



# Making Connections: Changing the Narrative

**PREVENTION**  
INSTITUTE

# What's the goal?

Change the narrative on mental health and wellbeing in your community.

# How do we get there?

Figure out what your message is, who needs to hear it, and how to reach them.

# Shaping your message

Ask yourself:

- **What's the issue? What's the problem we're trying to solve?**
- **Why does this matter?**
- **What should we do about this?**
- **Who needs to hear about this and why?**

Answering these questions will help you determine your communications goals, audiences, and messages.

# Elements of good messages

**Speak  
from the  
heart**

**Speak in  
common  
values**

**Concise**

**Visual**

**Memorable**

**Remember  
your  
audience**

**Talk  
about  
outcomes**

# Key messages

**Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness.** Talking about *mental health* rather than *mental illness* helps reduce stigma: mental health, like physical health, is something that everyone experiences and everyone needs to attend to their mental health and wellbeing.

**Where we live influences our mental health and wellbeing.** Show how conditions in your community impact health—positively and negatively—and why changing community conditions matters. We focus our efforts at the community level because individuals can't be healthy if they live in unhealthy communities. These aren't individual issues, but shared ones.

# Key messages

- **Mental health strategies include prevention and resilience, not just treatment and services.** Why wait and let people suffer when we can act now to prevent unnecessary suffering? We want to take steps to prevent trauma and other stress that can undermine mental health and make it difficult for people to recover from trauma and other stressors.
- **There's no one-size-fits-all approach to mental health.** The right approach for a given community takes into account that community's strengths and needs, reflects the community's culture and history, and addresses local norms around issues like gendered roles and expectations.



*“It has to be a holistic approach... Culture needs to be recognized, faith needs to be recognized. Every organization involved with this world needs to be engaged. All the work we’re doing takes more than one person to accomplish; we have to all work together.”*

-- Jama Mohamed, Former Making Connections  
Project Lead with UWEAST in San Diego





*"Feeling connected and feeling a sense of belonging to community, trust in the community, in the leadership—these give people a sense of greater wellbeing. These are the preventive factors that enable people to better change the sources of stress or change one's reactions to stressful situations."*

– Interviewee,  
Making Connections Landscape Report





*"When people ask 'what is the cost of prevention?' My response is, 'what is the value of your life?' If we can invest in stopping a young person from being unintentionally shot or a mother from being unnecessarily killed, or any other form of violence that harms an individual, a neighborhood, a school, a community, I can't put a price tag on that. But what I do know is that we have not equitably and fairly invested in prevention to the degree that we've invested in cops, cages, and corpses. What we want to see as a community is a city, a county, a state that is committed to investing in prevention instead of pain."*

– Reggie Moore, Director  
Milwaukee Office of Violence Prevention





*“Our health is directly connected to our living conditions, and our living conditions are almost directly connected to our ability to make changes in our lives. So, to create a healthy community, we need to figure out how to build power to make change, and how to end structural inequity and racism.”*

-- Jeanne Ayers  
Wisconsin State Health Officer



# Telling your own story

Personal testimony can be a powerful way to illustrate why your work matters and what life is like in your community -- and sharing your own story can also be a healing and empowering experience.

There are many stories each of us could tell. If you're not sure where to start, here are a few questions to consider:

- What's a challenge you've faced?
- What inspired you to get involved? What keeps you motivated?
- What advice do you have for others doing this work?
- What's the one thing you wish people understood about your community?

# Telling your own story, continued

- What is a conversation (about your community, the issues you work on, etc.) that you're really tired of having? What's a conversation you'd rather be having?
- How has your understanding of an issue that you care about changed over time? And why?
- What's something that changed the way you thought about a challenge you (or your community) faced?
- Who is a role model for you in doing this kind of work?

# Who needs to hear about this and why? Here's how to figure out who your audiences are:

What you say and what communications methods you use (like reaching out to reporters or creating an active social media presence) will depend on which audiences you want to reach:

- Members of the community you serve who are not yet involved with your work?
- Members of the broader community?
- People working in key sectors like education or healthcare who interact with the community or issue?
- Policymakers (local, state, federal)?
- Funders and donors?

