

Program Overview

Preparing for the Possible

Since its founding in 2000, NewStories has helped people, organizations and communities see the stories that have been guiding, liberating and constricting them. When those stories become conscious, they can be changed. Changing our stories changes what is possible.

It's time to change our stories about disasters. They're no longer isolated, infrequent events. They have become woven into the fabric of our daily lives. Climate disasters are what we normally associate with the term – wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, typhoons, tsunamis. Health disasters ranging from pandemics to opioid addiction also require our attention. Mass shootings terrify us all, especially families with school age children. Other social, political and economic disasters raise an appalling picture of wide-spread inequities.

We need a whole new paradigm to help us think about and act on the many disasters that populate our lives. At NewStories we believe what's needed is a regenerative paradigm. What's regenerative? Simply put, regenerative approaches are ones which restore and enhance rather than extract and exploit. In agriculture that means practices like permaculture which restore soil and ecosystems while producing food and products we need. In economics it means practices that build vibrant local economies. In health it means approaches which build our immune systems and enhance our bodies capacity to heal. In human habitat, it means structures and developments which enhance human connection and community and which economize use of energy and water. We can't always follow regenerative pathways, but we can become conscious of when we feel it necessary to follow other approaches.

NewStories designs and facilitates large and small gatherings – retreats, workshops, conferences and symposia, festivals. We help people listen to each other with respect, curiosity and generosity and speak their own truth without blame or judgement. We find, create and curate a wide range of resources which share ancient and contemporary stories that provide guidance in these turbulent times. We serve as a hub for projects and organizations doing the groundbreaking work needed now.

Our focus has always been on helping people co-create healthy, resilient communities.

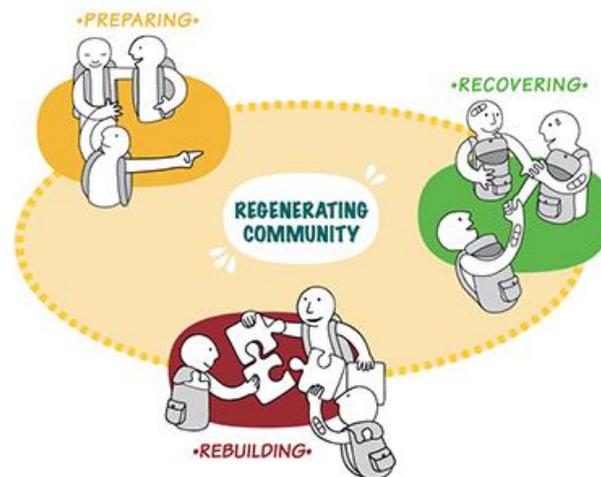
In 2011, our work took on an additional dimension. Because of longstanding ties with Japan, our founder and President, Bob Stilger, was invited into Japan to help people create the future they wanted, rather than waiting for government to rebuild the past. The Triple Disasters of March 11, 2011 – tsunami, earthquake, nuclear explosions – shattered Japan. Bob worked with people and communities in the disaster area and across Japan for six years. In 2015, Eiji Press in Tokyo published the Japanese edition of AfterNow: When We Cannot See the Future, Where Do We Begin? which shared his deep learning from working in disaster. In 2017, NewStories published a revised English Edition.

Our conclusion, after 8 years of working in disaster contexts is that building healthy resilient communities in these chaotic and unpredictable times requires a regenerative paradigm. Our work with disaster in Japan has extended to other parts of the world. Right now, we are heavily involved in Northern California, with other limited work in Washington State, Alaska, the Philippines and the South Pacific.

In the US, our primary focus is to create a regional learning community that stretches from Northern California to Alaska, stretching eastward to include Alberta, Montana and Idaho. We've titled this action-learning community "**Preparing for the Possible: Before and After Disaster.**" Our focus is not on disaster itself, but on what the specter of disaster makes possible.

Much of our current work – and current learning – is in Northern California where the constant, horrific threat of wildfires has created a regional awareness and consciousness about disaster and change which we think is stronger than anywhere else in the US. We believe this Northern California work will create the momentum needed to give birth to this network in the US Northwest and Western Canada. Working with people in a number of communities, we are translating our learning from Japan into a US context.

Broadly speaking, the focus of this new paradigm is regenerative community and pays attention to three dimensions: preparing, recovering and rebuilding.



