CHAMPIONS STORYBOOK

TO MARK WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2019
YOU ARE NOT YOUR ILLNESS.
YOU HAVE AN INDIVIDUAL STORY TO TELL. YOU HAVE A NAME, A HISTORY, A PERSONALITY.
STAYING YOURSELF IS PART OF THE BATTLE.

Julian Seifter
GET INVOLVED WITH WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2019

This year’s World Mental Health Day theme is suicide and suicide prevention. Every year close to 800,000 people globally take their own life and there are many more people who attempt suicide. Every suicide is a tragedy that affects families, communities and has long-lasting effects on the people left behind.

The fact is that mental health problems affects one in four of us yet people are still afraid to talk about it. For people with mental health problems not being able to talk about it can be one of the worst parts of the illness.

So by getting people talking about mental health we can break down stereotypes, improve relationships, aid recovery and take the stigma out of something that affects us all. And you don’t have to be an expert to talk.

Too many people right now who are struggling with their mental health are made to feel isolated, worthless and ashamed. World Mental Health Day is a chance for all of us to be more open about mental health - to talk, to listen, to change lives.

When we each decide to start a conversation, we bring our stories together, giving others permission to share their own stories and together we are a movement - we are Time to Change transforming our society to one where everyone has the choice to say that they are not ok without fear of judgement, discrimination or repercussions.

Let’s continue to share our stories through this Champions Storybook and show everyone why it is time to change.

THIS STORYBOOK INCLUDES:

- Personal stories shared by Time to Change Champions
- Signposting information to support yourself and others if struggling with mental health
- How to share your very own story with the world around you

And finally don’t forget to let us know what you have been up to by sharing your activities on social media. We are on Facebook, Twitter @timetochange and Instagram @timetochangecampaign.

Use the hashtag #WMHD to help share our message further.

BEFORE DIVING INTO THE STORIES... WE WOULD JUST LIKE TO LET YOU KNOW

Many of our Champions in producing this storybook have shared really personal things about themselves and their lived experience. As a result some may find these stories triggering.

PLEASE TAKE CARE and seek help should you find it does trigger something in you.

That support could come from your friends, family, your peer group, your employer or any of the agencies listed in the signposting section, the one thing you don’t have to do is suffer in silence.
Hi my name is Liz Rotherham and I currently work for an insurance broker as an Executive Assistant. I have recently become qualified as an Mental Health First Aid Instructor in the workplace which means I can now train staff members to become MHFA's which is fantastic.

I was diagnosed with Bipolar in 2003, which led me to being sectioned in a Mental Hospital for a month to recover from a major psychotic episode which saved my life. I thought I had special powers and the ability to stop a train which sent alarm bells to my manager at the time. I had lost totally rationalisation of my mind and was in a state of Euphoria, luckily for me my boss spotted the signs and called my parents to pick me up and take me to the doctors.

Whilst in hospital they injected me with a vast amount of medication, I remained there for a month to recover and get better. When I was discharged I had slumped into a state of depression due to the amount of medication they had injected me with and couldn’t cope on my own so had to go and live with my parents at the age of 32.

I spent two weeks in bed, not eating, washing and just staring out the window at a tree. I am 5ft 10 and I went down to a Size 6. My mum every night came to my bed and spoke encouraging words to try and lift me out of this black hole. The only way I can describe this feeling is that it felt like a black cloak had been pulled over my head. I had no emotions or thoughts apart from wanting to end my life again. I remained in this state for 10 months and didn’t leave the house within this period, eventually I returned to work but still felt empty.

I have subsequently experienced numerous episodes of mainly psychosis where I have been hospitalised over the last 15 years and every episode is different. Being in a state of psychosis is frightening and my paranoia has reached terrifying heights. I have often felt that I am being watched and bugged by some unknown entity that is after me and have experienced hallucinations that have scared me out of my wits.

When you are in that manic episode you think anything is possible and are extremely unpredictable. Rather than take all what has happened to me as a negative situation I have turned it round into something positive to help and educate people with regards to Mental Health. My family have been extremely supportive and also my managers at my current company. They have been open and non-judgemental towards me and support me unconditionally.

I do a lot of voluntary work to raise awareness and complete talks in schools, universities and companies. I have set up a website which I know is very basic but a starting platform for people to share stories: www.heads2minds.co.uk.

I am extremely passionate about helping to reduce stigma and stop discrimination, I truly believe if more people share their stories and don’t suffer in silence the world would be a better please and people will realise they are not alone.
My name is Savannah, I am a 21 year old who works part time in an estate agency and a passionate equestrian enthusiast who’s found her therapy in horses. I have experienced mental illness from a very young age, at age 9 I didn't understand what depression and anxiety was, it wasn’t explained to me, and I just constantly felt sad and was crying almost every day until I went to Camhs.

I am here to share my story to inspire others and let them know whatever mental illness you have its okay not to be okay, you can get through absolutely anything. After being badly bullied and going through issues at home, by age 13 I had experienced self-harming and suicide attempts. Throughout my teenage years it’s been a struggle, to this day my anxiety makes going to social events absolutely petrifying and I am not afraid to say that at times I do fear judgment.

I have recently been diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, during my years of living with depression and anxiety, I came to realise some changes in my behaviour, I also suffer with PMDD, I felt that it was related to that but even when I wasn't going through my menstrual cycle, I still felt out of character. I was losing people close to me because of my illness and it was heart breaking, since then I have gone back to CBT sessions alongside being on Sertraline, never be afraid to seek help!

