



Chard WATCH Community Interest Company
42 Fore Street Chard Somerset
TA20 1QA
www.watchproject.org.uk

Recovery Narrative Sharing Guidance



A guide to inform the process of
sharing personal experiences and stories
related to
mental health and recovery

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1. Introduction

Increasingly people are using narratives and personal stories as an effective way of raising awareness and understanding around mental health issues, wellbeing and recovery. These personal stories can offer insight and hope to others struggling with difficulties as well as helping the person whom has experienced mental distress to reclaim events and their life stories. Also these narratives can help mental health professionals and others working within health and social care gain greater understanding and consider different approaches within their practice.

Chard WATCH is a Community Interest Company established by people with lived experience of mental distress working together in equal partnership with the aim of:

1. Promoting the philosophy of Recovery and the practice of Recovery oriented approaches to mental health and wellbeing across the South West of England. Recognising recovery to be;

-) A deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and roles.
-) Discovering a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life, even with any limitations caused by mental distress.
-) Developing new meaning and purpose in one's life.

2. Act as a focus within the South West of England for more locally based groups and people promoting Recovery oriented approaches.

3. Collect and publish individuals' narratives of personal recovery towards mental health and wellbeing through a variety of media and formats on the WATCH Project website.

4. Provide information and education about Recovery.

This guide aims to support and inform both those considering sharing their own personal story and to those wishing to assist others in sharing through their involvement with Chard WATCH CIC.

2. Story sharing – principles and process

The following principles (adapted from Scottish Recovery Network 2009) should be used to help guide and inform the narrative sharing process:

1. **Control:** the author should retain as much control of the narrative sharing process as possible
2. **Support:** the author needs to be given time and support necessary to make an informed decision about whether to share their story.
3. **Wellbeing:** the safety and wellbeing of the author needs to be considered at all times.
4. **Responsibility:** the author is ultimately responsible for the level of personal disclosure in their story telling.

3. Getting started - deciding to share your narrative

Deciding to share your own narrative of recovery is an important decision, deserving of careful thought. As someone recovering from mental ill health, you can offer insight and hope to others struggling with similar difficulties, in ways that health professionals are often unable to. Take time to reflect on aspects you are comfortable about sharing and the things that you prefer to keep to yourself. No-one is asked to express any more than they wish.

Below are a few ideas you might want to consider.

Time in recovery. While you don't have to be fully well to share your story, you will need to feel that you have had time to come to terms with your experience. Having time for reflection and stability gives time to identify the successful changes you have made in your life. Ask people you trust; friends, or health support team, to help you decide what is best for you. Trust your instincts.

Maintaining wellbeing. The process of sharing personal experiences can evoke both positive and negative emotions. Maintaining your wellbeing throughout this process is therefore a key consideration. Planning, exploring triggers and coping strategies can assist you. Also thinking about what support you might need from supporters, friends, carers and professionals to ensure your wellbeing

Can you be realistic? One thing that is important in sharing your story is the role of compassion towards yourself and sharing, fairly, what happened when you were ill or distressed. The world is a complex and confusing place. It shows a lot of courage to overcome and share what you've learnt.

Belief that you have something to share. Many of us have self-esteem difficulties, so having perfect self-esteem is not required in order to share your story. But it's good to believe in yourself and your recovery enough to know that you do have a story, and a purpose that is worth sharing. Your supporters may be able to help build your confidence in this area.

Letting go of the past. Often when people start writing their story they may find a lot of painful memories and emotions emerging, some aspects of which may not be appropriate to include in these 'recovery' stories and yet can be really important within a person's journey. So some people have found it helpful to initially write, paint, draw, sing or use whatever medium works for that person a 'raw' personal story including everything (positive and negative) as an unedited version which can be kept for personal usage. Then to revisit the story again and write, draw, paint, sing or use whatever medium that works for the person, often leaving a short gap in time when some of the strong emotions have been released.

