

PART 4: THE PRESENTATION

After all the hard work you've put into getting people together, planning and organizing, you're ready to think about the presentation itself. This section focuses on ways of making sure that the presentations your group has organized are effective and that everyone benefits from his or her participation.

4.1 WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT EFFECTIVE AWARENESS PRESENTATIONS?

Focusing on the experiences of people with mental illness and their families

In each of the three communities where the program took place, a slightly different presentation format was used. Some used a video to introduce speakers and others used a variety of overheads and activities to complement the speakers. Others included only a brief introduction and devoted the rest of the session to the presenters.

After the presentations had taken place, and formal and informal assessments were conducted, students, presenters and organizers agreed that the most valuable component was the speaker's stories. People consistently recommended that, given the limited time, the speakers should be given priority over the other components of the presentation. This would ensure the presenters had enough time to

In Kingston, each presentation turned out slightly different because there were a variety of speakers and students, and different school settings. The format, however, was fairly consistent —

people who had experienced mental illness and family members told their stories, then the floor was opened to questions from the students.

tell their stories and would allow enough time to address students' questions.

Preparation and follow-up activities

If the presentation is devoted almost entirely to the speakers, time needs to be spent preparing students for the presentation. The accompanying guide, *Teacher's Resource*, contains examples of concrete activities that teachers can use before and after the presentation.

4.2 GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL PRESENTATIONS

In this section, we look at ways of ensuring an effective presentation by outlining the tasks that should be accomplished before, during and after the presentation. There are two parts: one for organizers and one for presenters. The section for teachers is located in the accompanying guide, *Teacher's Resource*.

The sections can be photocopied and distributed to the appropriate people to help them prepare for, and carry out, an effective presentation.

FOR ORGANIZERS

Organizers have a big job. They must keep on top of the details and logistics of the presentation, as well as make sure it goes smoothly. They act as the liaison between the schools, teachers and presenters, and as the ongoing contacts for the program.

The following is a list of tips and recommendations for organizers that we gathered from those who planned and delivered presentations in their own communities.

Tailoring the presentation

It is important to tailor the presentation to your audience. Using the School Information Survey

in the previous chapter will help you make sure the presentation is relevant to the audience. It will also help your presenters prepare for specific questions and concerns that may come up. Keep in mind the knowledge and maturity level of your audience.

Supporting the presenters

Presenters need support in preparing their presentations. Members of the organizing group can help by acting as an audience during rehearsals, providing suggestions and feedback that will help focus presenters' stories. The information gathered about the specific context of the school will help the presenters tailor their stories.

In Hamilton, several of the presenters were quite young and didn't have a great deal of experience with public speaking. The group helped the presenters structure their stories and provided information on general presentation skills. The presenters then had a practice run at telling their stories, with a few members of the coalition participating by offering support, feedback and guidance.

In Kingston, the representative from Mood Disorders Association used her connections to arrange for speakers, both mental health professionals and people who had experienced mental illness. A number of people agreed to act as backup speakers, which proved very helpful when, on the day of the presentation, one of the scheduled speakers was not able to participate.

Preparing for the unexpected

Have backup speakers, just in case one of your scheduled speakers can't make it.

Organizing the logistics

The ideal number of presenters per day is two or three, but four can also work well, depending on how much time you have. Each presenter should be given at least 10 minutes to tell his or her story and you should allow five minutes or so between presenters so students can ask questions.

Leave enough time at the end of the presentation for student's questions — at least 15 minutes. Some students may feel more at ease asking questions directly to the presenters, without having their question heard by the whole group. Try to provide this opportunity by ensuring there are at least 10 minutes of informal time at the end of the question-and-answer period.

The physical set-up of the room is quite important. Make sure the presenters feel comfortable and that students will be able to hear and see them well. Make sure the space is big enough so people won't feel confined, but small enough so that a sense of intimacy is possible.

Sample timeline for organizers

Before

Two months before:

- Make sure there are several back-up presenters in case a scheduled presenter is unable to take part.

- Provide support to presenters and help them develop their stories. Remind them to structure their story chronologically and to make their presentation relevant to a youth audience.
- Check in with teachers to make sure they have scheduled the preparatory learning activities and to see if they have any further resource needs.
- Remind teachers of the importance of having a school guidance counsellor or social worker attend the presentation to follow up on students' concerns (should any arise during the presentation) — or arrange to have a mental health professional from the coalition available to provide appropriate support and follow-up.

