

#8 A story of resourcefulness: creativity, faith, family and nature



Many of the storytellers we spoke to were just beginning to live with the implications of a psychosis diagnosis, and some shared the things that they were finding helpful. Different forms of creativity, friends and family, and faith were themes that emerged strongly through these stories. Creativity played an important role in many of our storytellers' lives, helping them make sense of their problems and to remain well. Creative writing and art workshops, often provided by Early Intervention in Psychosis services, were described as a great support to several storytellers.

At our first meeting with a young service user, a shy and softly spoken woman, she created a map of the topics she wanted to talk about. The three main issues important to her were: mental health services, the church and her family. She grew up on a farm with two older brothers and described her younger self as being shy and introverted, with not many friends.

She experienced some bullying from other children. She studied languages at university which she enjoyed greatly, taking the opportunity to study abroad.

I went to East Germany and it was just a year after the reunification. So, it was still quite Eastern bloc. But there was sort of westernisation was just beginning to take root. But it was interesting because it was totally different to what I'd known previously. And yes, so, I really enjoyed it and got to know the East Germany students and got to hear about their experience. And then my second placement was in France, which is the north in the [area], sort of which was nice. But it wasn't so different to what I was used to, a lot of the English-speaking students got lumped together so we all didn't use languages much. Whereas, where I was in [town], there was hardly anybody who spoke English, so I had to practice to get by, and I made a really good friend while I was there and we lived together. [Storyteller 9]

After doing some translation work for a company, she moved on to working in administration for a trade union. This suited her better as she felt she was helping people who needed it.

There was always that sense of satisfaction, in what I was doing, because initially when I was working as a translator, it was just a private company. Their interest was sort of, just making money and that was the only thing. I had some sense of satisfaction from the jobs I was doing, although a lot of the work I've done was temp jobs. It was quite interesting working for the trade unions, sort of thing, so I got to find out about how they operate, and I felt I got to know people – members and representatives.

A lot of it would be people ringing up for advice on their sick pay [laughs] or maternity and that sort of thing, but it was interesting. I enjoyed it and I made some friends, who I am still in touch with, one or two of the friends I've made there. I worked for [council], in Children's Central Care. That was quite rewarding there, in that I was doing something good for the kids, even though I wasn't directly involved in that.

One of her brothers had experienced mental ill-health and died at a young age due to a reaction to the combination of medications he was taking. He was on a life support machine which eventually had to be turned off. There was an inquest into the death, which was extremely upsetting for our storyteller and her family.

After going through the trauma of her brother's death, the storyteller experienced a relationship breakup and had to move home. She then developed depression. She was not well enough to go to work and thought seriously about taking her own life.

The first thing was I'd come back from seeing a friend and I was very, very down and upset and I tried to take an overdose of tablets. I had paracetamols and ibuprofen – I didn't go through with it.

Our storyteller explained that the main reason she changed her mind about taking an overdose was the fact that her parents had already lost a child.

Yeah, yeah. I'm particularly close to my parents and in a way, that's what stopped me from – the main thing that stopped me from taking all the tablets that I had, because I was thinking about my parents and I couldn't put them through that again.

But, well, I sort of started to and stopped midway and I drank about half a bottle of vodka but at the same time... my previous manager phoned me, I think it was the following day, and I was struggling, I was still struggling in the morning and she called an ambulance that came and gave me a check over and she referred me to a, well helped me get a referral, to a counsellor who I saw and talked to for about four sessions [...].

Our storyteller was referred to the crisis team and onto Early Intervention in Psychosis services. She was off sick from work for some time and eventually quit her job as she needed time to deal with her illness.

Yes, that's it. They referred me to a crisis team and a couple of people came round and gave me an interview. My work, I think, referred me to a counsellor, so I had a few sessions with a counsellor, I didn't always... I missed a couple of sessions because I wasn't feeling well enough to go, she said I ought to have gone [laughs], but yes at the time, I didn't.

So, and then, yes, I think the crisis team (over-speaking) then I was sort of assigned to [support worker] [laughs]. And yes, my life changed for the better and I didn't have any idea about what... Well, initially and she was helping me with day-to-day things and encouraging me to go out more and going to college [laughs]. That was a big challenge, as well.