# Think one audience at a time

You may look at that last slide and think, ***I want my message to reach all of those audiences!***

Communications efforts are most effective when they target one audience at a time: for instance, one message and strategy to reach members of the media, one message and strategy to reach community members, one message and strategy to reach funders, and so on.

In the rest of the presentation, we'll provide some ideas on how to do this.

# Why engage the media?

Media exposure can help recruit new people to join or support your efforts, encourage policymakers and funders to invest in community-level work, and other outcomes that support your work. You can also use the media to change how your issue and communities are understood.



# Ways to engage the media

- **Find reporters who are covering your issue** by looking at local newspapers and TV and radio stations to see which reporters cover issues like mental health, community organizations, education, healthcare, parks and recreation, and other issues that touch the issues you work on
- **Volunteer to be interviewed** or provide background information to reporters
- **Invite reporters to events** like the opening of a new community space or a community service day
- **Write letters to the editor** when you encounter news stories that are relevant to the work you're doing

# What makes a good media story?

- **Make it relevant:** What makes your community's story important and newsworthy? Link your work at the community level with broader issues that are in the news, like immigration policy, climate change, and the need for affordable housing.
- **Include “real” people:** Connect reporters to community members, especially youth, who can speak about why this work matters to them, not just staff. Community leaders, like elders and faith leaders, can be compelling messengers, too.
- **Tap into shared values, like fairness and opportunity.**
- **Speak from your heart.**

# What makes a good media story? (continued)

- **Focus on solutions, not just problems:** When speaking to reporters, don't just focus on the problem. Make sure your solutions are as specific and easy to understand as the problems.
- **Show the impact of your work:** How many people are involved in this work? How many activities or community spaces have been created through your work? Be prepared to get specific describing what your efforts look like.
- **Use vivid/visual language to describe community conditions:** Or take a reporter on a walk through your community and show how community conditions affect health.
- **Share your vision for your community's future, and show how the work you're doing now fits into that broader vision.**

In an Atlas of the Future story, KVIBE shares vivid images and video, and shows concrete impacts of their work in Honolulu.

KVIBE was born in 2005 out of an active living design grant that promoted physical activity in communities with a high rate of diabetes. Each year there are 400 donated bikes that are refurbished and about 4,000 bikes are repaired though 9,000 youth service hours.



# Talking to the media

## To Improve Mental Health, We Need To Take On Social and Racial Injustice

July 22, 2019

By Ruben Cantu and Dana Fields-Johnson, Prevention Institute



“The challenges ... are far too familiar to many communities of color with low household incomes in the United States: high rates of poverty, under-resourced schools, limited job opportunities, dilapidated infrastructure, unsafe streets, and high levels of violence.

What’s less familiar is the connection these community conditions have with mental health and wellbeing.

It’s time for us to start recognizing injustices like racism, anti-immigrant bias, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination as social injustices and obstacles to mental health and wellbeing. We can’t ignore these injustices if we want all communities to thrive.”

# How to make sure you get your point across

Think about your answers to questions like the ones below. If a reporter asks you these kinds of questions outright, that's great! If they don't ask, be prepared to bring them up on your own:

- **What do you want people to know about your community?**
- **What's the one thing you wish people understood about the issues you work on?**
- **What inspired you to get involved? What keeps you motivated?**
- **How can readers [or the reporter] learn more about what you're doing?**
- **What is a conversation about this issue that you're really tired of having? And what's a conversation you'd rather be having?**
- **How has your understanding of this issue changed over time? And why?**
- **Tell me about a moment when you saw clearly the value of the work you're doing...**

# Staying on message when talking to reporters

Here are some ways you can expand or redirect a conversation with reporters to ensure the conversation covers what's most important to you and your community:

- “That’s an interesting question, but the real issue is...”
- “Here’s what else is going on in my community...”
- “We can’t talk about X issue without talking about...”
- “We won’t understand X issue if we just focus on individuals... Here’s the role community conditions play...”
- “Let me put that into perspective...”



