

What's the Story?

Using Narrative to Build Public Will

Alison McIntosh, Neighborhood Partnerships

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

— Antoine de Saint-Exupery



Narratives vs. Stories

“Stories and narratives are often used interchangeably, as synonyms. But here I will draw a crucial distinction between the two. **Narratives are stories that do not end** – they persist indefinitely. They invite, even demand, action by participants and they reach out to embrace as many participants as possible. They are continuously unfolding, being shaped and filled in by the participants . . . **Stories are about plots and action while narratives are about people and potential.**”

-John Hagel

Building Blocks of Narrative

- The frames we use and evoke
- The elements and tools of good storytelling
- Awareness of competing cultural models, stories, myths and parables
- Tapping into shared values, shared hopes
- A “common sense” description of problems and solutions



our brains are
rapidly seeking
to connect new
information to
the existing
stories in our
heads

Communications is Storytelling

Storytelling is as old as humankind yet as new as this morning's news headlines.

“Analysis might excite the mind, but it hardly offers a route to the heart. And that’s where we must go if we are to motivate people not only to take action but to do with energy and enthusiasm.”

- Stephen Denning

Master Narratives

Whenever we engage in public debates we may think of ourselves as conduits of information. However, our audiences think about those same policies, issues, and programs in terms of the background story— **the master narrative** —that lies beneath our bullet-points, facts, statistics, and legal citations.

Narratives need . . .

