



Disability & Housing Storytelling Guide

The Problem.

Why Do We Need Narrative Change¹?

Nationwide, people with disabilities experience the highest rates of housing discrimination, homelessness, institutionalization, and housing insecurity. Yet, for generations, disabled people have been left out of the solutions needed to end the housing crisis. On top of this, dominant narratives² about disability and housing continue to sustain exclusionary, ableist policies and practices, worsening the housing crisis for all.

Our Stories.

How Can We Change the Narrative?

As disabled people and allies, we are uniquely qualified to share our stories and change the narrative about disability and housing to create inclusive, accessible, affordable, and equitable housing policies and practices, what The Kelsey calls “disability-forward housing.”³ By sharing our stories, we can debunk dominant narratives and advocate for everyone to live in housing that they choose and that meets their needs.

The Guide.

This Resource...

1. Offers guidance on writing your personal housing story
2. Provides talking points to advocate for accessible, affordable, inclusive housing
3. Gives examples of powerful stories that drive 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 Dominant Narrative: Stories told most in the news and mainstream institutions (like the government); Stories that create and support stereotypes & negative beliefs about certain groups of people.

³ Disability-forward housing is housing that is affordable, accessible, fully inclusive and integrated, where disabled and non-disabled residents live and thrive.

Before You Write Your Story...

Practice Self-Care: Writing and sharing your story can bring up both joyful and challenging emotions. As you begin, make sure to prioritize your mental and emotional well-being. Take breaks when needed and do activities that help you feel grounded and supported.

Define Your Audience: What does your audience value? How do they talk about these issues, and how might your story impact them? What types of decision-making power does your audience have? For example, are they policymakers who have the power to vote on specific bills? Are they funders who need to decide what causes to donate money to?

Think About Your Goals: Do you want to raise awareness, create change, and/or offer solutions? Are you sharing your story to support a specific policy or program?



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

How to Write Your Story.

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

1. **Set the Stage.** Introduce the main character(s), setting, and context. Highlight the story's relevance to the audience by addressing their needs, interests, or aspirations.

Example: "Imagine a world where everyone has a place to call home. I was thirty when I lost mine."

2. **Present the Challenge.** Present the obstacle or conflict that drives the story.

Example: "In 2025, Los Angeles remains one of the most expensive cities for renters in the U.S. Meanwhile, [21% of renter households in California are considered extremely low-income](#)—including me."

3. **Present the Turning Point.** Build tension and focus on a critical moment of change or action. Show the emotions involved in this moment.

Example: "For seven years, I called this apartment home—a space filled with memories and comfort. But everything changed the day I opened the rent increase notice. Heartbroken, I realized I had no choice but to move out."

4. Present the Resolution. Provide a conclusion. This doesn't mean that there is a happy ending or that the problem is solved. It's just where the story ends for now.

Example: "Although my current housing does not meet all of my needs, I am hopeful to find a home again that does."

5. Call to Action. Motivate the audience to take a specific next step. Make the action achievable, urgent, and tied to the story's resolution. This highlights the importance of the audience's involvement and motivates action.

Example: "Unfortunately, this is the reality for too many individuals and families. The only thing standing in the way of a solution is a lack of political will. Leave a public comment to expand rent stabilization in Los Angeles County by clicking the link below."

6. Practice, Practice, Practice. As disabled poet Laura Hershey reminds us, "[You get proud by practicing](#)." Practice sharing your story alone and/or with people you feel comfortable with. Practicing can help increase your confidence. Practicing also helps you understand how long your story is and what edits you may need to make.

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



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

Talking Points for Disability-Forward Housing.

Sharing our housing stories can also include key facts about the housing crisis, its impact on disabled people, and the needed solutions. The Kelsey uses the following talking points to discuss the need for affordable, accessible, inclusive housing.

Note: We encourage you to determine if it would be helpful to add state, regional, or local facts and talking points to your story.

For state disability data, start with the [Centers for Disease Control CDC](#).

For state housing data, start with the [National Low-Income Housing Coalition NLIHC](#).

