

## 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.

**For anti-stigma, stop here. For advocacy efforts, continue.**

### 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



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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 4. How I'm different today

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

**For anti-stigma, stop here. For advocacy efforts, continue.**

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## 5. What is the need or problem

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

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## 6. What will help others

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

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## 7. My "ask"

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

# Sample Story of Loss



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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 3. What would have helped

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

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## 4. How I'm different today

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

**For anti-stigma, stop here. For advocacy efforts, continue.**

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 7. My "ask"

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



# Steps to Telling Your Story

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



1.	<b>Introduce yourself</b>
	<b>Give your name and city or town.</b> 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.”
	<b>Share how you are impacted by mental illness.</b> Are you living with mental illness, a family member, a caregiver? This brings a "real face" to mental illness.
	<b>Advocacy: State your issue and position.</b> Let your listener know what you want them to support or oppose (or do). This helps your listener focus.
2.	<b>What happened?</b>
	<b>What happened before you received the help you needed?</b> Keep this brief-- think about the most important thing you’d like your listener to know.
3.	<b>What helped?</b>
	<b>Describe what helped in your recovery (or would have helped).</b> Include both external interventions and individual strategies for improving or maintaining wellness. This adds a hopeful tone and helps show the value of services and supports.
4.	<b>How are you different today?</b>
	<b>Share what is going right in your life or how you are experiencing recovery.</b> This concludes your personal story on a positive note that inspires.
<b>For anti-stigma, stop here. For advocacy efforts, continue.</b>	
5.	<b>What is the need or problem?</b>
	<b>Mention the problem or need you want addressed.</b> Transition from the personal to the challenge(s) faced by people living with mental illness.
6.	<b>What will help others?</b>
	<b>Talk about what will help.</b> Let your listener know what will address the need or problem you described.
7.	<b>Make your "ask"</b>
	<b>Ask your policymaker if you can count on their support (or opposition).</b> Include a bill number, if possible. Thank your policymaker for his or her time.



# Story Practice Sheet



<b>1. My introduction</b>	Include your name and city and organization, if applicable. We encourage you to describe yourself as “a member of <a href="#">[NAMI State Org or Affiliate]</a> , part of America’s largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.” Add how you’re impacted by mental illness, your issue and position if your purpose is related to advocacy.
<b>2. What happened</b>	Aim for 3-9 sentences. Briefly describe the most important and compelling thing(s) about your situation.
<b>3. What helped</b>	Aim for 1-5 sentences. Briefly describe what helped in your recovery (or what would have helped). Include both external interventions and individual strategies for improving or maintaining wellness. Aim for a hopeful tone that helps show what is helpful.

<b>4. How I'm different today</b>	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.
<b>For anti-stigma, stop here. For advocacy efforts, continue.</b>	
<b>5. What is the need or problem</b>	Aim for 1-2 sentences. Transition to the challenge(s) faced by people living with mental illness that you want addressed.
<b>6. What will help others</b>	Aim for 1-2 sentences. Talk about what will help. Let your listener know what will address the need or problem you described.
<b>7. My "ask"</b>	Aim for 1-2 sentences. Thank your listener for listening to you. Then, ask your listener for a commitment. Be specific.