

How to Tell Your Story

An Important Tool for Successful Advocacy

What has had the greatest influence on your life? I'm sure in your mind you substituted the word "who" for "what." Because people have had the greatest influence on you – a parent, a teacher, a coach, a minister, a friend. Advocacy is no different than you and your life. And a person like you – and your story – play a key part in convincing Elected officials, or members of the media, to support and/or cover your issue. What book has had the greatest influence of your life? I bet that it's a work of fiction – like The Grapes of Wrath – as opposed to a work of non-fiction – like Poverty in America. No non-fiction book has ever made me cry, but I get a shiver up my back and my eyes tear up now when I remember the hero of Grapes tells his Mom that "wherever there are people struggling, fighting back, I'll be there." That's because a novel is about characters – people. Non-fiction is about policy, numbers, programs. One is directed toward your heart or your gut, and the other to your head. You – and your story – make the issues on which you advocate real for the people that can help you win your issue.

TIPS:

- **Personal not Policy.**

How does the issue affect you? The people you serve? What impact will action – or lack of action - by your target have in your life, and the lives of those you serve?

- **Real, not Abstract.**

How does your issue affect real people, in your community?

- **Emotional not (just) Factual.**

How does your issue make you feel? Angry? Sad? Hopeful?

- **Immediate, Concrete and Local.**

How does your issue have an impact where you live or work?

- **Moral, Ethical and the Right Thing to Do.**

Why is this issue so important to you? And to your community, the nation, the world?

- **Short – no more than 2 minutes long.**

WHAT'S NOT A "STORY"

The supportive housing provided by the Shelter Plus Care program of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development is extraordinarily effective. Last year, we won \$100 million for the program from the US Congress on a national level, and this year we won \$194 million. In the nation as a whole, local government and non-profits have created tens of thousands of units of supportive housing.....

WHAT IS A STORY #1 – A RESIDENT

My name is Alice Rodriguez. Two years ago, I was addicted to crack cocaine, living on the streets, and earning my living selling my body. I had lost my two children to foster care. Some nights, out on the street, Toni Allison of the Women's Empowerment Project here in Denver would stop by and talk with me. She got to know me, and I got to know her. She offered to help me find a place to live, and the kind of programs that could help me get my life back. I'd change the subject. I'd even get mad at her for suggesting that I needed to change my life. But she kept coming by. One night a bad customer beat me up pretty badly. I had to go to the emergency room, and they had to use stitches to stop the bleeding. I needed my drugs, and I needed money, so I had to go back out onto the streets, stitches and all. Toni stopped by again that night. She offered me a way out, and this time I took it. I moved into Dolores House. Today, I have almost 12 months clean and drug free. I see my kids on weekends. If I stay clean, and with the help of God and the staff at the Empowerment Program I will, I'll get my kids back. I'm here today to ask you to provide the resources to help Toni get more people like me off of the street and into a home. (True story).

WHAT IS STORY #2 – A PROVIDER

Hi. My name is Michael Thompson. I work for the Black Coalition Against Aids in San Francisco, CA. I am a gay man, and as you can see, an African-American man. When the AIDS pandemic exploded, many of my friends became infected. Many of them died, including Alex Whitehead, my partner for over 15 years. AIDS did more than destroy their bodies – before it killed them, it destroyed many of their lives. I mean that drained them and their friends and families of everything they had and owned. A few of them were reduced to living on the street. Many lived – and died - on the couches of family and friends. We now have the drugs to keep many HIV positive people from dying. Why should they have to live on the street? Funds from the McKinney and other government programs have permitted the Coalition to help scores of people with AIDS get off the street. I am here today to urge you to provide the resources for us to complete this work, so no one with AIDS must live – or die – on the street. (True story).