

## **Using Storytelling to Enhance Diversity**

*Rozalia Horvath (PA), NEAFCS Diversity Subcommittee*

Today, companies embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion, but might only focus on visible traits like age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Differences in socioeconomic and marital status, ability, and sexual orientation are also group strengthening attributes. But even the most diverse workplace does not automatically imply inclusion. Inclusion has to start internally; people must have their voices heard without fearing consequences and decision-making to feel belonging.



To obtain sustainable behavior changes with diversity training, people must see it as value, not just a requirement. Using stories can help bridge this gap. We all grew up with stories and know their power to connect and influence us, but we rarely use them in our workplace. Listening to diverse stories increase our empathy, and even when we disagree, we might find more commonalities than differences in others. Sharing personal stories by explaining our perspective and values, overcoming obstacles, and telling our "AHA" moments that changed our lives help listeners learn more about us.

Brain science using MRI scans show that the storyteller and the listener's brain waves synchronize during storytelling, lighting up the same parts. The more the listeners understand and connect to the story, the more similar their brain wave patterns become. Companies should embrace employee stories and uniqueness, show different perceptions are not necessarily wrong, and teach people to listen nonjudgmentally. People only share their stories when they feel safe and validated. Once employees reach a deeper level of empathy and show unity as a diverse group, it will change their relationship with diverse groups in the community.