

A group of about eight people are sitting in a circle around a bright campfire at night. The scene is set in a dark forest with trees visible in the background. The fire provides the main source of light, casting a warm glow on the people and the ground. The people are dressed in outdoor or casual clothing, and some are looking towards the fire while others look towards each other, suggesting a shared conversation or story-telling session.

# The Value of Sharing Peer Stories

Chris Kinsella – Peer Support Volunteer

# Hello! I'm Chris.

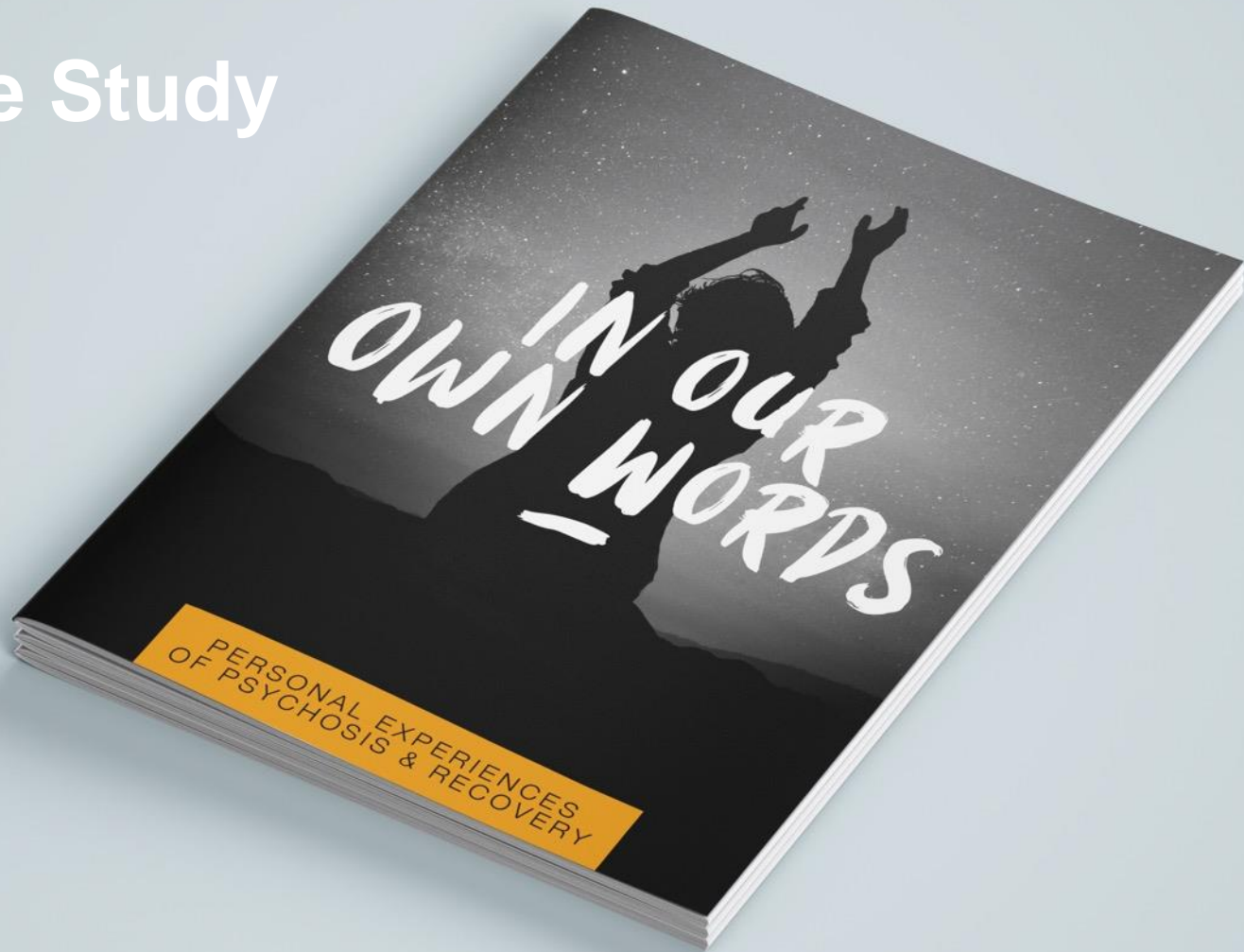
[uk.linkedin.com/in/chriskinsella](https://uk.linkedin.com/in/chriskinsella)