Regenerative communities are ones which reweave the very fabric of community, connecting people with each other in trusting relationships where everyone knows they belong and are welcomed. In the context of disaster, these communities develop regenerative approaches to preparing, recovering and rebuilding:

- **PREPARING** in ways that reconnect neighbors with each other, and neighborhoods with the community as a whole. Having Go Bags and water and food supplies and knowing evacuation routes is very important – but not as important as knowing Granny Becky is

recovering from a hip operation and needs help and knowing who to reach out to for what.

- **RECOVERING** in ways that provide tangible support to everyone – those grieving loss of loved ones, those traumatized, those who have lost homes or jobs or both, those who didn't have jobs or homes before the disaster and are even worse off.
- **REBUILDING** in ways which consciously regenerate community – removing barriers which keep local firms and local people from doing the jobs needed, making changes in community plans so that neighborhoods are more disaster ready, creating spaces for grief and for celebration which recognize rebuilding is long term work.

NewStories is working with many partners to understand and develop this regenerative paradigm for disaster. It will take many years to turn this Titanic. Our current focus is on four related initiatives:

1. [Regenerative Responders in Paradise, CA](#). Paradise was a community of 27,000 before the wildfires of November 8, 2018 which destroyed most homes and businesses as well as natural habitat. The future is uncertain. [NewStories](#) and [Living Guild](#) are working with a diverse group of community leaders to create a new, regenerative response. Beyond the immediate devastation, destruction and death, catastrophic disasters like this one wake people up. They are called to many questions about the purpose of their lives and about what's really important. It is a time of great potency. And, at the same time, there is an almost irresistible push to return to the old normal. It's what people knew. It was predictable. The initiative, tentatively called **Imagining Paradise**, will work intensively with a web of "imaginal cells" – essential efforts people are called to do. Using a combination of regenerative frameworks and practices as well as creative methods for community engagement and co-created collective impact, it will a) help leaders deepen and strengthen their individual efforts, b) connect all efforts in a mutually supporting web, c) make this work visible and accessible in Paradise and the surrounding area so it both attracts broader involvement to individual efforts and sparks new initiatives as well. [Overview of Imagining Paradise](#)
2. [Neighborhood-based Preparation Strategies](#). There's an abundance of information and direction on how to prepare for disaster. Why is it so infrequently used? NewStories, working with [Transition US](#) and the [City of Renton Office of Emergency Management](#) have developed a new approach called **Ready Together**. Building on methodologies tested in Transition US's [Transition Streets](#) program, we have created a preparedness approach based on guiding "near neighbors" – groups of 8-10 households living in close proximity – through a seven week learning program which is supplemented by online resources and learning salons. Our intent is to do this in enough communities, carefully documenting and evaluating results, that we are able to introduce a new, proven framework for disaster preparedness. [Overview of Ready Together](#)
3. [Northern California Network of Fire Affected Communities](#). In 2019 NewStories has been working in several fire-affected counties in Northern California – Butte, Lake, Sonoma and

Napa. Part of what we have been doing is connecting people from these counties with each other to share experiences, stories, lessons learned, common obstacles. Based on a July experience drawing people from Butte, Sonoma and Napa Counties in Lake County, it seems to be time to link people in the region together with learning journeys, learning exchanges, invitations to harvest and share their own learning, a website and more. We are presently working with partners in the region to envision new action learning network.

4. Northwest Network. Finally, our intent is to use the experience and stories from these first three initiatives to catalyze a **Preparing for the Possible Network** in a region which includes the Northwestern US and Western Canada. We will begin with virtual convenings which bring people from different communities in the region together to co-create a vision and action plan to call this network into being. This initiative emphasizes
 - a. *Connecting people* across the region who are engaged in this important work of creating the communities and lives we want now, in our chaotic and unpredictable time.
 - b. Building the skills of leaders to *convene* conversations that truly matter in their communities, drawing diverse people together to listen, connect and find next steps.
 - c. *Curating* the experiences, stories, and lessons learned from communities across the region so we can all learn from each other's experience.
 - d. Determining what else we should *create*, together that increases our capacity to unfold a future we can't quite see.

[Overview of Northwest Preparing for the Possible Network](#)

NewStories has been developing these four initiatives without external funding. We've raised contributions to cover costs of travel and other direct expenses, but all time has been donated. We are now seeking funds, both to continue development of these initiatives and for the initiatives themselves.

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