Image Credit to Jules Hinmon/MAKE Studio

The Plain Truth Project:

Making News Inclusive and Accessible

October 14, 2023

Sign In and Photo Consent for Online Participants

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Hk5x25bjELLZkoELgtGeHcBBnqQKMagMKJzr9lhvZXk/edit

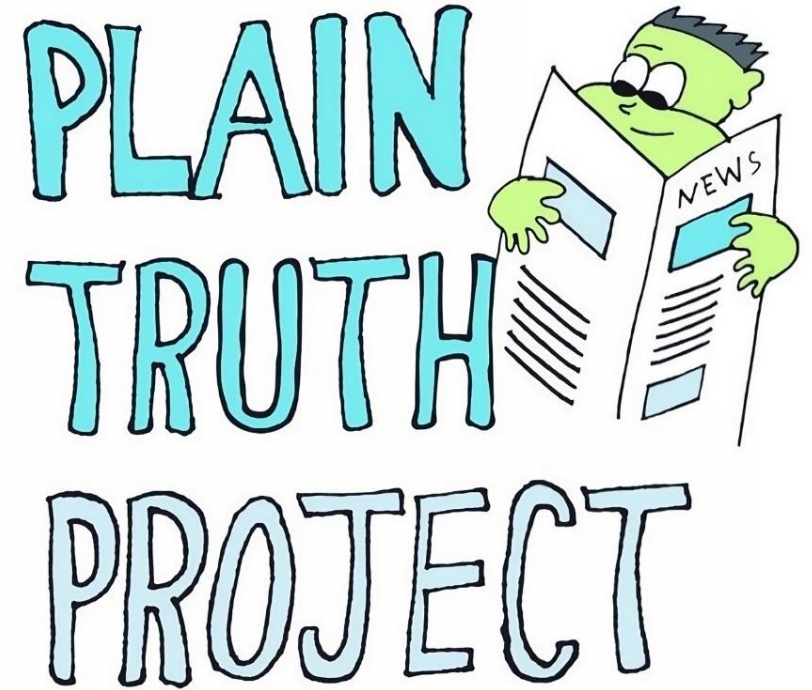# To Access Digital Versions of Documents and Presentations

www.plaintruthproject.org/access

Thank you to the following for support:

- Brown Institute for Media Innovation, Columbia University
- National Center for Disability and Journalism, Arizona State University
- Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, University of Toledo
- Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, University of Southern California
- ProPublica
- Center for Public Integrity
- Arizona Daily Star
- Hezzy Smith and the Harvard Law Project on Disability
- Detour Company Theatre
- MAKE Studio
- Madison Latham

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January 2020

Amy Silverman joined Beena Raghavendran and others at ProPublica for a year-long journalism project about the lack of services for Arizonans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Amy, Beena and others immediately began planning reporting based on being able to interact with sources in person.

