STORYTELLING TIPS

Stories and testimonials are particularly effective ways to illustrate the value of your work. Stories touch people's hearts and lodge in their memories. They can be extremely effective in fundraising appeals, donor and board communications, and grant reports. Here are a few tips that can be useful in collecting stories. We ask for a story as part of your final grant report, but appreciate getting them at any time.

- **Questions, questions.** The best stories come directly from your clients and front-line staff. When you talk to a client, ask them what brought them to your program. What difference has your program made in their life? How has it made them feel about their future? If they are telling someone about your program, what do they say? Ask your staff people to talk about their experience working at the organization: why they joined, what they see every day, how they see a tangible change taking place in the community, thanks to the organization’s work.

- **Last line first.** A good story has a definitive beginning, middle, and end. Know what you want people to remember, how this story ends before you write.

- **Details.** Sensory details engage the listener, and set your story firmly in time and place. Let your listener or reader see the person you are talking about, feel the emotions you are describing.

- **Testimonial as story.** Sometimes a quote says it all. It could be a quote lifted from media coverage. A line from a thank you e-mail about the difference your program made. A verbal comment from a local leader about your value in the community (that you jot down and then later seek permission for use). Quotes can also be a nice visual element for use in print or electronic materials.

- **Capturing stories.** You and your staff encounter stories every day. We recommend establishing a common place, or person, to capture these stories in writing. Maybe it's a file on a shared drive, or the opening 5 minutes of a staff meeting.

- **Asking permission.** Let the person know that their story, or quote, might be used in your or your funders’ communications, and possibly in a media story, to inspire hope and encourage future support of the program. It's best to get their permission in writing (e.g., an e-mail).

- **Name names.** Name your characters. Real names are always best—and essential if you want to share your story with the media. If the client is not comfortable using their name, consider using just a first name, or a pseudonym. When you write down your story, include the client’s name, date, and whether you requested permission to share the story. Photos are always a great addition.
Examples

Here are a few examples to illustrate the points above.

"One morning I saw a kid at a bus stop sharing Hot Cheetos with other kids. That was breakfast. We need to change that."
– Joany Titherington, manager of the new Oak Park Farmer's Market in Sacramento, supported in part by Kaiser Permanente
  - Hot Cheetos provides great sensory detail.
  - The bus stop in the morning locates it in time and place.
  - Brief example showing why change is needed.
  - Came from a media story; used in a Kaiser Permanente annual report.

When Lance Gates finished a tour of Iraq and left the Marines, his health coverage ended. He and his wife, Laura, could not afford to extend their military insurance, and they didn't qualify for the state’ health insurance program for children. Relief came when Sonoma County's Department of Health Services helped them find and enroll their son, Brody, in Kaiser Permanente's Child Health Plan. "I don't know how I would sleep at night if he wasn't covered," Laura said. "I would hate to be in a situation where I'm thinking, 'Do I take my child to the doctor, or do I buy groceries?'" In 2010 we served more than 49,000 children through our Child Health Plan.
  - Real names and details make it come alive (not just that the dad was in the military, but where and with whom).
  - Through questions, the writer was able to show how the family’s lives are better because of the program, and how much worse things might have been without it.
  - Originally a story on Kaiser Permanente employee Web portal, used in our annual report.

“On tours of the new school clinic, students asked the school health center staff, 'Is this all for us?' Having a beautiful new space helps convey to students how important they and their health are to the community.”
—Bonnie Trinclisti, a leader at one of the 10 Oakland Unified School District school-based clinics that Kaiser Permanente supports through a $7.5 million investment.
  - Even in the retelling, emotion is clear and compelling.
  - Began as a line in a progress report; now we use it as a testimonial.

We enthusiastically welcome your stories. Please send them to your grant manager or to denice.y.alexander@kp.org at any point. If you have any questions, please let us know.

Thank you! We look forward to reading your stories!