



**NAMI** | New Hampshire

# SHAPING SYSTEMS THROUGH **STORYTELLING**

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# Our Work

**NAMI New Hampshire is a non-profit, grassroots organization dedicated to improving the lives of those impacted by mental illness and suicide.**

By engaging policymakers, state officials, and community stakeholders, we work to strengthen services and supports for Granite Staters and their loved ones.

We train people to craft and share their stories to make change in state policies and dispel the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental illness and suicide.



# STORIES IN ACTION

 **NAMI** | New Hampshire  
National Alliance on Mental Illness





# Our Vision

A mental health system where people can access the supports and services they need in the right place, at the right time, in order to achieve long-term recovery and thrive in their community of choice, free from stigma and discrimination.

## **A System Built On Stories.**

To create effective, efficient systems free from abuse or mistreatment, policies and systems must be built by the people who work within the system every single day:

**People with lived experience, their family members and loved ones, and the providers who care for them.**



# Goals for Today's Session

Explore how stories inform systems and how to craft your story as a provider to effectively advocate.

## Learn

Explore how stories should inform systems and the unique role providers can play in advocacy.

## Write

Practice crafting your personal and provider story to use effectively as a template for future advocacy.

## Refine

Share what you wrote in small groups to get feedback on your story and ways it can be strengthened.

## Act

Make a plan to take action and use your story to change systems, and find those that can help you on your way.





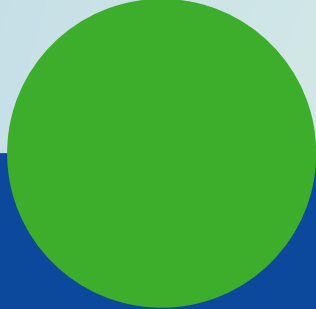
# STORIES OVER SYSTEMS

 **NAMI** | New Hampshire  
National Alliance on Mental Illness

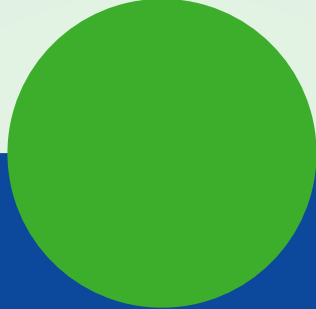


# APPROACHING ADVOCACY: HOW A STORY CAN HELP

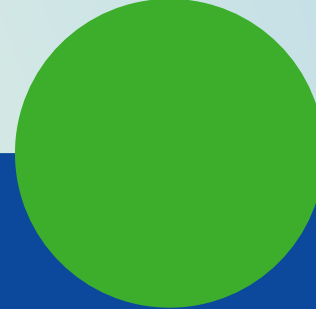
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Produces higher comprehension, recall, interest, and engagement in listeners.



Uses empathy to communicate your appeal on both logical and emotional levels.



Makes the issue “real” and lowers resistance to new perspectives or policy solutions.

# Using Stories to Transcend Politics.

In an environment where preconceived belief often takes precedence over data, research, and facts, stories are essential.

Stories create trust and connection that can communicate your appeal beyond partisan positions or perspectives.

Hearing directly from those impacted by a policy can challenge core beliefs more effectively than any other perspective.





# Accessible Advocacy

In NH's citizen legislature, accessibility is a key component of effective advocacy.

424

Members of the  
NH General Court

\$200

Legislator's salary  
for a 2 year term

1,000+

Bills filed every  
leg. session

**Stories can be** more helpful than data in explaining systemic issues to non-experts. We should not think of storytelling as separate approach to data-sharing , but instead **an effective method for communicating the same complex reality that data captures.**



# UTILIZING PERSPECTIVE



# Provider Perspectives

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Providers bring uniquely overlapping perspectives to systems that can strengthen their advocacy.

## Clinical

Education and clinical experience enable outcome-driven and person-centered systems design.

## Practical

Frontline experience delivering services reveals system flaws invisible to consumers and policymakers.

## Personal

Personal experience with services for self or family allows providers to assess systems from both ends.



# MENTAL HEALTH IN NH

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**1 in 5**

1 in 5 Youth and Adults experience a MH condition each year.

**10-34**

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for Granite Staters age 10-34

**71k**

71,000 NH adults reported needing MH care but not receiving it.



# Valuing Lived Experience in Providers and Systems

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Voices of lived experience are essential to building effective and humane systems.

Many providers have personal experiences with the systems within which they work. By sharing these stories in advocacy efforts, providers can change minds and systems.