Then came the pandemic…

We needed to find new ways to report and tell this story – and really connect with our sources.
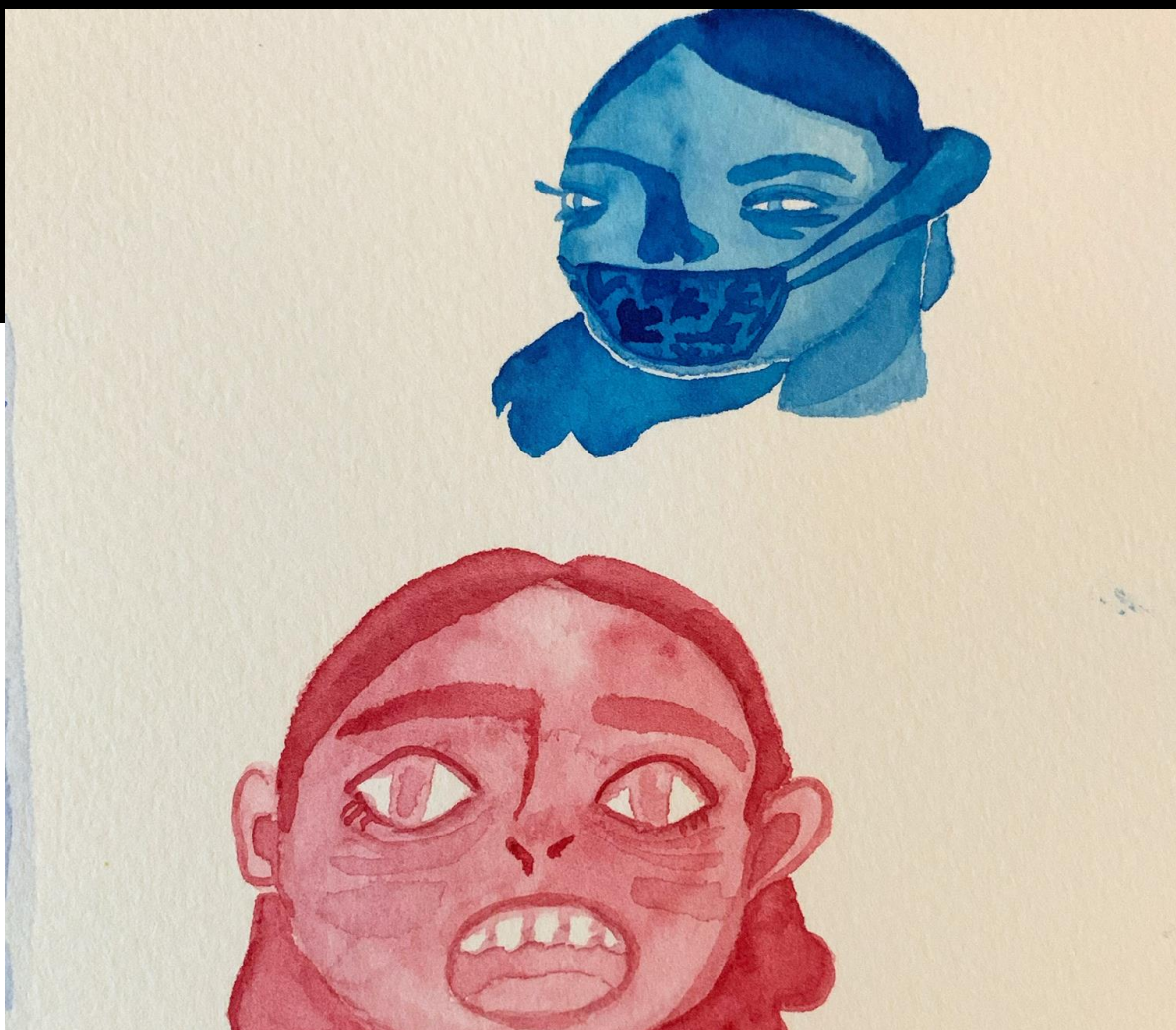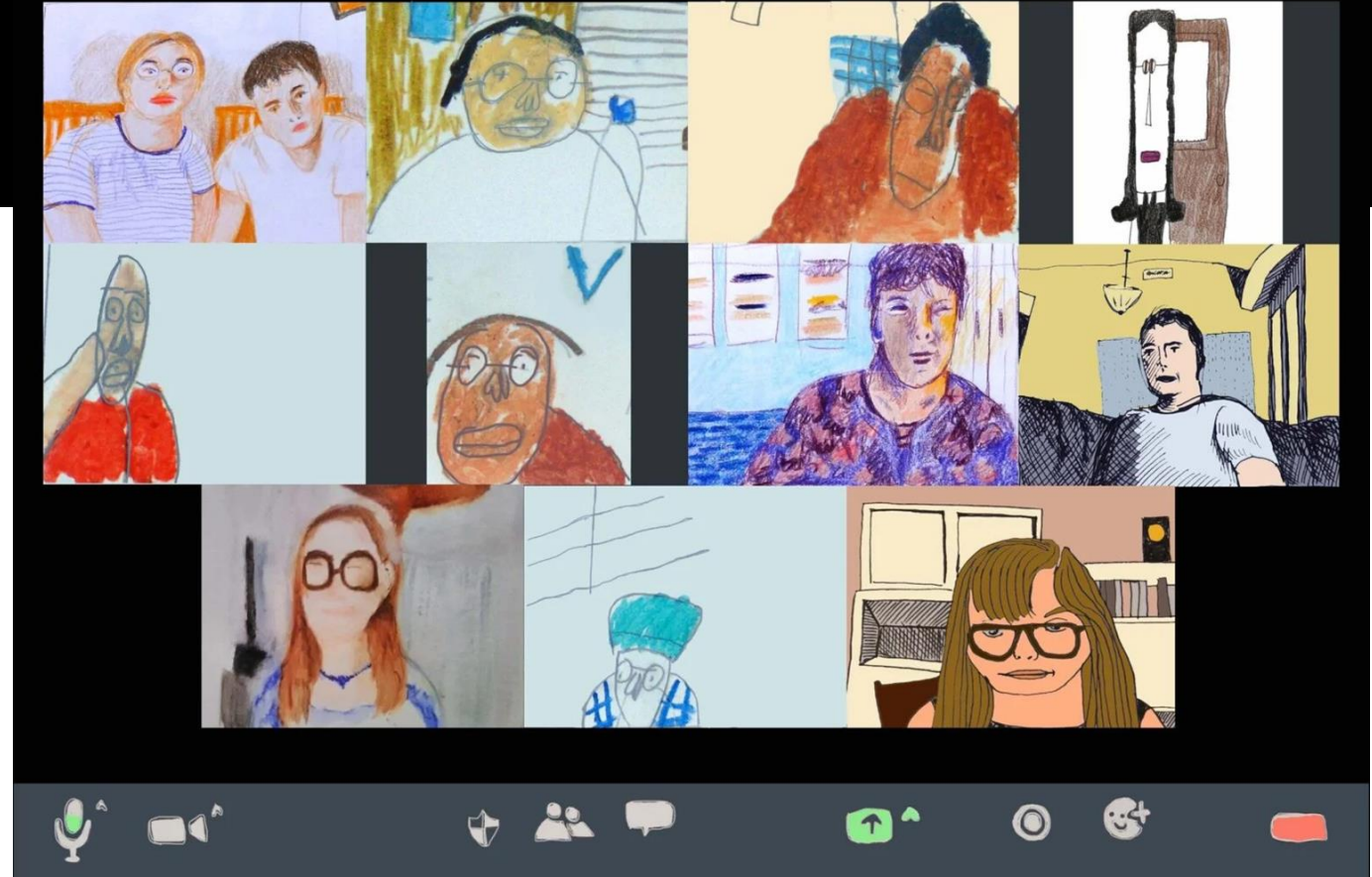

Image Credit to Annabelle Stern

MAKE STUDIO

Shoshana Gordon, another journalist we worked with, hired MAKE STUDIO in Baltimore to illustrate the people in the story.

And we asked people to join us on Zoom for a storytelling workshop and performance for and by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Rosie Eck, Erika Clark, Tony LaBate and Louis Middleton/Make Studio for ProPublica

They said yes!

We had been working with Becca Monteleone on the storytelling workshop.

When we learned she knew how to do plain language translation we asked ProPublica to bring her in her to translate the whole project.

They said yes!

This is traditional language.

She Needs a Device to Communicate. The State Has Kept it From Her for 18 Months.

Emory, 11, has cerebral palsy and uses an augmentative communication device to talk to her friends. One day, her mother turned it on and smoke came out. "They make it so hard for families that they give up."

Image Above:
Emory Webster, right, and her mother, Adiba Nelson, in their home in Tucson in October.(Mamta Popat/Arizona Daily Star)

Image Below:
Emory Webster loves to paint and hang out with friends. (Erika Clark/Make Studio for ProPublica)

This is the same headline and paragraph translated to plain language.

She Needs a Device to Talk to People. Arizona Has Not Given It to Her. It Has Been 1.5 Years.

Emory is 11 years old. She has cerebral palsy. She uses a device to talk to her friends. One day, her mom turned it on and smoke came out. She said, "They make it so hard for families that they give up."

Image Above:
Emory Webster, right, and her mother, Adiba Nelson, in their home in Tucson in October.(Mamta Popat/Arizona Daily Star)

Image Below:
Emory Webster loves to paint and hang out with friends. (Erika Clark/Make Studio for ProPublica)

# We had great response from other journalists!

NiemanLab

ProPublica experiments with ultra-accessible plain language in stories about people with disabilities

ProPublica's plain language experiment is a first for a mainstream news organization. Disability experts say it shouldn't be the last.

By **SARAH SCIRE**

NOV. 10, 2020, 10:15 A.M.

