

## ACE-DV Webinar Tip Sheet #2

### Valuing Your Story

This tip sheet offers key points and takeaways from the webinar, [Valuing Your Story](#), hosted by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (September 2018). This webinar featured the voices and experiences of Adult Children Exposed to Domestic Violence (ACE-DV) Leadership Forum members Rebecca Balog, Lenny Hayes, William Kellibrew, and Annika Leonard.



### Making the case to yourself

- Realizing the value of your story is a journey
- Complicated by experiences of trauma and oppression
- Impacted by upbringing and cultural values

*“When I tell my story it’s not about me, it’s about giving voice to others so that they can tell their stories.” – Lenny*

Annika first learned that her story had value “when I started to share it.” She reflected on how people were really moved by what she said, which made her realize it was both important and special. The first time William told his story he was in 10th grade, and saw that people were crying. Afterwards, “when I went to the playground... every kid surrounded me, and I mean there were probably 100 kids out there.” That experience showed William that his story actually had value, and that people cared beyond his friends and family.

Rebecca disclosed her story during an interview with a local agency, which is what led her to secure her very first job in the movement. That made me realize just how much value this experience brings.

### Considerations when valuing your worth

- Importance of centering and giving voice to survivors’ experiences
- Risks and consequences of sharing trauma stories, especially for marginalized communities
- Value the bravery in your healing journey
- Know that there is no story just like yours

*“That’s how I began my healing: When I finally understood how unique I was, and that trauma was an individual experience from the core, I knew that I should stop comparing myself to people. I am so unique, I am an individual, and my story is mine.” – William*

*“That’s the bravery in doing this work, that we’re in our healing and we are ready to share with others.” – Rebecca*

Lenny noted that often the stories of Two Spirit Native LGBTQ people go unheard because of the barriers they face in coming forward, sharing, *“I didn’t tell my story until I went through 10 years of extensive therapy and healing, and then got a lot of courage to tell my story... I do this work because I know that my community is often not recognized.”*

Annika shared that as a woman of color, her story has been weaponized, especially when shared in mixed company with those who hold power and privilege. So, while Annika acknowledges the value in sharing them, she advises survivors of color to be prepared for how these stories may be used against them in certain contexts and take steps to reduce the harm.

## Making the case to our agencies/systems

- Responsibility for centering survivors’ experiences to impact change
- Self-advocacy is necessary – believing in yourself and bringing that forward
- May require us to push ourselves out of our comfort zone

*“We are the stories... This is about us. And when we presume there is a history of trauma and resilience in the room, we are honoring the stories of individuals who may not feel comfortable talking about this.” – William*

*“It’s a lot of hard work; it’s not easy. But I would definitely tell people not to give up, and to keep coming forward and telling your stories because... all of this work really begins with the survivors.” – Lenny*

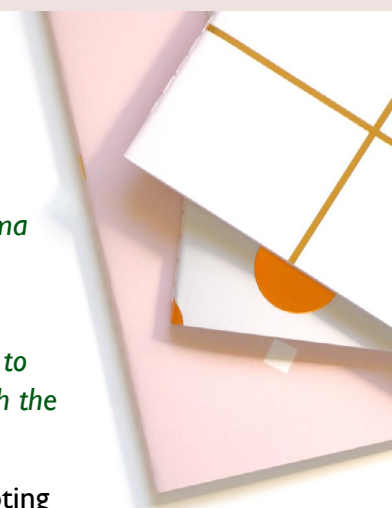
All panelists expressed the centrality of survivor stories to our movement’s work, noting how the courage to bring these stories forward can impact change on all levels. However, the lack of buy-in from Annika’s organization is what prompted her to start her own organization. She said, *“Once I found the power of my voice and the power of my experiences, and the possibilities that it created for other people, it pushed me to step out even further.”*

## Negotiating terms and fees

- Remember the value that your story brings to a space when negotiating fair compensation
- Speaker rates may vary in different settings – government, non-profit, etc.
- Communicate your reasonable expectations of hosts with regard to travel costs and arrangements, accommodations, accessibility, safety and well-being
- Include contract language or riders that specify what is important to you

*“I always keep in mind what a mentor said to me once: ‘Know your value.’” – Lenny*

William expressed that *“our stories are priceless”* and Lenny echoed this with advice to start high and negotiate from there, asking that your host cover travel and other expenses. William advised that having someone represent you in negotiations or consulting with someone for guidance on rates is a helpful strategy.



## Owning your story

- Retaining rights to your story
- Considerations regarding family member and others named in your story

Rebecca advised that when opportunities arise to share your story in a formal setting as part of grant-funded work, pay close attention to contractual language around “ownership.” You can take precautions such as being creative with what you include – or choose not to include – in your Powerpoint or other materials that will be owned by your host organization.

William shared that trademarking your name is an option available to storytellers, suggesting that those who are interested may want to consult with a friend with a legal background about legal protections that are available.

## Caring for yourself

- Ignore trolls
- Create and maintain boundaries
- Consider the “cost” in the personal toll that storytelling often takes
- Build self-care into your speaking engagements if possible
- Seek out supportive relationships with peers and mentors
- Prioritize your wellness



*“Healing happens in relationships, so it’s about building relationships with trusted individuals that we can talk with and hear feedback from.” - William*

*“Please don’t internalize [mean-spirited negative feedback]. Remember you are on a healing journey for healing people. They are hurt people hurting others.” – Rebecca*

William advised that storytellers figure out how to get the best out of the speaking engagement to supports well-being at the end of the day. For example, if your host agency is willing to add an extra day to your trip, it’s a good idea to take that day as an opportunity to practice self-care and grounding.

Lenny makes time for themselves daily, as one of the most important things their life, noting that “I can’t help others if I’m not helping myself.” Lenny shared their practice of going and sitting with elders in their community, “elders who I feel safe with, who will share knowledge with me, and who will remind me not to be in a place that’s negative.”

Access the full recording and related materials from this webinar at [VAWnet.org](https://www.vawnet.org).

More information about the ACE-DV project can be found at [nrcdv.org](https://www.nrcdv.org).