My workplace has been absolutely amazing in terms of supporting my mental health, they never object to me calling in sick last minute due to days where I haven't been able to cope, I have previously emailed in to say I was leaving London for the weekend to spend time with family because my anxiety and depression was so bad, I don't feel like I have to excuse my mental health, working for the company I work for has encouraged me to challenge my anxiety with speaking on the phone.

I believe that those who are experiencing mental illness needs to hear my story for inspiration so they know they are not alone and also to those who may not understand mental illness very well so they can get a better picture on how difficult it is to live with and how they could help out someone they know with a mental illness, being a shoulder to cry on and listening goes a long way, I hope my story can be one out of many to help break the stigma of mental health.

If I was to ask for any help from those around me, all I would ask for is understanding and to bear with me on the days when I struggle. My family and small circle of friends have been absolutely amazing with this journey, they’ve been there for me throughout the most amazing times and the worst times of my life, they have guided me and encouraged me to have more security within myself and not letting my illness define who I am.

This has taken a lot of my power and to come to terms with but I’m starting to gradually feel like myself again and couldn’t be more grateful for them for staying with me.
Don’t be afraid to reach out
by Stacey

My name is Stacey and I work in publishing as an editor. I’m happy to say that I’m firmly in recovery from anorexia now, but the memories of holding down a full-time job whilst battling anorexia are still clear in my mind. I remember shivering at my desk (air conditioning isn’t at all enjoyable when you’re constantly freezing anyway), staring blankly at my computer screen trying to force my malnourished brain to function enough to meet my deadlines, whilst desperately clock-watching to see how long I had left before I could allow myself anything to eat or drink.

I remember avoiding interacting with colleagues, simply because interactions of any kind sapped my energy resources and I just didn’t have any to spare. I remember physically struggling to carry a pile of proofs, and fighting back tears when I dropped the proofs and realised I’d have to summon the strength to pick them back up.

Looking back, it all feels incredibly unreal. Thankfully I can no longer imagine being in that mental or physical place, but there are people who are in similar places, right now. It may be someone you pass in the corridors, someone in that meeting you attended yesterday, or someone who sits in your office.

Eating disorders are horrible illnesses and it is no mean feat to deal with one while holding down a job, so if you notice that someone is showing signs of struggling with an eating disorder (The Beat website lists signs of various eating disorders), please show them kindness and compassion.

That, of course, goes for any mental or physical illness, but eating disorders tend to combine mental and physical ill health in such a cruel way that I think it’s particularly important to treat sufferers compassionately in the workplace.

I fully appreciate that it may be hard to look out for colleagues in our busy working lives, but it can make all the difference to someone if you do. One particular event will always stick in my mind: My GP called me to check in during a particularly bad patch (I was incredibly lucky to have an amazing GP). There are limited private areas in my office building so I’d been forced to take the call in the quietest, least-used corridor I could find.

As I was speaking to my GP and getting distressed as she insisted that I ate breakfast despite my brain telling me not to, a senior colleague walked past and overheard snippets of my side of the conversation.

When I finished the call, she approached me and asked if she could support me by sitting with me as I ate. Despite the fact that I’m sure she had better things to do than watch me eat, she sat with me for over 20 minutes, distracting me with casual chat and gently encouraging me. Her support not only meant that I ate that meal, it meant that I felt less alone and invisible. I will forever be grateful for that act and it shows that a little kindness can go a long way.

So please, don’t be afraid to offer support if you’re concerned about someone. They may or may not accept your help, but I can guarantee that they will appreciate the offer.
Baby steps: A process of managing recovery from mental ill-health in the workplace

by Anon

I want to share my story of how my employer managed my integration back into the workplace, following a period of absence for anxiety and depression. I hope other employers will be inspired to use a similar approach.

I have battled with anxiety and depression since my early teens; experiencing various episodes in reaction to stressful life events. My most recent episode, a year ago, has been a bittersweet journey from hitting rock bottom to climbing up out of the depths back into the sunlight.

When I hit rock bottom, I was working in a management position in the NHS; the environment was hostile and I was unhappy, but I carried on brushing my feelings under the carpet; I wanted to succeed to feel valued and pay the bills. As I continued to deny my feelings, my confidence diminished; I found it difficult to make decisions and in turn felt like I was failing. Dark thoughts of suicide crossed my mind and I thought that everyone would be better off without me.

One day I didn’t want to leave my bed or face the world. I phoned my line manager to tell her how I felt; that is when my process of recovery began. The best advice she gave me was to take baby steps and to be kind to myself. I went to see my GP who prescribed medication and CBT. After several days in bed, I eventually got up and washed up; I rewarded myself by watching an episode of “Friends”.

Over time these achievements got bigger, including seeing family and cooking my favourite meals. I rewarded myself by doing things I enjoyed; eventually watching all ten series of “Friends”! Just like a baby I was learning to meet my basic needs again. I realised my recovery was going to be a long process.

My line manager gave me time and space to work through things to recover. She came to my house, my safe space, to complete one to ones and was honest about the processes in the Trust Sickness Policy, so I knew what to expect. I didn’t feel pressure; she met me where I was and walked alongside me. During my absence, I was being paid a full-time wage, which alleviated my anxiety of not being able to pay the bills.

After six months and several sessions of CBT, I made the decision to return to work as it gave me independence. My line manager was supportive and allowed me to work fixed term to undertake additional duties. I was allocated small tasks, so I didn’t feel overwhelmed, but these tasks had achievable goals, which made me feel valued. I had regular one to ones and had access to my manager in between if I was having a wobble.

Through CBT I learnt that if anything was worrying me, I needed to get it out my head by being honest, so I did and continue to do so now.