However, providers face steep barriers that may discourage them from sharing their story or engaging in advocacy whatsoever.

# Provider Advocacy

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## Challenges & Obstacles



# Common Obstacles

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Providers face unique challenges in engaging with advocacy and sharing their personal stories.

## Access

Lack of knowledge about state politics; professional burnout; and questions of role.

## Fear

Fear of repercussions from the state, their employer, or others within the community.

## Stigma

Feeling that sharing their personal story will jeopardize their job or professional standing.

# Stigma as a Barrier

Stigma surrounding mental illness is a barrier for professionals across industries. Providers may worry that sharing mental health challenges will damage careers.

## Stigma harms us all.

Stigma prevents people from getting the care they need and perpetuates personal, professional, and systemic discrimination.

**By sharing our stories, we can eradicate stigma to promote help-seeking, end discrimination, and improve systems.**





# CRAFTING YOUR STORY AS A PROVIDER





# Your Story

Having your story prepared can help you easily advocate when opportunities arise.

Later on, we will ask you to draft or outline a version of your story based on a simple, effective story structure. Your story can:

- Be based on your or a loved one's experiences; your provider experience: **or ideally both.**
- Relate to a specific policy; or refer to a general need or cause.



# Step 1

## Introductions

Introduce yourself, the issue, your role in the community, and your desired outcome.

In 3–6 sentences, tell your listener:

- Who you are, *including identifying your role as a provider;*
- Why you are speaking with them, *naming specific policies if possible;*
- How you are connected to the issue, *personally and professionally;*
- And your “ask” or appeal, *the action you want your listener to take.*



## Step 2

# Your Experiences

Closely explain your personal experiences and how they affected your life **before getting help**.

In 3–9 sentences, describe for your listener:

- Challenges you faced that led to your involvement in the issue. *Ex: How mental health challenges affected you before you were able to get help.*
- How those challenges affected your personal and professional life. *Ex: Loss of relationships; Inability to work.*

**Tip:** Don't overexplain – stick to a few examples.



## Step 3

# Your Recovery

Explain what helped (or would have helped) you address your challenges. Use this section to create a positive blueprint for your issue/ask.

In 2–5 sentences, highlight:

- The services, supports, and steps you took that helped you get better.
- **OR,** If there was no hopeful outcome, describe what would have helped if the system or service were available.

**Tip:** Point out positive qualities of services and emphasize hope where possible to create an effective blueprint for your solution.

## Step 4

# What Has Changed

Conclude your personal story by showing what has changed in your life since you got help.

In 2–3 sentences, show your listener:

- What is going right in your life since getting help with your challenges.
- **Or,** How your life would be different if your ask was accomplished today.
- A hopeful vision for the future.

**Tip:** Mirror step two to create an “arc” – if your challenges affected your work, share how you are now succeeding professionally.



## Step 5

# Broaden the View

Expand the perspective to show how others in your community face the same challenges.

In 1-4 sentences, convey:

- How other people may face the same challenges, or be unable to access the same services, that you did.
- Flaws in current systems and policies that cause the challenges you faced or create outcome disparities.
- **How you see this issue play out with your clients in your role as a provider**

## Step 6

# Identify Solutions

Provide concrete policy or system changes that would improve community outcomes.

In 1–3 sentences, clearly state:

- Specific policy changes that would address your identified issue.
- **Or,** Steps that should be taken to identify solutions if none exist.
- How life would change for you as a provider and those you serve if the changes are accomplished.

**Tip:** Create a hopeful vision of the future to motivate positive action.



## Step 7

# Final Appeal

Thank your listener and restate your “ask.”

In 1-3 sentences, conclude your story by:

- Thanking your listener for their time.
- Directly stating your “ask” – the action you would like your listener to take.

**Tip:** Make an ask that is feasible for your policymaker is not too broad in scope.

*Ex: “Please support SB 255”*

# RESPONSIBLE STORIES





# Responsible Storytelling

Due to their influence, certain considerations must be made when using stories in advocacy.

## Accuracy

Stories supplement data – not supplant. Don't employ or alter stories to undermine facts and data.

## Application

Don't use stories that are unrelated to your issue. Stories should support policies that will make a difference.

## Scale

Honestly portray your story and the issue at large. Don't use stories to exaggerate issues or proposed solutions.

# Provider-Specific Considerations



## Patient Privacy

Share stories only with permission or remove details that could identify your client. Obey relevant law.