Our storyteller formed a close and trusting relationship with her support worker and brought her along to both interviews with us. The support worker had encouraged her to join creative writing and art classes. Although she was reluctant at first because of her shyness, she now regularly attends and gets a lot of satisfaction from them.

They dragged me to college, yes, and getting home and helping me enrol on the course, which I, yes, I totally enjoyed. I think I was, at first, I found it difficult being with other people at that moment, I was kind of, had all these sort of paranoias, I was really paranoid. [Laughs]. And I was getting paranoid about everything, but I kept going and yes, I enjoyed it. And I've been able to sort of explore my creative side, which I hadn't had the opportunity, or time to do previously. So, I've enjoyed doing that and meeting some of the people.

Although she found the social aspect of attending workshops difficult initially, she persevered and this has become easier. She now gets pleasure from meeting with the other people on the course.

Yes, I'm doing some drawing, which I used to like doing at school and I had to give it up at school because of the option system, but, yes, I've been looking... got into drawing and we've done some painting, as well. And it's a mixture of people, different levels of course, yes. So it's interesting to see, everybody's got different styles.

Art therapy and a creative writing workshop have helped her explore her past, enabling her to make some sense of it and come to terms with the trauma and upset she experienced.

I found the art therapy a useful way to express myself. It mainly focused on my past, I think it associated with my past, what I had been through rather than what I'm feeling now or in the future.

After being unwell, the storyteller described how being out in the open connects her to her childhood growing up in the country and helps her to find her spiritual side.

So I think sort of part of it was growing up in the countryside and now sort of since having depression, it's nice going... I like going out for walks in the park or such things, which is good for my mental health. And I've become more interested in the trees and also my spirituality, I sort of see it in different, slightly different way now.

Appreciating nature, the beauty of trees especially, she found she was looking more at the structures of various trees:

Yes. I think I've been appreciating trees more recently, also doing art as well. They've got some interesting structures, so I'll spend more time looking at the trees than I might at flowers and colourful things. And I got into doing some... got more interested in gardening, when I was living with my former partner and growing things, which I quite enjoyed.

Faith became important too. Being introduced to the church by a friend who had also experienced mental ill-health was helpful. She still attends the services and reads the bible.

I got into my faith, after I started becoming depressed, before I kind of... I was yes, didn't have any faith before, I could appreciate that sort of, how all spirituality benefited people and I went to... going to a village school, lots of them, I'd been to the local church, [...] I had some exposure to Christianity, as a child, but I wasn't really convinced then, I didn't really... and my parents didn't go to church, other than at Christmas, or [laughs] yes, or, for weddings and funerals that kind of thing. But, I'd got a friend, who'd for some time, she's become a born-again Christian, she'd been trying to encourage, influence me in that way, for some time, I didn't think she'd succeed, but she did in the end [laughs] and I think, yes, when I was really at my worst, I didn't think I had a future, and I was really anxious and I always not going out at all. I

got nervous of going out and some of the time I was staying with my friend and she'd also experienced depression, so she had some understanding and yes, she... I think I was more open to believing it, yes, I became more open to it, spirituality and I started... she

CREATIVITY IS A MAP BACK TO ONESELF

Dolly's perspective

“ Luckily, I discovered creativity such as writing and art, which helped me express difficult feelings. I wrote poems about loneliness that made me feel less lonely. I realised I was drawing myself a map that was leading me out of pain and back to myself again. It is the one thing that has consistently helped me in my life and mental health. I think I would still be lost without it. ”

persuaded me to join a fellowship with her friend and we were reading some of the bible and talking about it.

Finding faith in the church gave her hope for the future beyond depression and a sense of belonging. Her support worker encouraged her to keep a dream diary and a journal, which she says she writes in when feeling at her worst.

Thinking about some of the drawings I had done at home, I started off trying to draw some of my dreams and try and represent my depression, thinking about the dreams I have had.

It appears that the art and writing sessions have been a great help to this storyteller, keeping her motivated and helping her to express herself and examine her life. The church and her newfound faith give her a sense of belonging and help her to remain well.