PREPARING FOR PEER 2 PEER

WILMA'S RECOVERY STORY

Scottish Recovery Network

peer2peer

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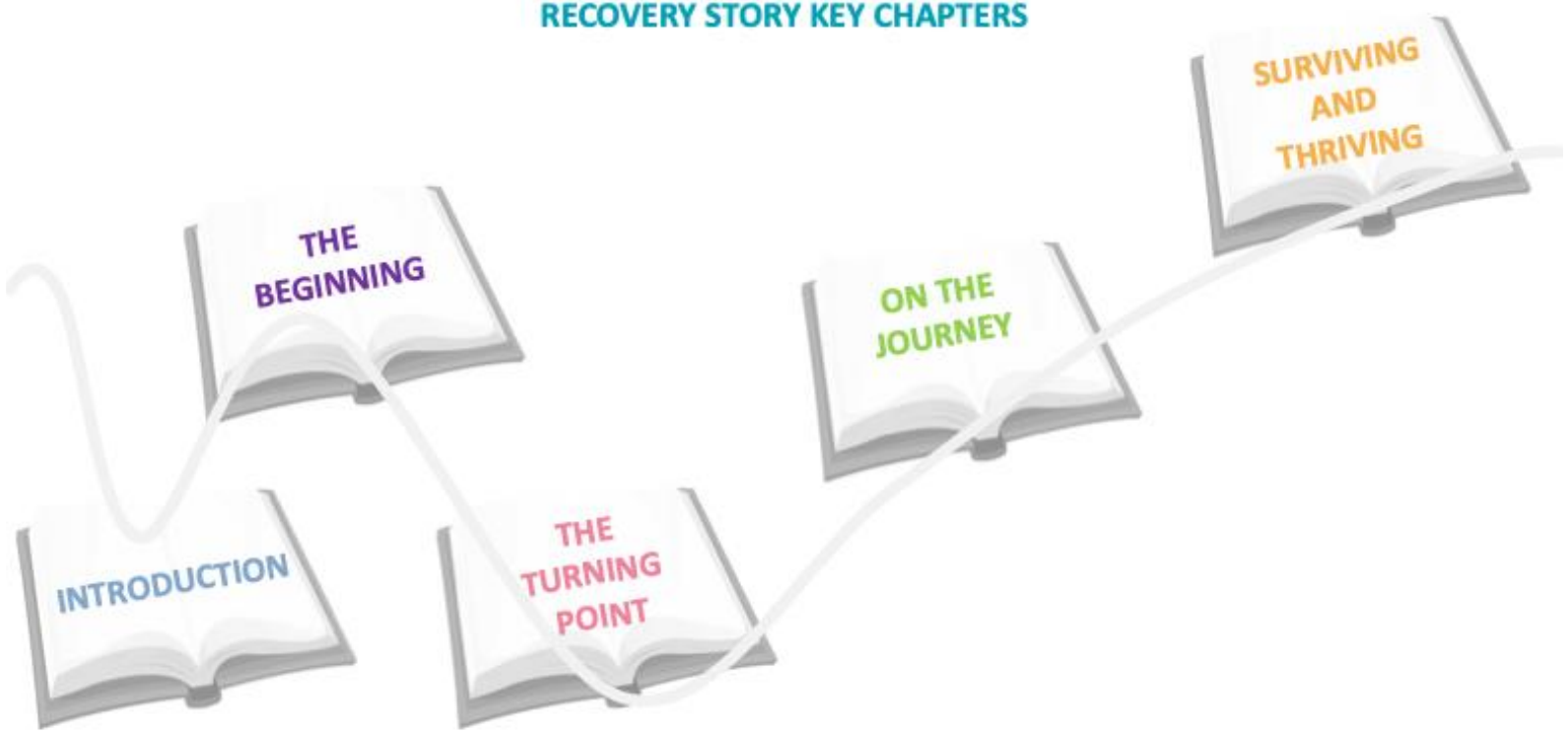
RECOVERY STORY KEY CHAPTERS



INTRODUCTION

My name is Wilma Paton, and I stay in Ayrshire. I have an older sister, and a cat called Lulu. I am a friend, a colleague, a team member and someone who cares for others. My health and wellbeing matter to me so I can keep well to participate in and enjoy the things I like doing in my life. My friends, family and my work are also central to my wellbeing and growth.

I love my work as a Peer Facilitator. I see every day as a learning day and have a passion for continued learning for my growth and development to be the best I can be and pass my learning onto others so they can be the best they can be. I love socialising with my friends and watching my favourite team play football. I enjoy spending time by the sea and one of my favourite places I love to visit is Portencross Castle.

I am good at helping and supporting others listening to what they have to say and empowering them to move forward. I am good at writing poetry, (which I started to do for the first time in March 2020 during lockdown and continue to enjoy) and find this a good coping strategy during difficult times and to capture the good times too.

In my peer relationships I use these fundamental self-truths to demonstrate my authenticity and encourage others to do the same.

THE BEGINNING

I was aware something was wrong when my friends and family were telling me that they could see I was not by usual self. My smiley, happy, funny character had gone, and they were concerned about me. I was being asked questions, but I did not want to talk.
My early signs were, I was withdrawing from others I wanted to be on my own all the time and not talk to anybody. I was exhausted and tired, anxious and agitated and feeling low it was like being stuck in a black tunnel, I was blind and could not see.

I remember the lowest point and feeling lonely, isolated, scared, detached from everything and everyone. Each day was so long, and I was struggling to see the day through knowing the next day was going to be the same. I was struggling to cope not just mentally (long-term impact of trauma) but physically with the chronic pain from my spinal condition.

