



# *Sincere Stories, Significant Impact*

Ethical Storytelling & Why It Matters



# Welcome & Agenda



- Who are you & what are you bringing with you today?
- Part One: What is Ethical Storytelling?
- Part Two: The Underlying Impact
- Part Three: Shifting The Narrative/Where Do We Go From Here?



# Who We Are

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giant squid group



# Community Invitation



- Relational Space
- Standing Invitation for All
- Take Space, Make Space
- Listen Deeply & Lead with Curiosity
- Consider Intent and Impact
- Universal Respect
- Stay Open to Emergence



# *Getting Grounded*

Community Centric Fundraising  
Principle #9: We see the work of social justice as holistic and transformative, not transactional.

What community goals (e.g. social or economic changes) are you personally or professionally focused on? What do you hope to get from and give to this group or community?



# What Is Ethical Storytelling?



“We believe people’s stories are more than emotion-generating machines. That story consumers are more than guzzlers of emotion. And that stories should always be constituent first, donor second. We aspire to tell stories that are truthful, nuanced, educational and empowering. Not just for donors or for branding, but because stories shape our humanity and our world.”

*[ethicalstorytelling.com](http://ethicalstorytelling.com)*



*“No Kid Has Ever Asked Me To Call Them Under-Resourced...”*



Jamyle Cannon, Founder & Executive Director of The Bloc (Chicago, IL)

# Conversation Cafe



How is storytelling a justice issue for nonprofits? Businesses? Civic leaders?



- 5 people, one person is the host
- 1st Round: 1 min/person to share thoughts
- 2nd round: 1 min/person to share thoughts
- 3rd round: 5 minute group conversation
- Group Report Out!





# Underlying Impact



- Why does it matter who sets the narrative?
- Who knows “best” what work needs to be done
- How does our position or lived experience impact our stories and our influence?

# Grace Foster Case Study

As the former ED of a DC organization serving people experiencing homelessness, Grace intentionally introduced ethical storytelling into her work.

Grace faced a number of challenges in her work. Members were seen as "homeless people." This dehumanized people and made it easier to ignore their needs. She also found that people often focused on the negative aspects of people's stories, such as their trauma, rather than seeing the whole person.

Donors often wanted to fixate on the "bad things" that they could not personally connect with. **This meant that they were missing the whole person and the actual reality of systemic homelessness.** Grace also found that people often wanted to spotlight people's trauma, which was harmful and could retrigger them.

## Challenge

- Dehumanizing, generalizing language used
- Stakeholders focused on negative/trauma, wanted to “fix” bad things
- Missed what members actually needed

