

Anti-Stigma Campaign “Real Life Conversations” Story Invite

Intro

As part of our Anti-Stigma campaign, we invite you to share a brief story from your past or present describing a turning point or a summary of a significant period in your own recovery from mental illness. These stories will be used to put a positive face on the experience of mental illness and to inspire others with the hope of recovery. Examples of your successes will counter the negative stereotypes of people who have mental illnesses. Your story may be used in whole or edited into a short, concise version.

The media in which your story may be used include, but are not limited to, radio in the Region IV South area, newspapers in the Region IV south area, the Region IV South Conversations website, Elimination of Barriers Initiative (EBI) website, the Resource Center to Address Discrimination and Stigma (ADS Center) website, and the National Anti-Stigma Campaign website and project activities.

Sample Testimonial

To give you an idea of the kinds of stories we are seeking, here is an example:

At the age of 14, I started having serious hallucinations and blackouts. I’m half African American and half Native American, and I didn’t try to get help because, in both communities, they called that “going to the white man.” But I became an outcast, because my symptoms got so bad that none of my friends wanted to have anything to do with me. Instead, I lived with these symptoms for four years. My mental illness got so bad that I couldn’t cope with school and they asked me to leave. I went to Miami to live with my father, but he threw me out; and from the age of 15 until I was 18 I lived on the streets of Miami, with constant hallucinations and delusions.

At 19, I joined the military. But I was still sick and, after basic training, they gave me an honorable discharge and directed me to get mental health treatment, so I did. After taking medication and seeing therapists, I went back to work two years later, as a cook. Four years after that, I got an associate’s degree from the Restaurant School of Philadelphia and became a chef.

I worked as a chef for about 15 years. But there was a lot of stigma around mental illness in the restaurant business. Every restaurant I worked at, I saw other people disclose about themselves and they wound up being badly harassed and losing their jobs. So I hid my illness.

In 1995 I started working part time for the Chester City Consumer Center. After attending the Center for six months, I had asked the director if there were openings and she said she had wanted to hire me for the last six months. I’m still at the Center, now as its director, and it will be 10 years in November. Working with the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, which is out there advocating for consumers, has helped me. Until I started working here, I felt like no one really cared.

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Length

Please try to describe your story in 350 words or less. We strongly suggest that you write out your story and practice reading it prior to the audio recording. After your story has been recorded, we may need to edit your story for length or style. Although our intention is to protect your story from further revisions, we cannot guarantee that your story will not be edited by the press or outside partners.

Questions

Here are some questions to think about as you share your story:

- What did you go through in dealing with mental health problems?
- What specifically helped you the most in your recovery?
- How has your life improved with your recovery? What have you accomplished?
- Did you experience any discrimination or stigma on the path to recovery, e.g., in the workplace or in school? How did you overcome it?
- Have you been able to help others in their recovery? How?
- How would you change the mental health system, or society in general, to promote recovery?
- How has life in the community supported your recovery?
- Why have you chosen to let others know about your illness?

Also, it would be wonderful if you could provide some details about your life in general (outside of the mental health arena). For example:

- Do you work and, if so, in what field?
- What are your interests?
- Are you married?
- Do you have children?
- Do you have a college degree or any advanced degrees?
- Are you involved in any civic or charitable causes?

We want to illustrate the fact that people who have mental illnesses can and do recover from them, have interests and abilities, and contribute to the community.

Consent Form

Please also sign the consent form and bring it back the day we record the audio. If possible, please provide a photo, preferably in color. If you send a photograph through the mail, please be aware that we may not be able to return it to you.

Thanks in advance for your contribution.