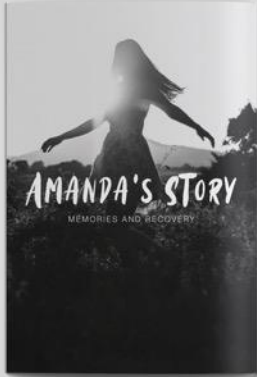
- **Creative Communications Consultant**
- **Recovered from a first episode psychotic break (2018).**
- **Peer Support Volunteer North Derbyshire Early Intervention Team**
- **Expert by Experience with PPN**

# This Presentation – Peer Stories

- Can peer experiences be useful to the PPN's communications?
- Can they be a more relatable way of providing understanding of services?
- When a client/peer talks about the healthcare positively, can this supplement a professional's position?
- Can peers help form a bridge to professionals?
- In a therapeutic relationship, if you only hear from one side – **you only get half the story.**

# Case Study





## AMANDA'S STORY

MEMORIES AND RECOVERY

My illness began in 2008 soon after the birth of my son. After a long and difficult labour, I was discharged from hospital feeling 'terrible' but immensely happy and energised. Once home, I felt almost 'superhuman', rushing around the house preparing bottles, cleaning, washing clothes etc all whilst not needing to eat or sleep. I soon began to feel completely overwhelmed by my immense feelings of happiness but I assumed along with my husband that this was normal behaviour for a first-time mum.

However, after hearing the devastating news about the death of a friend's baby a few days later, my mental state began to quickly deteriorate. I became convinced that my baby was going to die and was terrified that people were trying to take my baby from me. In order to save my baby, I believed that the universe was communicating to me through changes in the weather, voices in my head and via TV and radio.

Moments to be cherished such as late-night cuddles enjoying the warmth of my son in my arms were replaced with delusions, hallucinations and mania. Haunted by demons and visited by angels, I was frightened, elated, exhausted, overjoyed, successful and ecstatic all in equal measure. My mind continued to unravel in front of my family until I completely lost touch with all sense of reality. At this point it became clear that I was seriously ill and in need of urgent professional help.

I was eventually admitted to a specialist Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) where I was treated for Postpartum Psychosis and later diagnosed with



## MY MEMORY OF PSYCHOSIS

I'm at home with my husband and our three day old son when we receive some devastating news, a close friend has just given birth to a stillborn baby.

Then, my mind chatters in an instant, dark thoughts overwhelm me, the sickening realisation that my new born baby will die, I MUST save him. I look out of the nursery window, cherry blue sky turnsinky black, hail pours as tears fall down my cheeks. My thoughts are controlling the weather, I feel the universe communicate to me via the radio - 'Keep him alive! Keep him alive! Every song carries meaning, lyrics scream out at me 'baby don't leave me', 'baby I love you', always the words baby, baby, baby! Secret message just for me, I must write them down. Notes all over the house, a reminder to everyone to 'keep my baby alive'.

It's night time, I don't need sleep, too many thoughts are racing through my mind, voices inside my head start chattering to each other, a nurse, midwife and doctor discuss my state of mind, quietly and discreetly, they know I'm listening, but soon the voices in my head become louder, fighting for attention. Frustratingly I'm struggling to write down everything they say, words pour onto my page at lightning speed, I MUST document my thoughts, they are momentous, they will change the world, I am special.