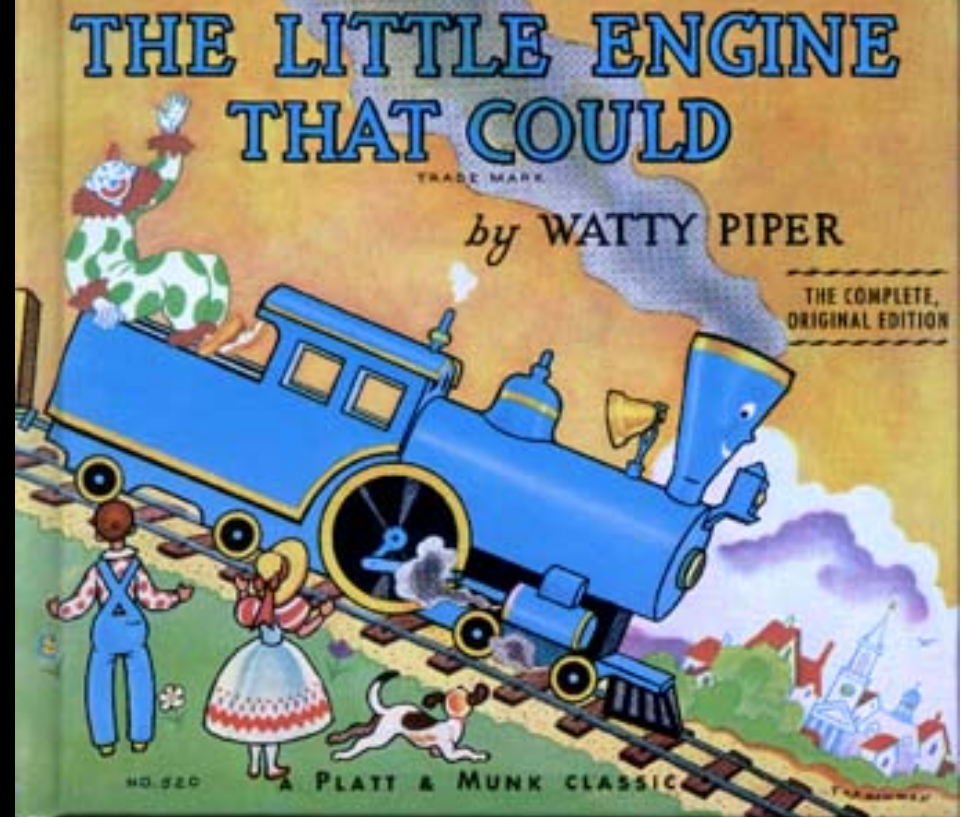
aspiration, not desperation



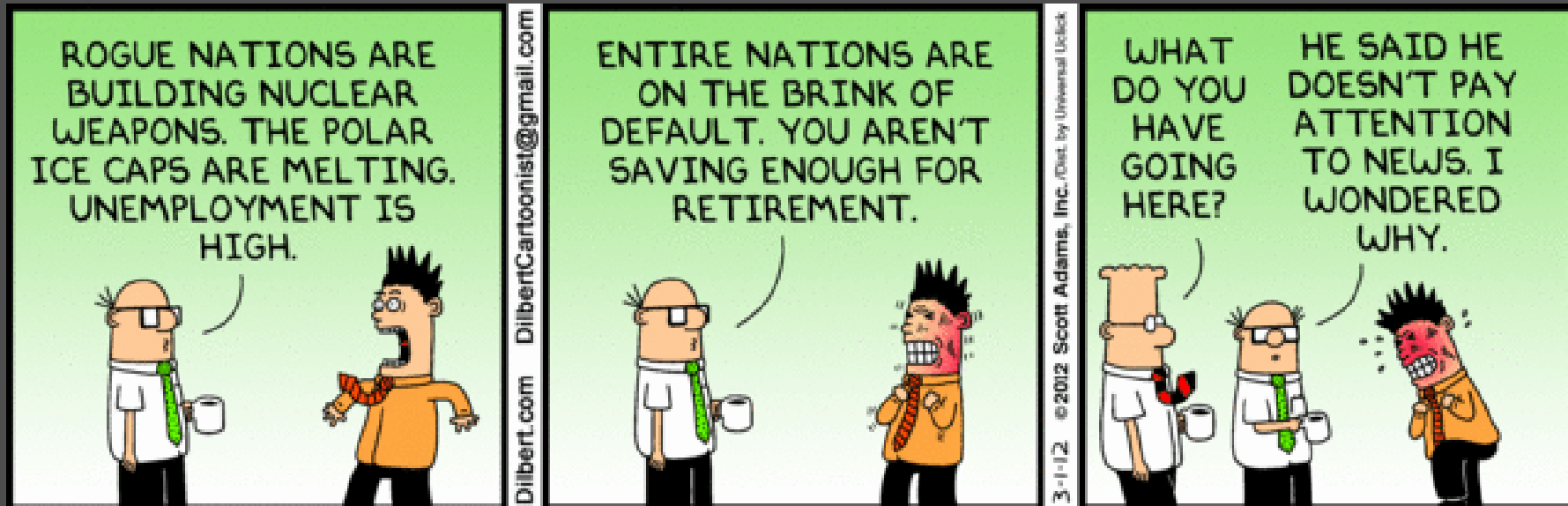
Chicken Little

Desperation

Aspiration



Crisis or Solution?



New Mexico

Land that used to be Enchanting

Home

Wilderness

Threats to Wilderness

Questions About
Wilderness

Special Places

Gila Wilderness

Latir Peak Wilderness

Pecos Wilderness

Manzano Mountain
Wilderness

Campaigns

Proposed Wilderness

Wildlife

Take Action

Support Us

Press Room

About Us

news

New Mexico Wilderness



A Wilderness Legacy

When Spanish settlers first arrived in New Mexico four hundred years ago, they described rolling hills of auburn grass and cacti that came up to the stirrups of mounted horsemen. Later, Aldo Leopold, "the father of Wilderness", wrote of this land of unparalleled biological diversity that the "...oak-dotted hills, ...pine clad mesas, and lazy trout streams ...come near to being the cream of creation."

Sadly, today most of the rolling grasses are gone, the streams have long dried up, and many of the speckled mesas and hills have been sacrificed to economic development and motorized recreation. These lands, once treasured as some of the wildest in the west, are quickly dwindling.

Wilderness Protection is the Answer

There are well over 4.5 million acres of potential Wilderness in New Mexico; only an aggressive Wilderness advocacy campaign will create the

public demand to permanently protect these areas as Wilderness.