One month before:

- Prepare a list of local mental health resources.
- Collect resources for an information display table at the presentation.

Two weeks before:

- Phone presenters to remind them of the date and time of the presentation, and to see how their presentation is coming along.
- Ask presenters if they would be interested in, or available for, a debriefing session after the presentation. If so, make necessary arrangements.

One week before:

- Contact the teacher who will be hosting the presentation and go over any last-minute concerns.
- Make sure there is space available to have a debriefing meeting after the presentation.
- Co-ordinate transportation needs of the presenters.

One day before:

- Remind presenters of the time and location of the presentation, and where in the school they will meet beforehand.

The day of

- Arrive an hour early to make sure the room is set up properly.

During:

- Introduce the program, the speakers and the committee members who are present.
- Make sure things are running on schedule.
- Facilitate the question-and-answer period.

After

- Follow-up with teachers.
- Collect evaluation results.
- Write thank-you letters or cards to teachers and school contacts.

FOR PRESENTERS

People who have experienced mental illness are the key members of the group. Your input will be extremely valuable throughout the process of developing and implementing the program, not just during the presentations. Your experience will help the group think about issues, such as the kind of language that should be used when talking about mental illness and the people who are affected by it; the role mental health professionals should play in the presentation; and the amount of time given to different aspects of the presentation.

The following is a list of tips and recommendations for presenters. The ideas and suggestions come from a range of individuals who have spoken to different audiences about their experience with having a mental illness.

Thinking about your audience

As you plan your presentation, think about your audience. How old are they? What do you know about their interests and concerns? Has anything happened at their school, or within the community, that will affect how they react to a discussion of mental health and mental illness? (The organizers of the presentation will be able to give you some of this information. In their meetings with the school, they will have gathered background information about the students, the school and issues that may be of concern.)

Think back to your own experiences as a teenager. What was it like for you when you were their age? What was going on for you socially, emotionally, academically and in your family? Were there any indications that you were developing a mental illness at that time? Providing your young audience with examples and experiences they can relate to will help them get the most out of your presentation.

Considering your messages

What kind of messages do you want your audience to take away from your presentation? In a typical presentation, three or four individuals will share their stories about their experience with mental illness and stigma. Time will be limited — you may want to think about emphasizing two or three points and tying these to your individual experiences.

Talk about your experiences but recognize that some issues need to be discussed carefully to

avoid unintentionally giving students information that may instruct them on how to carry out harmful behaviours. For example, avoid giving detailed information about suicidal feelings or attempts. If you talk about the experience of eating disorders, exclude specific information on how purging and other weight-loss strategies are carried out.

Become familiar with the stories of the other presenters. This will help you avoid repetition and provide opportunities for you to support one another and to share your perspectives on common experiences.

Make your presentation informative. Incorporate a few relevant statistics or facts about mental illness into your presentation; it will ground your experience within a broader context. Do this in a way that will grab the attention of your audience.

Planning what you want to say

Think about what, and how much, you want to share with the audience. It is up to you what you include and what you leave out. If someone in the audience asks you a question about something you are uncomfortable discussing, it is acceptable to say you do not want to talk about that issue, or that you prefer not to answer the question. Rehearse ways of saying no.

A good way to get going on your presentation is to make a few notes. Think about the experience you have had with mental illness and try to organize the information chronologically. When did you first begin experiencing symptoms of mental illness? How old were you at the time? What else was going on for you at that time socially, emotionally, with your family? How did you feel about what was happening to you? How and where did you get help? Was the treatment regime prescribed for you a “fit” from the beginning, or did you try different things at different times? How did the stigma associated with mental illness affect you?

Involving others

After you have made a few notes, get input from other people. Tell your story, using your notes as a guideline. Have someone time you and provide feedback on the content.

You may find it worthwhile to get feedback from family and friends. There may be important things about your experience you have left out, or perspectives on situations that are different from yours and valuable to include.

