Social Storytelling: Making Homelessness and Homeless Services Real to a Broader Community

Rick Brown, MA
Jennifer Dix, BBA

National Health Care for the Homeless Council
Introductions and Housekeeping

• Welcome and evaluations
• Introductions
• An example: Calvin’s story
  – Reactions?
• Storytelling for advocacy and advancement
  – Builds on past presentation
Learning Objectives, or #Takeaways

• Describe the role that storytelling can play in destigmatizing homelessness and illustrating homeless services.
• Name three tactics for incorporating storytelling in social media.
• Describe common challenges and concerns in storytelling.
• Widely applicable, and not just to social media
What Is Storytelling, and Why Is It Important?
Storytelling…

• Is everywhere.
• Takes many forms, including multimedia:
  – Photos
  – Copy for social media
  – Videos
• Provides a critical means to tell the story of our field
  – Hugely important for health centers and homeless service organizations in our field
• Can sometimes be more impactful than stats, facts, and figures
Illustrating Homeless Services

• Helps show our value to funders and donors, our community, potential consumers, etc.

• Give life to data and statistics
Storytelling as Advocacy

• Helps destigmatize homelessness and make experiences of homelessness real.
  – Counteracts dominant narrative of homelessness in U.S.
  – Makes the crisis of homelessness real

• Helps empower consumers
Why Is Social Media Important?
Social Media

- Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube
- Great storytelling vehicle
- Fluid, direct, and immediate
- Unlike advertising, it’s not a “loudspeaker”, but a conversation
- Engagement
- Way to be part of a community
Social Media

• Pervasive
• Frequency
• Reach
  – Including consumers
• Cost effective
• Part of your integrated communications
• Protection and accessibility
Methodology: Storytelling Examples and Techniques
What Will I Need?

• The best place to start is by looking at the work of others.

• Social media is highly accessible

• No advanced equipment is necessary

• Social media is highly diverse
Backbones of Good Stories

• Stories should be
  – Credible and relatable to an audience
  – Make an emotional impact
  – Convey some sort of transformation of journey--from rising action to climax to resolution
  – Empower their storytellers
Copy

• The simplest building block of stories is the written narrative.
  – Facebook posts
  – Tweets
  – Links to longer-form content; blog copy
Impact of Services

Illumination Foundation

- Humanizing
- Follows through with [link](http://bit.ly/DonaldMStory)
- Makes a call to action
- Awareness AND fundraising
General Awareness and Advocacy

• Syndicated article intro and linked to the full story in the Boston Globe

• Highlights advocacy

• Informs AND raises public profile

• Human, heartfelt with direct consumer focus
Impact of Services

Outside In

• Simple, yet effective

• Implies story of transformation

Last year, we helped 126 homeless young people find employment!
Storytelling in Social Media Copy

• Work with CAB to engage a willing consumer
• Take portrait and conduct interview
• Quote news coverage that illustrates a story
• Pull factoid and tweet
• Should always be about people
• Keep it simple and relatable
• Remember, Facebook for longer posts and Twitter for short and direct
• **Always** include a call to action.
Photos and Images

• Images increase engagement
• Always use images if possible
• Adds element of visual storytelling
The Human Element

Central City Concern

• Photo humanizes Kassy
• Links to call to action
• Caption builds on image
Illustrating Services

• Simple, visual
• Implicit story
• Minimal caption
Capturing Event to Illustrate Services

- Simple, powerful
- Consumer success story
- Promotes engagement
Donor Solicitation

Circle the City

• Consumer success story
• Promotes engagement
• Highlights role of organization
On average, people without homes die 30 years earlier than their housed counterparts.

Source: National HCH Council
Telling Stories in Images & Photos

- Pay attention to metrics
- Use any camera or smartphone
- Think about what you want to capture
- Be creative with photo opportunities
- Be respectful
- Use basic photography principles
- Consider engaging consumers
Videos

- Very effective
- High engagement
- Work across all social media platforms
- Require the most work and time
Consumer Testimonials

Carmon Ryals

- Powerful in her own words
- Immediate impact
- Show direct impact of ABQ HCH services
Consumer Testimonials

Rodney Dawkins

- Simple slideshow with audio
- Rodney’s story in his own words
- Demonstrates services
Institutional Overview

Albuquerque HCH

- Highlights services
- Vividly illustrates what ABQHCH is as an organization
Direct Appeal

BHCHP Sox for Socks

- Creative and clever
- Engages and informs
- Makes a direct ask
Video Storytelling

• Don’t always need professional equipment
• Find a quiet space and use a lavaliere microphone if possible
• Have a plan
• Coach interview subject
• Gather more material than you need
• Consider Facebook Live or Periscope
• Be mindful of the time investment.
Challenges and Concerns
The Storytelling Experience

• Avoid re-traumatization
  – Homelessness is traumatic
  – Telling these stories can itself be triggering.
  – Rehearse and be patient--avoid triggers
  – Always proceed with informed consent--be clear to storytellers about who might see their story.

• Avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes--consider your audience

• Stay on-message with stories
Informed Consent & Respect

• Storytelling should not merely inform but empower
  – Consider working directly with your Consumer Advisory Board
• Allow people to tell their own story
• Be sure to use releases
  – Inform storyteller of purpose, use, and protect from liability
  – Require signatures and dates
• A release isn’t enough--respect is.
Now Go Tell Your Story!
Further Resources and Examples
Tell Your Story!

- Now that you know these techniques, put them to use!
  - Not just applicable to social media
  - Remember the key tenets
  - Be measurable! (Where you can)
Further Resources

• Storytelling resources
  – NCAB Storytelling Guide
  – Activating Your Inner Aesop
  – Digital Storytelling: Stony Brook University and StoryCenter both have great resources

• Social media resources
  – HCH2017 Presentation: Amplify Your Voice in an Accessible Medium: Social Media 101 for Health Centers

• More examples and resources
Discussion and Questions