ProPublica Uses Plain Language to Make Stories More Accessible
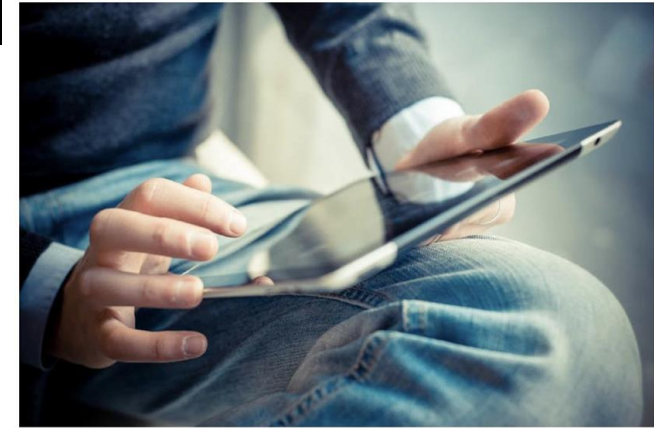
Posted Monday, January 25, 2021 12:00 am

Rob Tornoe

It's nice when a newsroom experiment pays off in unexpected ways.

In Arizona, ProPublica teamed up with the *Arizona Daily Star* to sponsor a story by Jev Silverman that looked into why the state Division of Developmental Disabilities wanted
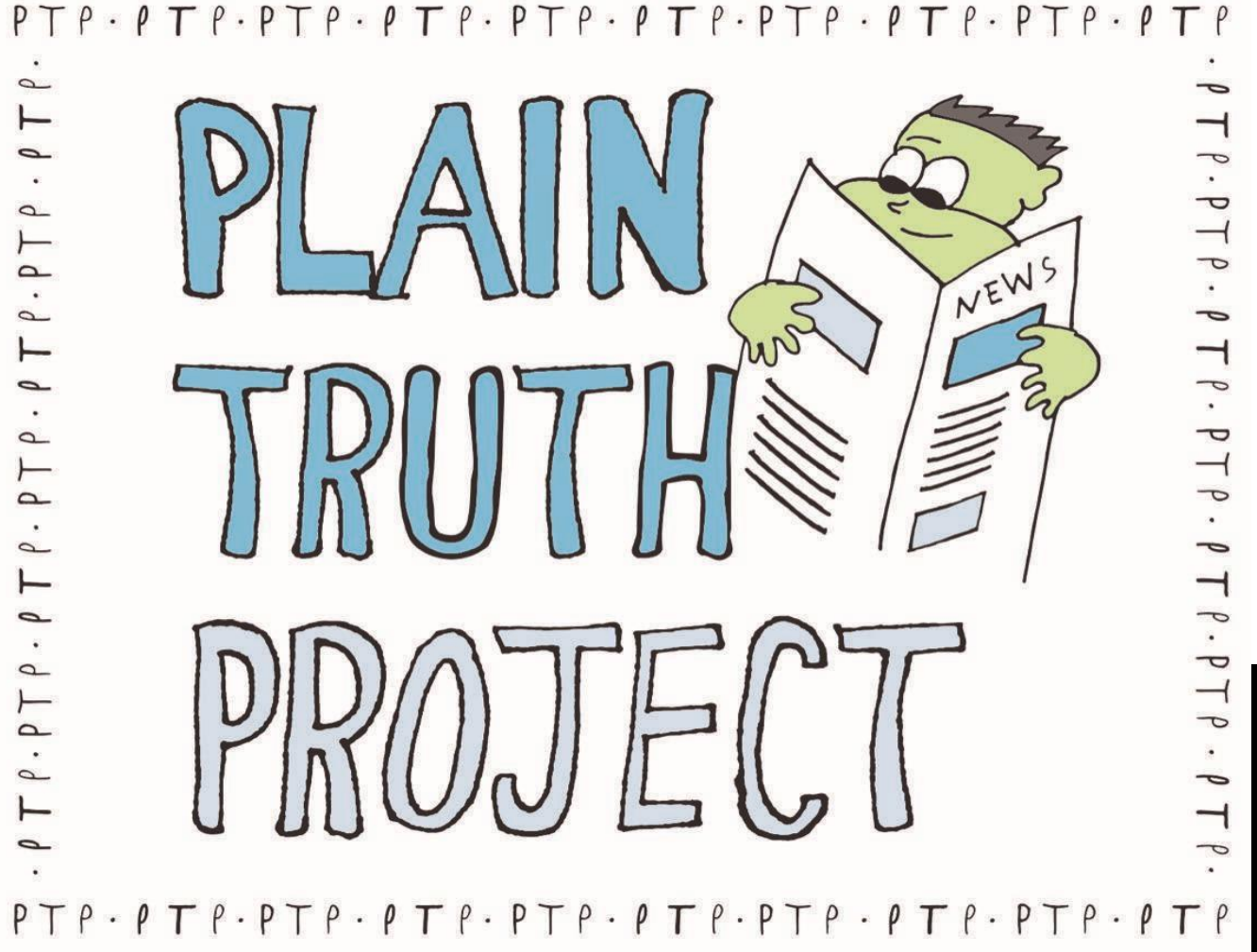
But we wondered –

Had anyone with intellectual and developmental disabilities actually read the plain language version?

Was our work reaching the right people?
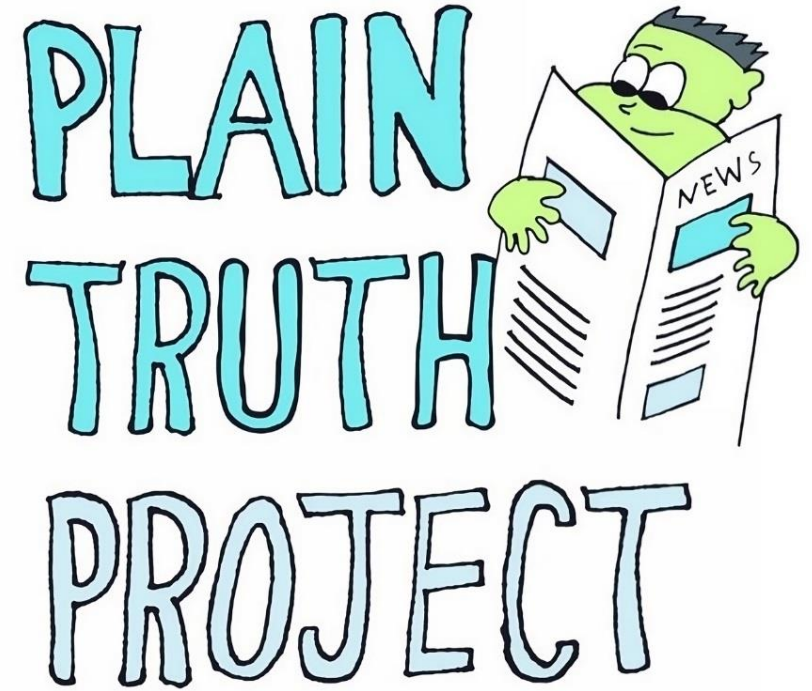
And what do people with IDD want out of journalism?

SO, WE STARTED THE PLAIN TRUTH PROJECT.