The impact this had was I was just surviving on a daily basis. My mental health and physical health were poor and impacted my relationships with family and friends. Friends stopped contacting me as they knew I would not talk to them or meet up. I was struggling to learn anything as I could not concentrate as I was so tired. I finally agreed to contact my GP, and I went on to receive support from mental health services.

To cope I mainly stayed in my own space and was living day by day sleeping most of the time. I was receiving support through mental health services; however, it did take a long while to see a glimmer of light, and feel a bit of hope, that my situation may improve.

In my peer relationships I use this experience to have empathy and compassion for others.

THE TURNING POINT

I was aware that things were beginning to change when as a result of receiving support and working through my trauma, I could get better, and life was worth living. I could see small changes that the work I was doing was helping me to feel slightly better and gradually I was starting to think positive and take interest in things again. The turning point was asking for help and being given a safe space and time to talk without being judged. By connecting with my GP, it opened the door to mental health services and getting the right support I needed. I started to understand the reasons why I was feeling, the way I was, in response to my trauma, and I learned it was understandable to have these feelings.

As I progressed through my support sessions I was understanding how and why I was feeling the way I was. Piece by piece it was beginning to make sense, and my thoughts, feelings and emotions were changing along with my thinking. I was more positive and taking up some of my hobbies again and talking to my family and friends. The black tunnel had more light in it and the feeling of hope was stronger.

This had a positive impact in my relationships with friends and family. I was starting to talk more and have conversations again and show interest in what was happening around me. I was beginning to connect with others again and my concentration was improving and this helped me to learn coping strategies and work through my recovery journey. Others around me were happy and supportive to see the small changes having a positive impact as they were beginning to see the Wilma they knew coming back.

My first steps on the road to recovery were admitting and accepting I needed help, asking for that help, and attending therapy sessions. By understanding how and why, I was feeling the way I was, and accepting with time and patience my situation would improve and recovery is possible. Connecting with my friends again was a big step moving forward and helped build my confidence. Setting myself small tasks and having a plan to work through helped me achieve my goals and build up resilience and self-belief that I am good enough and I can achieve things in life.

In my peer relationships I use this experience to support others in the early stages of their recovery and helping them recognise and build on the turning points they experience.

ON THE JOURNEY

On my journey I have learned the importance of boundaries. I put boundaries in place for things I accept and not accept to support me. One of the big ones for me is it is okay to say no to things and people. Not to over commit to things and take on too much.
In addition, I can and will change my mind to decisions already made if I need to. I will have respect for my thoughts, feelings and emotions every day and for others to respect them too and it is okay to have an off day. I connect with a friend each day. I welcome and look forward to friends and family visiting me but let me know you are coming. Set a time each day to focus on self-care and do something I enjoy!

The support I received from mental health services had a massive impact in my recovery to get me talking about my trauma and working through my thoughts, feelings and behaviours which then changed the way I was thinking. This enabled me to get to a stable stage in my recovery to go on and join North Ayrshire Wellbeing and Recovery College. This is where I learned more about recovery, self-management, coping strategies, peer support, personal leadership and facilitation skills.

I am a stronger person now and have built up resilience. I am aware of certain times of the year and situations that will be difficult for me. I use my learning to cope and plan ahead for these times and understand it is okay to have certain feelings and thoughts at these times. If I do experience a setback, I have a plan that I can go to, and I will recognise my early warning signs.

When I do feel low, sad and overwhelmed I recognise the signs that effect my thoughts, behaviours and emotions. I am now in a position to address the situation, reflect and change my mind set to positive thinking for growth and development. I understand life will be difficult and challenging at times, and that it is okay to feel the way I feel in that moment, work through it, and move on. My spinal condition impacts my physical health and mobility in many ways and is a challenge to manage. This effects my mental health, thoughts, behaviours and emotions. I have learned and continue to learn ways to manage this and to focus on my ability not by disability.

In my peer relationships I use this experience to empower others to focus on their strengths, set boundaries, and to be kind to themselves on the journey.

SURVIVING AND THRIVING

My vision for the future is to keep learning everyday progressing with my growth and development to be the best version of myself. This enables me to pass my learning onto others to support them in my Peer Facilitator role. I am focusing on my assertiveness, communication, computer skills, and working to my strengths, moving forward into the future. As I always say now 'every day is a learning day.'

The types of self-care I find nourishing, include keeping connected and socialising with my friends, resting and taking breaks to recharge when needed, meditating/mindfulness, listening to music and playing my drum, walking, going a drive in my care and spending time by the sea, having a laugh and having fun, writing poetry and going to the football. All of these things help me stay on track with my vision.

Learning is a big part of what brings me joy in my life. One of the courses, I attended when at the North Ayrshire Wellbeing and Recovery college was African Drumming, this has led me to being a committee member of a drum community called Drum4URLife. I volunteer at a local hospital at the welcome desk and enjoy meeting and helping visitors, staff and patients. I like being part of a team alongside my fellow volunteers and take part in on-going training for this role. My job as a Peer Facilitator takes my learning on personal leadership and facilitation to the next level. I am fully supported and take part in on-going training to support me in my role moving forward and my job is fun and very rewarding. All of these bring social connections, fun and learning to maintain my growth and development.

As with all learning and change, I am at times working out my comfort zone and face challenging times. By taking positive and considered risks this allows me to continue with my learning for continued growth and development. I might not get things right first time, but I don't see this as failure, I see it as a learning opportunity. This allows me to work to my strengths to grow and develop to be the best version of myself looking into the future to supporting others to be the best version of themselves.

In my peer relationships I use this experience to encourage others to take positive risks and gather the learning through reflection and setting new goals.

To end with I quote some words from the hymn Amazing Grace to describe my recovery journey:
'I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see'