I decided not to go back to my full-time managerial job as it was not conducive to my mental health and didn’t offer a good work life balance. Instead I have found a part-time job with less responsibility. My confidence has increased, and I no longer feel like a failure – I am enjoying the sunshine!
The time I felt like enough was enough

by Marcus

My name is Marcus Shelley and to the outside world I look like a normal 40 year old guy, I have a good job, I’m married, I have two children, a dog, a house, a nice car, what could I be depressed about?

The truth is I have been battling with some sort of mental health issue since I was a teenager, I was the “clown”, the “lad” who would drink a bit too much and end up doing something stupid normally with a girl, as time marched forward as it tends to do, the persona of the loud, brash, controversial character became the norm, and the real me got lost.

I got married, had children and gave myself into a lot of debt, but the persona of “Marcus” carried on, inside I was screaming, angry, sad, worried and I did what men tend to do, I got those emotions and stuck them deep down inside and nailed a lid on them.

Ill health struck me, I had four major stomach surgeries, my wife nearly died giving birth to my son, my son nearly died being born, both were in intensive care, I couldn’t look after my daughter as I was recovering from a major surgery, those feelings and emotions got pushed deep down and a lid firmly nailed shut, or so I thought.

Money worries and problems caused by bad financial decisions on my part were taking a toll on my life and marriage, and those lids I had nailed on were starting to come off, and emotions were leaking in to my system. I was shouting at my kids, being irritable and generally feeling rubbish about myself and my life, that’s when my wife told me to see a Doctor, I did, and I was diagnosed with Depression and given anti-depressants.

Fast forward 10 years, my marriage survived, my kids are great and growing up to be brilliant people, but that toxic persona of “Marcus” was still there, I’m still behind a mask, the medication keeps me level (ish), then out of nowhere BOOM, a bad day, a bad week, a bad two weeks and I’m feeling really, really low, and suicidal thoughts are running through my head, id picked out a spot and a method, but the thought of my kids at my funeral make me tell my wife, I tell my parents, my friends and my Doctor.

A change of Medication, some tough conversations with Friends and Family, counselling, mindfulness and mediation and the real me starts to shine through, I still take Medication, but I’m good, money worries have been solved, my kids and marriage are good, I no longer nail lids on emotions and feelings, I talk about my issues, I have coping strategies, I’m self-aware, I know I have the best people I know looking out for me, and I know its ok not to be ok.
By Louise

My name is Louise and I am a PTSD warrior. I work as a support assistant and I am day by day trying the change the world through positivity and meditation!

So how do we normally write stories? Usually they go something along the lines of there once was a girl and when she grew up she was happy, the end.... Well not exactly, after surviving a violent childhood, a sexual assault as a young teen, PND at 24 and PTSD at 28, the girl found her life for a while to be very hard....... 

It’s not the fairy-tale story but there is light that has emerged from the darkness. PTSD developed after the deaths of my two baby girls, it catapulted me into a world of nightmares, flashbacks, panic attacks, deep depression, rage, numbness and a constant battle with the suicidal thoughts. I was scared to sleep and I couldn’t face being awake. I had to hold down a full time job, mum, wife and appear as normal and together as possible. I had never talked about my mental health as I didn’t think anyone would understand. This lasted 7 years and I finally broke completely.

My brain due to the stress reacted in a very strange way, it was like I was being interviewed and all I could see was myself, repeating over and over all the trauma I had suffered, the voice was loud and constant.

I ended up going through a course of EDMR which helped me process the trauma, I began dancing classes to build up the mind/body connection, I trail ran to breathe in the forest and I meditated to soothe my mind. The main thing that happened which made the biggest impact was I finally decided to not be ashamed anymore, I became open and honest about my journey in order to help others to see that there is that light at the end of the darkness.

I started to organise mindfulness sessions in my workplace, I ran Time to Change events and trained as Mental Health First Aider to promote wellbeing in the workplace. The response has been incredible, people started to ask questions and share their own experiences. There is starting to be an openness and asking each other if they are ok. People tell me all the time that I don’t look like someone with PTSD and I love using this to highlight people’s misconceptions of what people with Mental Health look like.

I was once told by someone during a yoga class that in order to move forward we must learn acceptance of ourselves and the people we are. I slowly learnt to do this, to let go of my desperation to not be ill and to accept my journey, my past and my PTSD. I have now been able to build myself into the strongest form of myself.

I know this won’t be how it will be for everyone but do not give up, if it takes a month or 7 years like me, try new things that push you and your anxiety, gain those small victories of getting up every day because YOU will change the world around you as having a mental illness makes us the most fearless people in the world, keep winning your battle.
My name is Janine and I work as a Business Support Officer for Kirklees Council. The council signed up to the Time to Change Employer Pledge in 2016 and I became a Mental Health Employee Champion in 2017 (one of the best things I have ever done!).

I live with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and fibromyalgia. My main symptoms include fatigue and pain which can often affect my mental health, causing low mood and anxiety. I have gradually realised that the mind and body are closely linked and that my physical symptoms can have a huge impact on my thoughts and feelings and vice versa. After my initial diagnosis of CFS in 2001 I really struggled in all aspects of life and found it hard to accept that this debilitating condition was real and happening to me. It was a very difficult time in my life and although I had wonderful support from professionals, my family and close friends I felt so alone and out of control.

After a few years of trudging through mud and going around in circles not only were my physical symptoms impacting on my life but I started feeling and behaving angry, emotional, anxious, withdrawn, negative, less confident... all those things and more. I knew that I had to do something to help myself more. I have always been active and enjoyed sports so I thought I’d try doing a little walking and running. This was definitely out of my comfort zone so it was quite a challenge, but I had the support of my family and wonderful husband Chris. My dad and brother have always gone fell walking and running and Chris was joining them most weekends, so not wanting to be left out I thought let’s give it a go!

