The Transformational Power of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey® Narrative

For People with Mental Health Challenges

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Abstract

This paper introduces a framework that helps to map out individuals' experiences of long term mental health challenges and their recovery process. The framework uses the hero's journey as a platform to gain a deeper understanding of the recovery narrative. Having access to a dynamic yet still navigable framework allows a strengths-based approach that empowers the individual to develop a new story, eroding self-stigma. Using the Hero's Journey® narrative can help individuals to see their experience of mental illness as a source of growth and strength rather than a fruitless, frustrating, stigmatizing endeavor. Moreover, the experience of understanding their journey as that of a hero can help individuals understand the gains the hero's journey affords. Since the hero's journey is a cross-cultural, timeless structure, a variety of individuals can use it as a foundation upon which to build their own personal narrative. This paper outlines the stages of the hero's journey and how they can be applied as a therapeutic framework. It highlights the transformational power of this narrative for people with mental health challenges.

Introduction

Self-stigma and other disempowering self narratives are significant barriers to recovery from long term mental health challenges. "Ignoring internalized stigma… may leave difficult roadblocks to recovery unmoved," (Yanos et. al, 2012, p. 248, and Yanos et al, 2015, Lars and Yanos, 2016). These barriers need to be addressed with effective interventions, especially amongst young adults. The development of the *Hero's Journey® of Recovery* as a written framework, copyrighted by Dorio Burton and Becker in 2015, was a direct response to this need to reach young people who commonly feel stigmatized by their long term mental health challenges, specifically schizophrenia and bipolar, schizo-affective, major depressive, and anxiety disorders and substance abuse issues.

A review of the literature found only a few practitioners around the world using this framework in recovery from long term mental health challenges. However, the available literature endorses the usage of the hero's journey as a framework when working with this population. Kerr et. al endorse the hero's journey as an effective narrative tool (Kerr et al., 2019) for relating to those in recovery of mental illness. Duffy, J.T. (2016) displays the effectiveness of viewing adjustment disorder, a disorder that describes the very life disruptions that lead to the beginning of the hero's journey, through the empowering and orienting lens of the hero's journey. At the core base of any therapeutic approach is the relationship. Halstead, R.W. (2011) speaks to this in his paper entitled "From Tragedy to Triumph: Counselor as Companion on the Hero's Journey." In this article Halstead clearly describes the supportive, guidance role taken by practitioners utilizing the Hero's Journey® framework. In the article "The Hero's Journey of Self Transformation: Models of Higher Development from Mythology" Hartman and Zimberoff (2009) attest to the metamorphoses that can arise during a hero's journey - a dragon may

transform into a mentor, a foe an ally. This demonstrates the ability for the hero's journey to faithfully map onto even life's strangest and most unexpected turns. MacRory-Crowley and O'Malley (2019) in their article in The Psychologist attest to the power that identifying with a hero can have on a client. Clearly more research needs to be done to demonstrate the effectiveness of the hero's journey with a variety of populations. What has been demonstrated thus far is that the hero's journey as a therapeutic framework has been shown to be effective with different populations and applications.

The hero's journey is the universal story (mono-myth) described by Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), an American mythologist, writer, teacher and storyteller. Campbell studied myths from across the globe and discovered a unifying theme, or archetype, called the mono-myth. The mono-myth tells the tale of those who accept the call to adventure, cross the threshold of the known into the unknown, find mentors and allies, face foes, ultimately confront their dragons, and are transformed (Campbell, 1949). The Hero's Journey® of Recovery framework was inspired by the stages that Campbell described, and it is based upon the archetype of the hero. The framework offers people with long term mental health challenges a new narrative that invites them to consider the recovery journey as their own hero's journey. Using relatable film clips of other examples of hero's journeys found in poetry, art and movies, and intentional questions, this framework gives individuals with challenging and long term mental health issues the opportunity to consider a new narrative. This narrative offers hope and empowerment in the face of internal and external stigma and discouragement, allowing them to access their "inner hero." The inner hero is comparable to the Buddhist psychology concept of basic sanity (Trungpa, 2005) or Marsha Linehan's description of wise mind (Linehan, 2015). In all of these

cases there is an identified part of the individual living with mental illness that remains intact and allows them to access recovery.

The framework, developed organically, is versatile and can be used in individual counseling sessions or in a structured group setting, typically lasting eight weeks of 90-minute sessions. It can also be used to stimulate discussions in a more informal setting such as in the Inspiration Club discussed below. In a group setting participants have been found to become each other's allies along the journey. The group provides validation, hope and inspiration to those who may be just starting out on the recovery journey. Members can learn from each other as each share their strategies of dealing with tests, foes and challenges and their dragons. Also-- since isolation is a common negative symptom of long term mental health issues and stigma, group participants can connect to people with common journeys. Peer Support Specialists can help facilitate both formal or informal discussions and often step into the role of mentors and allies to those newly on the journey. The framework development continues to be a work in progress as the authors continue to deepen and expand their study of Joseph Campbell's work.

