

Schwartz Awards 2021
Alder Hey Children's Hospital
Most Powerful *Team Time* (Trust Board) – October 2020

Following a presentation to Alder Hey's Trust Board of pilot *Team Time* data, members were impressed with the feedback and results of the storytelling intervention. The facilitators of *Team Time* were keen to get the Board to invest in training more facilitators to upscale storytelling across the Trust. So that the holders of the Trust purse strings could 'try-before-they-buy', a trilogy of *Team Time* sessions were offered to Trust Board members, comprising of Executive and Non-Executive Directors.

Inspired by the first written comment made after the break on a previous agenda item during the same meeting, a *Team Time* theme was chosen: "I'd really appreciate a follow-up on this in Oct/ Nov in terms of **actions [not words]** and decisions that we can collectively sign up to; this is what we are going to do, this is what is going to be different..."

Two weeks later, one of the very driven members of the senior leadership team who wrote that comment was being prepped to be a storyteller at the inaugural Trust Board *Team Time* session themed, 'More Than Words'. By his own admission, this particular staff member had a reputation of being quite critical and authoritarian when he wanted things to be done. However, this normally straight-talking executive was a very different man when it came to sharing his own story: a perspiring, bag of nerves to be more precise.

His story sought to explain his core values of hard work and achieving one's goals. He wove in some inspirational quotes about actions speaking louder than words. He went on to illustrate this with personal examples from his life. He recalled being a university student when his younger cousin was a paediatric leukaemia patient in Leeds. He recalled with detail the beloved Spiderman toys and lego pieces these oncology nurses bought for his terminally-ill cousin, and the poignancy of them attending the funeral with those same toys as a show of support for the bereaved family. Here, the storyteller explained, lay the reason and inner determination to make sure that paediatric oncology services he later went on to be involved with in his career were the best that they could be.

Punctuated with tears and sniffles and muffled, frequent apologies for 'not holding it together', this steely senior leader showed his vulnerability in recalling a painful but life-changing memory in front of his type-A personality executive colleagues for the very first time.

'Is it possible to be too emotional about someone dying?', asked one of the senior leaders rhetorically. 'Absolutely not', she assured him with tears in her own eyes. 'Thank you for your bravery in sharing your story.' Another Executive Director, a long-standing colleague of the storyteller, was too choked up to speak. He chose to write in the chat box: 'Do we talk enough about knowing each other, what makes us tick, what matters, why we do what we do, and how we do them? Your story challenged my thinking about whether I/we get each other's purpose, what stresses us, what energizes us. I feel guilty hearing your story as to whether I/we create time for this. It matters.'

The ripples of the story were felt throughout the Executive Team for days after the session. The storyteller E-mailed the facilitators of the session within the week to report that "it was a real privilege to share my story...and I think it helped bring colleagues together and understand one another more." The power of this deeply personal story thawed the historic professional defences built up between members of the senior leadership team over time, and quickly made colleagues appear human to each other. Compassionate leadership starts with leaders being compassionate to each other. This powerful inaugural session kick-started this change.

Schwartz Awards 2021
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Most Powerful *Team Time* (Emergency Department) – February 2021

The exhaustion of the third lockdown was palpable. Like marathon runners, Emergency Department staff were 'hitting the wall'. How could they let off steam? How could they look after themselves during these restricted times? The departmental senior staff felt it was time for an intervention, a boost, a pick-me-up. It came in the form of a week dedicated to compassion: *Kindness Week*. Perpetuating the Emergency Department's tradition of choosing song titles to reflect *Team Time* themes, 'Just Be Good To Me' from the 1980s was advertised for the Friday afternoon *Team Time* session as part of Kindness Week.

Facilitators took a gamble with picking one of the storytellers for Kindness Week. An Emergency Nurse Practitioner who had recently returned to work (still on phased return) following a long period off work. During the pandemic she had been sectioned under the Mental Health Act and hospitalized. With support and encouragement from senior staff, friends, and her colleagues she agreed to give a warts-and-all story about her recent struggles with mental health. She was initially reluctant to reveal the 'dark details' fearing that she would upset the audience. She eventually agreed to share her true feelings as part of her story.

And share she did. There she was, the most bubbly nurse practitioner in the department talking about her recollection of confessing to a colleague that she couldn't face assessing patients anymore. She described the agitation and adrenaline rush of anxiety she felt when driving to the river, not caring at all about her children while she planned her own suicide. The fog of confusion was compelling, but she managed to contact her mental health worker who managed to find her in the car before any suicidal thoughts were enacted. Her descriptions of 'falling into the depths of the well' and the overwhelming feeling of not being able to clamber out of the 'dark pit of hopelessness' pervaded for weeks during her hospital admission.

