

Change the Narrative Fellowship Program

Barbie's Story

There once was a girl named Persistence. Persistence had many dreams like having a big stable home with enough bedrooms, a white picket fence to keep the danger out, a college education, a career she was proud of, and enough money to explore the world beyond the barriers that kept her confined. However, she faced many obstacles on the road to pursuing her dreams. But that didn't stop her, Persistence knew that she was special, she just needed enough people to see it.

Therefore, every morning when she got dressed, she would put on her empowering t-shirt, her optimistic sneakers and her lucky jeans. Those jeans came well equipped because she made sure to never leave the house with empty pockets. So in the front left pocket, she would place courage. In the right ambition. In the back-right pocket, she would place determination and in the back left she would place hope. She makes her way out the door with all of these things, and starts her journey towards her goal, how to make it all possible. She grew up in a broken home and was really poor, but she knew that she was smart, and from what she saw on tv, smart people go to college. So she would go to colleges and explain how she was of "low income" but had high expectations of herself. However, the admissions counselors would inform her you could not pay tuition with hope, dreams, and self-expectations. Persistence walked away with her head down, but she wasn't done. She found a way, I went to school, but I quickly realized what I had in my pockets wasn't enough to provide for my family.

I've walked into many rooms wearing the cloaks of shame and the story already being told for me. I've been tokenized, exploited and forced to feel like a success story however, the success being portrayed doesn't reflect the success needed to overcome poverty. The triumph that people see, and the success that I need are two different things and it happens a lot in my community. So how do you show gratitude and be a part of the solutions? You tell the truth. This is my truth.

My name is Barbie Izquierdo and I have dedicated the past 13 years to publicly sharing parts of my life to advocate for legislative changes that keep the best interest of low-income people in mind. I was featured in a documentary about hunger and food insecurity in America called A Place at the Table. I sacrificed my privacy, dignity and so many other things, and it absolutely changed my life. I gave the world glimpses of what it was like not having enough, showing the world that I would force my children to sleep without eating because we simply didn't have it.

Today, I travel the country to speak and work a full time position with Hunger-Free America based on my lived expertise. My journey started with public speaking and I am now trying to start my own consulting and speaking business to build a firm foundation for my family and yet I still need help battling poverty. Persistence is being heard and helping to pave the way for Hope, Determination and the other women like me fighting through economic hardships.

Learn more about the Change the Narrative Fellowship program [here](#).