

Stories are everywhere – your job is to find them.

Everyone has stories to tell – being able to collect stories requires listening, encouraging and organizing. Here are five steps to start capturing stories.

1. **Mine your resources for stories:** look at your data, ask clients, interview staff.
2. **Build a culture of storytelling** - ask staff to regularly share stories.
3. **Articulate** the stories you want your staff and ambassadors to capture so they know where to find them.
4. **Put posters or flyers in high traffic areas** so clients and families know you are interested in hearing their stories.
5. **Capture your stories** in a way that works for you, like on a spreadsheet.

What Makes a Good Story?

Good stories:

- **Are unexpected.** Think about what makes you proud of the work you do. Is there something about the people you have helped that is unique, unexpected or different than what may be “normal”? Do you provide programs or services that are new or different than the way you’ve offered them in the past?
- **Are clear and actionable.** The story is focused, specific and direct. The story illustrates a deliberate action or specific incident. The message or purpose of the story is conveyed through language the audience can understand. It directly relates to a specific goal of yours and has a specific call to action for the audience.
- **Show progress or improvement.** A story happens when there is a change. Think about an outcome you are proud of, and then think about what that means for an individual impacted. Ask a person or people involved to find out what got better for them as a result of this change. For example, if you have created a partnership with a primary care facility to increase referrals, dig into how new access to specialty care has helped a person who was referred to your agency to get healthier, how that has changed what they think about specialty care, or their ability to access your programs and services.
- **Have an emotional component.** Improving health is not all about lowering blood pressure or reducing substance use. It is about what health means toward regaining connections to loved ones, building self-confidence and overcoming fears or anxieties. Tap into the feelings experienced by people associated with your work and weave those emotions into the way you tell the story.
- **Feature a real person’s voice.** No matter the way you will be telling the story (article, video, in a presentation) – you will be relating a personal experience to another person. When creating a story, think about how you talk to people and how you like people to talk to you. When do you tune people out?
- **Are relatable and replicable.** You do not need to seek out stories that are “exceptional” – rather the opposite, you should ask people about their experience and determine what about their story is relatable to your target audience.

Sample Questions to Ask in an Interview

If you are interviewing someone regarding a personal story of addiction or recovery, here are potential questions or points to cover:

- Nature of illness — i.e. when it was diagnosed, symptoms, impact
- How has the illness affected their ability to live, work or go to school? How has it affected their connection with their family or other social relationships?
- How were they able to find access to treatment?
- What specific services and supports did they receive? How did each help?
- What was the role of their case manager/clinician/treatment team?
- Who was helpful to them in their recovery? How?
- What does recovery mean to them? What are they able to do today as a result of the services they received?
- What are their dreams/hopes/plans for the future?

Always be sure to have permission, in writing, before sharing someone's personal story. The sample information release is an example of how you may want to formally record permission to share a person's story.