After a while I began to realise that not only were my physical symptoms easing but my mental health also improved. I now have a love of the great outdoors especially the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales and spend most of my weekends and holidays walking and running on the hills and mountains. For me the great outdoors is my therapy and makes me feel more alive than anywhere else.

I still have moments where I struggle due to fatigue and pain so I have learned to accept and adapt my activities, using yoga and meditation when I need to rest.

Unfortunately the last 18 months have been a very difficult time. Last year in January my brother-in-law suffered a stroke, in February my father-in-law suffered a fatal stroke and then in March my 28 year old friend also suffered a stroke. Fortunately my brother-in-law and friend have made a full recovery but the loss of my father-in-law has been very difficult.

I breathed a sigh of relief when we got to the end of April 2018 without any further tragedies but my ‘Stroke Story’ doesn’t end there. In March this year I suffered a TIA (mini stroke) which came right out of the blue and remains a mystery as to why it happened. I was extremely lucky as the episode only lasted 2 hours and I have no brain damage or side effects. I am now on blood thinning medication and I have been signed off from the hospital. Life is full of stressful events and can be such an emotional rollercoaster but I truly believe that my ‘mountain therapy’ and healthy lifestyle have saved my life and continue to do so. I also feel very grateful and lucky to have a great support network of family, friends and work colleagues.

Becoming a Mental Health Champion has given me a platform to speak out more and share my experiences which has not only helped others but has been very cathartic for me. I have become so much more confident and strong and I am not frightened to talk about mental health. Don’t be afraid to ask how someone is doing. Remember it’s just a conversation.

Along with my wonderful fellow champions I have been involved in organising and running events for staff. These have been very successful and our commitment and passion to provide support and tackle stigma and discrimination continues.
Me and my best friend Anorexia
by Hope

I am the Author of Stand Tall Little Girl and a Mental Health Campaigner; travelling around the country to raise awareness of mental health, fight stigma and to make sure that everyone knows that it is totally okay to talk about how they feel.

When I was 13 years old I developed anorexia. Anorexia became quite literally my best friend, my everything in life. I wanted to always do just as she said. I thrived off everything anorexia gave me, this sense of purpose and value that I wasn’t getting anywhere else.

Little did I know as this friendship developed over the next year that it was actually getting very dangerous. That each day I listened to it I was getting sucked further and further in to a dangerous cycle of self-hatred. And four years after this friendship developed I hit my complete rock bottom ending up in a mental health hospital where I had to spend the next year of my life trying to recover.

For so long I was so embarrassed about what I had been through, I thought it made me weak, but in actual fact it made me stronger than ever. With my anorexia I am in a state of ongoing recovery, I know what I need to do to stay well, but I also am learning what support I need from those around me.

For me it is a few key things that really help:

Checking in with me, sometimes it is easier to paint on that happy face to pretend like everything is okay.

Letting me know which restaurants we are going to (if I need to know). This is a bit of a balance as sometimes I like to challenge myself, but there will be days when I just need to know.

Having people, I am accountable to: this is people who can pick me up on things if they think I am looking like I am starting to struggle again whether with food, or exercise. Reminding me that it will be okay.

Talking; The hardest but the most crucial thing. We have a duty of responsibility to those around us and it is essential that we keep talking about mental health, maintain that momentum so that people know that it’s okay to talk, but also that they aren’t alone. The talking for me was where I see the most need for change but also so much positive potential. I have friends who I completely trust with how I feel and these people can go from being really direct to me in their conversations to offering support. The thing that really worked for me is having people who listen, don’t try and fix but walk alongside me in how I am feeling.

When I first started talking so openly about my recovery I was terrified, the stigma, that misunderstandings and also what people would think of me, but do you know what having had anorexia doesn’t make me weak, but stronger! We are strong together and we fight these battles every day.

If you are worried about a friend or have your own story to share join the movement and join us in fighting for change.
Change is always possible
by Ed

I’m Ed Boait and I suffer with paranoid schizophrenia, it is a severe illness and I was hospitalised many times. But a few years ago things changed, they changed dramatically to the extent that I now call it a ‘new life’, maybe it was the right medication or maybe it was a great desire to be free.

When I was twenty and told I would be ill for the rest of my life, that I would have to take medication, that sedated me, every day, I refused to believe it. Now I’m thirty seven and I take my medication every day and know that it is very helpful at keeping me stable. There are other things in my life that keep me stable, I do a lot of meaningful voluntary work, in the area I wish to eventually get paid work, my goal is to be a mental health advocate. I also write twice a week and have three books ready to self-publish, writing is my creative outlet, it make me feel happy and also, with my philosophy blog, intellectual.

It was the philosophy that gave me so many problems at the start of my illness, I was convinced that I would be a world famous philosopher, that my philosophy would cure the world’s ills. So much time was spent reading and thinking, months in hospital trying to find the solution to the ultimate questions of God and physics. Determined to prove the psychiatrist wrong, because he thought this philosophy idea was all delusion.

There were big moments of change, my friends came back into my life around the same time I was given clozapine, both boosted my self-belief and I felt like I had joined back into real life. Then a few years later I had a night of realisation, the voices in my head were telling me I needed to die immediately and in the morning I then knew I had a severe illness.

But even after these events I still stopped my medication several times and had disastrous psychotic episodes, one lasted longer than six months. The illness still was getting the better of me and I made two serious suicide attempts. Another problem was the drug use, I stopped using street drugs a few times and a few times I went back to them, once I was taking heroin every day.