New Mexico – Land of Enchantment

The wild lands of New Mexico have been the source of our spirit and culture for a thousand years. We have a legacy of living with the land, not just on it. A new century poses new challenges – balancing growth and prosperity with the open space that is our heritage. The Wilderness Alliance is working to keep this balance and ensure that New Mexico remains enchanting for future generations . . .

What's Wrong

Why it Matters

What Can be Done

What Can be Done

**Why it
Matters**

**What's
Wrong**

Families without housing face a staggering number of obstacles. Children can suffer from poor academic performance, have higher rates of asthma, ear infections, stomach problems, and speech problems, and are at higher risk of mental and physical trauma. Parents struggling with housing security find it difficult to get and keep a job, pursue educational goals, and provide adequate care and attention to their families. By creating opportunities for families to build economic and housing security, **families can build better lives and our communities will be stronger.**

We know that **communities are stronger and healthier** when at-risk families get the help they need to find and stay in safe, affordable housing. As a result, families improve their children's education, find stable employment, and have a deeper sense of belonging in their neighborhood. It is for this reason that the public sector should work with nonprofit organizations and private funders to give every family the opportunity to have a safe and stable home.

Solution Oriented Language

An example:

- “We know what works.”
- “We can solve this problem.”
- “There’s a tested solution for this.”

Chicken Little and Global Warming

"Our study indicates that the potentially devastating consequences of global warming threaten people's fundamental tendency to see the world as safe, stable and fair. . . ," said Robb Willer, UC Berkeley social psychologist .

"The scarier the message, the more people who are committed to viewing the world as fundamentally stable and fair are motivated to deny it," agreed Matthew Feinberg,

Overall, the study concludes, **"Fear-based appeals, especially when not coupled with a clear solution, can backfire and undermine the intended effects of messages."**



A close-up, black and white photograph of an elephant's face, focusing on its eye and the intricate, wrinkled texture of its skin. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the ridges and valleys of the skin. The text is overlaid in white, sans-serif font.

Remember – Order Matters!

Once a frame is triggered it
crowds out all other frames

Moving from
aspiration, to desperation

Portrait



Landscape

Public or Private Responsibility?

“The use of either the **episodic** [*portraits*] or the **thematic** [*landscapes*] news frame affects how individuals assign responsibility for political issues; **episodic framing tends to elicit individualistic rather than societal attributions of responsibility while thematic framing has the opposite effect.** Since television news is heavily episodic, its effect is generally to induce attributions of responsibility to individual victims or perpetrators rather than to broad social forces.”

(Iyengar, 1991)

Different Stories > Different Solutions

Portraits

- Individuals
- Events
- Private
- Appeal to consumers
- Better information
- **Fix the person**

Landscapes

- Issues
- Trends
- Public
- Appeal to citizens
- Better Policies
- **Fix the Condition**

- Based on work by Iyengar and Gilliam

From Portraits to Landscapes

Personal stories are told more often and are easier to tell than stories that illustrate the systems and structures that perpetuate inequality. **Stories of individual change are at the core of our culture and they engage us. Stories of collective action are there as well but told less often.** With practice, advocates can identify the conditions they want to illustrate and better link those descriptions to the particular policy debate and values they hold.

- Larry Wallack

Analysis of news reports suggest that when poverty is framed as a societal problem, society is deemed responsible. Alternatively, when news presentations illustrate poverty with a specific example of a poor person, responsibility is assigned to the individual.

