



# SESSION 3



# SESSION 3

## MY RECOVERY STORY

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this session is to introduce recovery story sharing and story living and begin the process of developing a personal recovery story.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this session students will:

- Understand the concept of story sharing and story living and the difference between illness and recovery stories
- Understand the values underpinning story sharing and what that means for them
- Start the process of authoring their own recovery story



## SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

ACTIVITY	METHOD	MATERIALS
Welcome	Trainer led	
Connecting up	Group exercise: I am.....	
Why share our recovery stories?	Group exercise	Flipchart
What is a recovery story?	Small and/or whole group exercise	Film: Shona's story
My recovery story	Individual exercise with small or whole group discussion	Handouts
Reflection		

## INFORMATION

The sharing of personal experiences; also commonly known as sharing recovery stories has been closely linked to the development of the recovery approach. It is also an approach which is increasingly being seen as beneficial (Llewellyn-Beardsley, in press; Nurser, Rushworth, Shakespeare & Williams, 2018; Rennick-Egglestone, in press).

Sharing our stories allows us to visualise our experiences over time and to reflect on the long-term journey of recovery with its ups and downs. Sharing your story and hearing others promotes recovery, especially for people with weaker social



ties. Stories can also inform and inspire people with experience of mental health issues, their carers and supporters and service providers.

Learning about other people's experiences can also help to challenge misconceptions. Stories offer hints and techniques on recovery. They recognise the fact that people in recovery are experts by experience, showing very clearly that people can and do recover.

Developing and taking control of your own story can be an empowering experience and is an essential part of the recovery process. By thinking about our experiences, we are able to look for things that have worked and gone well as well as the difficulties, distress and challenges. This is especially important and powerful as many people spend time being assessed and assisted by mental health professionals and social services. Naturally, the conversations are often focused on the negative effects of poor mental health.

As a result of repeating these conversations over time, the problems and difficulties begin to define who the person is. For example, the person's 'story' might become 'I have this diagnosis'; 'I am someone with a drug problem' or 'I am someone who has had a traumatic experience'. While these facts are true, they are not the whole story – or the whole person. The fact is that many people living with mental health issues have had to face severe hardships – yet they've survived. So it's clear they have exceptional resilience and strength. But for as long as they stay focused on the negative effects of mental ill health, it's unlikely they'll see these positive qualities. And that can hinder recovery.

Thinking through and sharing recovery stories has a lot to offer us at a personal level. It promotes and supports our recovery and wellbeing and helps to create positive identity and meaning in life as well as being an empowering experience. We also know that stories of lived experience and recovery are important in changing negative attitudes to people living with mental health issues and in demonstrating that recovery is real. Hearing stories of lived experience and recovery is inspiring to others living with mental health challenges and can help to connect them to others who can support them to take control of their own recovery.



## WHAT IS A RECOVERY STORY?

There are many examples of recovery stories in print and more recently, in audio and video. The content of the stories varies but often includes coping with difficulties, future plans, resistance and the learning and new perspectives gained during the recovery process. Stories are told in many emotional tones ranging from confident and grateful to anxious and resigned. Individuals often talk about various turning points in life and how they dealt with these situations. These past findings can be used in developing further recovery stories as they can help to structure the stories and support others when they are sharing their experiences.

## ILLNESS VS RECOVERY STORIES

It is important to distinguish between 'illness stories' and recovery stories. While most recovery stories will refer to difficult times and issues in people's lives the focus is on their learning or wisdom and what helped them recover and move on with their life. While hearing stories of recovery can be inspiring and motivating we know that some stories such as those with graphic details of trauma or where they are solely focused on difficult times are not necessarily helpful to others. (Rennick-Egglestone, in press) When working with Living e-Motions students it is important to help them to decide what and when they want to share and to consider why they would share with others.

Scottish Recovery Network has a number of publications based on narrative research undertaken and their website contains many recovery stories. You can find more information on the narrative research project as well as stories of recovery at [Stories and experiences « Scottish Recovery Network](#). There is also a Youtube channel with a range of recovery films and stories [Scottish Recovery Network - YouTube](#). The Making Recovery Real playlist contains a range of recovery stories shared by people in Dundee.

## STORY LIVING

Story living is being used in Living e-Motions to distinguish between a process of telling a story and one where a story is not only shared but the person uses



their story or lived experience to support their own recovery journey and that of others. In this way story living recognises that people are not just telling a story but are 'experts by experience' and through the process of story sharing have developed insight and understanding that they can use to support recovery.

In story living we do not just tell our story but think about what we and others really are interested in and what we can learn from. A focus on illness and trauma tends to elicit sympathy rather than inspire hope and can be overwhelming for the people hearing the story. Sharing recovery experiences creates an opportunity for others to learn. It illuminates aspects of the challenge, shares what helped you to move beyond those challenges and what you do to continue your journey and elicits hope.

## VALUES UNDERPINNING RECOVERY STORY SHARING

When people first start thinking through and sharing their story, it can be an emotional and challenging experience. They may start to question all or parts of their existing story and some may feel anger or frustration that they or others had lost sight of their strengths, skills and qualities. But most people find this passes quickly and report feeling better for having got their 'story' out – whether they choose to share it, or keep it to themselves.

It is important that the environment for thinking through and sharing stories is one where we can all feel safe, supported and in control. As a Living e-Motions course trainer you will play a central role in creating and maintaining a safe and supportive environment. When doing this it is important that everything about the story sharing process needs to be based on the following principles:

### CONTROL

The person sharing their story is always in control of the process. It is their story and cannot be altered or adapted by others. They decide what is shared, how it is shared and when it is shared. Everyone sharing their story should have options as to how they share their story and the ways in which this is then used. This consent process is a discussion and is also one where people can change their mind at any time.



## SUPPORT

The person sharing their story needs to be given the time and support they need to think through their story and to decide whether or not they want to share it. Through discussion people need to be supported to make the decisions that are right for them and ensure they take and maintain control of their own story.

## RESPECT

Everyone's lived experience and recovery journey is different. When sharing stories, the point is to reflect on ours and listen to others. We do not need to identify or agree with other people's stories but we should respect their experiences and support them in the process of authoring and sharing their story.

## WELLBEING

Sharing stories is an empowering experience but it can feel emotional and challenging at times. The wellbeing of the person sharing their story needs to be at the centre of our considerations at all times. People sharing their stories also need to be encouraged to think about the wellbeing of others.

## RESPONSIBILITY

The person sharing their story is ultimately responsible for deciding what they want to share, when and with whom.

There are more information and suggestions on how to create a safe, positive learning experience in the section on delivering the Living e-Motions course and in Session 1 Establishing the Learning Group.

We have also provided a template consent form which you can use or adapt to meet your needs. It is important that people give informed consent to their story being shared with others in person or through writing or film.