Other tips when telling your story. As you develop your narrative you may want to be descriptive, interpretive, reflective, subjective or objective as feels right to you. Talk to

others who are recovering and who have shared their stories or read other recovery stories to help inspire you.

4. Reasons to share your story

Reasons behind sharing personal stories include:

-) To provide messages of hope, recovery and inspiration for others
-) Explaining that situations can improve and a positive life is possible
-) To pass on useful insights into what was helpful or unhelpful in your experience, which could be used to others to make their experience less painful
-) Sharing of an turning point or significant event in your life that inspired your recovery
-) To promote mental health and wellbeing
-) To help challenge stigma and discrimination around mental distress
-) To help refocus mental health services towards a view that recovery is possible

5. What to write, paint, draw, sing, and photograph etc about?

There are many aspects of your recovery journey that you could consider writing, painting, drawing, singing, photographing etc about. A few ideas could be:

Sharing what has worked and helped you. Do you feel that you can identify the things that have helped you make progress? Focusing on aspects that have made a difference is very important for the reader or viewer and empowering for you, and we want you to express your own unique views and experiences.

Success in difficult times. You may wish to include information on what happened initially, things that didn't go as planned or blips in your recovery. It is helpful to know what worked when you were first ill and later what provided support and enabled you to avoid further setbacks.

Your support system. You may be able to identify a range of things that work for you. It may help to describe how you deal with negative feelings for example. One of the important parts of sharing your story is how it will help others. You may wish to show how you were able to re-build connections with family and friends, or activities that you've taken up or the key people and activities that support you.

Inspiration. You may wish to include what was the turning point for you? What significant event or person for example helped you begin the journey of recovery?

Remember the value of focusing on recovery, inspiring hope and sharing solutions.

(Adapted from material by Linden Lynn, Thom Rutledge, psychotherapist & Jenni Schaefer singer/songwriter)

6. Writing your story for Chard WATCH CIC

Story format

-) There are many ways to share stories; painting, drawing, posters, story boards, photos, video, theatre, music, song and other sound images, poetry, written and spoken words. We hope you can find a way that seems most meaningful to you, when you contribute your story.

-) If you wish to make a joint or group contribution, please feel free to do so.

-) Please submit all written material in a typed format

The audience

-) Please be aware that Chard WATCH CIC is publishing all accepted stories through its website and therefore the audience is unrestricted and potentially very large and widespread nationally and internationally.

Anonymity

-) Sharing your story does not automatically require you to use your real name. You can use an alias or be anonymous if this feels easier and less exposing.

The future

-) Stories reflect an author's thoughts and feelings at a specific time in their life. Some story sharing formats, such as printed or recorded materials, cannot be changed, withdrawn or updated once they are published. Keeping this in mind while developing your story may prevent a negative experience.

Content

-) We have limits on work that can be submitted: Written stories - 3,500 words. Poems - 500 words. Videos and music - no longer than 10 minutes.

-) You need to ensure your choice of language does not affect the usability of the story. For example avoiding use of explicit language or swearing. Also please do not make reference to named third parties – either an organisation, companies, individuals, unless you, as author, have gained written consent from them.

Editing

-) We hope to accept your story as it is and all contributions are treated with sensitivity and respect. Should any editing be necessary to enable publication by Chard WATCH CIC we'll discuss any changes with you and will endeavour to make as few alterations as possible to remain true to the spirit or meaning conveyed by yourself as author. We will ensure the final version is agreed with you.
-) Although our intention is to protect your story from further revisions, we cannot guarantee that your contribution will not be edited by the press or others if it is published or is available in downloadable format.