## Ethical Conflicts

Advocate to improve client outcomes, not solely benefit providers or the system.



## Trust & Integrity

Present issues accurately and support proven policies you know to be effective.



# Draft Your Story

You may use a story relating to any issue, ideally one that relates to both your personal and professional experiences.

You may use family or client stories.

You may use a specific “ask” to an issue you are passionate about or a general appeal.

*Ex: Support funding for MH services*

Follow the steps from earlier in the session:

- Introductions
- Your Experiences
- Your Recovery
- What Has Changed
- Identify Solutions
- Final Appeal



# GROUP DISCUSSION: STORY CHALLENGES

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- What did you find challenging about writing your story? Which sections were easiest or hardest and why?
- How did you balance your personal and professional perspectives? Did one overpower the other?
- Did you find it difficult to condense your story, or did you run out of things to say?
- Did writing your story cause any emotional reaction? If so, did that come through in your writing?



# SMALL GROUP EXERCISE:

## STORY SHARING AND FEEDBACK

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Split into groups of three and practice sharing your draft story and providing feedback, rotating through the three roles below. Take note of strong elements in the story and areas it could be strengthened. (Exercise length: ~15 mins)

### **Speaker**

Share your story in  
under two minutes.

### **Timer**

Listen and track the  
speaker's time.

### **Listener**

Jot down notes and  
helpful feedback.





USE YOUR  
**STORY**



# Story Adaptations

Having a simple story drafted allows you to quickly adapt to different advocacy opportunities.

## Call

Calls & V-mails:

- Be friendly and concise
- Prepare for questions
- Choose the right time

## Write

Letters & emails:

- Use proper salutations
- Include bill numbers
- Give your contact info

## Post

Social posts:

- Hit only the highlights
- Use correct & effective tags
- Promote your ask to others

## Testify

Public hearings:

- Shorten story to <2mins
- Prepare for questions
- Anticipate an audience

# Responsibility to Act

As members of our communities, we all have a responsibility to advocate — for ourselves, our family, and our neighbors.

With this in mind, providers have a special responsibility, as experts in their field and a voice for their clients, to take action.

**Advocacy is preventative care.**

By fighting for quality systems change, we can save lives, prevent crises, and make sure everyone gets the care they need.

**We hope you leave this session ready to take your next step towards action.**





# NEXT STEPS TOWARD ACTION

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## **Refine your advocacy story.**

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Take what you've learned and written today and craft a completed version of your story so that you can easily take action in the future.

## **Connect with other advocates.**

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Find others in your community and local organizations working on issues you care about and find out how you can get involved.

## **Contact your policymaker.**

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Call, write, or meet with your state policymaker to let them know about the issues that are important to you.

# WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

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**nami**  
National Alliance on Mental Illness

**New Hampshire**

## Contact Us:

**Holly Stevens, Director of Public Policy** – [hstevens@naminh.org](mailto:hstevens@naminh.org)

**Sam Hawkins, Public Policy Assistant** – [shawkins@naminh.org](mailto:shawkins@naminh.org)

**General NAMI NH Advocacy Email** – [advocacy@naminh.org](mailto:advocacy@naminh.org)

## We can help you:

- Craft your story
- Contact your policymaker
- Find and track legislation
- Form grassroots connections
- Share your provider perspective
- Change lives in the Granite State



# RESOURCES

- ***NAMISmarts for Advocacy: Telling Your Story***, NAMI (2023)
- ***Mental Health in New Hampshire State Fact Sheet***, NAMI (2025)
- ***Evaluating Personal Narrative Storytelling for Advocacy***, Jessie Austin and Emma Connell (2019)
- ***How to Connect with Lawmakers—The Power of Telling the PA Story***, AAPA
- ***Using narratives to impact health policy-making: a systematic review***, Fadlallah, R., El-Jardali, F., Nomier, M. et al. (2019)
- ***Storytelling and evidence-based policy: lessons from the grey literature***, Brett Davidson (2017)
- ***Using narratives and storytelling to communicate science with nonexpert audiences***, Michael F. Dahlstrom (2014)
- ***Stories in Action***, Walsh J, Vaida N, Coman A, Fiske ST. (2023)
- ***The Power of Narrative Influence: How Strategic Storytelling Can Drive Policy Reform***, Oluwatomisin Ajayi (2025)
- ***Obligation or Option? The Physician's Role in Advocacy***, Gary Pettett (2011)
- ***Does reducing stigma increase participation in benefit programs? Research suggests so.***, Nora Delaney (2022)