The Plain Truth Project:

Image Credit to Jules Hinmon/MAKE Studio

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Self-Advocacy and Journalism

Phillis Schmidbauer and Darius Cunningham

Introduction – Phillis Schmidbauer

- Self-advocate
- People First Toledo President
- SALUTE Sargent-in-Arms
- Lightning Leadership (Special Olympics)
- Strong advocate for others

Image Credit to Jordan Young/Toledo Community Photography

Introduction – Darius Cunningham

- Self-advocate
- People First Toledo Vice President
- Member of SALUTE
- Lightening Leaders (Special Olympics)
- Advocate for disability
- Wants to teach others to be against racism and domestic violence

Image Credit to Jordan Young/Toledo Community Photography

Image Credit to Jules Hinmon/MAKE Studio

Why is Self-Advocacy Important?

Myths about people with disabilities:

- That we can't live a normal life – WRONG!

- That we can't speak up for ourselves – WRONG!

- That we don't have friendships or relationships – WRONG!

- That we can't help other people – WRONG!

- That it's okay to make fun of us – WRONG!

As self-advocates we:

- Stick up for ourselves and others who can't stick up for themselves

- Go to the state house and city council to advocate for change

- Do outreach in your community (like at transition fairs)

As self-advocates we:

- Make friends with lots of different kinds of people from around the country

- Go to meetings and learn about our rights and community

- Teach people about advocacy

Why Should Journalists Work with People with Disabilities?

Journalists need to know...

What language to use

- Don't use the r-word
- Don't call us stupid, dumb, slow

Do not to treat us differently.

We can do anything

We can take care of:

- Our homes
- Our pets
- Our money
- Our families
- Ourselves

What issues we care about in the news:

Darius cares about:

- Equal opportunity for people with disabilities in sports
- Gun violence and other kinds of violence

What issues we care about in the news:

Phillis cares about:
- Transportation
- Covid-19

We want to see better representation of people with disabilities in the news

We want to see news stories about people with disabilities:

- Succeeding in sports
- Living in our communities
- Fighting against discrimination
- Living healthy and long lives

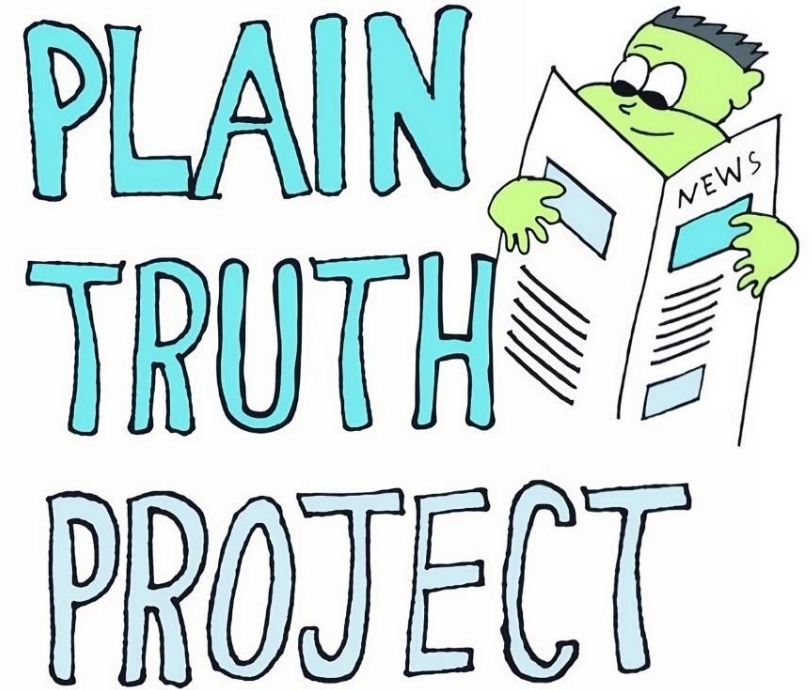# We want to see news stories about people with disabilities:

- Creating art and films
- Working and helping others
- Changing our communities to be more accessible
- In organizations that do advocacy like People First and SALUTE

The most important thing to remember is that we have normal lives. We're people like everyone else

Thank you!

Image Credit to Jules Hinmon/MAKE Studio

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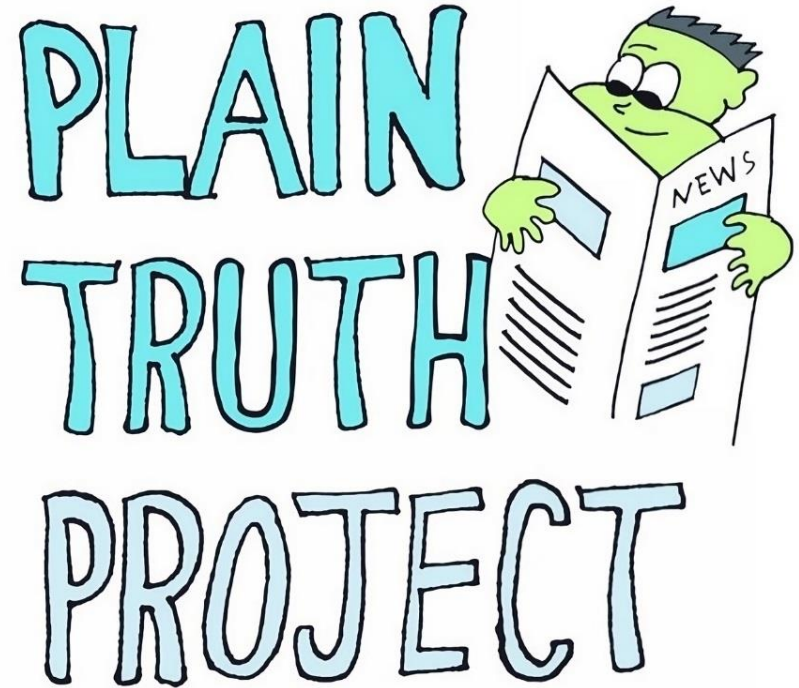# RESEARCH TO DATE

Becca Monteleone

Amy Silverman

Beena Raghavendran

Phillis Schmidbauer

Darius Cunningham

Marissa Kuehn

PLAIN TRUTH PROJECT

Image Credit to Jules Hinmon/MAKE Studio

RESEARCH PLAN

Phase 1: Focus groups

Phase 2: Collaborative Workshop

Phase 3: Interviews

FOCUS GROUPS

- Five focus groups

- Twenty-one participants

- Age range: 19-67 (average age: 31)