Acceptance of Stories

-) We have an editorial group whom consider all submissions of work at regular intervals of time. Once you have submitted work you will be kept informed with the following process:
 1. Receipt of story acknowledged by Chard WATCH CIC with a rough idea of by what date the Editorial group will consider the submission.
 2. Feedback from the Editorial group of whether the story can be accepted by Chard WATCH CIC with a discussion with you if the Editorial group feel it needs some editing or revisions.
 3. If your story needs some editing this will be done in conjunction with you as the author. During this process you may feel you wish to make some alterations to your initial narrative which we are happy to discuss with you. Any editing will be made within an agreed timescale.
 4. Final version will be agreed with the author and consent sought.
 5. Date of publication
 6. Acknowledgement and thanks by Chard WATCH CIC

Unaccepted stories

-) All stories are valuable and no-ones story can be 'wrong'. However we need to ensure all stories are suitable for publication by Chard WATCH CIC. Also on occasions we may have limitations on the number of contributions we are collecting. Should Chard WATCH CIC be unable to accept any stories we hope to be able to signpost you to a story telling group or another organisation.

Consent

-) We will ask you to sign a consent form when your story has been accepted. However please consider carefully any wider implications of sharing your story for yourself, friends and family before you submit your story and feel comfortable.
-) Information in a narrative may potentially identify others including friends, family, colleagues, professionals and supporters of the author. We ask you to try to protect identification of others in your story and if this is not possible we will need you to allow us to contact them so they can to sign a consent form.

7. Final notes

Individuals we have worked with have many different reasons for sharing their experiences through such media as written stories, poems, paintings and video. Many people describe the process of developing and sharing a personal story as helpful and encouraging. It can provide an opportunity to review the past and identify the things that have gone well and can create a sense of meaning and direction. Some people also describe the powerful sense of fulfilment and value they get from offering hope and inspiration to others.

We hope this guide has been helpful to you in considering sharing your story and that you may now feel inspired to write and submit a story to us either through the e mail address or address below.

We also welcome any feedback on this guide, our website and any other thoughts you may have – as like yourself we are on a journey developing Chard WATCH CIC and are keen to constantly improve!

THANK YOU

Email to: *information.watchproject@gmail.com*

Or to the address below:

Chard WATCH CIC, 42 Fore Street, Chard, Somerset, TA20 1QA

Chard WATCH CIC - Consent Form

I give my full consent for the use of my personal narrative in Chard WATCH CIC's mental health recovery narratives project.

By signing this form I give my permission for Chard WATCH CIC to:

Please tick below

- a) *Publish my narrative on the Watch Project website, in a format agreed with me, and also use copies of any creative work in different media that I contribute to the project.*
- b) *Distribute my narrative widely, including to mental health teams, agencies, organisations, employers, job centres and various community settings that may benefit from having this narrative available in their workplace, organisation or group.*
- c) *Use my narrative on the WATCH PROJECT Website and on display boards across the South West.*
- d) *Via the above distribution routes, make the narrative publicly available.*
- e) *Use any photo that I choose to contribute of myself, as a 'model release'. (This is the official term we need to use, when a person's photo is submitted. If including photographs of third parties they will also need to sign a form.)*

I understand that I can choose to contribute anonymously or I may write under a pseudonym to protect my privacy and have chosen the name below.

Please print (optional)

I understand the need to ensure no third party can be identified such as a person, organisation or company.

I have ensured no third party is identified.

OR

A third party is identified and I have discussed this with them and have sought permission from them to share their contact details with you to obtain their written consent.

Third Party contact details:

Name.....

Address.....

.....

E mail.....

Telephone no.....

I release Recovery South West Community Interest Company from any liability to me and to my heirs, executors and legal representatives which may arise out of the use of my narrative for this project.

I understand that the above organisation will be using the narrative to inform and benefit others. This may include those who are or have experienced mental distress, their family and friends and those who work in the health and social care services, to support and enable others to move forward in their recovery.

Name..... Signature.....

Address.....

.....

Phone..... Email..... Date.....

Please return completed forms to: information.watchproject@gmail.com or at the address below:-

Chard WATCH CIC, 42 Fore Street, Chard, Somerset, TA20 1QA