- 1. The Intersection of Disability and Housing.** 70 million people⁴ with disabilities in the United States experience one or more housing barriers, including the high cost of housing, the housing shortage, discrimination, and the lack of accessible housing.
- 2. Federal Housing Assistance Gaps.** Over 18 million disabled adults qualify for federal housing assistance but are not receiving it.⁵
- 3. Disabled Adults in Congregate Settings.** There are more than 2 million disabled adults who are living in institutions and congregate settings, like nursing homes, psychiatric facilities, and group homes.⁶
- 4. Rent and SSI.** Over 4.8 million disabled adults who rely on Supplemental Security Income SSI cannot afford rent in any US housing market.⁷ Use the [Technical Assistance Collaborative's "Priced Out" tool](#) to see what percentage of their income SSI recipients would need to spend on rent in different cities.]
- 5. Rent & Home Ownership.** Only 12% of people with disabilities who use supportive services rent or own their own homes.⁸
- 6. Housing Discrimination.** People with disabilities experience the highest rate of housing discrimination in the country, and inconsistent and insufficient policies and procedures give disabled people unequal access to housing.⁹

⁴ [CDC Data Shows Over 70 Million U.S. Adults Reported Having a Disability.](#)

⁵ [People with Disabilities Living in the US Face Urgent Barriers to Housing | Urban Institute](#)

⁶ [Written Testimony, Alison \(Allie\) Cannington, Diveristy & Inclusion Subcommittee 5.24.22](#)

⁷ [Priced Out - TAC](#)

⁸ [RISP Infographics | People with IDD in the United States | Institute on Community Integration Publications](#)

⁹ [2023 Trends Report](#)

Examples of Housing Stories.

Example #1

After writing out his story, Jensen Caraballo spoke with the media, starting with an interview with a PBS NewsHour producer. He then adjusted his story to help more people understand the link between disability and housing. To make it work for TV, he focused on key points and short, memorable messages.

[Watch Jensen Caraballo on PBS NewsHour](#)

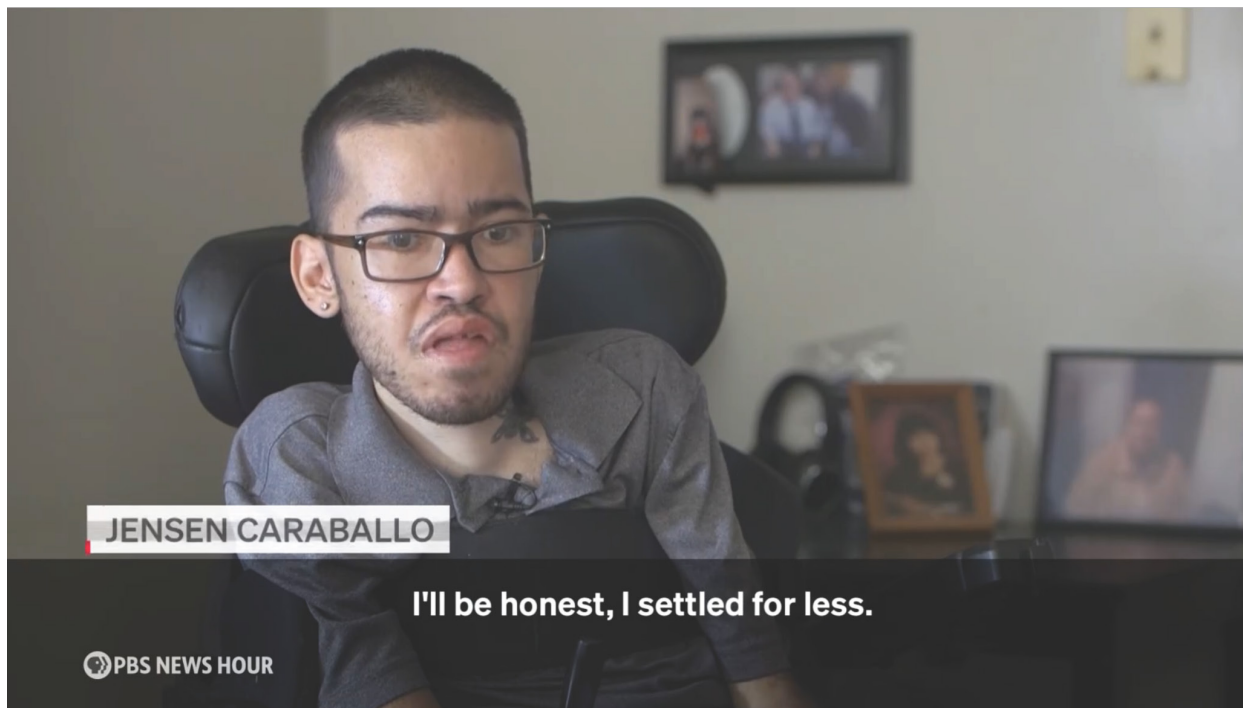


Image description: A screenshot of a PBS NewsHour episode. Jensen Caraballo, a tan-skinned man with short brown hair, glasses, wearing a gray shirt, is sitting in a power wheelchair and talking. His name is printed to the left of captions that read, "I'll be honest, I settled for less." The PBS NewsHour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

Example #2

Domonique Howell adapted her story for testimony before the Senate Special Committee on Aging. She shares statistics on housing insecurity among people with disabilities in Pennsylvania, talks about her own housing experience, and closes with a call to action for more affordable and accessible housing.

