



Disability & Housing Storytelling Guide

The Problem.

Why Do We Need Narrative Change¹?

People with disabilities have a harder time finding and keeping a home. They face more discrimination, are more likely to be homeless, and can be forced to live in institutions. But they have not been included in plans to fix the housing crisis. On top of that, unfair ideas about disability and housing lead to rules that make the problem worse for everyone.

Our Stories.

How Can We Change the Narrative?

As disabled people and allies, we have the knowledge and experience to tell real stories about disability and housing. By sharing these stories, we can change the way people think and talk about housing, making sure it is inclusive, accessible, affordable, and fair for everyone. At The Kelsey, we call this “disability-forward housing.”²

The Guide.

This Resource...

1. Shows how to write your housing story
2. Gives facts about accessible, affordable, and inclusive housing to help you talk about it
3. Gives examples of stories that create change

¹ Narrative change is about changing the common stories and ideas people have about something. It's about telling new stories that challenge old ideas and beliefs. By changing the narrative, we can influence the way people feel and act and government policies to create a more fair and inclusive society.

² Disability-forward housing is housing that is affordable, accessible, fully inclusive and integrated, where disabled residents and non-disabled residents live and thrive.

Before You Write Your Story...

Take Care of Yourself: Writing and sharing your story can bring up happy and hard feelings. As you begin, make sure you take care of your mental health. Take breaks and do activities that help you feel good.

Think About Your Audience: Ask yourself these questions: Who do you want to read your story? What do they care about? Are they policymakers who vote on laws? Are they funders who need to decide where to donate their money to?

Think About Your Goals: Why are you sharing your story? What change do you want to help make?



Image description: A colorful illustration of two people against a multi-colored background. One is reading a book.

How to Write Your Story.

Note: These examples are not from a real housing story.

- 1. Give Some Background.** Write about the important people in your story. Talk about where they were and what was going on around them. Bring up things that your audience cares about (like their interests or goals) to help them connect to the story more.

Example: "Think of a world where everyone has a place to call home. I was thirty when I lost my home."

- 2. Define the Problem.** Write about the problem in the story.

Example: "It costs more money to live in Los Angeles than to live in most cities in the U.S. On top of this, [21% of renters in California are extremely low-income](#)—including me."

- 3. Define the Big Moment.** Write about the moment things changed or when something important happened. Talk about the emotions that you felt in that moment.

Example: "For seven years, I lived in this apartment. It was my home. But everything changed when I learned that it was going to cost more money to live there. I was so sad because I had to move out."

- 4. Write the ending.** Wrap things up. This doesn't mean everything is resolved. Think about how you want to finish the story: Do you want to end the story with a happy moment? Do you want to talk about what you want in the future?

Example: "Even though where I live now does not have everything I need, I hope I will find a new home someday."

- 5. Call to Action.** Tell the audience how they can help. Make it clear and tell them they shouldn't wait. Make sure that what you're telling them to do connects to your story. This helps them understand why their help matters.

Example: "This happens to a lot of people. We need help from the government to make this stop happening. Tell your government leaders to make a rule that says the cost of rent needs to be more affordable in Los Angeles."

- 6. Practice.** Laura Hershey is a disabled poet and she once said, "[You get proud by practicing](#)." This means that practicing can make you feel more confident. You can practice alone or with people you feel comfortable with. It will help you figure out how long your story is and what changes you want to make.

To use The Kelsey's storytelling template, [click here and download a copy](#).



Image description: Illustration of four people of different backgrounds and colors.



Image description: An illustration of people with and without disabilities putting large and colorful building blocks together. Two are standing and one is in a wheelchair.

Talking Points for Disability-Forward Housing.

When sharing our housing stories, it's important to include facts about the housing crisis, how it affects disabled people, and what people can do to help. The Kelsey uses the below points to talk about why we need affordable, accessible, inclusive housing.

Note: You may want to add specific facts about where you live to your story. Here's where you can find those facts:

For facts about disability in your state, [click here](#).

For facts about housing data in your state, [click here](#).

- 1. How Disability and Housing Connect.** There are 70 million people with disabilities³ in the U.S. All of these people face problems when they try to get housing. A few of these problems are: not enough affordable housing, not enough accessible housing, and being treated unfairly by the people who sell housing.
- 2. Support from the Government.** More than 18 million disabled adults should be getting support from the government to pay for their housing, but they are not getting it.⁴
- 3. Disabled Adults Not Living in Communities.** More than 2 million disabled adults live in places such as nursing homes, hospitals, and group homes⁵ instead of in their own homes or communities.

