



NAMI Smarts for Advocacy

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 never imagined I would experience a mental illness.

Two years ago, 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. Instead, my symptoms gradually worsened until I could no longer work.

3. What helped

With the help of a psychiatrist who diagnosed me with schizophrenia, I learned how to successfully manage my symptoms. I will always remember her telling me that having schizophrenia did not mean life was over. She 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?

1. My introduction

Hello, I'm Cynthia Smith from Springville. I'm a member of [organization]. I love my job as psychiatric nurse practitioner, but it's not because I help people. I love my job because, every day, I support people as they help themselves.

How do I do that? Let me tell you a brief story about Lucy. Lucy is not her real name, but this is her real story.

2. What happened

When I first met Lucy, she was 27 years old, toothless, homeless and estranged from her family. Ten years earlier, Lucy had been voted the most likely to succeed in her high school year book.

3. What helped?

When our outreach worker first met Lucy on Smith Street, she asked Lucy what *she* wanted. What Lucy wanted more than safe shelter, more than warm clothing, more than a hot meal, more than stopping the voices in her head, was to have...teeth. We aren't dentists at the Mental Health Center but that didn't stop us. We knew that getting Lucy teeth would help Lucy feel like what she wanted mattered to us. By following her lead, it opened the door to getting Lucy to step inside our treatment center. Over a few weeks, Lucy trusted us enough to help her stop the voices in her head with medication and then, soon after, she participated in treatment groups and supported housing. Eventually she felt secure enough to join the supported employment program at our psychosocial clubhouse.

4. What is different today?

And now, one year later, Lucy lives in her own apartment, works part-time as a computer programmer and sings in her church choir. She continues treatment and attends monthly dinners at the clubhouse to stay connected with the friends she made there.

5. What is the need or problem?

Lucy is proof that that recovery is possible when we can access the right combination of care at the right time.

6. What will help others?

A strong mental health system where we can utilize a *variety* of supports makes all the difference.

7. My "ask"

Can I count on you to protect our mental health services so we can give individuals like Lucy the variety of supports she needs to get and stay healthy?

1. My introduction

Hello, I'm Jerry Jackson 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 here because of my brother, Tom, who struggled with major depression. I'd like to share his story and ask for your support of mental health services.

2. What happened

My brother was a great athlete, made good grades and always had my back.

But after he entered college, my brother started battling depression. He wrestled with a painful darkness that held him in its grip—and he lost. He took his life two years ago. And I lost my best friend.

3. What would have helped

Nothing will ever bring back my brother, but I know that mental health treatment can save lives.

4. How I'm different today

Today, it's still difficult to talk about Tom, but I'm speaking up to help others.

5. What is the need or problem

Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in our country, but most Americans with mental illness aren't getting the help they need.

6. What will help others

A strong mental health system will help more people get the right care at the right time and, very likely, spare another family the worst phone call they'll ever get.

7. My "ask"

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

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 legislator if you can count on their support (or opposition). Include a bill number, if possible. Thank your legislator for his or her time.

Story Practice Sheet



1. My introduction	Include your name and city and organization, if applicable. 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.” Add how you are affected by mental illness and your issue and position.
2. What happened	Aim for 3-9 sentences. Briefly describe the most important and compelling thing(s) about your situation.
3. What helped	Aim for 1-5 sentences. Briefly describe what helped in your recovery (or what would have helped). Aim for a hopeful tone that helps show what is helpful.

4. How I'm different today	Aim for 1-3 sentences. 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	Aim for 1-2 sentences. Transition to the challenge(s) faced by people living with mental illness that you want addressed.
6. What will help others	Aim for 1-2 sentences. Talk about what will help. Let your listener know what will address the need or problem you described.
7. My "ask"	Aim for 1-2 sentences. Thank your listener for listening to you. Then, ask your listener for a commitment. Be specific.