

BRIDGING HEARTS

Building Self-Awareness & Empathy Through Personal Stories

Noemi Beck, Clinical Director

Storytelling is a form of communication that provides personal information about a person's life including memories from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Storytelling allows people to have a better understanding of one's life by grabbing others' attention, create empathy and allow others to have a different perspective (Social Mobility Commission, 2024). Storytelling can also lead to an increased inclusion, especially in the population of people with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (IDD). People with IDD often feel they are not being listened to, understood, and included in activities and decision making that are impacting their overall daily living/functioning (Lifshitz & Shahar, 2022). This study aims to explore the narratives of people with IDD and mental health diagnosis. We are predicting that the person narrating their stories will have a cleared self-identity, an increased understanding of their diagnosis and have a better sense of feeling included. We are also predicting that after hearing the narratives, system members will have an increased understanding of the person which may lead to empathy, inclusion and having a different, more positive perspective of the person. 14 START recipients participated in the project. Participants were asked to complete a two-question survey to gain understanding of how they feel providers understand or don't the impact of diagnosis on their lives. After the survey, participants were asked if they would like to create a personal story and share it with their system members. The last phase of the project involves meeting with system members to share their personal stories.



“Having a personal story will most definitely help. Someone who is going through difficulties, wants to be seen and understood better.”

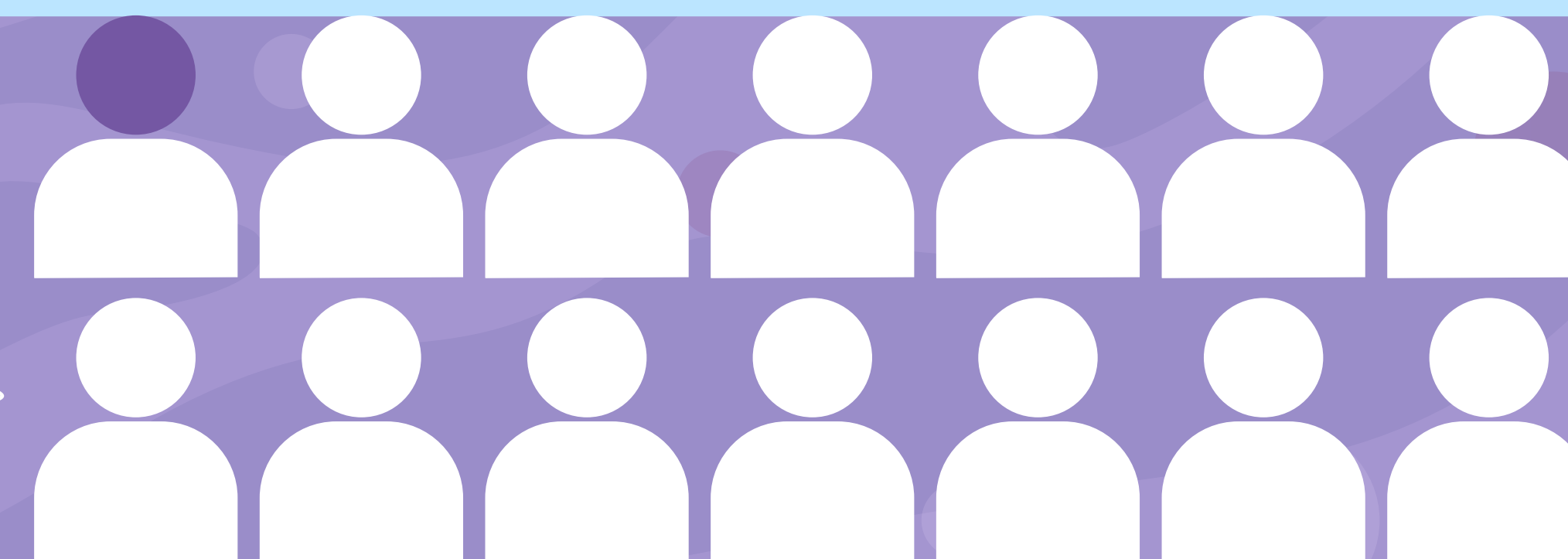
“I don't feel like they understand certain parts of my disability. Looking at physical appearance not mental needs, not capable of a lot. No one is listening. No one wants to care or help. Causes anxiety and want to give up.”

“No, I don't believe people understand how much I missed out of life due to my diagnosis of Autism.”

THERE ARE 14 PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

Two questions asked:

1. Do you feel your providers understand the impact your diagnosis had on your life? **Yes or No**
2. Do you think that if a personal story is shared it would help them have a better understanding of the impact of your diagnosis on your life? **Yes or No**



Results:

Question 1: 6 answered yes, 8 answered no



FIGURE 1

Question 2: 10 answered yes, 0 answered no, 4 answered not sure



FIGURE 2

Results:

Participants for the project were current START recipients through the ALTA CA START program in Sacramento Ca. We predicted that most if not all participants may feel that system members/providers don't have a good understanding of the impact of diagnosis on their overall wellbeing. As seen in Figure 1, 8 out of the 14 participants felt that system members don't have a good understanding. Participants also were asked if they believe that having a personal story would help increasing understanding and empathy and 10 out of the 14 participants reported yes, 4 reported they were unsure. Throughout the development of the personal stories, participants reported having strong emotions while creating the story, and an increase in self-awareness as well as acceptance.

Next Steps:

1. Complete the personal stories for all recipients who wish to have one completed
2. Organize a meeting between the participant and their chosen provider (s) to share their stories.
3. Utilize the FEIS/PEIS to see how satisfaction with mental health services changes after the personal story has changed.

References:

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