³ [CDC Data Shows Over 70 Million U.S. Adults Reported Having a Disability.](#)

⁴ [People with Disabilities Living in the US Face Urgent Barriers to Housing | Urban Institute](#)

⁵ [Written Testimony, Alison \(Allie\) Cannington, Diveristy & Inclusion Subcommittee 5.24.22](#)

4. **Rent and SSI.** More than 4.8 million disabled adults who need Supplemental Security Income SSI cannot pay for rent anywhere in the U.S.⁶ SSI is a program that gives money to people with disabilities and older adults who make **little income** or are unemployed. [Click here](#) to use a tool that shows you the percentage of money people who use SSI would have to use on rent. You will see that all housing in the U.S. costs too much money for someone who uses SSI.
5. **Rent & Owning Homes.** Only 12% of people with disabilities who use supportive services rent or own their own homes.⁷
6. **Housing Discrimination.** People with disabilities experience the most unfairness when it comes to housing in the U.S. Unfair government rules also make it hard for disabled people to get housing.⁸

Examples of Housing Stories.

Example #1

After Jensen Caraballo wrote his story, he talked to a reporter about it. He made his story work better for TV by using easy-to-understand points and catchy sentences to help people remember it.

[Click here](#) to watch Jensen Caraballo on PBS NewsHour.

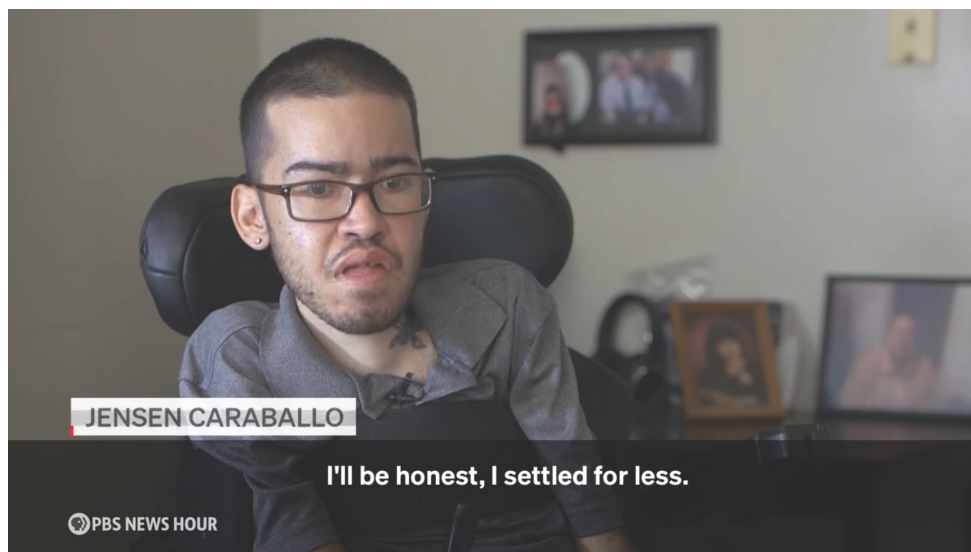


Image description: A screenshot of a PBS NewsHour episode. Jensen Caraballo, a tan-skinned man with short brown hair, and glasses, wearing a gray shirt, is sitting in a power wheelchair and talking. His name is printed to the left of closed captioning that reads, "I'll be honest, I settled for less." The PBS NewsHour logo is in the lower left corner.

⁶ [Priced Out - TAC](#)

⁷ [RISP Infographics | People with IDD in the United States | Institute on Community Integration Publications](#)

⁸ [2023 Trends Report](#)

Example #2

Domonique Howell used her story for a speech in front of the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging. She also shared facts about housing and people with disabilities in Pennsylvania. She finished her speech by talking about what the Committee could do to help create more affordable and accessible housing.

[Click here](#) to watch Domonique Howell give a speech in front of the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging (her speech starts at 00:44:221).



Image description: Domonique Howell, a Black woman with long, dark locs, is wearing a pink sleeveless top and sitting in a chair. She is speaking into a podium microphone. Closed captioning reads, "...Department received an average of 100 calls per month for disabled people needing..." An ASL interpreter is visible in a smaller video screen in the lower right corner.