## Solution

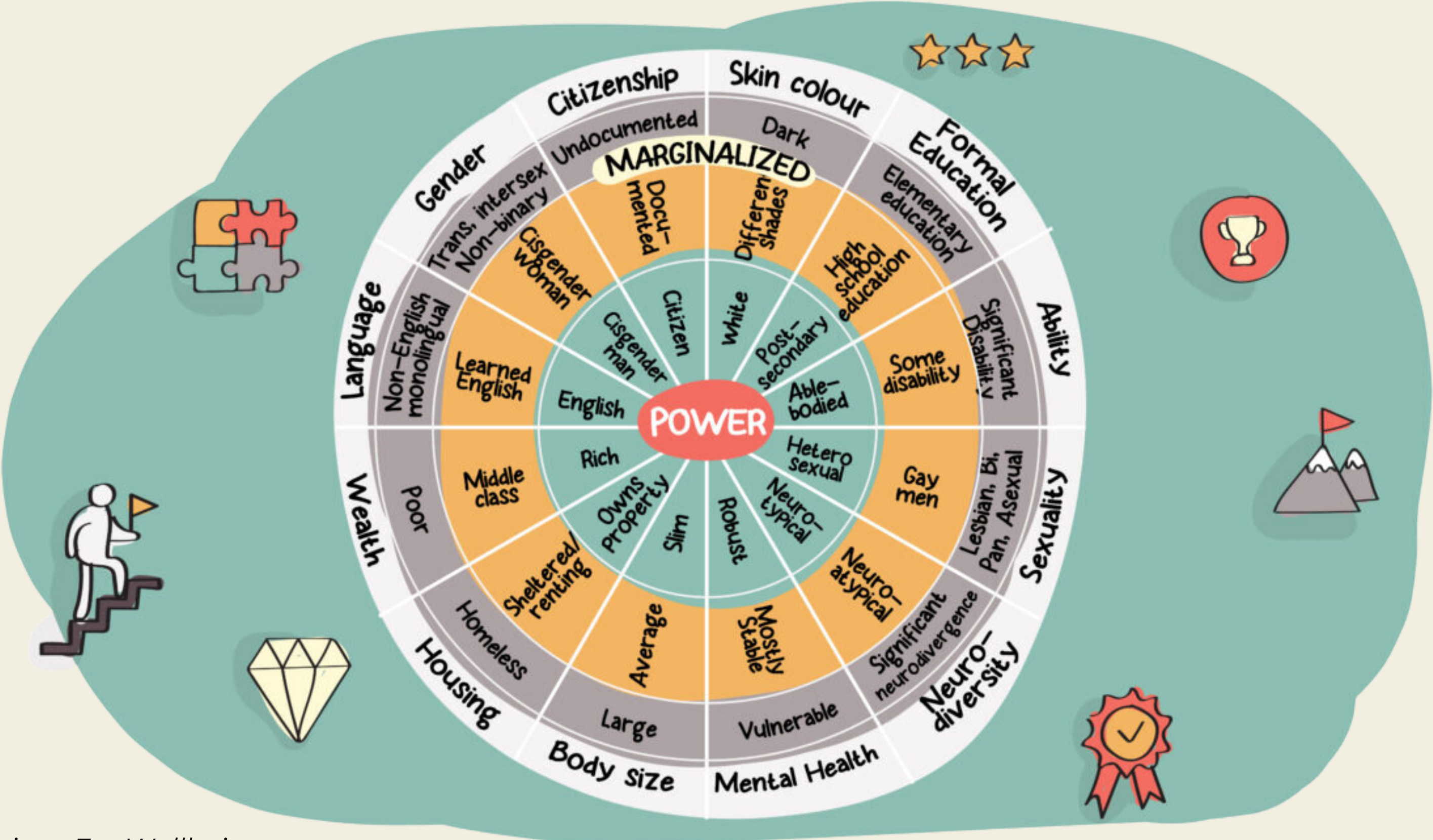
- Intentionally changed language
- Asked members what they wanted to share

## Conclusion

- Stakeholders gained deeper understanding of systemic issues leading to homelessness
- Better buy-in around strategic decision making
- Increased general operating funding
- One major donor increased their donation from \$1K to \$150K for three years.



# Wheel of Power & Privilege





# 15% Solutions: A Path to Progress

**The 15% Solution**, a Liberating Structure created by Gareth Morgan, is the first step you can take without approval, resources, or help from others. **It's something you can begin right away.**



## *When it comes to ethical storytelling...*

- What is *your* 15 % Solution?
- Where do you have the freedom to act?
- What can you do without more resources or authority?





# What Does This Look Like and Q&A

## People First Language

People first language places personhood at the center and considers other descriptive social identities as secondary.

## Empowering Language

Affected people are agents in their own story; not helpless or victims. Nonprofits and donors are not saviors.

## Self-Identification

Self-identification can be an act of resistance and validate experiences, cultures, and struggles. Reflect how people choose to talk about themselves.

## Active Voice

Active voice put the agent of the sentence in the role of performing the action and allows us to directly name perpetrators of violence and harm.

## Poverty & Economic Justice

Focus on how barriers impede people's efforts to thrive, instead of portraying low-income people as powerless.

## Talking About Race and Ethnicity

Explicitly incorporate a race lens that examines root causes, mechanisms, and patterns that uphold current systems.

# *Group Share Out and Q&A*

“Remember to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the ones you cannot live within.”

– Ruha Benjamin





# What's Next?

## Sources & Further Research

- [A Progressive's Style Guide](#)
- [D.C. Style Guide for Inclusive Language](#)
- [Ethical Storytelling](#)
- [Recipes for Wellbeing](#)
- [Social Justice Phrase Guide](#) from the Opportunity Agenda
- [Voice of Witness](#)
- [7 Ways to Tell Stories Ethically](#) from CCF & CCF's Principles
- [15% Solutions](#)