- 57% female, 33% male, 5% gender fluid, 5% did not disclose

- 75% white, 10% Black, 5% Asian, 10% did not disclose

- All self-identified with intellectual and/or developmental disability

ACCESSIBLE CONSENT AND ASSENT

Focus Group Informational Sheet

We are a group of researchers and journalists. Our names are:

- Becca Monteleone
- Amy Silverman
- Beena Raghavendran

We are doing a project about how people with disabilities get their news. We are asking people:

- Where they get their news,
- What stories they are interested in,
- Problems they have getting the news,
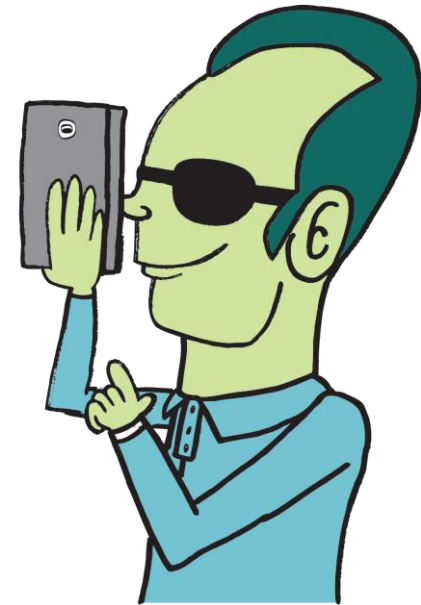- Ideas for making it easier to read the news.

If you decide to talk to us, we will meet in a group of 5-10 people. We will talk for one to two hours.

We might meet in person or on video chat like Zoom.

MAJOR THEMES

- Accessing the News

- Barriers to Access and Understanding

- Disability in the News
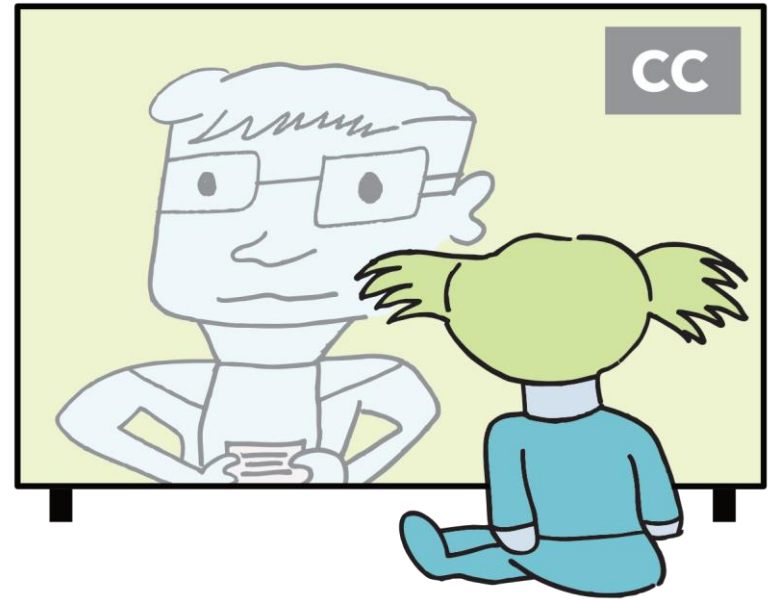
- Opportunities for Change

Image Credit to Zach Manuel/MAKE Studio

ACCESSING THE NEWS (1)

Preference for:

- Television
- Social Media
- News Applications

Image Credit to Jules Hinmon/MAKE Studio

ACCESSING THE NEWS (2)

Gatekeeping:

"I try to watch some of the news, my parents won't let me, because there's like killing people and raping and there's a lot of people, a lot of bad people who are doing bad stuff. Like, I know that bad people are doing bad stuff. I'm getting old, like my parents, I'm not watching the news like them."

ACCESSING THE NEWS (3)

Second-Hand Access

"Um, like-like with the president and stuff…And [my mom]'ll explain, "Well, you know, he's not-he's not for people with disabilities or he is with somebody for disabilities. This is who you need to—or this is who you should vote for. This is, you know, you know, this and this and this." And, you know, she gives me pretty good advice on stuff, so, and tries to explain it-it. Because I learn better to things—to have things explained to me better than I can reading it or anything like that, so."

FREQUENTLY MENTIONED NEWS TOPICS OF INTEREST:

- Local News
- Politics
- Weather
- Animals

- Sports
- Entertainment
- Violence

BARRIERS (1)

Image Credit to Louis Middleton/MAKE Studio

Commonly cited barriers include:

- Complex writing or unfamiliar words or concepts

- Speed of presentation

- Trustworthiness of the source

- Cost and Technological Barriers

BARRIERS (2)

Complex Writing/Unfamiliar Words of Concepts

"I have to ask my people—like my staff members—what does this mean?"

BARRIERS (3)

Speed of Presentation

"But there's just a lot of information and it's so quick, quick, like that, it's hard to pick up everything you want to, you know, process...You know, and slow down the people talking or, you know, give it so that it's more understandable, that's a simple way to understand."

BARRIER (4)

Trustworthiness of the Source

"And then, you know, I don't know just to me that COVID stuff was, I was just—it was all mis—to me it was, you know, misleading sometimes to me. I would hear different, you know, sides, everybody's sides to it so I didn't know what to believe."

BARRIERS (5)

Cost and Technological Barriers

I didn't have cable. I didn't have nowhere to look for, um... to see what's going on. I didn't have no way...If I had cable, that would be a different story...And I didn't have no bunny ears. Mine won't work, so..."

DISABILITY IN THE NEWS (1)

- Most participants:

    - Did not seek out stories about disability

    - Had appeared themselves in human interest stories
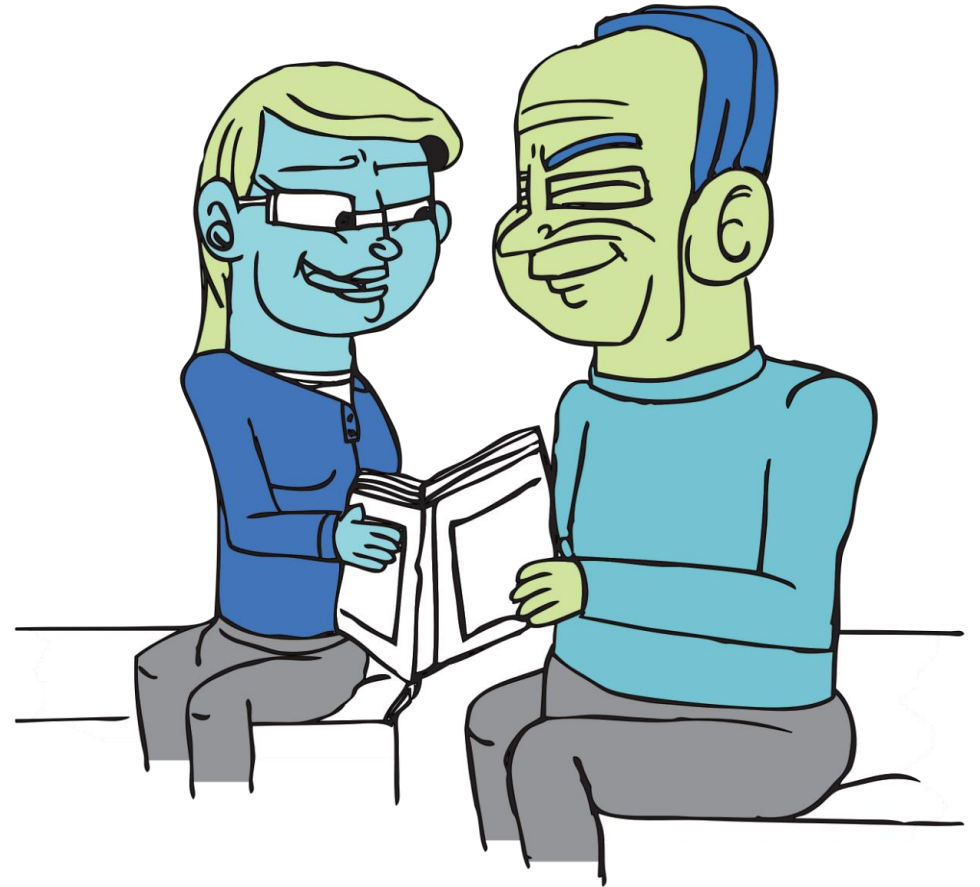
Image Credit to Zach Manuel/MAKE Studio

DISABILITY IN THE NEWS (2)

Advocacy and Awareness

"Um, just, uh, in general, because I do know, like—and this is not just about, this is just about just stigma in general—like, because I know that there's not much coverage on, like, certain disabilities. Because there's stigma around it…So, I just wish that there was more, less stigma about this kind of stuff, and more acceptance, and being able to learn and be able to adapt to others."

DISABILITY IN THE NEWS (3)

Language

"There are still a lot of—especially local news stories, when they talk about disability, they might use outdated terminology to refer to certain disabilities. And that, you know, just leaves a bad taste in my mouth, when the wrong words are used, um, or the wrong—because the wrong words might imply, you know, incompetence or something that they don't intend. And I think we know what they're trying to say, but when you use the wrong words, you know, it demonstrates just kind of a lack of awareness, you know? And maybe a lack of communication of how someone wants to be called and how they, you know, want their disability to be represented and referred to in the story."

DISABILITY IN THE NEWS (4)

Tokenism

"Thinking back to what [S4] says—a lot of the time, media isn't just a PR stunt or publicity. It's just something they did really, really, really bad….I'm sorry…I'm not somebody you can use as a ragdoll or a doll or a dog to put on a post to show us off. I'm sorry. I'm a human being with feelings."

DISABILITY IN THE NEWS (5)

Rethinking "Inspiration Porn"

How people with disabilities can be, uh, working somewhere like, on like, uh, a county board, and then also, um, how they can go on with school and still get a degree even though they have a disability…We don't let anybody tell us that we can't do it."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE (1)

Suggestions for increased access included:

- Pictures and videos
- Glossaries
- Plain language
- Summaries

- Hands-on application
- Slower presentation
- Clearer breaks between segments
- Other modes of access (e.g. Braille; text-to-speech)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE (2)
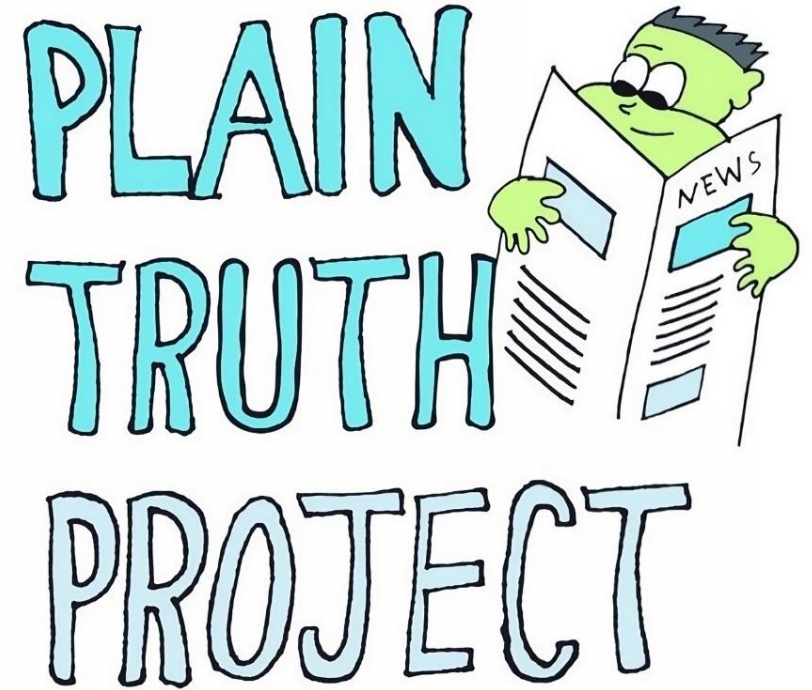
More first-hand stories about disability

"I was thinking that, yeah, we all have our own stories and it would be we need to just be able to tell our own stories and say, 'Hey, you know, we are out here too.'"

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE (3)

For Journalists:

"Like journalists, people doing the interviews. It's more how you talk to us that I think kind of gives me the wrong way. I mean, I'm sorry. I'm not five years old. I'm not a little kid coloring in the corner. I'm a human being with feelings. Just sometimes you've got to reword the question. Just be patient. And some people are not. And unfortunately, we're not going away. We're here! You've got to either adapt to us or get out of the field. [laughs]"

The Plain Truth Project:

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Approaches to access

Arizona's services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are supposed to be the best in the country. But the state is failing to deliver. ProPublica and the Arizona Daily Star are working to make stories accessible. You can read the stories in plain language and Spanish and listen to audio versions.