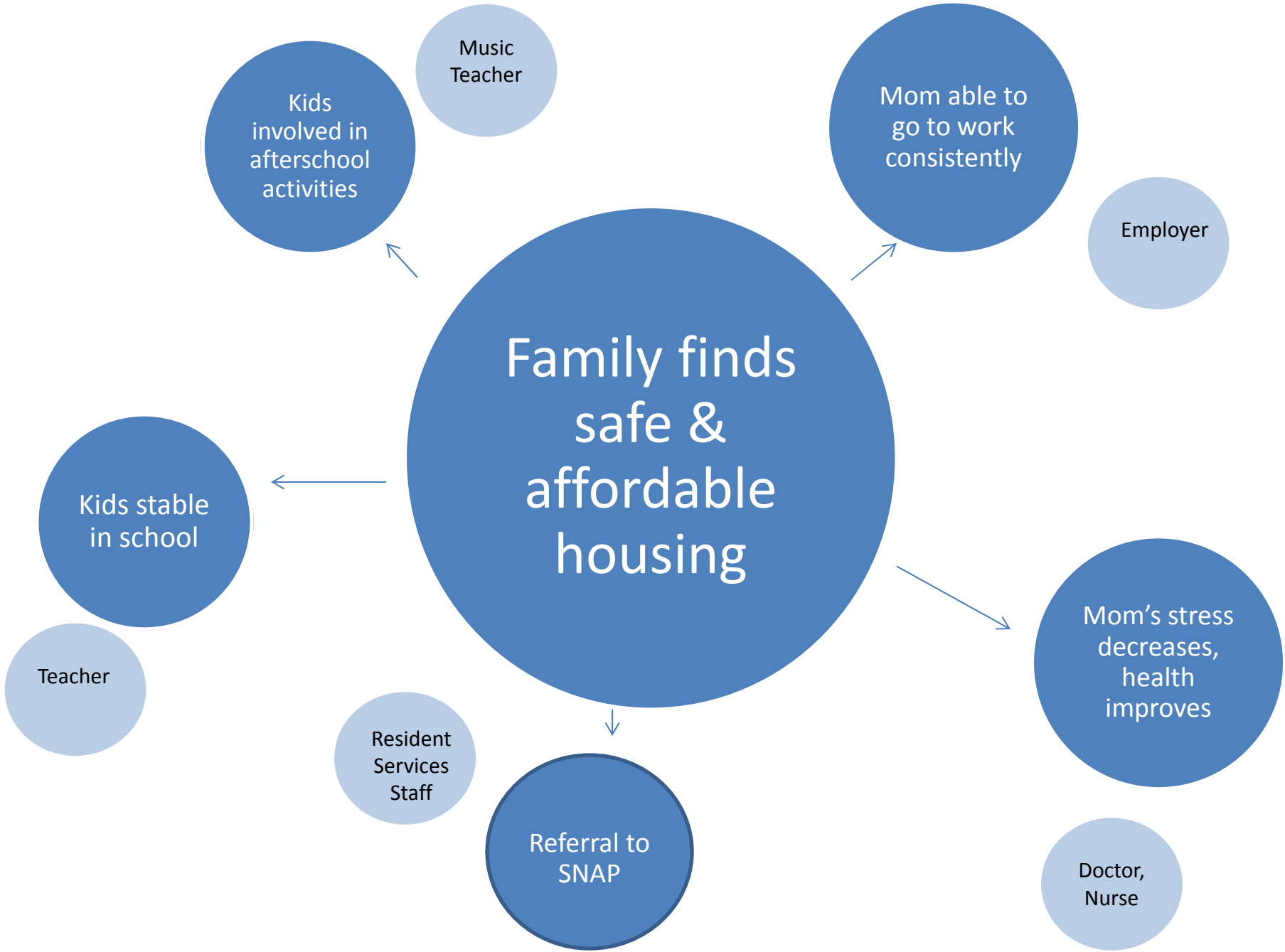
(Iyengar, 1990).