Sure the medication I currently take is good for me, it took twelve years to find the right medication at the right dose. But it is all the other things that I am now able to do that give me the real freedom from my illness, the work, the writing, the daily living chores, the great support from friends and family. The change happened and now I am more able, happier and more determined than ever, I don’t like the word but I use it a lot, ‘control’.

My adult life has been one disaster after another but in the past few years I have slowly taken control of my life, I used to say to the nurses it was about responsibility and now I feel I have that ability to make positive choices. Massive changes have happened to me, but maybe the most helpful was learning to talk about my illness.
Managing my mental health at university

by Anon

I’ve experienced depression, anxiety and low self-esteem since I was 12. This has massively affected my confidence throughout life, and it wasn’t until two years ago when I turned 40, that I saw university study as a feasible option. I’ve now finished two years of a Creative and Professional Writing degree which I hope will enable me to use my voice to help others.

I want to share my experience of mental ill-health because it’s part of me, and I want to be known for who I really am and to challenge the sense of shame I sometimes carry around not feeling ‘OK.’ I hope by adding my voice to the others already out there, we can continue to dilute and finally dissolve shame and stigma surrounding mental illness. And hopefully we’ll move closer to a society that supports all its members to thrive.

My first two years at university have been a huge struggle, in large part due to my mental health problems, but also because of isolation, physical health problems, issues with accommodation, and the death of a close friend.

There are things I do to help myself get through, such as journaling, meditating, attending group exercise classes, and keeping in contact with good friends who I can be honest with about how I am. I also try to be honest when my course-mates and lecturers ask me how I am because I want to challenge the culturally acceptable response of “I’m fine.” It also makes me feel a little less alone if I can be honest, although I don’t always have the courage to.

The university also has systems in place for supporting those in need, while fostering awareness of mental-health issues and the need for self-care. The Wellbeing Service offers government funded mentoring for those eligible, 6 counselling sessions each year for every student, and additional support for those with ongoing issues. The ‘Feel-Good February’ and exam-time ‘UWE says Relax’ campaigns seek to offer extra wellbeing support through activities such as mindfulness, exercise and crafts.

While that’s all good, what I would love to see is easily accessible and visible wellbeing support as a year-round feature of campus life. For example, while the provision of study spaces across my campus is fantastic, I would love to see more dedicated chill-out spaces that encourage students to take care of themselves and get the support they need. Soothing spaces with wellbeing resources and inspirational material. I believe that looking after our mental health is as important a life-skill as anything else we may learn at university.

And the most helpful thing that I believe individuals can do to support one another, is to start conversations. Whether you know someone or not, say hello, ask them how they are (how they really are), how their day is going. Tell them how you are. And if they want to talk, just listen. You may not understand, you don’t need to, just be open to hearing how they are, even if they aren’t feeling OK. To have someone show kindness and to care enough to ask how you are can mean a lot when you’re struggling, and to be able to tell someone you don’t feel OK can be a relief and a step towards realising you need to get help.
Shedding
by Anon

Growing up, my Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) felt like an extra layer of skin, protecting me from the big world around me. I was in permanent flight or fight mode, worried about almost everything and anything, and I didn’t know why. I felt anxious going to school or work, spending time with people, being alone, feeling busy or bored. I would pull and stretch this skin to its breaking point, feeling restless and uncomfortable, unable to concentrate, sleep and interact with others. My mind would seek out self-destructive yet soothing habits like biting my nails, and dermatillomania. These habits were an outlet, and manifested the fact that I was clearly not okay. My GAD fed many other mental health problems including low mood and depression. I began to see a counsellor and he guided me through a course of CBT. It felt comforting to be able to express my feelings in a safe, non-judgemental space. I then began a dose of antidepressant medication (SSRIs) which levelled the playing field of emotions into this blissful middle range. However, after a few months I stopped as I felt the brain fog was masking my problem.

After some of the most challenging yet rewarding years of my life, I noticed the skin started shedding, and a new self-emerge. As I changed and evolved, this restrictive layer detached so that I had room to grow and start afresh. Just like a snake shedding the skin over their eyes, I renewed the lens through which I saw myself and the world, separate from anxiety.

Moving countries and starting afresh was a major process of kicking this process into gear, and I began discovering myself through creative activities and social interactions. I am now able to create happy and healthy friendships, to heal troubled relationships, to work and study, to find purpose and passion without that anxiety feeding on my energy supply. During this process of shedding I had family and friends support, understanding colleagues, and a guiding counsellor. I believe that while my anxiety is still there, it’s not my thickest layer of skin.

I am currently looking into a career in the mental health sector after completing a counselling skills course. I find my passion lies within the journey of the self to recovery, and I want to walk alongside others to help them on their path of healing. My personal history allows me to share and connect with others of similar circumstance. When someone experiences anxiety, it is important to be their backbone and to offer stability within a very volatile journey. I found the support of my manager to be incredibly helpful as she understood the days I turned up feeling overwhelmed and accommodated that process by listening and even changing tasks to suit my needs.

I believe it is important for organisations like workplaces and schools to be more accommodating about anxiety, as it can sometimes feel like an enormous amount of effort to just show up. I believe little accomplishments should be recognised, and encouragement and support continually offered. I hope to challenge the stigma around mental health and empower people through being honest and open about their journey.
A different reality, but it’s still reality

by Charlotte

Staring out the car from the passenger seat, sun shining on my tired face, glancing at the passers-by living their life in all its glory, I can’t help but think of what’s next for me.

In my mind, life just doesn’t feel really real. People don’t understand that. It’s like I’m watching a movie on my own life in the front row seat, except it’s all in my head. Everything feels so much more alive, every sound and movement. Every twinkle of light and fragment of shaded darkness.