Example #3

Judith Brown wrote her story and used it to make a short video for social media. Even though she doesn't talk about her whole story in the video, she still talks about the main point of her story and tells people how they can help.

[Click here](#) to watch Judith Brown's Instagram Video about how she wishes more people knew that they could own a home one day.

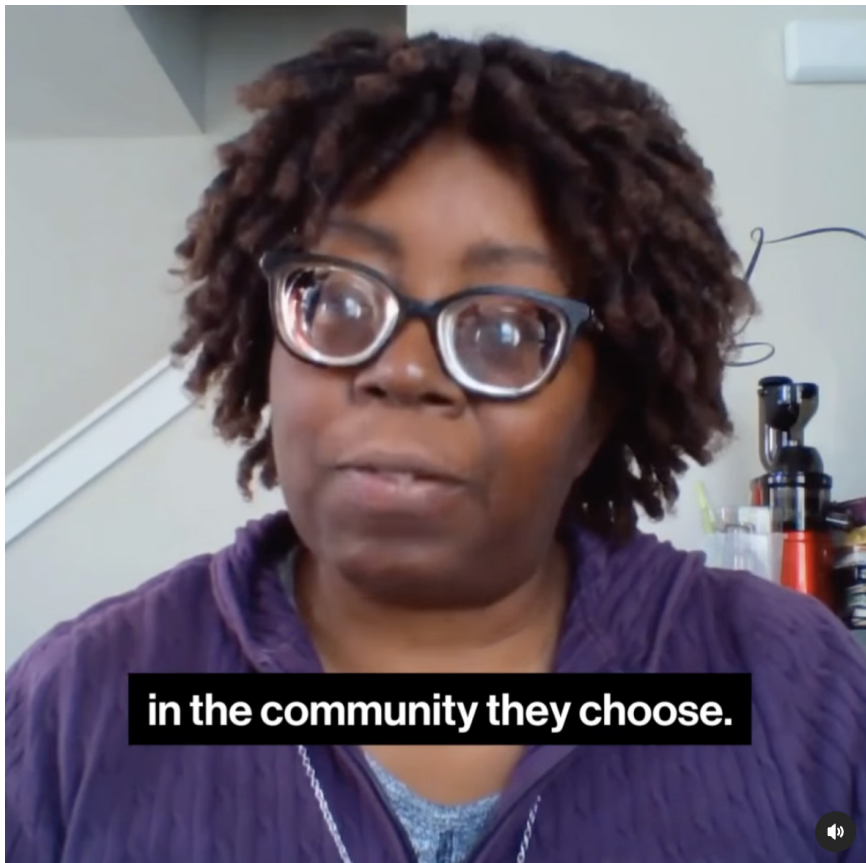


Image Description: Judith Brown, a Black woman with short curly hair, is wearing glasses, a purple sweater, and a blue top. She is speaking and closed captions across the screen read, "...in the community they choose." A small icon indicating that the sound is on is in the lower right corner.

Example #4

The Arc of the United States, a disability organization, shared Ricky's story on one of its social media accounts. They shared this story to help people understand that Medicaid is an important government program. In the video, Ricky talks about how Medicaid made it possible for him to live where he wants to live and do the things he wants to do.

[Click here](#) to watch Ricky share his story.



Image description: Ricky, a Black man who is bald and wearing a green gingham long-sleeved collared shirt, sits in a power wheelchair and talks. He is in front of a black backdrop. The closed captioning across the screen says, "I was on the waiting list for five years."

Conclusion.

The Kelsey and the 2024 Disability and Housing Narrative Change Cohort created this resource. Thank you to the Housing Narrative Lab for helping us.

These are the names of the 2024 Disability & Housing Narrative Change

Cohort members: Allen Hines, LaTangela Foster, Judith Brown, Jensen

Carabello, Lisa Cooley, Felix Jordan, Sam Johnson, Sandra Conley,

Domonique Howell, Raúl Orellana, and Michi Marcher.

Click [here](#) to read all of the 2024 Disability and Housing Narrative Change Cohort housing stories.

[Click here](#) to share your housing story with The Kelsey.

We are very sad to share that Jensen Caraballo has passed away. Jensen's life and advocacy impacted our work a lot. We will always remember him and the other disabled leaders who worked to make this world better for everyone, including our co-founder Kelsey, who is the reason The Kelsey was created.