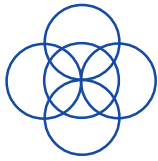


# Birth to 6 EVENTS



A BULLETIN FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SERVING YOUNG CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Issue 59—May 2008

## Leading with Story

-Arianna Keil, Birth to 3 Professional Development Specialist

“We give folks the data, but we don’t help them change their story.”  
- Judy Brown: *A Leader’s Guide to Reflective Practice*

In her work on using reflective strategies to facilitate change, Judy Brown discusses the importance of story in understanding data. She believes stories act as a bridge between research, data and a professional’s experiences and values. “The research and the data don’t provide a new story, with room in it for them [professionals encountering new data], so they stick with their old story, in the face of the data.”



**How can we use the data we have on our programs to create a new story that would better serve children and families?**

“Still we have more and more data, and we seem to feel more and more stuck,” Brown notes. She points to story as a way to get unstuck. “There

seems to be something in a good story that can hold truth with simplicity, complexity, and profundity at once. A good story has a kind of electricity to it, an energy that sweeps us along with it. And we end up in a different place within ourselves listening to that kind of story.” She continues, “As I have worked with organizations of all kinds over the decades, I have noticed that it seems mostly in telling stories that we have something that can be offered to others in a form that they can welcome, take in, digest, and which nourishes them.”

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*The theme of this issue of the Birth to 6 EVENTS newsletter is “Stories at the Center.” Stories are at the center of much of the way humans come to understand their experience. This ancient form of connecting with others allows us to give meaning to sometimes difficult to interpret experiences or information.*

*In early intervention and early childhood special education, stories play an unusually important role on several levels. Family stories are at the heart of our work. They help us to understand families’ day-to-day joys and struggles and the best places to embed intervention. Read the summary of a journal article on the role of family stories in intervention research and practice on page 6.*

*Stories can also help us place data in an appropriate context. Numbers alone give us some information, but numbers embedded in a story about how a program works to serve children and families provides much richer information. In this issue you’ll find articles on the historical evolution of stories within the field, the perspective of one RESource representative on how she sees stories helping programs explain and befriend their data, and forms used by State Birth to 3 staff to translate data into stories. It also features former Winnebago County Birth to 3 Coordinator Pam Garman’s reflections on her 16 years of work in the field and the story of transition from center-based services to service provision in natural environments.*

*I hope this issue prompts you to consider your story and to recognize its power in your work.* 

Arianna Keil, editor

# LEADING WITH STORY

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## Why is story so attractive to people?

Brown offers some insights. "Story is genuinely invitational, an offering which the hearer can consider, but which is not forced upon them. It is the antithesis of the 'sell', with its marketing energy seeking to influence and convince. Story simply offers. ...it is the 'stealth technology of communication.' Story comes in under our naturally defensive radar, under the radar that says, 'Don't you go trying to change my mind. I like my thinking the way it is.'"

## Become a storyteller

"Only in a partnership between science and story-telling, among us and within us, can we begin to learn what we need to learn. Our scientists and policy-makers must tap the story-telling capacity within themselves, and around them, in order to tell the story that will guide us all in healthier, more life-affirming directions," Brown observes. She advocates that each of us reaffirm the partnership between the scientist and the storyteller, both around us and within us.

Data without story is data without impact. Brown recommends professionals charged with the task of making data relevant and understandable use the bridging power of story to accomplish this end. 🌐

## The Bridge with a Sign

- Judy Brown

He had found  
A bridge,  
With a sign:  
"Please use  
this bridge  
to cross."

He wondered aloud  
How many times  
In his life  
He had wandered  
On the bank  
Of a river of change,  
And not seen  
Such an obvious sign,  
Nor put his  
Foot upon the bridge  
Before him.



"Story is far older than the art and science of psychology, and will always be the elder in the equation no matter how much time passes."

- Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run With the Wolves*