And it scares me. Because I feel so alive in this personal universe of mine, yet, all I can think about of the bad that is yet to come, the fear that comes with it and the refusal that I have to accept any fragment of happiness, just in case it’s taken away from me.

In my own way, I am in awe of the world around me, but my mind cannot understand that I am part of that world.

I spoke to my therapist recently, as I’ve been doing some CBT on my compulsions. She told me how that my habit of feeding my compulsions may make me feel safe and secure, but I’m reality, I’m moving away from what I want.

I can’t go out and travel, because if I put my feet on a plane, it will crash. I’m not a good friend, because I have to analyse every aspect of each conversation. I struggle to do basic tasks, because in always preparing for the even that there may be a fire, break in, murder, mugging or anything that I’ve been taught to fear.

I’ve protected myself so damn well that even existing is a danger in itself. It leaves me with a limited quality of life.

And people do laugh. Or question. People can’t seem to understand that for some of us, every day is living like a final destination movie. We don’t talk about the world of intrusive thoughts enough.

Where your brain is on overdrive and you feel like that doomed character in any horror movie (and you can’t even watch horror movies because you’ll then believe it will come true).

As someone who’s had to leave a job and has had strained relationships, leaving me with a much unfulfilled calendar, I wanted to shine a light on how everyday tasks are not easy for everyone. ‘Everyday’ isn’t even a word I can relate too.

At 23 all I do is blog once a week, cuddle my dog and try get through the day, it may sound easy but I leaves me feeling empty and frustrated at this thing in my head.

I didn’t have help for 9 years, and it’s been hard to challenge my thoughts and my compulsions, but having someone explain and understand how my brain is not this big evil monster, or an enemy, but more of an overprotective friend has helped me a lot.

Having someone treat my embarrassing habits with respect, I didn’t expect that, but it gave me confidence.

The next time you talk to someone and you feel your eyebrows raising at that ‘obscure’ routine they have or that ‘silly’ habit, remember that as irrational it may be, it’s more than just a thought, a habit or routine, its emotion.

If they want to talk to you, listen, be patient and never ever giggle, I’ll take in your response fully and obsess over it for weeks. Just because it doesn’t make sense, it doesn’t mean it isn’t real.
My Time to Change

by Catherine

My name is Catherine and since I was about 8 years old I started to suffer with anxiety. As I grew up I found that it got worse and I lost my confidence and struggled with depression. I was unable to focus at school, had low self-esteem and couldn’t control my anxiety or depression. It didn’t help that my depression resulted in me being bullied whilst my teachers and psychiatrist told me that “14 year old girls don’t get depression and anxiety!” School was a nightmare! It never went away and I have struggled for most of my life. Sometimes it is extreme and I’ve felt I couldn’t cope resulting in me contemplating ending my life or using self-harm as a release. When I had my daughter I knew I would be susceptible to post-natal depression and sure enough I went through that too, which was really scary.

One of the problems I have encountered is stigma and people’s perceptions of mental illness. I worked as a Manager for a long time where I really struggled, I tried to be open and honest about my depression and anxiety but was often met with comments like “well you don’t seem unhappy…you’re always jolly and laughing.” or (my favourite) “Depression is the new back ache…it’s the excuse for everything!” There was no support, just long hours and immense pressure to perform and hit targets.

It took a nervous breakdown for me to acknowledge that I didn’t have to put up with people’s perceptions anymore, that I could do something about ending the stigma and take some control of my mental health problems. Work isn’t everything so I think it’s important to recognise when you’re struggling and to take time out. If work is making you unhappy then be kind to yourself and look for a job that allows you to get a better work/life balance. This can be really hard but once I gave up my horrible job and changed my career, my mental health improved. Changing my career was awful for my anxiety so I started researching techniques to help me cope; I discovered mindfulness and exercise really worked for me.

I started to apply a technique called Critical Path Analysis, which I had learnt about at University. It helped me to understand the triggers for my depression and anxiety. I used it to trace the path of my mental health struggles over a period of time and then matched them up with life events. I found that when I first started struggling with anxiety it matched up to a period where I had lost two close relatives, we had moved house and I had started a new school. It was a real light bulb moment to find out what the triggers were and this helped me to understand and manage my mental health better, I know I need to focus on myself during tricky times now and administer some self-care so I exercise, manage my diet and focus on doing the things I enjoy.

Becoming a Mental Health Champion at work has made a huge difference to my mental health. It’s not an easy role but it makes me feel like I am making a difference and using my experiences to help others. The champions I work with really inspire me, we all struggle with our mental health but it’s great that I can sit down and talk with them about our struggles, often with good humour. We are really making a difference and making sure people talk openly about their mental health struggles at work. Since becoming a champion I have trained as a mental health first aider, stood up and talked about mental health to a crowd of people and held two large mental health events for staff.

It was a nightmare for my anxiety, but I had the support and encouragement of my fellow champions and a little bit of Prosecco after helped too! The events were a huge success, people came and talked and listened and that made me feel great. I don’t fear my depression and anxiety anymore it’s made me stronger, braver and made me take better care of myself. I talk about it, laugh at it, make fun of it… it’s an absolute pain and I hate it but without it, I wouldn’t be doing what I love now… I wouldn’t be me.
You are important and only you can control the way you feel.

Over the past year I have learnt I am in CONTROL. Whilst low feelings and the same or new bad thoughts still regularly build within me and there are channels, groups, books to help get out of the bad feelings – I have learnt they are tools to enable ME to take CONTROL.

