

SAMPLE FAMILY MEMBER STORY

1. Introduction

Hello, I'm Kim Ryan from Springville. I'm a member of NAMI Springville, part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

I fear the response my son might receive during a mental health crisis and that's why I'm here to tell you about the importance of 988 and learn more about the mobile crisis needs in our state.

2. What happened

I love my son, Josh, dearly. But every day, I wake up and go to sleep worried about him. Josh is a filmmaker, something he's loved doing since he was a child running around recording home videos. He also lives with bipolar disorder, diagnosed during high school. When Josh went off to college, we were nervous if he would keep up with his treatment, but he assured us not to worry. There were weeks when we wouldn't hear from him, but I always thought back to when we dropped him off: "Don't worry, Mom. I'll be okay."

Then last year, Josh was particularly manic while filming a project. His friends, not knowing what to do, called 911 for help. Fortunately, the law enforcement officer that responded had received crisis intervention training and deescalated the situation. Yet I can't help but think about how poorly it could have turned out if even one little thing went differently.

3. What helped

A mental health crisis deserves a mental health response, but we too often rely on law enforcement to respond to someone in crisis. Thankfully, instead of being arrested, Josh was able to receive the help he needed and came back home safely. Not everyone is that lucky.

4. How we are different today

Josh has been doing well recently. He's staying at home with us while working on his next project. I'm grateful every day when I see him editing away. But there's always the possibility of another crisis.

5. What is the need or problem

I'm always thinking about the "what ifs." What is law enforcement responds to a future crisis and escalates the situation? What if calling for help means Josh ends up in jail instead of treatment – or worse, if he's killed during the response? These are the questions that parents like me have to ask ourselves because we do not have the services available to help our children if they need it.

6. What will help others

If Josh experiences another crisis, I want to know that there's help available for him. It's great that 988, the three-digit number for mental health crises, is now available for everyone, but we need to make sure every call to 988 can be answered locally so callers are connected to local resources. And when needed, that mobile crisis teams of mental health professionals respond and that we have the option to use crisis stabilization options in our community. Having these available will give me and other parents like me peace of mind.

7. My "ask"

Thank you for listening. I hope I can count on you to learn more about the availability of mobile crisis units and crisis stabilization units in our community and help us promote the 988 helpline.

SAMPLE PEER STORY

1. Introduction

Hi, I'm Maria Scott from Orange. I'm a member of NAMI Orange, part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

I live with schizophrenia and have been in crisis. Luckily, I received the help I needed. I'm here to urge you to support H.B. 988 to fully fund our state's crisis response system.

2. What happened

I received my diagnosis at age 24, following my first episode of psychosis. Fortunately, I was able to get into treatment quickly and developed a plan with my care team that helped me fully live my life – until the pandemic hit. While isolating in my apartment, I stopped engaging with my team completely. My symptoms worsened until I lost my job, lost my apartment, and was wandering the streets fighting with the voices in my head. Someone saw me and called 911.

3. What helped

Thankfully, law enforcement wasn't dispatched that day. Our community has mobile crisis teams made up of mental health professionals, and fortunately, one of these team responded to that call. The team talked to me about what I was feeling, and what would help me feel better. I wasn't scared of them because they weren't in a uniform, and they were asking me about what I needed. I agreed to go with them, and they brought me to a local crisis stabilization center, where I took a shower and talked to mental health professionals who helped identify next steps. They treated me with dignity and respect. While the rest of my journey has not always been smooth, I'm here talking to you today because that team knew how to help me.

4. How I'm different today

Because I got help, not handcuffs, I re-connected with my treatment team. Over time, I have gotten back on my feet and am working towards my goals. Instead of ending up in jail, I have a new apartment, where I recently set-up the remote "office" for my new job. I'm meeting with my treatment team regularly and have hope for the future.