Like a tortured gladiator, she spoke valiantly while choking back tears sharing her historical stories of the shame and guilt she felt as someone who suffered with regular mental health flare-ups. 'The damage of stigma' she reported was something she struggled with in over a decade of working in the same department, citing behaviours of staff members that ostracized and excluded her. But then the sun came out. Her shining message that it was the kindness of others that motivated and encouraged her to self-care poured oil over troubled waters. How difficult it was to come to that conclusion, she lamented, when the shame of the stigma of her mental health had consumed her and her conflicted feelings of self-worth.

What happened during the round was quite the domino effect. One doctor started sharing her own periods of suicidal thoughts that dotted her training. One Band 5 nurse shared a similar story of her challenges with bi-polar disorder. A receptionist talked about the support she received from Trust psychological support. Suddenly, the discussion had normalized mental health. It was OK not to be OK. There was no shame in being mentally unwell. The participants celebrated the slogan that the kindness of others empowers us to help ourselves. There were tears, messages commending bravery, with lashings of support and love for the storyteller. She was bathed in the compassion of her colleagues, and was overwhelmed by their response. 'It feels like another step towards normality' she said during her debrief. 'No need now to keep that side hidden.' 'I feel a lot lighter now that I have said it', visibly relieved.

But it didn't stop there. The Departmental Facebook page news feed featured an article on mental health in the workplace. Participants from *Team Time* carried on the conversation on the Facebook page, with no fear or shame discussing suffering with mental health problems. More and more staff joined in. That story was more than cathartic for the storyteller. It sparked a departmental social movement on reducing the stigma of mental health amongst our staff.

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Most Powerful Schwartz Round (online – whole Trust) – December 2020

The seismic shock of the events in the United States brought the Black Lives Matter movement to global attention. The national press had recurrent themes about how the pandemic is widening the socio-economic gap. There was a popular meme doing the rounds: 'we may not be in the same boat, but we are all in the same storm'. An online Trust-wide Schwartz Round titled 'Are We All In This Together?' was proposed on the theme of inclusion and diversity.

A senior nurse who arrived in Liverpool as a student from Trinidad when the Beatles were still in the charts shared a hard-hitting story of exclusion early in her nursing training and career. Always being made to do the most unpleasant of nursing jobs (sluice cleaning) compared to her white colleagues, being allocated to work shifts during nursing nights out, study leave being declined because 'those courses are not necessary for you', and being ignored by work colleagues when seen in the supermarket or shops when not in uniform. She declared that it took a very long time for her to feel accepted as an equal nurse. However, she also said that it has taken 50 years for someone to ask her the direct question of whether she had ever suffered racial discrimination in the NHS. 'Ask yourselves – have any of you got a non-white work colleague? Have you treated them any differently from people who look like you?' Her questions were blunt. The response: a palpable silence of reflection.

A senior facilities manager highlighted a different type of discrimination: the divisions of status. How senior consultants and executives seem to rule with a sense of entitlement to convenient car parking spaces, how domestics are having to be consoled by their line managers after being treated and spoken to in derogatory tones akin to a slave and their master, and the digital poverty and exclusion of portering staff during the massive shift into online working during the pandemic. This passionate manager devoted to the wellbeing of his staff gave a strong message to his audience. Our support staff are human. Why is it that a domestic is treated like a faceless entity? Why is a porter just a uniformed number? For a friendly city like Liverpool, the hierarchy and treatment of support staff could often be out of character for a Trust that has been recognized as outstanding in the domain of 'caring'. His story gave a strong message of asking us to take a long hard look at how we treat others, especially staff.

We all get a heart-sink if someone complains about us in writing. But when the complaint makes allegations that a parent and their patient child were treated differently because of their religion, it adds a whole other layer of complexity and guilt. A senior nurse talked us through the rollercoaster of emotions when a complaint alleged she discriminated against a family because they wore a headscarf/were of Islamic faith. This storyteller talked about sadness, guilt, anger, indignation. But the strong undercurrent to all her emotions, was why? Why did this parent feel that her treatment was motivated by religion? How could this nurse ever recover from this blemish on her record? There were so many unanswered questions. Her delivery was composed, but she was clearly shaken. The power of her story lay in the maturity of her compassionate reflection. Regaining her confidence was a real test of her resilience.

Contrast with the final Operating Department Practitioner (ODP) storyteller – a story of hope, love, and respect. He came over from India leaving his family behind. His story of how welcomed and included he felt at Alder Hey, how he found the Scouse dialect so challenging, but that his adopted Scouse family always showered him with love and humour. He related to the strong family ethic of Scousers similar to his own culture. His declarations of respect and gratitude to his mentors and supervisors over the years warmed the heart. Here is what we had hoped for: a story of inclusivity. A feel-good finish. A rose among the thorns.