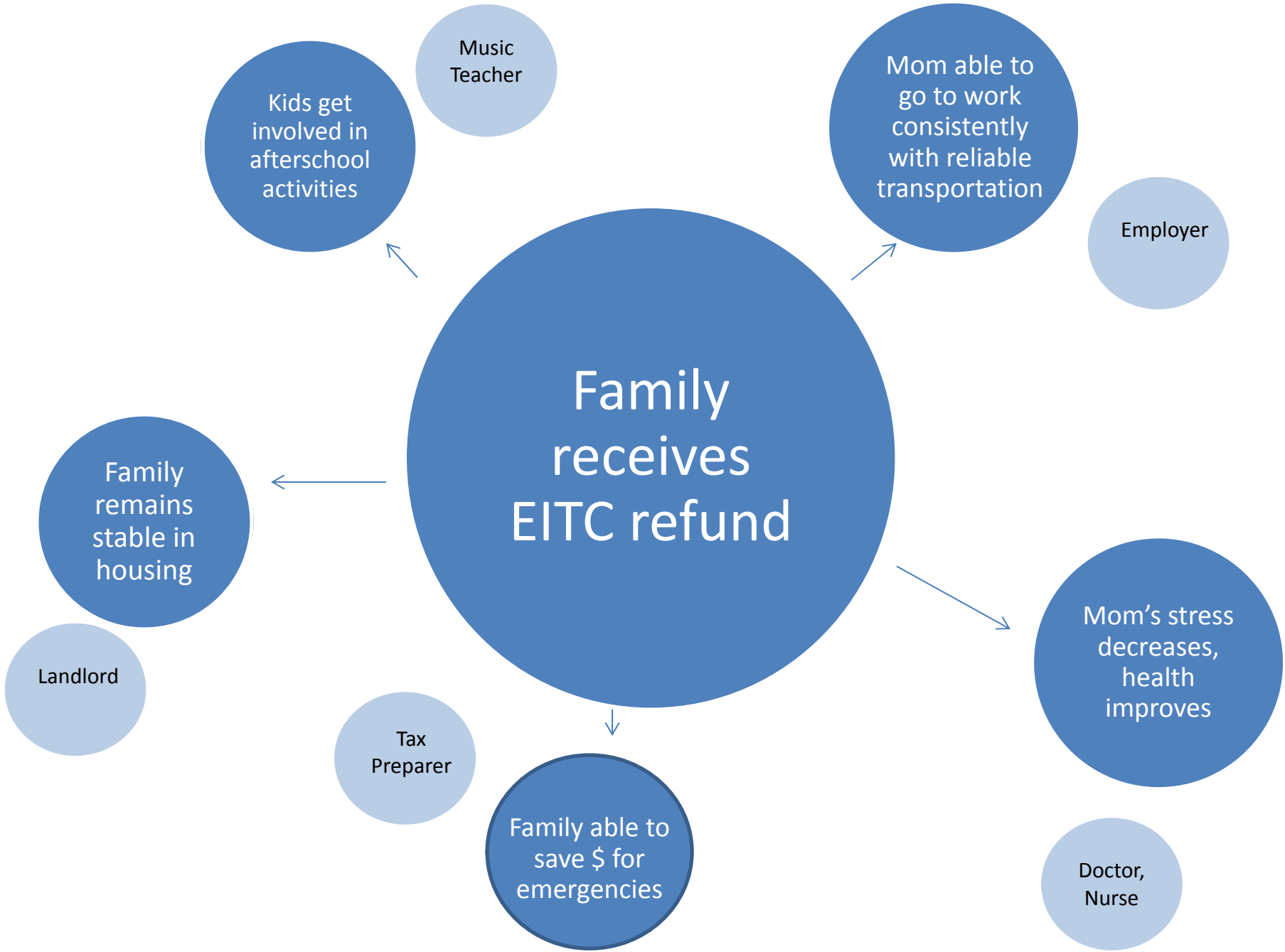
**We need to create
collective**

**Narratives, not
individual Stories . . .**

Ripple Effects







Family receives EITC refund

Kids get involved in afterschool activities

Music Teacher

Mom able to go to work consistently with reliable transportation

Employer

Family remains stable in housing

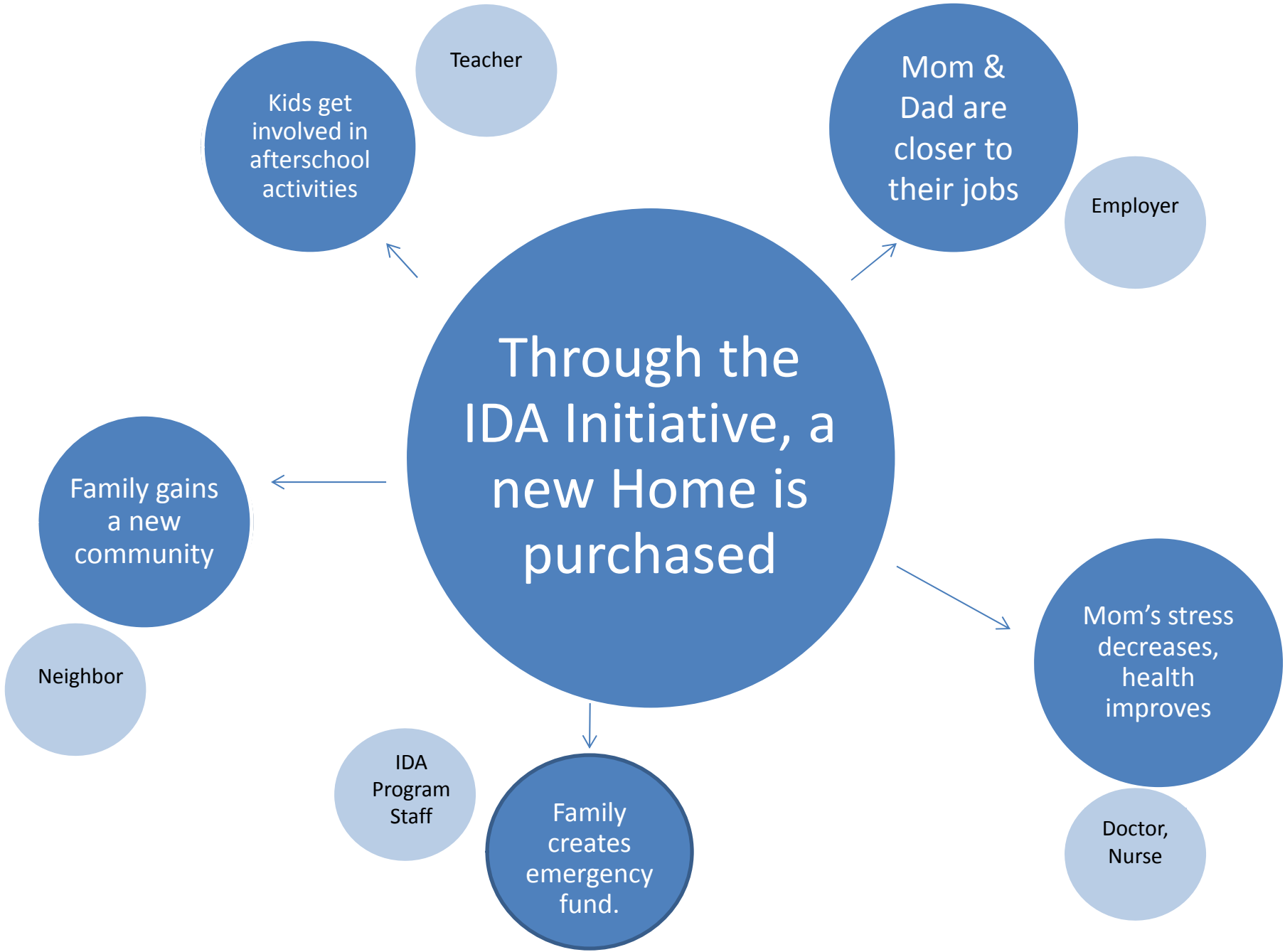
Landlord

Family able to save \$ for emergencies

Tax Preparer

Mom's stress decreases, health improves

Doctor, Nurse



Landscape Stories

- In the media:
 - Paid Sick Days Campaign, City of Portland
 - Letters to the Editor
 - Restaurant Owner, School Nurse, Public Health Nurse, Non-Profit Executive Director
- In the Legislature:
 - Affordable Housing for Farmworkers
 - Legislative Testimony
 - Tenants, Owners, Farmers, Migrant Health Care Expert, Farmworker Union

Messengers

- The choice of messengers is as important as the message itself.
- The message is reinforced or undermined by the choice of messenger.
- Knowledge and trustworthiness, not likeability or familiarity.
- Some messengers are not credible we assume they are biased toward a perspective.
- Unlikely allies can prompt public reconsideration recommendation.
- Some messengers convey specific frames.

- *FrameWorks Institute*



**What are the
“Ripple Effects”
of your work?**