5. What is the need or problem

I'm proof that receiving a mental health response in a crisis can change a person's life. But too many people in crisis don't receive this help because it's not available. I don't want to think about where I would have ended up if the mobile crisis team wasn't sent after that call. I could be in jail – or worse. Everyone should have access to this type of care if they are in crisis.

6. What will help others

988, the three-digit number for mental health crises, is now available to everyone. We must make sure that if someone needs more help than can be offered over the phone, the person answering the call can dispatch a mobile crisis team like I had. And if needed, the person in crisis can go to a crisis stabilization program instead of a jail cell or crowded emergency room.

7. My "ask"

Thank you for listening. I hope I can count on you to inform your constituents about 988 and learn more about the availability of mobile crisis units in our community. Together we can reimagine our mental health crisis response and help people like me across the state.

SAMPLE STORY OF LOSS

1. Introduction

Hello, I'm Matt Johnson from Dover. I'm a member of NAMI Dover, part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

I lost my daughter during a mental health crisis and, because of my family's experience, I'm here to urge you to fully fund our community's crisis response system.

2. What happened

When my daughter, Ashley, was younger, her infectious laughter lit up every room. She loved dancing and painting and earned high grades in school. But shortly after she turned 20, there was a change – we stopped hearing from her regularly and noticed her personality changing. When we visited her at college, her roommate told us about weeks of erratic behavior, but we thought she was having a hard time adjusting. After a month, Ashley withdrew from her friends, dropped out and moved back home.

Once Ashley was back home, we noticed the changes firsthand and tried to help her. New mental health professionals, different medications, so on and so on – all seemed to help at first, but the unpredictability always returned. One night, Ashley became extremely agitated, beyond what we ever witnessed before. Concerned for her safety and with nowhere else to turn, we called 911 for help. Law enforcement responded, but the situation escalated very quickly. The officer started issuing orders, and I can only imagine that Ashley was panicked and confused. She confronted the officer, and she was shot and killed in our driveway. Our family has struggled to pick up the pieces, but I know that we'll never feel normal or whole again.

3. What helped

I cannot stop replaying that night in my mind. If we had someone else to turn to for help besides law enforcement, the outcome could have been so different.

4. How I'm different today

I miss my daughter every day. This didn't have to happen—to my family or others experiencing a similarly painful loss—if our community could've given Ashley the help she needed in her crisis.

5. What is the need or problem

I'm grateful that 988, a three-digit number for mental health crises, is now available to everyone. I wish we had this resource available during Ashley's crisis. Does our community have mobile crisis teams available to help every person in crisis? If not, this means that law enforcement may still be the only option to send to a home like mine for some when they call for help.

6. What will help others

More mobile crisis teams in our community will help us reimagine our mental health crisis response, focused on providing mental health support rather than criminalizing someone in crisis. People in crisis, like Ashley, deserve to receive a mental health response.

7. My "ask"

Thank you for listening. I hope I can count on you to learn more about the 988 system and the availability of mobile crisis in our community. We have an opportunity to reimagine our mental health crisis response and help families like mine across the state to ensure no one else goes through what my family has gone through.

SAMPLE PEER STORY – CALLING 988

1. Introduction

Hello, I'm Jessica Smith from Monroe. I'm a member of NAMI Monroe, part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I'm here today to tell you about my experience calling the 988 Lifeline and to urge you to invest in our crisis call centers.

2. What happened

My periods of depression can be quite severe. During these periods, I can hardly get out of bed some days. One night, after finding the energy to make dinner, I was all-consumed by a wave of helplessness. I felt overwhelmed and I did not see how I could wake up the next morning and go to work. I wasn't even sure I would make it through the night.

3. What helped

I knew I needed someone to help me. I called 988 and was connected to my local crisis call center. The person on the other end of the phone talked through what I was feeling. She helped me make a plan on what I would do next that didn't overwhelm me, and she gave me resources on local support groups I could connect to. The counselor was also able to schedule an appointment for me with a mental health professional later that week.

