

TELL YOUR STORY

Hope Starts With YOU

As grassroots advocates our greatest tool to communicate and resonate with elected officials is telling our stories. Our stories and experiences demonstrate how the lack of appropriate mental health services is negatively impacting New Yorkers. Success stories also demonstrate the positive outcomes that are generated when proper mental health services are available.

By telling your story, you are putting a human face on these issues. This is crucial as elected officials and their staffs are constantly inundated with special interest concerns. Lobbyists provide facts and figures, but advocates tell our stories and demonstrate how these issues are actually impacting people.

This message is especially important to legislators to help them understand what is taking place in their districts and how their constituents' lives can be improved. In many cases, the legislator may not be aware of the shortage of mental health services, not because they do not care, but because they have yet to be properly educated on the issue. Hearing from their constituents demonstrates that these issues matter and more must be done. By telling your story, you become the face for the issue and can be the reason an official decides to take action.

While the details of your story are important, you also want to remember that people's attention spans are short, so telling your story succinctly is also crucial to successful advocacy. The following resources, as part of the NAMI Smarts for Advocacy program, are designed to help you most effectively tell your story in order to enact positive change.

Seven Steps to Telling Your Story

The following seven steps will help you craft a succinct and powerful story.



1.	Introduce yourself
	Give your name and city or town. Include your organization. We encourage you to describe yourself as "a member of [NAMI State Org or NAMI Affiliate], part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness."
	Share how you are affected by mental illness. Are you living with mental illness, a family member, a caregiver? This brings a "real face" to mental illness.
	State your issue and position. Let your listener know what you want them to support or oppose (or do). This helps your listener focus.
2.	What happened?
	What happened before you received the help you needed? Keep this brief--think about the most important thing you'd like your listener to know.
3.	What helped?
	Describe what helped in your recovery (or would have helped). This adds a hopeful tone and helps show the value of services and supports.
4.	How are you different today?
	Share what is going right in your life or how you are experiencing recovery. This concludes your personal story on a positive note that inspires.
5.	What is the need or problem?
	Mention the problem or need you want addressed. Transition to the challenge(s) faced by people living with mental illness.
6.	What will help others?
	Talk about what will help. Let your listener know what will address the need or problem you described.
7.	Make your "ask"
	Ask your policymaker if you can count on their support (or opposition). Include a bill number, if possible. Thank your policymaker for his or her time.

Sample Family Member Story



1. My introduction

Hello, I'm Jenny Jones from Springville. I'm a member of NAMI Springville, part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

I'm also the proud mother of a 23-year-old son who lives with bipolar disorder. I'd like to share my story with you and ask for your support of mental health services.

2. What happened

When my son was still a toddler, I had a thought that no mother should have: I wondered if my beautiful boy would be in juvenile detention on his 16th birthday. He just did not respond the way other children did to requests, to routines, to daily life and love.

As he grew, we never knew what would be broken, who might be hurt or when it would happen.

3. What helped

In fifth grade, my son's teacher said, "Jenny, honey, I've taught hundreds and hundreds of kids. I know when a boy is misbehaving and I know when something is wrong. And something *is* wrong. You just keep looking for help."

When Andy was finally diagnosed with bipolar disorder, our lives changed. With treatment, he started smiling, enjoying school and making friends.

4. How I'm different today

On his sixteenth birthday, Andy wasn't in juvenile detention; he was creating art. Today, he's enjoying life, working hard and making me proud.

5. What is the need or problem

My son is proof that treatment works. But, not everyone gets the help they need.

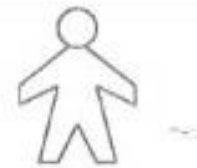
6. What will help others

A strong mental health system will help children and adults get the right care at the right time.

7. My "ask"

Thank you for meeting with me and listening to my story. Can I count on you to protect mental health services—and give families the hope of recovery?

Sample Peer Story



1. My introduction

Hello, I'm Shannon Johnson from Springville. I'm a member of NAMI Springville, part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

As a person who lives with schizophrenia, I'd like to share my story with you and ask for your support of mental health services.

2. What happened

I was married and had a successful career in business. I worked hard and never imagined I would experience a mental illness. But, I did.

I started seeing a therapist after experiencing nightmares, nervousness and problems going to work. I thought that with a few visits to a therapist, these problems would be over. But, my symptoms got worse and worse. Eventually, I lost everything.

3. What helped

With the help of a psychiatrist who diagnosed me with schizophrenia, I found my way back again. I will always remember him telling me that having schizophrenia did not mean life was over. He gave me hope.

4. How I'm different today

Today, I'm proud to be working again and volunteering with NAMI's *In Our Own Voice* program.

5. What is the need or problem

Many people have mental illnesses like mine, but not everyone gets the help they need.

6. What will help others

A strong mental health system helps more people get the right care at the right time to experience recovery.

7. My "ask"

Thank you for meeting with me and listening to my story. Can I count on you to protect mental health services?

