

#4 A story of rediscovering trust



Some storytellers talked about losing trust in themselves, their family and their social circle. Others said that they did not trust mental health services or other authorities such as the police. Conversely, a key component of some stories was finding trust after losing it or developing it for the first time. Several storytellers talked to us about finding people they could talk openly to and put trust in.

One storyteller, with a good career, told us how he had left his job to freelance and how he stopped having contact with his family and friends after winning a big contract. After isolating himself, he eventually became unwell.

I won quite a big job with a lot of money, so I was financially secure, but I started to believe that because I was given all this money, that people were working in the background to build a platform to launch me as somebody very successful. [Storyteller 1]

This really is the beginning of the seeds of fear because I also had a non-executive director who talked about being involved with the Russian Mafia and stuff.

He believed he was destined to become a celebrity in his field of work and therefore wanted to protect his professional reputation. He stopped trusting his social circle, feeling suspicious of other people's motives. He also became mistrusting of the public, believing people had ulterior motives.

So, the first sort of paranoia, "Paranoia One" we called it, was I started to think that my friends were trying to frame me. I was very conscious of it, if I was going to be a celebrity, to have my reputation protected. So, I started cutting off friends and increasing my isolation. I couldn't get any more work, so I got frustrated and went to Brazil for six weeks because I hadn't been on holiday for years, so I went to Brazil and travelled around.

But wherever I went, I felt that there were people following me and I even said to a girl I was with that I felt people wanted my blood, as it were.

On reflection, the storyteller could understand that his fears were a part of being unwell, but differentiating between reality and paranoia was difficult when he first became ill. He spent a lot of time alone at home writing screenplays. The work of creating screenplays took over his life.

So, I wrote my first screenplay and since then I wrote 34 screenplays. That gave me the relationships I was missing with people, with humans, that I was having with my screenplay characters. So, it filled a hole in my life.

During his illness he lost contact with his family, which was uncharacteristic as he was close to them, and lost trust in all relationships. He spent more time alone and as his fears progressed, he began to think there were hidden messages that only he was able to recognise. He refused to see family and believed his behaviour at home was being filmed. His family became concerned when he refused to see them.

When I left the house, I recorded my flat because I thought it had cameras installed in the lights. I thought I was being constantly recorded all the time in my flat. So it was amazingly intense really. So, what have we got here? So, then what happened was I turned my parents away and by the time I turned my parents away at Christmas, they came to take me home, because they go home at Christmas and I just slammed the door in their face.

The storyteller's family managed to get him sectioned. While in hospital, he refused to talk to the other patients and doctors, not trusting anybody and keeping himself to himself. He had previously been very close to his parents, so this period was difficult for all of them. After getting over the shock of being sectioned and an incident where he describes being forced to take medication that had frightening side effects, the storyteller began to re-engage with his family. This appeared to be a turning point for him to start rebuilding relationships of trust.

So, I've always been very close to my parents and I pretty much ring them every weekend. I did when I was ill, ring them. It was only at the end that I then stopped ringing them and so they realised something was a bit odd. So now I'm healthy again I ring them every weekend again, and so does my sister. So, we usually speak for a couple of hours. Yes we've always been very close and [they've been] very supportive of me and everything. So I think they were very scared. My dad cried because he was scared that I disowned them. I did say that I'd disowned them when I was in hospital and they were upset because they thought that by putting me in hospital that I'd never speak to them again, which fortunately hasn't happened. But yes, I've never seen my dad cry really so it was obviously very traumatic for them, very stressful for them to go through.

Having rebuilt his relationship with his parents, he went back to work. He was uncertain whether he'd be able to manage but he slowly began to build up trust in himself again.

REFLECTIONS ON SUSPICION

Gary

“ An early sign of my own mental ill health was when I began to believe everyone who tried to contact me, family or friends, had motivations for their own benefit. I wanted to be alone. I was feeling very inspired with my creative writing and just wanted to write.

Every knock at the door was intrusive. Doctors and the police came and put me in the hospital. I felt a grudge towards everyone. ”

Having been through psychosis, our storyteller was aware of the events and actions that had caused him to become unwell.

So, it's just being more aware of the triggers, being aware of my vulnerabilities and the triggers that cause my paranoia. So, the fact that I cut myself down, isolating myself. Now I'm much more... like making the film, going to meet-up groups to go and see movies and stuff like that to keep myself socially active.

Having no previous knowledge of psychosis and being unaware of the Mental Health Act and the laws around sectioning, it had been a shock for him to find his civil liberties taken away. It was difficult for him to trust the hospital system.

I'd never heard of sectioning. I couldn't believe they could take my freedom away. I was shocked. I was horrified. I had no awareness that they were able to do that to people, so it was all new to me, so whenever you've been through it, you're like, "Well I bloody well don't want that to happen again".

Looking back, he says that things may have been easier if he had shared with others what he was going through, rather than hiding his psychosis and making out everything was alright.

I just wonder if the more people I had around me, whether I'd have ever admitted these strange things that were going on. I'm not sure I would but I'm just saying that the more opportunities you have to open up and be honest about your situation, the better. I'd reduced it down to such a narrow point of contact that I was able to keep up this front that everything was okay when it wasn't.

Having come to terms with his mental illness, he says he is now willing to talk to other people about the experience.

My attitude is that I was ill, I'm always happy to be a poster boy for psychosis, it doesn't bother me. I'm happy to talk about it. I don't have stigma. For me, it doesn't have a stigma attached to it. I had an illness, I've dealt with it and it's just like having a cold or something like that, you get ill. I haven't had any stigma problems associated with it but also, I don't feel... like I don't like holding back. I'd much rather just be honest.

So I think this public awareness, and that's part of the reason for making the film, it's this whole public awareness of mental illness that there's all about just getting people to talk and not letting people isolate themselves because it's not healthy. I think it's too easy to... like I said, I'd never heard of psychosis.

He has returned to work and regained his social life, which he sees as a way of staying well. He is open about his experience of psychosis with his friends and has regained trust with his family and social circle.

Well I've got a girlfriend so that helps, human interaction with people, talking to my parents regularly, work. I felt a lot happier when I was at work so work is very important. I'm very focused on getting some work. Yes, and socialising. So I was quite lucky at the last place I went to, we used to go down to the pub on a Friday, which was quite nice. Nobody knows I'm ill. They're shocked when they discover I was ill because I'm quite normal now. So yes, I quite enjoy being social, which is the side effect of not isolating myself. I make an effort.

This man's difficult journey through psychosis seems to have made him stronger. He regained good health and has recovered trusting relationships with his family and friends.

