Writing Through Lived Experience:

How Writing Can Help You on Your Mental Health Journey
What We Will Share Today

- Why write?
- Writing on the brain
- Defeating self-stigma in the MH journey
- Developing your writing practice
- Writing tips and strategies
Why write?
“I write because I don’t know what I think until I read what I say.”

– Flannery O’Connor
Everyone tells a story about themselves inside their own head. Always. All the time. That story makes you what you are. We build ourselves out of that story.
Your Brain on Writing
How Does Writing Affect Your Brain?

“. . . writing can serve as a calming, meditative tool. Stream of conscious writing exercises, in particular, have been identified as helpful stress coping methods. Keeping a journal or trying out free-writing exercises, can drastically reduce your levels of stress.” - NeuroRelay

http://neurorelay.com/2013/08/07/how-does-writing-affect-your-brain
HOW STORYTELLING AFFECTS THE BRAIN

NEURAL COUPLING
A story activates parts in the brain that allows the listener to turn the story into their own ideas and experience thanks to a process called neural coupling.

DOPAMINE
The brain releases dopamine into the system when it experiences an emotionally charged event, making it easier to remember and with greater accuracy.

MIRRORING
Listeners will not only experience the similar brain activity to each other, but also to the speaker.

CORTEX ACTIVITY
When processing facts, two areas of the brain are activated (Broca’s and Wernicke’s area). A well-told story can engage many additional areas, including the motor cortex, sensory cortex and frontal cortex.

Infographic highlighting the effectiveness of using ‘Whiteboard Animation’ for storytelling @stayingaliveuk - www.stayingaliveuk.com
What We Have Learned from *Write On!*
people who live with trauma + healing through writing, storytelling and community = new beginnings

past + present = future
“Interventions targeting self-stigmatizing beliefs can potentially break the chain of negative events. The Write On! Workshop is one such intervention.”
“Write On! gave me the confidence to write without judgement. It taught me how to be a better public speaker and performer. It gave me a beautiful support system, and helped me heal old wounds. After years of putting myself down, Write On! helped me reconnect with my love for writing. It has helped me to find my voice, and for that, I will be forever grateful.” - Lauren

For more info, go to: mhconn.org/writeon
“Now I’m ready to let the truth fly.”
- *Write On!* participant
Setting Up and Maintaining Your Writing Practice
Writing is a Muscle

- Make a realistic commitment
- Choose a time of day that works
- Forgive yourself if you miss a day
Writing Tips and Strategies
All the Feels

Write for 3 minutes about how you feel, without stopping.

“Today I feel
__________”
Would You Rather . . .

. . . live in fear or in debt?
. . . spend the day surfing in the ocean or surfing the web?
Let it Out

Set the timer and start writing. Don’t edit or worry about having an idea. Just write.
Write A Letter

Need to forgive someone? Angry or hurt? Write a letter. The point is to write it, not mail it.
Get Perspective

Write a recap of an event to a friend. Now do it again to a parent. Now do it again to your boss . . .
Let’s take some time to write . . .
“I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn.”

– Anne Frank
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