

The Tales We Tell

8 Essential Stories for Building Care and Compassion



What's in a story? Often more than meets the eye. Stories say a lot about us. They let people know what we do, what we believe, and, ultimately, what they can expect from us.

Our words influence whether someone feels welcome (or excluded), at ease (or shamed), valued (or unwanted) – simply through the content we choose to share and elevate. **Here are 8 types of stories that build bridges to care and compassion** for the pets and people in your community.

1 Connect Animal Care & People Care

Share how your organization supports pets and people together. For example, talk about your pet food pantry, low-cost vaccine clinics, or safety net fostering. Describe your advocacy for co-sheltering and affordable housing in your community. Share why this work matters with examples of how it's helped people and animals thrive together.

Why:

How we connect with people matters – the stories we share, the words we choose, and the space we give to each conversation are a big part of this. **We cannot fully care for animals without caring about the humans in their lives.**

2 Look at the Big Picture

Talk about how people and their pets are impacted by the systems and structures around them. Most people are doing their best to navigate social systems beyond their control. For example, rather than equating pet surrender with abandonment, root your story in compassion. Explain what was behind the rehoming decision. Things like inaccessible housing, veterinary care, and behavioral support are common reasons.

[Systems Framing](#) is a resource you can use.

Why:

Harm happens when we shame individuals and ignore the systemic inequities that influence their lives. A single moment is no one's entire story. **When we expand the picture, we stop seeing villains around every corner and start seeing opportunities for real change.**

3

Honor Every Kind of Human-Animal Bond

Show the many ways our bonds with animals can be real, meaningful, and full of love - even if they look “different.” For example, someone may be deeply attached to their pets even if their religious beliefs make it difficult to see them as family. Indoor play may replace long walks for pets or guardians with physical disabilities. For a person experiencing homelessness, love may mean forgoing a meal so their companion animal has enough to eat.

Why:

Bonding with animals is universal. But the form it takes varies depending on one’s culture, personality, and circumstance. **Help overcome stereotypes and judgment by showing that love and care can exist in many forms.**

4

Share the Love

Strike a compassionate chord. Share an update about how an animal and their guardian have flourished or the healing they have enjoyed together. Highlight the happy outcomes your organization has supported by helping animals and their people.

Why:

Stories that spotlight the mutual benefits of the human-animal bond **underline the importance of our work in animal care and well-being.** They also bring joy to our teams and supporters.

5

Balance the Sour with Sweet

Inspire engagement with the moments that brighten your days. Cheering a pet’s long-awaited adoption. Witnessing a tearful reunion. Seeing a once ailing animal finally turn the corner or find peace. These are stories worth shouting from the rooftops. Plus, help your community see the beauty of every animal with cute and touching photos that celebrate all species, breeds, ages, and abilities.

Why:

Caring for animals is a serious and often challenging responsibility. It brings endless to-dos, heartache, and problems that can seem too complex to solve. **It is important to acknowledge that helping pets and people is also marked by tremendous joy.**

6

Give Someone Their Flowers

Bring your work to life by honoring those who make it happen. What qualities make your team unique? How has a volunteer's knowledge or kindness improved an animal's experience? What extra step did a staff member take to help a pet stay with their family? By giving someone their flowers, you're demonstrating your organization's commitment to animals and their people.

Why:

Without people at all levels, the essential work your organization does would not be possible. **Personalize your impact by highlighting your amazing team.** This fosters respect for the individuals who work hard every day to support your mission.

7

Pass the Microphone

Seek and feature stories told by pet guardians and animal advocates in the community. Create space for people to talk about their lived experiences in their own way. Highlight stories and voices that often go unheard.

Find more guidance on elevating individual voices in [Messaging with Dignity: Amplifying Stories.](#)

Why:

People are the experts in their own lives. When shared with compassion for the people involved, powerful **first-hand accounts can open doors to empathy and new perspectives.**

8

Celebrate Learning & Change

Share examples of how your organization is evolving - ideas, practices, programs. Change and learning are essential if we want to do our best work for animals. These stories help your community trust you and your work. People see through insincere apologies, but true accountability builds trust. Be clear about new ideas or changes you've adopted after listening to your community. Emphasize the importance of collaborating and sharing resources with others.

Why:

While you know a lot, you're also human. Your organization doesn't have all the answers all the time. Rarely is there only one "right" way to do things. We're all learning as we go - and that's a wonderful thing. Stories that celebrate change normalize this in our work.