

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT: Elevating Lived Experiences

WHO WE ARE

NC Child is a statewide, 501(c)(3) nonprofit that advances public policies to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive, no matter their race, ethnicity, or place of birth. We believe that good public policy happens when evidence-based research and interventions meet the lived experiences of families and communities.

BEST PRACTICES: GUIDANCE FROM OUR 2023 STORYTELLING FELLOWS

- Start from a place recognizing that your story is yours—but you are not alone. Authenticity and honesty matter because it's how people can see themselves, their experiences, and their communities in your experiences. Get comfortable being vulnerable.
- Every word counts. Think strategically about your purpose and incorporate the details of your story that emphasize and serve your mission.
- If you're sharing your story and it is related to public policy, your story still matters even if (and when) the policy changes. Be flexible and find the connections.
- Your experience is powerful on its own—but if you can connect your experience to broader issues or trends in data, make the connection for your audience because they may not be able to on their own. In other words: show your audience how to connect the dots between current policy, data, and your personal experience.
- Know who your audience is and speak directly to them. Tell your story authentically and be sure to highlight points where you may share common ground or objectives with your audience.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Through the support of the Georgetown Center for Children and Families and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, we worked side-by-side with six community members to help them tell their stories about their family's health and their experiences with Medicaid. Throughout this process, our storytellers engaged with practitioners, NC Child staff, and with each other to learn how to share their experiences authentically and intentionally, with an eye towards moving the needle on important health policies.

**“SHARING MY STORY
HELPS PEOPLE SHED
THEIR PRECONCEIVED
NOTIONS ABOUT WHO NEEDS
GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE,
AND HELPS THEM PAUSE AND
REFLECT ON JUST HOW MANY
OTHERS LIKE ME THERE ARE—
AND WHY SOMETHING LIKE
MEDICAID EXPANSION
MATTERS.”**

-2023 Storytelling Fellow

If you are interested in learning more about our 2023 Storytelling Fellowship or are interested in learning more about how to elevate the lived experiences of the families and communities you serve, contact NC Child communications director Emily Blevins at emily@ncchild.org.

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DO IT YOURSELF: HOW ORGANIZATIONS CAN ELEVATE THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

- Storytellers come from all walks of life. Start the process by asking them what barriers they may face when it comes to participating in a storytelling process, and work with them to provide accommodations and assistance to make the experience safer, healthier, and more equitable.
- Be responsive to questions—and to feedback. Everyone has a story to tell, but each storyteller's journey is different. Organizations should seek to create an environment where there is thoughtful, two-way communication between themselves and their storytellers.

“IT’S IMPORTANT TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO LIFT UP THE EXPERIENCES OF THE COMMUNITY. ORGANIZATIONS MISS OPPORTUNITIES BECAUSE THEY WAIT TOO LONG OR THINK THE STORY ISN’T RELEVANT—BUT THE ISSUES ARE ROOTED IN THESE STORIES.”

-2023 Storytelling Fellow

“I SEE MYSELF AFTER THIS EXPERIENCE AS AN ADVOCATE AND VOICE FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES CARING FOR LOVED ONES WITH DISABILITIES. I CAN GIVE VOICE TO MY PASSIONS AND EXPERIENCES, AND I CAN GIVE A MICROPHONE TO OTHERS.”

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- Create and communicate a structure for the process. Outlining clear goals for meetings and creating defined benchmarks and milestones helps anchor storytellers to the process and creates an environment that is organized, safe, and allows them to be even more creative.
- Give storytellers the space to collaborate with each other. Everyone's story is different, but giving storytellers opportunities to iterate alongside their peers can help unlock new ideas—all while building a supportive environment.
- Encourage the pursuit of different storytelling formats. Long essays can be challenging, and storytellers may benefit from being encouraged to try different mediums—art, music, poetry, etc.

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