sparks a memory
2. **SELECT** an object/or memory that symbolizes your work
3. How has the work you do impacted or changed you?

# WHY STORIES?



**“A narrative works off of both data and emotions, which is significantly more effective in engaging a listener than data alone. In fact, Jennifer Aaker, a professor of marketing at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, says that people remember information when it is weaved into narratives ‘up to 22 times more than facts alone.’”**


**— *Cody C. Delistraty, The Atlantic***

# SOCIAL IMPACT STORYTELLING

“It’s one thing to read about a social issue on paper; it’s another to learn about an actual person’s experience with that issue and putting a face or a voice to the story.

And yet it's important to remember that with the power of storytelling, comes a great responsibility. **There’s a fine line between telling a person’s story and using their story, and between empowering someone’s voice through storytelling and exploiting them.”**

— *Deborah Swerdlow*



Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today.


Robert McAfee Brown

# NON-PROFIT STORYTELLING

“For many nonprofits, marketing towards donors, sponsors, and foundations is a necessary way to stay afloat and thrive in a competitive industry...

**“We often package the nonprofit’s work into a compelling story, one that will hopefully tug the heartstrings of a donor enough so that they can contribute to the cause...”**

— *Chandana Bhimarao & Chelsia Low,  
The Berkeley Group*



Storytelling is the best marketing.

# STORYTELLING

“Any one person’s story can change the way we think — and in changing the way enough people think, it can change our world. **But what of the stories that cannot be told by one person alone?**”

“**What of the stories that touch many people, all of whom have different perspectives and points of view?**”

— *Stephen Bradley, Wired*





# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER



- People often want their stories to be heard.
- What stories need to be told?
- What about the stories of the Organization? Clients? Staff?
- How is the story collected?
- How is the story saved? Documented?
- How is the story shared?
- What role does the storyteller play/the NPO? What are the ongoing relationships?
- What about storytelling is frightening? rewarding?

# BUILDING OUR STORYTELLING MUSCLE

**“The stories we tell ourselves—and don’t tell ourselves—impact our emotions, physical states, our choices, and relationships.** The processes of interpersonal communication and collaborative storytelling involve exercising psychological muscles, executive function, and resilience where a person can begin to gradually reclaim control of their physical and mental connection to the environment around them.”

*—Mohsin Mohi Ud Din, Founder of #MeWeSyria*

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# IN PRACTICE

What is something that inspires you about the work you do?

What story might you want to share?

Organization/Staff/Client?



# CLOSING THOUGHTS

## Questions

Stories move in circles.  
They don't move in straight lines.  
So it helps if you listen in circles.  
There are stories inside stories  
and stories between stories,  
and finding your way  
through them is as easy and as hard  
as finding your way home.  
And part of the finding  
is the getting lost.  
And when you're lost,  
you start to look around and to  
listen.

Corer Fischer, Albert Greenberg, and Naomi Newman



**SELF  
NARRATE**