[Watch Domonique Howell testify at the Senate Special Committee on Aging \(testimony starts at 00 44 221\).](#)



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 hand corner.

Example #3

After reflecting on her housing journey and the challenges she faced in becoming a homeowner, Judith Brown turned her story into a short video for a social media campaign. While the clip doesn't cover her entire experience, its strength lies in delivering a clear and direct call to action.

[Watch Judith Brown's Instagram Reel about what Home For More means to her.](#)

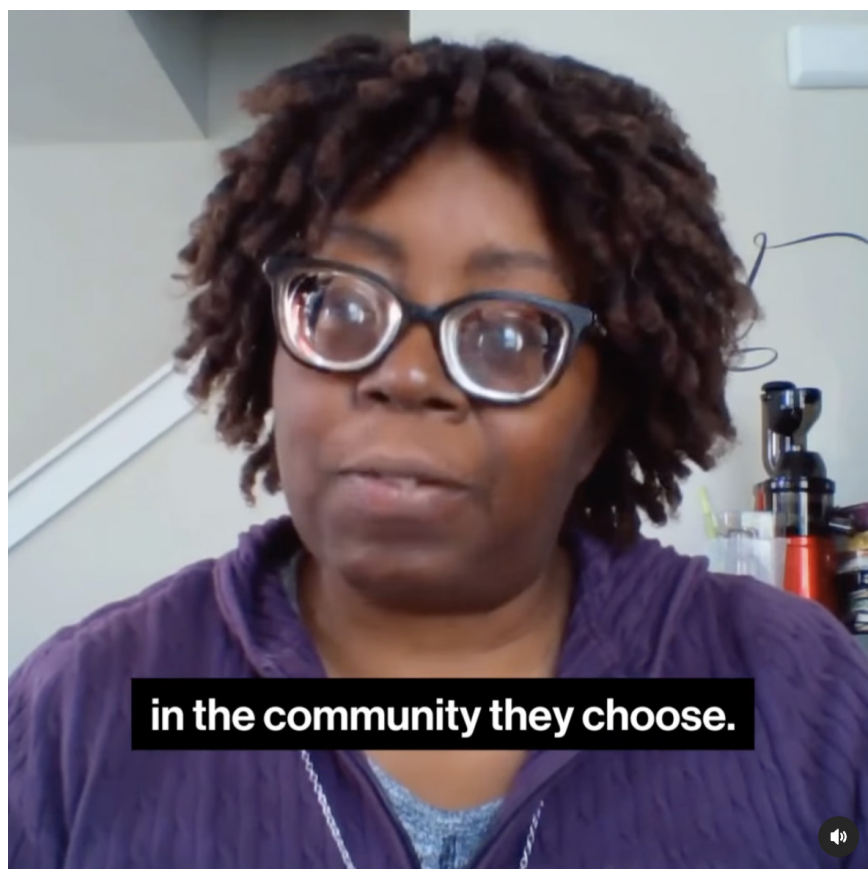


Image Description: Judith Brown, a Black woman with short curly hair, is wearing glasses, a purple sweater, and a blue top. She is speaking and captions across the screen read, "...in the community they choose." A small icon indicating that sound is on is in the lower right corner.

Example #4

The Arc of the United States shared Ricky's story on social media as a part of an advocacy and awareness campaign to protect Medicaid. What Ricky chooses to share shows the connection between Medicaid and his experience living independently.

[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.

This resource was created in partnership with The Kelsey and the 2024 Disability and Housing Narrative Change Cohort. We sincerely thank the Housing Narrative Lab for supporting us along the way. We are grateful for their contributions and invite you to [share your housing stories](#) to keep the conversation going.

2024 Disability & Housing Narrative Change Cohort: 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.

It is with heavy hearts that we share that shortly before the publication of this guide, our dear friend and fellow advocate, Jensen Caraballo, passed away. Jensen's advocacy and leadership leave a lasting legacy on this movement. We continue our work in his honor and in honor of all disabled leaders whose stories and activism laid the foundation for a better future— including our co-founder, Kelsey, whose lifelong advocacy is the reason we exist as an organization.