A speaker associated with the Kingston awareness program illustrated the incidence of schizophrenia in the general population in the following way. He began his presentation by asking how many students were in the school. Then, using the statistic that one in 100 people may develop schizophrenia, he applied this formula to the population of the school and came up with an estimate of how many of their peers might eventually develop schizophrenia. This strategy helped students make the connection between their own experience and a statistic about mental illness.

Now it is time to write down what you are going to say in more detail. If you are a comfortable speaker, write down the main points of your story on an index card to use as a reference during your presentation. If you are not comfortable with public speaking, you may feel more comfortable with a script.

Sample timeline for presenters

Before

Two months before:

- Confirm your participation in the awareness presentation.
- Confirm the location of the presentation, the date and the audience. Also confirm when and where you should meet the other presenters and whether there will be a meeting to debrief afterwards.
- Begin developing your presentation.
- Meet with the other presenters and get to know what they will be talking about.
- Attend a planning committee meeting. At this meeting, you will provide input on issues that are important to you, such as:
 - the content of the presentation
 - the role mental health professionals, consumers and family members will play in the presentation
 - how the room will be set up
 - other issues that are important to you.

One month before:

- Make arrangements for travel to and from the presentation.
- Complete your presentation notes and get input from friends, family and others.
- Begin rehearsing your presentation.

One week before:

- Call the main contact on the planning committee to check for changes to the location, start time, and expectations around your presentation.

One day before:

- Double check arrangements with the main contact on the planning committee.
- Ask for a wake-up call, if necessary, the day of the presentation.

During

- Remember that you don't have to answer any questions that you don't feel comfortable with.

After

- Reconnect with the group to share ideas about how the presentation went, and what to change for next time.
- Stay in touch with the group — group members can be a good source of support for yourself and others.

TOOLS

- Sample Introduction
- Key Questions for Structuring Presentations

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION

(From the Kingston program)

“Hello everyone and welcome to our panel on mental illness. The purpose of our panel is to clear up some of the misconceptions and myths we have about people with mental illness.

There are many falsehoods about those of us who suffer from a mental illness. First of all, any mental illness is a physical illness in the sense that it is the brain, a part of our body, which is not working properly.

Other myths that are common in our society are that people with mental illness tend to be violent, that poor parenting causes schizophrenia, that mental illness is contagious, and that all homeless people are mentally ill.

In Ontario, we tend to think of the mentally ill as marginalized people who cannot hold jobs or contribute to society. I suffer from depression and an anxiety disorder, but with medication and therapy, I have successfully completed a 30-year teaching career, and have helped raise and put three children through university.

You may not realize it, but many famous people throughout history have suffered from various mental illnesses: Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Kurt Cobain, Charles Schultz and Robin Williams— just to name a few. These people have certainly contributed to and enriched our society.

Today we are participating in a program sponsored jointly by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Canadian Mental Health Association, and the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario. As I mentioned, the purpose of the panel is to clear up some of the falsehoods regarding people who have mental illness. To do this we will hear the stories of two people this morning — one who has clinical depression and one who has schizophrenia. Tomorrow we will hear from three more people — one who has bipolar disorder, one who has an eating disorder, and one person who will tell us what it is like to live with a family member who is mentally ill.

Presenters will take about 15 minutes to tell their story. Following each story we will have a five-minute question-and-answer period. If there is time at the end, we can hopefully have a general question and answer period.

At this time I would like to introduce our first speaker.”

KEY QUESTIONS FOR STRUCTURING PRESENTATIONS

For people who have experienced mental illness

- How old were you when you first experienced symptoms of mental illness?
- What was your life like before the onset of your symptoms of mental illness?
- What was your experience when you had your first signs of an illness?
- How did the people around you react to your illness? Family, friends, co-workers, students...
- What kind of support did you find most helpful?
- What has been your experience with stigma?
- What are your current goals, or achievements or challenges?

Add other questions as appropriate.

For family members

- How old was your family member when he or she first experienced symptoms of mental illness?
- What was life like with (family member) before the onset of the symptoms of mental illness?
- What was your experience when (family member) showed the first signs of illness?
- How did the people around you react to (family member's) illness? Family, friends, co-workers, students...
- What kind of support did you find most helpful?
- What has been your experience with stigma?
- What is life with (family member) like now?

Add other questions where appropriate.