I'm exhausted, when did I last sleep? Eat? Drink? I hear drumming in my head and a physical sensation, like a wave washing over me, I'm about to



## THE BRIGHTEST LIGHT

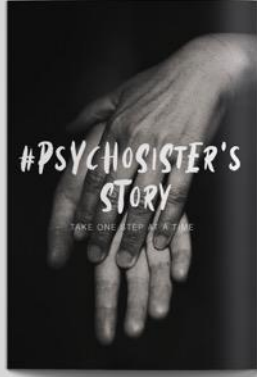
As morning broke the events took a different turn. The sun had risen and was shining brightly through the window. It revealed that the two eyes were, in fact, red lights - the kind they put on top of crates for aircraft safety. It was a revelation. It was not a pair of evil all-seeing eyes staring down at me. Maybe there was hope, and I could escape. A wave of relief swept through me. At this point, the sunlight surrounded me, I became pure light, and it became me. I am not a 'believer', but at this moment, I felt as if one with God.

The travel back home started well. I had escaped the heat and visited heaven, I was happily greeting people in the street and had an urge to give away money, of which my wife did not approve. At the very least, I thought of myself as an instant convert to Christianity but secretly harboured a hope that I might be the new messiah. But pride always comes before the fall.

## SECTIONING

The train ride back had started well, but once I had taken my seat, the carriage became a new prison. Each table of people became representative agents of international governments that were vying for my possession. I became hysterical and started verbally abusing my fellow passengers. At this point, my wife called for an ambulance to pick us up from the station. She found this decision intensely painful, she saw it as a betrayal. It was the only

'I became pure light and it became me'  
Pen and ink drawing by Chris



## #PSYCHOSISTER'S STORY

TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME

For anyone that may be feeling a little lost or hopeless - *As a Psychosis survivor I can say, it gets better!* My journey to recovery at times has felt insurmountable, clear and somewhat stagnant. Fast forward a year later and I'm back into the swing of things - Confident as ever and ready to take on life's next challenge.

Let us address the unmentioned stress and panic the global Coronavirus outbreak has had on us, including the heightened emotions of The 'Black Lives Matter' Movement. Whatever day, month or year you may be in, it is safe to say that we are looking at the world's most current affairs and the level of injustice floating in the air. Keeping up with worldwide events can be extremely exhausting.

On the brighter side, we continue to acknowledge the celebration of life, the daily thoughts and feelings we actively recognise and me to maintain being able to overcome our own individual battles. That in itself is an enormous accomplishment - So congratulations!

Remember that stress is inevitable. Take time to find 'Your own way' to manage this.

## IT ALL BEGINS HERE

At the beginning of 2020 during my last year of University, I had a single manic episode of psychosis. Surreal to say that I've spoken about it now so openly.

The whole notion of being taken to hospital to being transferred to a unit as an inpatient was an

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

North Derbyshire Early Intervention in Psychosis Service works with people aged 16-64 who experience psychosis for the first time. They may be experiencing hearing voices, changes in perceptions, increased feelings of suspicion, distressing beliefs and thoughts, or changes in behaviour such as becoming more isolated or less motivated.

It is a multi-disciplinary community-based mental health team including Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Nurses, Peer Support, Volunteers, Occupational Therapists, Family Therapists, and Support Workers.

The peer support volunteers who have made contributions to this booklet may be available to discuss their experiences of psychosis with other people using the Early Intervention in Psychosis Service.

For more information about the volunteers, you can speak to your Care Coordinator. To make a referral to the team call 0300 153 8601, this is a freephone number and open 9am to 5pm on weekdays (excluding bank holidays). Alternatively, contact your GP to discuss a referral with them.

*'Within the darkness and chaos there were moments of astounding beauty'*  
Mixed media painting by Amanda



## EMERGENCY SUPPORT

For urgent support, call your mental health team in office hours. Outside of office hours call your GP, they may be able to arrange a crisis assessment if appropriate.

Emergency 999 and ask for police or ambulance.

