

# Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month 2022

## "In My Own Words"



Psychosocial Disability (PD) Awareness Month is celebrated annually in July. For 2022 we are running the theme "In My Own Words", focusing on self-advocacy and storytelling to amplify the voices of mental health care users, with the aim of highlighting the need for inclusion, acceptance and reducing stigma.

### Self-Advocacy

The aim of self-advocacy is for persons with PD to decide what their needs and wants are and how they would like to implement an advocacy policy or plan.

#### Layers of self-advocacy:

- **Personal:** be assertive, practice self-care and know your therapy and medication needs
- **Community:** includes working with other advocacy groups and developing good relationships
- **Political:** vote for candidates and representatives who are conscious of your needs

### Stigma

Whilst people may be accepting of the medical diagnosis of a mental health disorder, many people still have a negative view of persons who are diagnosed with a mental illness. Stigma is one of the main barriers faced by persons with PD today.

#### Harmful effects of stigma:

- Reluctance to seek help or treatment
- Social isolation
- Lack of understanding by family, friends, co-workers, or others
- Fewer opportunities for work, school or social activities

### Storytelling

Storytelling can empower individuals and communities by recognising their experiences and expertise and promoting their sense of empowerment. It has become an important advocacy technique when it comes to breaking stigma.

#### Effective storytelling:

To ensure a story is effective, one can follow a few crucial steps including: getting informed consent from the person sharing their story; collaborating with communities to find storytellers and remembering to craft an engaging story to keep your audiences captivated.



### Our Call-To-Action

- We are calling for the South African government to refresh the Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan in collaboration with mental health care users.
- We call for meaningful commitment from government to listen to the stories of persons with PD and to learn exactly how their needs should be met.
- We call on organisations working with persons with PD to purposefully commit to instituting storytelling as a tool for effective advocacy.