Telling Your Story Effectively

The following six steps will help you craft your story in a succinct and powerful way. Each step includes examples. Make sure you include each step, but put things in your own words.

1. Introduce yourself
   - Share your full name and city/county/town. This helps your audience connect with you. Example: my name is Sharon Johnson and I am from Anytown, Virginia.
   - Let your audience know how you are affected by mental illness. This gives a “real face” to mental illness and prepares your audience to empathize with your story. Example: I am the mother of a son who lives with bipolar disorder.
   - Let your audience know why you are speaking or writing. Let your audience know what you want them to support (or oppose). Example: I am here to share my son’s story and to as for your support in preserving mental health services.

2. What happened?
   - What happened before you received the help you needed? Keep this very brief – think about the main highlights that you could share in 30 seconds. Example: Our family was in a state of panic and chaos for years. Andy went in and out of the hospital. He tried dozens of medications, and was even arrested once for being a public nuisance.

3. What helped?
   - Describe what has helped you/your loved one. Example: It took months to get him into stable, supportive housing where he could receive case management and psychosocial services.

4. How are you different today?
   - Share what is going right in your life, or how you are experiencing recovery. Example: Today Andy attends a peer support group at the local community services board, and was recently placed in a part-time job through the Department of Rehabilitative Services which enabled him to socialize and earn money for himself. He is working hard on his recovery and makes us all proud.

5. Talk about mental illness or mental health care and the hope of recovery.
   - This is a transition from your personal story to a message for your audience. Example: Andy’s challenge is more common than one might think: one in seventeen adults lives with a serious mental illness like bipolar disorder, major depression, or schizophrenia.

6. Make your ask.
   - Let your audience know how they can help. Say thank you. Example: We need your help to protect mental health services and to preserve the hope of recovery. Thank you.