- Plain-language translations
- Community events
- Callouts
- Inclusive sourcing

Approaches to access

2020 partnership: ProPublica and Arizona Daily Star investigation

1. Center people with IDD in reporting
2. Public events: highlight perspectives of people with IDD and invite more to share their stories
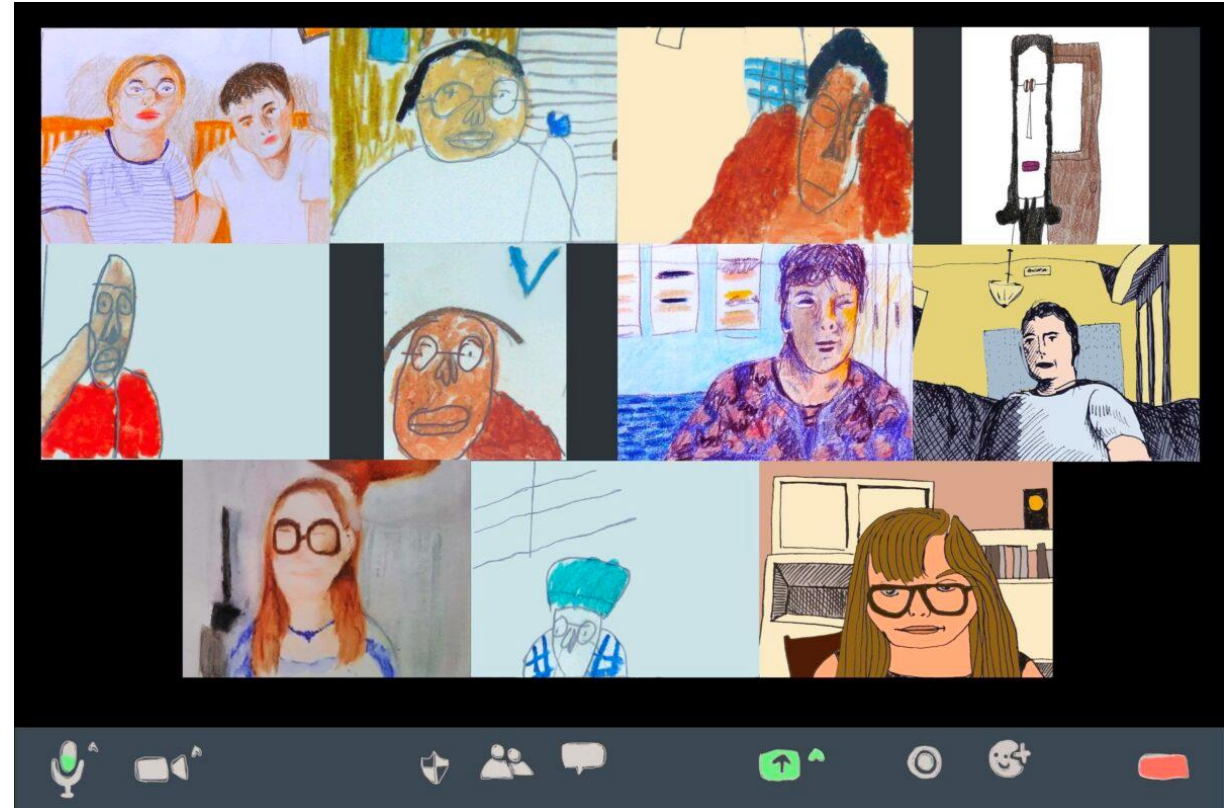3. Accessible publication

Center people with IDD

- Same journalistic goals: listen, source, look for detail
- Focus on the goal of putting people with IDD first
- Conduct several interviews with source
- Fact-check
  - Interview others without IDD (don't need to publish all of it)
  - Lean on available records

Public events

- Get creative
- Building trust takes time
- Invite people far and wide
- This is how the culture changes

Rosie Eck, Erika Clark, Tony LaBate and Louis Middleton/Make Studio for ProPublica

Accessible publication

- **8** investigative stories translated into plain language
- **4** audio stories of investigative articles in plain language
- **4** audio stories of investigative articles in original text

Response

- Did the translated stories reach communities with IDD?
- Did the stories resonate with them?

Response measurement

- Initially
  - Pageviews
  - Shares
- In retrospect
  - Changes triggered by investigation
  - Reach of community engagement
  - Discussion and cultural change
 - Fulfillment of ethical responsibility for accessibility

Ideas for future response measurement

- If translating: Promote both stories equivalently
- Promote each story in the same scroll point in an article
- Still: Access gaps

Questions

- Plain language: not a silver bullet
  - Needs of non-readers
  - **Menu** of options
  - Need guides, consensus
  - Without meaningful connections in IDD community: problematic

- Outreach
  - Covid challenges
  - Internet access, especially in group homes
  - Even with Internet, accessible technology needs

- True collaboration

The Plain Truth Project:
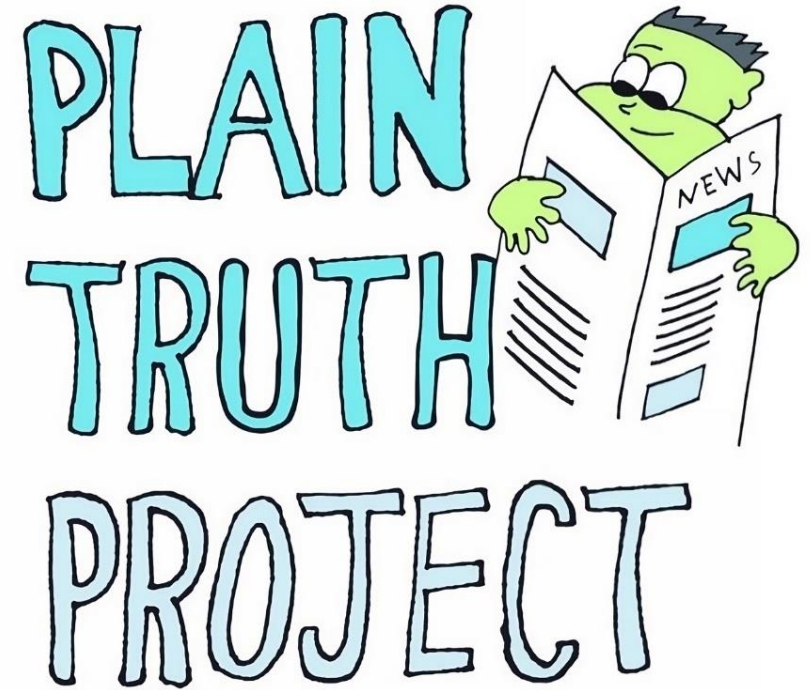
Image Credit to Jules Hinmon/MAKE Studio