Books and groups just allow me to share my feelings and discuss why or what is making me feel that way. Yes it can help by forcing me to think out aloud with a friend or professional who can steer the conversation, but ultimately I AM in CONTROL. Nothing can make me change or change feelings, only I can do that.

My best and most successful way to change my low feelings, agitations and thoughts is... to appreciate and consider myself!

I do this at nights for 1-2 minutes. When I get to bed, I breathe. I close my eyes and listen to each breath, feel my lungs expand and relax, after a few moments or sometimes longer, I feel my legs get lighter, my arms become weightless, then I focus on breathing again... for another 30 seconds. This is my time, my control, I am in control of my breathing and in control of my life. After about two minutes... my head is empty, my mind relaxed, I feel in control, and generally I am fast asleep.

PS. I have never done yoga, meditation type things classes, so if you have not either then this can still work for you. This is simply my 3 minutes at night when needed. It really helps me feel calm and fall asleep so that I do not wake up tired and agitated before my day even starts. 3 minutes- it’s my top tip for self-care.
My Journey with Post Natal Anxiety
by Gemma

I can’t start this story by saying that no one warned how exhausting mum life would be, because they did. Friends, family and the internet all tell you that mum life = sleepless nights. What none of those people did tell me that mum life = mental health nightmare.

I do have a history of anxiety and panic attacks. Seven years ago I lost my Grandpa and I suffered a year of complete heart ache, which eventually led to me having a full blown panic attack every time I went to bed. However I just thought it would be fine, I can survive on four hours of sleep and this little person will be so much fun and she will just fit into my life.

Four hours would have been the dream, try 40 minutes! Add into the mix that she cries A LOT and she can’t even lift her own head up, let alone do anything fun and it was the single most hardest thing I have ever done. In addition to this, we now live in a world of social media which we seem to have learnt to obsess over, that does not allow anything but “perfect” to be the case. You must post the good parents, the smiles, the cuddles, the days out. Don’t you dare post the tears, tantrums and the messy clothes / house / life!

Once I finally got into the flow and felt like I had created some sort of routine, I had to return to work and that’s when the mum guilt reared its head and I truly started dealing with the mental health struggles of mum life and hit my rock bottom.

I started to notice things take a bad turn when I would see her playing with her dad and think “they don’t need me, they’d be happier without me”.

These thoughts were honestly terrifying but they felt so real and I knew then that I had to do something to help myself and put my mental health first.

I don’t claim to be an expert in any of the below but these things are the things I found helped me keep my head on straight and be a calmer and happier person and mother.

1. Mindfulness and Meditations
2. Self Help Books
3. Writing down something I am grateful for from that day when I go to bed – even if it’s just that the weather was nice
4. Drink lots of water
5. Try exercise just for 10 minutes every other day

I think as a society we should be more accepting of the less than perfect. Don’t give someone a hard time because their child slept in their bed, give them praise for getting some sleep so that they can parent in the best way possible. Having friends who were more honest about their journeys and they didn’t actually always enjoy it and actually their mental health also suffered during this journey helped me immensely.
I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE MY STORY – WHERE DO I START?

START BY VISITING THIS SECTION ON STORYTELLING

SHARING YOUR STORY

Sharing stories about what it’s like to live with a mental health problem is one of the most powerful ways to break down stigma and discrimination.

This section has been created by working with many of you who are reading this to make sure that, together, we can help you to share your stories to inspire minds and change hearts.

Enjoy reading stories and finding new stories, and remember that you have an amazing story to tell.

In this booklet there are lots of useful hints and tips about sharing your own mental health story, we hope you find it useful.

MENTAL HEALTH AND STORY TELLING

1. Make sure you consider your own wellbeing when sharing your story. It’s okay to come back to telling or writing your story if you are feeling unwell.

2. It’s perfectly okay to blog about or share your experiences with difficult issues, such as self-harm, suicide, and eating disorders.

3. When sharing your story in the newspaper, on the radio, online or in any public forum, you are sharing it with a wide range of people. When talking about these issues it’s important to remember that:

   i) Some of the people reading your story may be feeling vulnerable. Think carefully about the sorts of things you are describing, and how this may make them feel.

   ii) Descriptions of behaviours, numbers (in relation to eating disorders) or methods could be triggering for people reading your story. Try to focus on talking about the feelings you experienced.

4. Think carefully about any imagery you want to use in your blog. Images of self-harm could be difficult for people to see. Time to Change has created some imagery to accompany mental health stories as part of the Get the Picture Campaign.
Whether broadcast or print, it is always worth thinking about key messages before your interview. These are two or three points that you would like to put across during the interview. Remember - even seasoned pros struggle to include their messages and it’s not a problem if you miss these out!

Practice makes perfect! Rehearse your key messages in front of a mirror, conduct a mock interview with someone you know or a member of the Time to Change media team and speak into a voice recorder to see how you sound.

During the interview, be concise with your answers. Think of all sentences as ‘sound bites’. Breathe and smile - both will instantly make you feel relaxed and slow down your speech.

Make time to think about the types of questions you would prefer not to answer. While journalists will endeavour to get the very best parts of your story, sometimes they could ask difficult questions and ones that you may not be comfortable with. Remember, you are always within your rights to say you do not want to answer a particular question.

Whenever you speak to the media, you are there to share your story and not act as ‘spokesperson’ for Time to Change. Sharing your personal experience of mental health problems is a powerful tool to change attitudes and tackle stigma.
Make your story relatable. Write your story in a way that surprises or makes people think. Be yourself when you write – people want to hear your voice.

Remember that a powerful story isn’t just about writing down your experiences – it’s the way you tell it. Consider the story arc (beginning, middle and end), the audience, the angle or hook, the action and the answer (what’s the conclusion?).