4. How I'm different today

Once I got off the phone with her, I was able to go to bed and get some sleep. I work up the next morning feeling something I hadn't in weeks: hope. Eventually, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and have been receiving treatment ever since. I still get periods of depression, but I better understand the warning signs and have a provider I can reach out to when things feel overwhelming.

5. What is the need or problem

Because I was connected to a local crisis call center, the counselor on the phone knew of resources in my area and was able to schedule that follow-up appointment. Counselors are able to help de-escalate a crisis situation but how do we know if they are connecting people in other communities to follow-up care that they need? And are those services even available? It can take weeks to get an appointment with a counselor.

6. What will help others

Thankfully, calling 988 helped with my immediate crisis, but I wouldn't have known where to look or how to find the follow-up care I needed. I know others may feel the same and I want everyone who experiences a mental health crisis to access services in their community.

7. My "ask"

People need to know that this three-digit number is available to them if they are having a mental health crisis. And, they need to be connected to follow-up care that is available in their communities. I ask that you learn more about 988, how it is connecting people to needed care in their area, and whether they are receiving that follow-up care.

Seven Steps to Telling Your Story

The following seven steps will help you craft a succinct and powerful story.

1.	Introduce yourself
	Give your name and city or town. Include your organization. We encourage you to describe yourself as “a member of [NAMI State Org or NAMI Affiliate], part of America’s largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.”
	Share how you are affected by mental illness. Are you living with mental illness, a family member, a caregiver? This brings a "real face" to mental illness.
	State your issue and position. Let your listener know what you want them to support or oppose (or do). This helps your listener focus.
2.	What happened?
	What happened when you/your loved one had a crisis? Keep this brief--think about the most important thing you’d like your listener to know.
3.	What helped?
	Describe what helped in addressing your crisis (or would have helped, if you or your loved one didn’t receive the care you needed). This adds a hopeful tone and helps show the value of services and supports.
4.	How are you different today?
	Share what is going right in your life or how you are doing today. This concludes your personal story on a positive note that inspires.
5.	What is the need or problem?
	Mention the problem or need you want addressed. Transition to the challenge(s) faced by people in a mental health crisis.
6.	What will help others?
	Talk about what will help. Let your listener know what will address the need or problem you described.
7.	Make your "ask"
	Ask your policymaker if you can count on their support (or opposition). Include a bill number, if possible. Thank your policymaker for his or her time.

Story Practice Sheet

1. My introduction	Include your name and city and organization, if applicable. We encourage you to describe yourself as “a member of [NAMI State Org or NAMI Affiliate], part of America’s largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.” Add how you are affected by mental illness and your issue and position.
2. What happened	Aim for 3-9 sentences. Briefly describe the most important and compelling thing(s) about your crisis situation.
3. What helped	Aim for 1-5 sentences. Briefly describe what helped you or your loved one address the crisis (or what would have helped). Aim for a hopeful tone that shows what’s helpful.

4. How I'm different today

Aim for 1-3 sentences. Share what is going right in your life or how you are doing. This concludes your personal story on a positive note that inspires.

5. What is the need or problem

Aim for 1-2 sentences. Transition to the challenge(s) faced by people in a mental health crisis that you want addressed.

6. What will help others

Aim for 1-2 sentences. Talk about what will help. Let your listener know what will address the need or problem you described.

7. My "ask"

Aim for 1-2 sentences. Thank your listener for listening to you. Then, ask your listener for a commitment. Be specific.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Text **"SmartsCrisis"** to **826826**

to sign up for NAMI's federal advocacy alerts and to advocate!

Constructive Feedback Form for Telling Your Crisis Advocacy Story

In the space below each scale, identify where the story was strong and impactful or what would strengthen the story.

Section of the Story	1 (would benefit from strengthening)	2	3 (works fine)	4	5 (very strong)
Introduction	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
What happened?	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
What helped?	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
How are you different today?	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
What is the need or problem?	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
What will help others?	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
Make your "ask"	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					

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Comments:					

