

Telling Stories

Having people tell their personal stories is the most effective way to have others understand their lives and what they are going through, and thus change hearts and minds. This appendix discusses how to find people who will tell their stories and how to record the stories for future use.

Getting People to Tell Their Stories

- **Consider the context for the story:**
 - **The audience:** What is their experience and perspective with disability issues?
 - **The context:** A story as part of a worship service? A story in a book or manuscript? A video as part of a presentation? Is the story to be broadcast? If so, how and to whom?
 - **The purpose:** Why do we want the person to tell their story? To decrease stigma? To increase understanding of disability? To help the person get involved?
 - **The message to be conveyed:** Join in advocacy/action? To raise consciousness?
- **Decide who the best person is to help convey the message:**
 - A respected congregation member?
 - A member of an outside disability group? Find out about local disability groups and call them to ask if someone would be willing to share their story to help educate others.
 - Who might recommend someone whose story would be a good fit?
 - Has this person told their story before successfully?
 - Talk with the person about doing the story:
 - Tell them why you're talking to them.
 - Tell them who recommended/referred them.
 - Tell them why they would be a good choice for telling their story.

- Introduce the person to the audience, and explain the purpose and context of how you plan to use their story.
- If possible, point to other people's stories (video or written) so they will know what you have done in the past and what they could expect working with you.
- If they can't do it, ask if they have a recommendation of another person.
- Make it clear that they will not be asked to share their own experience with disability, or that of their family, unless they choose to do so.
- Tell them if they want to tell the story, how we can help with questions and answers. Give them a list of prospective questions, and ask them to edit it and add other questions. In particular, ask about the full range of experience, including positive experiences that have come with the disability.
- If you are having a family member of a person with a disability tell the story, it should be the story of the family member's experience, not the story of their loved one.
- Allow them to back out without consequences, if they feel unable to share even at the last minute. (This offer means you will need a back-up plan.)
- Make it safe: If this is to be a recorded story, tell the person that if there is some part of their story they want to omit a day or so after the taping, that it will be omitted, no questions asked.
- Make sure you get a signed release form.

A highly recommended resource for creating oral histories is **Stories Between Us**, edited by Lena Richardson. This resource discusses gathering stories of the elders of a congregation. The same techniques used can be adapted to gathering stories of people with disabilities. The book has information about recruiting and training of interviewers to be good listeners, how to create interview questions, a sample release form, and more.

Stories Between Us – Oral Histories of a Countercultural Congregation – Plus a guide to creating your own oral history project! Edited by Lena Rebecca

Richardson, Lulu, 2012. Access information about the book at

http://www.storiesbetweenus.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=69&Itemid=80

Videotaping Stories

Videos are more complex than written or oral stories, but can be more powerful. Three options are:

1. Have people videotape themselves, or have their friends/family do it (quality may be uneven).
2. Arrange for a local crew to tape and edit the story (probably will cost several hundred dollars). Grants from the UU Funding Panel are possible. If several storytellers will be at the same place at the same time, there could be cost savings.
3. Make sure you get a signed release form so that you can use the video in the manner you wish.

An informative video on using video (and stories) for instructional/educational/justice purposes was filmed at the Unitarian Universalist Association's Justice General Assembly in June 2012, where Standing on the Side of Love Campaign Manager Dan Furmansky spoke on a panel about the use of social media in organizing. This video is his presentation on the power of storytelling and how the Standing on the Side of Love Campaign can support grassroots justice work. Click on this link to access the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO5D-la3qeE>

Stories are a powerful tool for social change. Use online communication to tell your story, build relationships with partner organizations, and win legislative and consumer-advocacy victories.

Suggestions for preparing for an effective videotaping session are listed below:

- Plan out what you want to say at least in outline form, but don't plan to read it word for word during the videotaping.
- Consider the audience perspective and purpose of video to determine what to relate and what to leave out.
- Plan to speak no more than 10-15 minutes. Then edit down to 3-7 minutes.
- Rehearse it with a friend before the actual taping

Video Production Suggestions

The following suggestions are adapted from the “Video Production Guide” prepared by Jay Collier and Kris Brewer for Massachusetts Institute of Technology TechTV (MIT, August 2009).

For more detailed information and suggestions, click on the link

web.mit.edu/techtv/videoprodguide/videoprodguide.pdf

- **Setting suggestions:** Setting should be simple with few distractions visible. Try not to have other people who don't speak be visible in the video; people viewing the video will start wondering who they are and why they're there.
- **Lighting suggestions:** Ensure there is good strong light, near windows, with all lights on.
- **Suggestions for sound:** Use an external microphone, wireless microphone, or clip-on microphone at chest height.
- **Suggestions for shooting video:**
 - Change the point of view between shots – shoot from different angles.
 - Change your shooting height: higher or lower angles.
 - Avoid motion while you are shooting; if you do move, do so as slowly and smoothly as possible.
 - Don't zoom while recording. Change vantage points with a new shot and edit.
- **Editing suggestions:**
 - Editing should create a short, compact (3-7 minute) video for telling a story.
 - Add in titles to identify the person, location, and subject.
 - Provide closed captions for accessibility to people who are hard of hearing or Deaf.
 - Video segments called “clips” are digitized to a hard disk.
 - Edit the original material by choosing the best clips. The story structure is simply assembled in order to make sure the intended story comes through clearly.
 - Take another pass and add transitions between scenes.
 - Clean up the sound and add music, if any.
 - Add titles to identify people, places, and things; to help tell the story, or to give credit.

- Add closed captions. This is easy to do if you load the video onto YouTube. You create a caption file with a transcript of the words spoken, upload it to YouTube, and a YouTube utility will create the timing tags to sync it with your video.
- Final mastering: Play back the program on the computer and record it onto your preferred medium.