**NHS 111**  
(free from cell charges, 24 hours)

## OTHER SUPPORT AVAILABLE

Derbyshire Mental Health Support Line 0800 018 0077  
(Open 24 hours a day, for all Derbyshire residents)

Sandwell 0300 304 7000  
(Out of hours support 1pm-10pm)

Southwestern 018 833  
Email: [jo@southwestern.org](mailto:jo@southwestern.org)  
(free from cell charges, 24 hours)

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) for men  
0800 018 0181  
1pm - midnight

Pages for people under 16 0800 018 0181  
SMS: 09783 206997  
(free - 10pm)

# In Our Own Words - Objectives

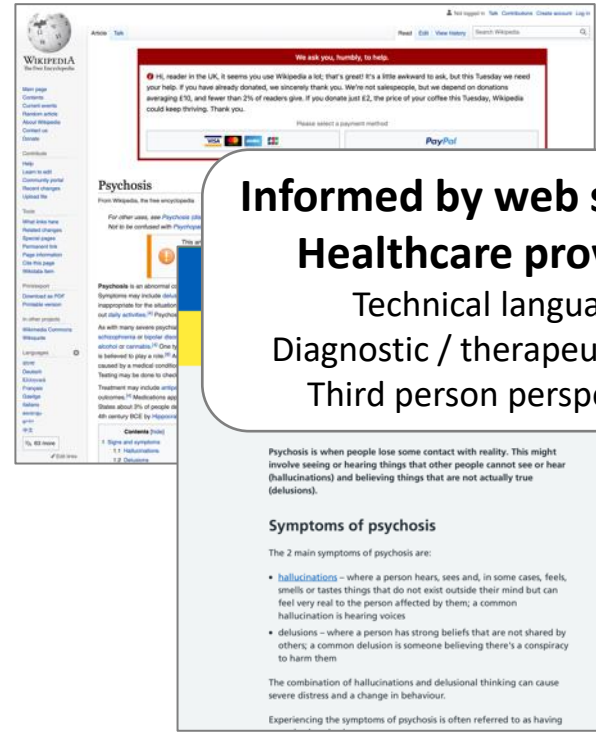
Insight: **First onset psychosis is a very scary and strange experience and there is very little 'relatable' information from a first hand perspective.**

- **Provide greater support to clients and careers at first onset.** Especially in counteracting the initial feelings of isolation and loss of hope.
- **Encourage more engagement** with peer support and 'open a door' to wider services.

# Mental Health – Perceptions



**Shaped by movies and TV**  
Confusion between conditions  
Fear of consequences  
Life sentence



**Informed by web search /  
Healthcare provider**  
Technical language  
Diagnostic / therapeutic onus  
Third person perspective



Psychosis is when people lose some contact with reality. This might involve seeing or hearing things that other people cannot see or hear (hallucinations) and believing things that are not actually true (delusions).

**Symptoms of psychosis**

The 2 main symptoms of psychosis are:

- **hallucinations** – where a person hears, sees and, in some cases, feels, smells or tastes things that do not exist outside their mind but can feel very real to the person affected by them; a common hallucination is hearing voices
- **delusions** – where a person has strong beliefs that are not shared by others; a common delusion is someone believing there's a conspiracy to harm them

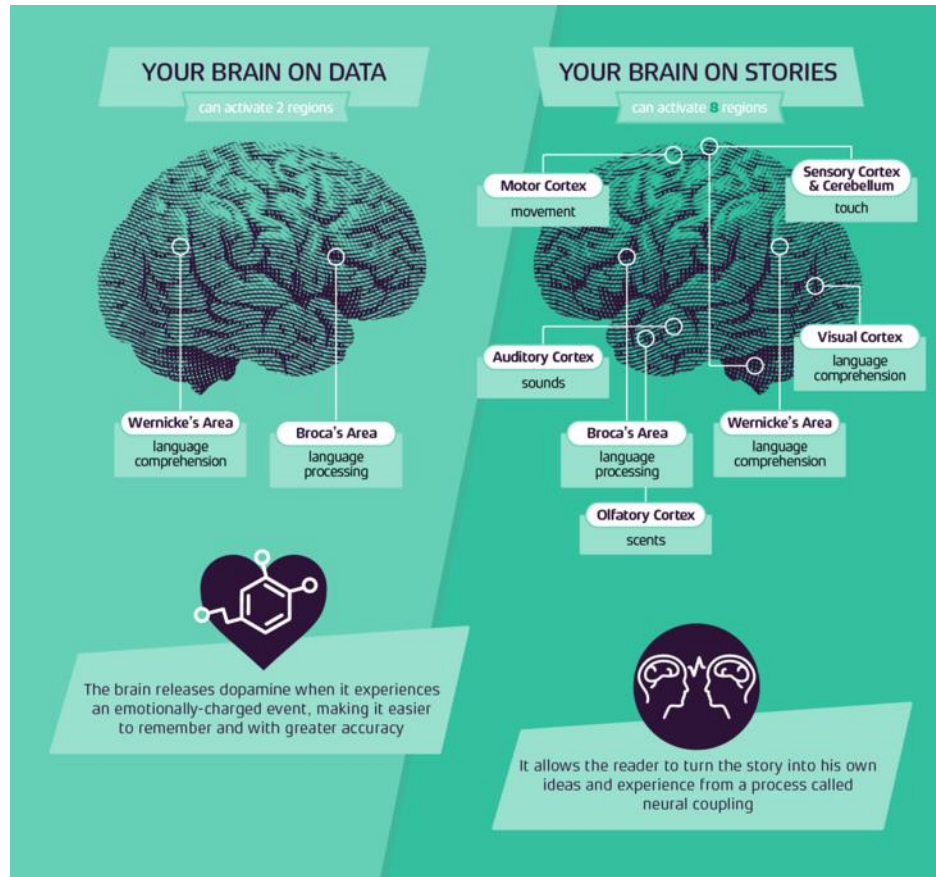
The combination of hallucinations and delusional thinking can cause severe distress and a change in behaviour.

