

## The Power of Telling your Story

One way we can win the hearts and minds of politicians and other decision makers is by telling our stories. Each of us has a story to tell that can motivate others in the community to help us beat cancer.

Whether we are talking to the media, meeting with a politician, or inviting someone to join our advocacy campaign, we can bring an issue alive by telling a story that explains why we care. This will have a greater impact than just presenting dry arguments or facts and figures. The key is to find the right balance.

But it's not enough to just tell our own story. We also need to involve our audience (for example, your local MP, or someone you are hoping will join your advocacy network) by challenging them with the need for action, and reminding them of how they can come on board. We also need to show them how the issue is relevant for them.

There are three parts to your story:

- A story of 'self', communicates who you are – your values, your experience, why you care about cancer control (this is the call to leadership)
- A story of 'us', communicates why others should care – our shared values, our shared experience and why we do what we do
- A story of 'now', transforms the present into a moment of challenge, hope and choice (strategy and action). This is what we can do to

[Elizabeth's Story](#) is a great example of how a cancer advocate has told her own story, but with a powerful message that brings others on board to her cause. Even if you feel your story is not as powerful as Elizabeth's, don't be dismayed. To get started you could ask yourself the following questions:

- Who you are and why do you care about the issue? Did something happen that motivated you to take action?
- Why should others care about this issue and why might they join you in taking action? For example, many of us have family or friends who have...
- What can we do together to improve the situation? What's the call to action?

### A few tips...

- Include some vivid details and insights that will bring your story alive.
- Think about your audience and what they might connect to in your story.
- Practice telling your story.
- Don't feel pressured to tell a really personal or emotional story that is going to upset you too much.
- Don't include too much irrelevant detail, for example, all your medical history.

For more information on telling a powerful story you can read about the work of [Marshall Ganz](#) on Public Narrative.

### Do you have a story to tell?

As mentioned above, each of us has a story to tell that can motivate others in the community to help us beat cancer. At Cancer Council NSW, we are constantly looking for stories that we can share via our newsletters, print media and social media and to help promote our campaigns.

If you have a story you would like to share with us, [email us](#) today\*. If your story is one we think we can share, we'll get in touch with you. Don't forget to use some of the tips mentioned in this article!

*\*We will never use your story or details publicly without prior consent from you.*

## ELIZABETH'S STORY

Hi,

I'm Elizabeth. I'd like to speak with you today about the fight to defeat cancer.

It starts about 5 years ago. I live on the Central Coast – a beautiful place to live with the bush and beaches on your doorstep. I worked as a school teacher and doted on my four beautiful boys... I still do. Life on the whole was pretty good. I was content with my lot. But then came a day that changed my life forever. The day I was told I had cancer.

Numbness, fear and thoughts about what might happen. What about my beautiful boys? My boys... I thought I've got to beat this. I am going to get through this.

During treatment for cancer you spend many hours in waiting rooms and get talking to others on the same journey. Cancer is a great equaliser in many ways; it affects all sorts of people from all walks of life. Our journeys, however, are not all equal.

I was seeing a specialist at Gosford Public Hospital and indeed had much of my treatment, including chemo, at Gosford Hospital. However, Gosford Hospital does not have radiotherapy. My specialist advised that I needed to undergo radiotherapy as part of my treatment and referred me for treatment at the Radiotherapy treatment centre in Gosford. The radiotherapy treatment centre in Gosford is a private facility. I didn't have a lot of money, but I scraped and saved and was lucky enough that I had generous and compassionate friends who were able to help me out, and that the centre did what it could to reduce the costs.

Whilst undergoing my radiotherapy treatment, I couldn't stop thinking about one of the people I'd met in the waiting room of Gosford Hospital. She was a young single mother with kids younger than mine. She couldn't afford to pay privately for treatment at the centre in Gosford and as such her only other option was to travel down to Royal North shore. Radiotherapy treatment would require going down 5 days a week, for up to 8 weeks. An hour and a half to two and a half hours travel each way. For her this wasn't an option either. She couldn't leave her young kids and she couldn't arrange or afford for their care for such a sustained period of time. For this woman, she felt, her only option was to have her breast removed.

I thought to myself whilst I was undergoing radiotherapy treatment that this was just not right in this day and age, in this first world country – that a woman had to have her breast removed because she couldn't afford to have the treatment she needed. I thought to myself when I get through this I'm going to do something about it so that this won't happen to others.

After I'd finished treatment and was in remission I put my mind to what I could do. I approached CCNSW and got involved with Relay for Life and Daffodil Day, but I was also drawn to a training program CCNSW were running in the Central Coast... Advocacy Training. I was told that advocacy was about speaking up with and on behalf of others, changing the system for the benefit of many. I thought back to that woman who had lost her breast and thought yes this is something I need to get more involved in.

After the training, those of us who attended decided to form a group to campaign for public access to radiotherapy on the Central Coast. We submitted a petition of 19,000 to parliament. We wrote letters. We met and got the support of local MPs. We met with the Minister for Cancer. We appeared in the media. And after 3 years we got it. We got the funding commitment to build public radiotherapy in Gosford. Work has already started on planning and it's expected to be built and operational by 2013. I can now see a time when patients will no longer be left in a situation where they are facing no choice but to have a breast removed.

But, in working on this I've come to realise that there is more to work to be done to ensure a fair deal for cancer patients and to ensure less people get cancer. Imagine if access to treatment was not dictated to by where you live or how much money you have. Imagine being able to enjoy a bite to eat with family alfresco without being surrounded by cigarette smoke. Imagine cancer patients being able to find a park just outside their treatment centre. My experience on the Central Coast tells me this is possible, but that it is down to us as individuals and us as communities to speak out. Our politicians are our representatives. And they will represent us if we speak to

them. If we don't speak to them rest assured others will and will be. If they don't hear our stories and the stories of what is happening to cancer patients then can we in all honesty expect them to act in the interests of cancer prevention and treatment? With a new state government and a raft of new MPs, we have a chance to get cancer on their agenda and help get a better deal for cancer patients in the years to come. Our politicians have a responsibility to represent us all. We have a responsibility to speak out to ensure they do.

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## **MORE INFORMATION**

Click on the links below for more information:

[Marshall Ganz](#)

[Crafting your Public Narrative – short version](#) [PDF]

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