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Storytelling and Journalism

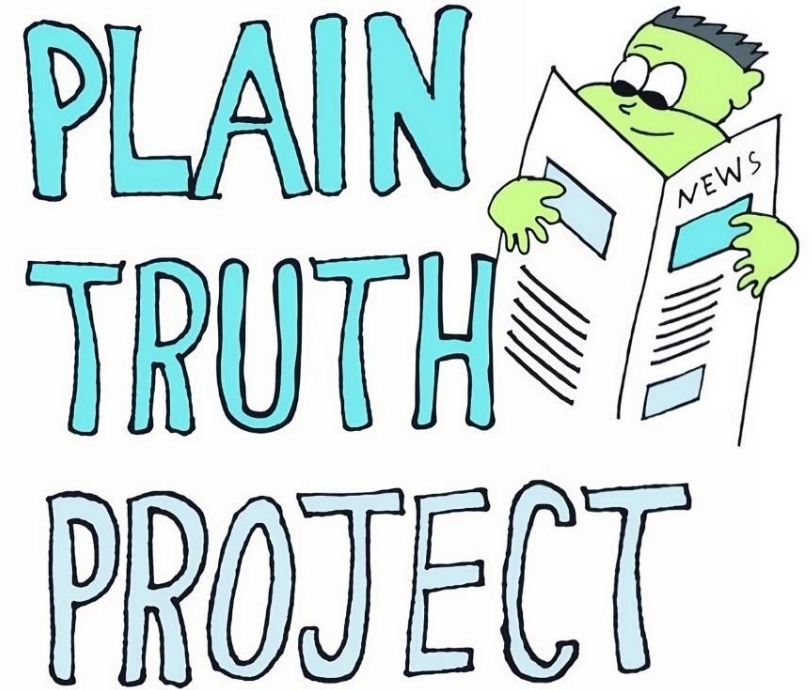https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wYwBh6n3M_Lk_VocI8eihu7oLRfDV1eV/view?usp=sharing

Panelists

- Phillis Schmidbauer
- Darius Cunningham
- Hari Kannan
- Adrian Forsythe
- Sophie Stern

Image Credit to Jules Hinmon/MAKE Studio

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Rules of Engagement:

a. Everyone contributes 1 idea to the brainstorm before anyone can contribute a second idea or discuss any of the ideas presented.
b. No one can say "My idea has already been said"
c. One person writes down all the ideas that have been said.

1. What values should drive cognitively accessible and inclusive journalism? Make a list of the top 3 values your team decides on and create a brief description for each.

2. What practices should journalists and publishers be working on to create more accessible and inclusive journalism, based on the values you developed.

Think through:

- Story selection/pitching
- Sourcing
- Writing
- Publishing
- Audience Engagement

3. What skills or resources does the journalism industry need to help achieve questions 1 and 2?

Draw a diagram of your answers to questions 1, 2, and 3 connecting values to practices to resources/skills
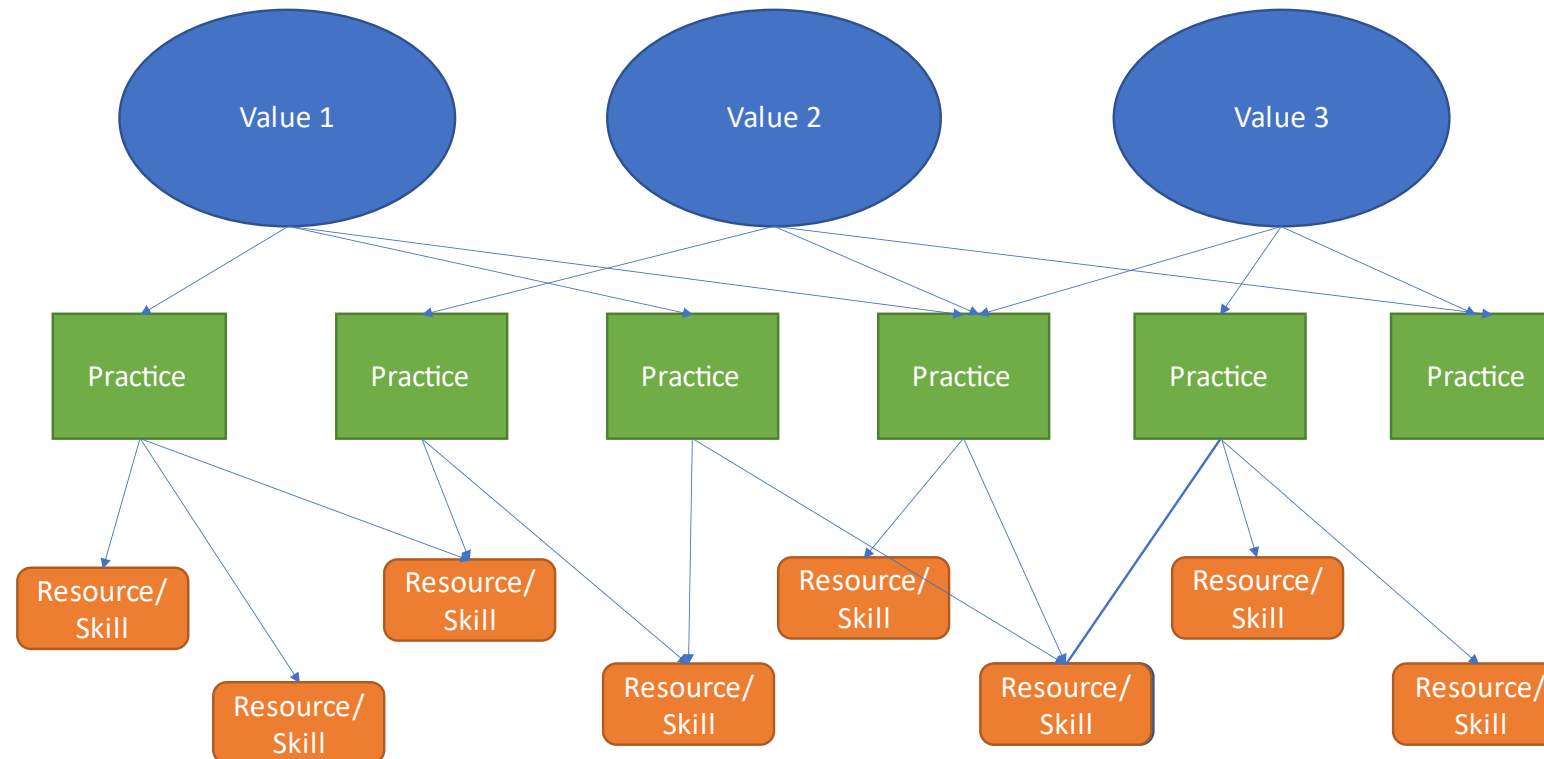
Do's and Don't's

What should we do more of? What should we do less of?

Resource Sheet (https://www.plaintruthproject.org/access)