

Sharing Befriending Stories

How to capture personal experiences to write effective and engaging web and social media content

Your Befriending service is making a difference, but do people in your community, your county, your country know about it? One way to effectively communicate the impact your service has is by sharing the real-life experiences of your befriendees, befrienders and staff. Personal stories make outcomes in mission statements relatable and the evidence presented in statistics inspiring. In order to do this, however, the content and presentation of these stories have to be carefully crafted to ensure your message is clear and engaging, any visuals are appealing and on-brand, and the story-telling process empowers those involved.

What Makes an Effective Befriending Story?



It is about a real person, who has consented to have their name and photo/video shared and has been involved in the preparation of their story. There was a time when case study style stories with identifying initials and accompanied stock images, were the norm, but no longer! People want to relate to an individual, not an idea. You should therefore choose your potential story-givers with a few factors in mind:

- While everyone's stories are important and valid, some stories will be better suited to be the flagship for your organisation's message. There may also be voices, currently under-represented, that you would like to use this opportunity to bring to the forefront.
- Sharing befriending experiences publicly can often involve people opening up about the personal challenges or difficult situations that led them to befriending. The process should, therefore, be dealt with sensitively, so the story-giver feels comfortable with the way their final story is presented.
- The age or circumstances around your befriendees or befrienders may mean more considerations around consent are needed in order to share stories publicly and non-anonymously.
- Some people are happy to communicate, share, write, be photographed or filmed, while others may be willing, but might need more encouragement. If anyone seems unwilling or resistant, give them an easy way to say 'thanks, but no thanks'.



The length of the story suits the platform it is shared on. A full story (approx. 300-800 words) should be shared in formats like a website or newsletter, where people expect to spend a few minutes reading. For a Twitter post that limits characters, you may want to pull out a quote from the story with a link to 'read more'. For Facebook, Instagram and

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LinkedIn, you'll be able to do a longer post, but people scrolling through will only see the first few lines, so you may want to either direct them to the full story elsewhere or state early on that it's a longer, but worthwhile post.



The story's message should be clear and presented in a way that is easy to understand. Imagine your audience knows nothing about what your organisation does and it's your story that needs to communicate what's at the heart of befriending. To do this you'll need to consider your own strengths as a writer/the strength of your colleagues and the skill set of your story-giver to determine who writes how much of the story.

For example, you may want to 'collect a story' by having a conversation with a befriender/befriended and, based on your conversation, write the story, which they can then read and provide feedback about. In another situation, the befriender/befriended may be a confident writer and would like to write their own reflection, which you could then edit, perhaps adding an introduction for context and conclusion that tells readers about your organisation & how they can get involved. Wherever you decide the balance should be, it's always a good idea to get a colleague to proof-read it to check for typos, omissions, and clarity once you're finished.



The story should communicate the personality of the individual. This will not only help the reader relate on an emotional level to the message, but also gives a sense of ownership over the story to the person who shared it. Using direct quotations or having the story-giver write their own reflection (as described above) can help feature their unique voice.



Conclude with a call to action. Now that you've inspired your reader, they'll want to get involved. Whether you want to raise awareness, recruit volunteers or fundraise, the story should conclude by telling the reader how they can help.



Any accompanying visuals (photos or video) must be of good quality. This doesn't mean they need to be all singing, all dancing, but it does mean no blurry images, photos that include other

people beyond those featured/have they given consent, oddly cropped pictures or shaky camera work. If possible, your organisation's logo/brand should be identifiable within the visual. Keep film clips to 1-3 minutes; films longer than this become less of an accompaniment to a written story and more of a story in and of themselves and require significantly more work to be engaging and effective.

It could be that although you have access to befriendeds & befrienders, your website or social media is managed by someone else in your organisation. They will, no doubt, be looking for good content, so use this as an opportunity to collaborate.

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Gaining Consent for a Befriending Story to be Shared

Ensure your story-giver understands

- the terms of consent (where, when and with whom the story will be shared)
- it is their right to remove consent at any time
- has a copy of the form with your contact details

SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

Your name, name of your organisation, contact number, contact email

This consent form provides a record of individuals' giving consent for their Befriending Stories and accompanying photos and/or videos to be shared for publicity, marketing and reporting purposes both in print and online.

We anticipate this story will first appear in (social media/website news story/newsletter/etc) on (date) and will be kept public (expiry date/indefinitely).

Details of person giving consent:

Name:

Contact Number:

Email:

Signature:

Date:

If person giving consent is under 16, consent must also be given from parent or guardian

Name of Parent/Guardian:

Contact Number:

Email:

Signature:

Date:

If you have further questions about the use of your Befriending Story or no longer wish this story to be shared, you may withdraw consent by contacting: Your name, organisation, contact phone, contact email.

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