Experiencing the symptoms of psychosis is often referred to as having

**Crisis Point: Immense need for greater information, quickly...**

# We borrowed some techniques from marketing communications


## #1 Storytelling



- Using narratives increases trust and action
- Humanises interactions
- **Increases emotional understanding and memory.**

# We borrowed some techniques from marketing

## #2 Peer Review



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Colour Name: **Black**

Roll over image to zoom in



VIDEO



L.King

★★★★★ **very attractive, easy to clean**

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 14 October 2018

Colour Name: Black | Style Name: Two Slice | **Verified Purchase**

I love this toaster, it's very sleek, easy to clean. Space for extra thick slices of toast. Very good quality for the Price.

14 people found this helpful

Helpful Report abuse

- Peer review is the most trusted form of communications for products or services
- Basically, clients saying honest, positive, and deserved things about you **increases trust massively.**

# Stories and Information

Mental health professionals from the crisis team arrive at the house, trying to convince me that I'm mad and need help. I'm not fooled, I know they are there to take my baby away. My husband is on their side but I'm not scared, I know how to outsmart them all, they'll never take my son from me. They are like puppets in a play and I'm the puppeteer, my power over them is thrilling. I'm always one step ahead, the universe is on my side and I feel its abundant energy fuelling me. I don't need sleep, food or drink to sustain me, I am superhuman.

Each session lasted an hour, sometimes longer. It was like putting a giant jigsaw puzzle together - sometimes you put down a piece, or form a part, then eventually you put the parts together to create the whole picture. Each session needed a day or two to process. As time went on, I could feel myself reforming, often accompanied by feelings of relief and happiness. But this reforming was not back to my previous self - it was a better, healthier and more truthful version of me.

- delusions – where a person has strong beliefs that are not shared by others; a common delusion is someone believing there's a conspiracy to harm them

[Cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#) for psychosis is based on an understanding of how people make sense of their experiences and why some people become distressed by them.

A CBT therapist may encourage you to consider different ways of understanding what's happening to you. The aim is to help you achieve goals that are meaningful and important to you, such as reducing your distress, returning to work, education or training, or regaining a sense of control.

# Results

- Clients have been more **responsive** to meeting Peer Support volunteers (which in turn can improve outcomes)
- **Improved outlook** in ability to make progress
- More **likely** to embark on services and courses of positive action
- Better **understanding** of healing processes and therapy
- **Didn't cost anything!**
  
- **Where are we now:** We are constantly expanding the booklet, have commitment to funding, plus looking at how we could use video interviews.

# Q+A

- Could peers (EBEs) have a place beyond advisory input?
- Can peer stories help improve education and understanding?
- Can seeing both sides of the therapeutic relationship increase trust and beliefs in positive outcomes?