Think carefully about the title of your blog; does it reflect what you have written? Is it something people might search for using Google?

OTHER TYPES OF BLOGS TO TRY

LIST BLOGS
These are blogs that focus a story around a series of points. Search ‘Sasha’ or ‘Six Weeks’ to see examples of list blogs on the Time to Change website.

LETTER BLOGS
These are blogs that can be you writing to a friend or relative about what you’d like to say to them, or a statement of support to people who might be experiencing the same. Things that you have. Search ‘a letter to my mum’ or ‘a letter to those who feel alone’ on the Time to Change website.

A SHORT BIT ON SHORT BLOGS

Did you know that 58% of people now access the internet on a mobile phone? (ONS, 2014). Lots of people are reading blogs on the go. Shorter blogs can be easier to read when out and about.

Additionally, shorter blogs can be a great way to get into blogging for the first time, or can give you the opportunity to focus on one particular subject or core experience. As with any blog, consider theme, angle or hook and structure.

THREE TOP TIPS FOR WRITING BLOGS
TELLING MY STORY MEANS...

“Freedom for me and so many others.”
@VcVivienne

“Helping others feel less alone.”
@SarahLam

“I enjoy sharing my story of severe mental illness, as I find it helps educate others about how it can happen to anyone, and give them an insight into life in a psychiatric hospital.”
@katgrant30
USEFUL LINKS TO HELP YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY TO SHARING YOUR STORY

MENTAL HEALTH BLOGGING GUIDANCE

Mind's guidance on blogging: http://bit.ly/MInDbl0g

Time to Change's top tips for writing blogs: www.time-to-change.org.uk/blog/tips-writing-blogs

BLOGGING AND MENTAL HEALTH – IMPORTANT TIPS

Time to Change's guidance on blogging about self-harm, suicide, and eating disorders: www.time-to-change.org.uk/blog/writing-about-self-harm-suicide-eating-disorders

VLOGGING

YouTube Creator Academy: Learn about producing, publishing and promoting your own videos and vlogs - http://bit.ly/Y0UTub3Cre8

THE CHAMPIONS OF TIME TO CHANGE PODCAST

Features people telling their powerful personal stories as well as sharing campaigning tips, challenges and lived experience tackling mental health related prejudice, stigma and discrimination in our communities. Note: there may be some content that could be triggering for listeners. www.time-to-change.org.uk/time-to-change-podcast

It's also available on SoundCloud and iTunes.

SETTING UP YOUR OWN BLOG

Tumblr has a Tumblr of its own for non-profits and campaigners with tips on how to make the most of the platform http://changemakr.tumblr.com


Blogging Platforms Pros and Cons List: http://bit.ly/1KA75kX

Sharing your story through Time to Change

To find out how to share your story by blogging for Time to Change, please visit our website from here.
SIGNPOSTS TO SUPPORT

It’s great to start the conversation in your workplace or community and we hope that our campaign materials and ideas help you to do this. Sometimes this can mean that people currently experiencing mental health problems will need some support as sensitive conversations may bring up difficult things. We would encourage you to highlight any support tools that are offered within your organisation or local area, but you may also like to use some of ours too so please feel free to use the below text or link to our support page online.

If you or a friend, family, colleague or any others in your life are experiencing mental health problems or need urgent support, there are lots of places you can go to for help: They are all confidential and non-judgemental services that provides advice and information to people with mental health problems and those who care for them, as well as giving help to health professionals, employers and staff.

SAMARITANS
Freephone: 116 123 (24 hours a day)
Email: jo@samaritans.org
Website: www.samaritans.org

Provides confidential, non-judgmental emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those that could lead to suicide. You can phone, email, write a letter or in most cases talk to someone face to face.

MIND INFOLINE
Telephone: 0300 123 3393
(9am-5pm Monday to Friday)
Email: info@mind.org.uk
Website: www.mind.org.uk/help/advice_lines

Mind provides confidential mental health information services. With support and understanding, Mind enables people to make informed choices. The Infoline gives information on types of mental distress, where to get help, drug treatments, alternative therapies and advocacy. Mind also has a network of nearly 200 local Mind associations providing local services.

RETHINK MENTAL ILLNESS ADVICE LINE
Telephone: 0300 5000 927
(10am-2pm Monday to Friday)
Email: info@rethink.org
Website: www.rethink.org/about-us/our-mental-health-advice

Provides expert advice and information to people with mental health problems and those who care for them, as well as giving help to health professionals, employers and staff. Rethink also runs Rethink services and groups across England and Northern Ireland.

SANELINE
Telephone: 0845 767 8000 (6pm-11pm)
Website: www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/helpline

National mental health helpline providing information and support to people with mental health problems and those who support them.

ELEFRIENDS
Website: www.elefriends.org.uk
Elefriends is a supportive online community where you can be yourself. Elefriends is run by Mind.

If you’re a carer needing support you can contact all of the above as well as Carers Direct and the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, both of whom are able to provide support and advice on any issues affecting you.

You can also create your own Signposting document that lists any support offered internally, for example any Employee Assistance Programme or links to existing networks in your organisation for example a Disability Network.
A MASSIVE THANK YOU TO ALL OUR AMAZING CHAMPIONS FOR TAKING THE TIME TO SHARE THEIR POWERFUL STORIES WITH US.

DON’T FORGET TO SHARE WHAT YOU GOT UP TO ON WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2019!
FIND US ON...

TIMETOCHANGE

@TIMETOCHANGE

SEARCH “TIME TO CHANGE”

@TIMETOCHANGECAMPAIGN