# A good picture is worth a thousand words. Here's how to create compelling images

- **Get close!** Photos are best when they have a point of focus (one or two people, a work of art, a meaningful object). Use your zoom function.
- **Stay focused:** Clear, crisp images are best for social media.
- **Tell a story with an image:** Does it trigger an emotion or create an atmosphere or mood? If so, this is a good photo.
- **Ask yourself:** Will this photo make someone want to learn more?
- **Take candid photos:** The best photos capture candid moments of people authentically engaging with one another. It's OK to take posed or staged photos, too, but real interactions will make people seeing the photos feel like they're part of the scene.
- **Show what your community looks like:** Take photos of street art and public spaces.







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# Making the most of social media

Social media is a great way to reach members of the community (whether new participants or new supporters), raise funds, and build public awareness around your work and the issues you care about. Broadly speaking:

- **Twitter** is best for reaching reporters and shaping public dialogue on mental health and other issues you work on.
- **Facebook** is best for reaching out to people in your community (whether that's a geographic community or a community based on shared identity), inviting people to events, and raising funds.
- **Instagram** is best for sharing photos and video, including live events.
- **LinkedIn** is best for professional networking, including connecting with funders.

# What makes a great social media post?

- **Interact!** Ask questions to encourage your followers to respond, invite people to send in photos from your events, and ask community members to share their stories with you. Host a chat or Q&A session on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram Live.
- **Post events on Facebook** and encourage people to RSVP.
- **Share images and videos:** Social media is a visual medium. Posts that include images and videos will attract more attention.
- **Use hashtags** so that people can find your work more easily, like your community/city's name, #mentalhealth, #resilience, etc. And be sure to tag #MakingConnex!
- **Friend or “follow” other organizations and influential people in your community.**
- **Keep posts short and to the point.**



United Women of East Africa Support Team

June 12, 2018 · 🌐



2,771 Views

Prevention Institute is with Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans - PANA and 3 others.

Published by Christine Williams [?] · June 12, 2018 · 🌐

We all need strong relationships to thrive. Watch how UWEAST and its partners are promoting mental health and wellbeing for young immigrant men from East Africa...



United Women of East Africa Support Team

July 12 · 🌐



Save the date!

#uweast #mentalhealthawareness #eastafrikan #youth #future #makingconnex

# Youth Talk

Coming together for a stronger & healthier African Community



July 23, 2019  
2 PM - 5 PM

Join us for a day of community learning & reflection  
Lunch Provided



Resilience Grows Here

August 10 at 1:36 PM · 🌐



Elizabeth Dole Foundation

August 10 at 1:00 PM · 🌐

👍 Like Page

Most adults don't fully understand PTSD and it can be even more difficult to explain to a child. U.S. Army Seth Kastle wrote a book titled "Why Is Dad So Mad?" to help explain his struggles with PTSD to his own daughter. <http://bit.ly/2ZkkIDK>



UPWORTHY.COM

Veteran writes powerful book, 'Why is Dad So Mad,' to help explain his PTSD to his young daughter.

👍 4

5 Shares

Not all social media content needs to be original. Social media is a great place to share news stories and resources that are relevant to your work, like this children's book shared by Resilience Grows Here.



Making Connections: Kankakee (3 mins)

400 views

 8  0  SHARE  SAVE ...



SPTHB @SPTHB · Jun 26

"Where Culture Meets Prevention" video with @CATV47 This video will be featured as a PSA to educate the community about the dangers of substance use and abuse. The video promotes #culture as a positive family attachment to pro social activities.



SPTHB @SPTHB · Jun 10

Members of Cherokee Nation ride to remember Trail of Tears



Members of Cherokee Nation ride to remember Trail of Tears  
About a dozen members of the Cherokee Nation road to remember on Saturday. It's part of a nearly thousand-mile bike ride from the ...  
[ktul.com](http://ktul.com)





**Questions? Want to talk  
through an idea?  
Reach out to  
[communications@  
preventioninstitute.org!](mailto:communications@preventioninstitute.org)**