Inspiration Club

The Inspiration Club, a weekly lunch group offered at Windhorse Community Services in Boulder, Colorado, was created with the intent to explore club members' experiences with long term mental health challenges. This group uses the hero's journey as a road map to understand and explore the recovery journey, and it is this nexus which will be articulated and discussed throughout this paper. Every Wednesday afternoon at the Windhorse Inspiration Club, a small group of young adults, ranging from ages 26 to 35 and facing long term mental health challenges prepare lunch, enjoy their feast and spend time sharing stories about their life journeys. Each of the club members experiences a different call to adventure: a call to greater self-knowledge and a

fuller life; a call to inner peace and calm; a call to self-understanding, authenticity and balance in life; a call to increase self-care activities; a call to be more in the world; and a call to learn to live with anxiety and fear. All of these represent different aspects of the recovery journey.

The mealtime check-ins spur conversation about the week's adventures: battles fought, connections forged, and lessons learned. Questions are posed for reflection: What stage of the journey are you involved with this week? How did your inner hero come forth? When did your inner hero go into hiding? What have you learned about yourself? Responses to these questions frequently fall under the headings of the need for self-care, the need for self-responsibility, working with negative thoughts and cognitive distortions, managing relationships, staying motivated, following through on commitments, dealing with stigma, discrimination, and barriers presented within the different external systems our members face.

Many of the club members have internalized a story of disempowerment, victimhood, and a sense of hopelessness that are associated with their experiences dealing with troubling symptoms, ongoing mental health challenges and stigma. Members often share how they feel disconnected from the world. Some share their experience of depression and self-hatred. Through weekly discussions and shared experiences, members become allies to one other. Over time we have noticed the individual narratives shift to increased empowerment, self-responsibility, self-acceptance, and compassion. Members become gradually more confident and resilient as they come to acknowledge and bring forth their inner hero—those heroic qualities (resilience, strength, courage, resourcefulness, perseverance) that they possess that allow them to face their daily challenges. Campbell (1991) reminds us that "the trials of the hero's journey force a hero to tap into unknown inner resources and potential." The inner hero is the part of self that was always present but that is sometimes taken over by the shadow self. The shadow self is

a concept proposed by Jung (1996) and used by Campbell to refer to those aspects of the self that we deem unacceptable or try to hide away. Our inner hero comes to life as we try to fight this shadow self and gain new insight and tools to deal with the issues faced in life.

Each week intentional self-reflection questions and multimedia experiences are presented as a springboard for group discussion. The intent is to allow members to recognize their inner heroic qualities and identify where these qualities have been active in their daily lives. For example, several members have indicated an increased likelihood to be more risk tolerant than risk averse. One member reported visiting the grocery store without suffering a panic attack. Another member identified this shift by contemplating getting a job and has applied to the local Vocational Rehabilitation Center for assistance. Yet another member realized she is not being sufficiently challenged in her volunteer activities and is planning to speak to the group leader about her role.

Through weekly discussions, new insights occur. These often lead to an increase in self esteem, courage and self reliance. Members begin making choices that support recovery. The framework offers new language and concepts about the hero's journey that are affirming, empowering and humanizing. Therapists, psychiatrists and peer support workers become mentors. Friends become allies who provide support, guidance, inspiration and hope. As we venture through the stages of the journey, members start to view their recovery journey in a different light. *Struggles become a vehicle to accessing the heroic qualities within*. Adversity, challenges, and tests are considered an expected part of their journey. The framework emphasizes that the journey is not easy, and the hero has to examine strategies and personal perspectives that may be ineffective. To move forward, members must develop new ways to deal with the challenges presented. Ultimately, heroes must call upon all that they have gained thus

far on the journey to now face their dragons—the symbols of the things most feared (Campbell, 1991). These dragons represent the most salient aspects of a hero's life that has been holding them back and must be dealt with directly. In this struggle members realize the strength and rewards they have gained from the battles. As the weeks and months pass, members affirm that through their hero's journey they begin to surrender "the old way of meaning making and start to give birth to a new manner of seeing (themselves and) the world," (Larson, 2005, p.138).   This new narrative is powerful and has had a transformative effect on the members of Inspiration Club. As Allison (2019), and Williams (2016) emphasize, personal transformation is key in recovery.

The Stages of the Hero's Journey®

Regardless of life circumstances, the hero's journey "provides a timeless map, providing information about where you are in your own journey and what to expect...it is a guide to not only how life is, but how to move through it." (Williams, 2017, p.43) The Hero's Journey® of Recovery framework adopts the stages outlined by Campbell, but has adapted these to maintain the same themes and characteristics of each stage. Similar to other life journeys, the recovery process is aligned with this universal myth, and the hero's journey should be considered a framework when trying to comprehend and articulate the recovery process.
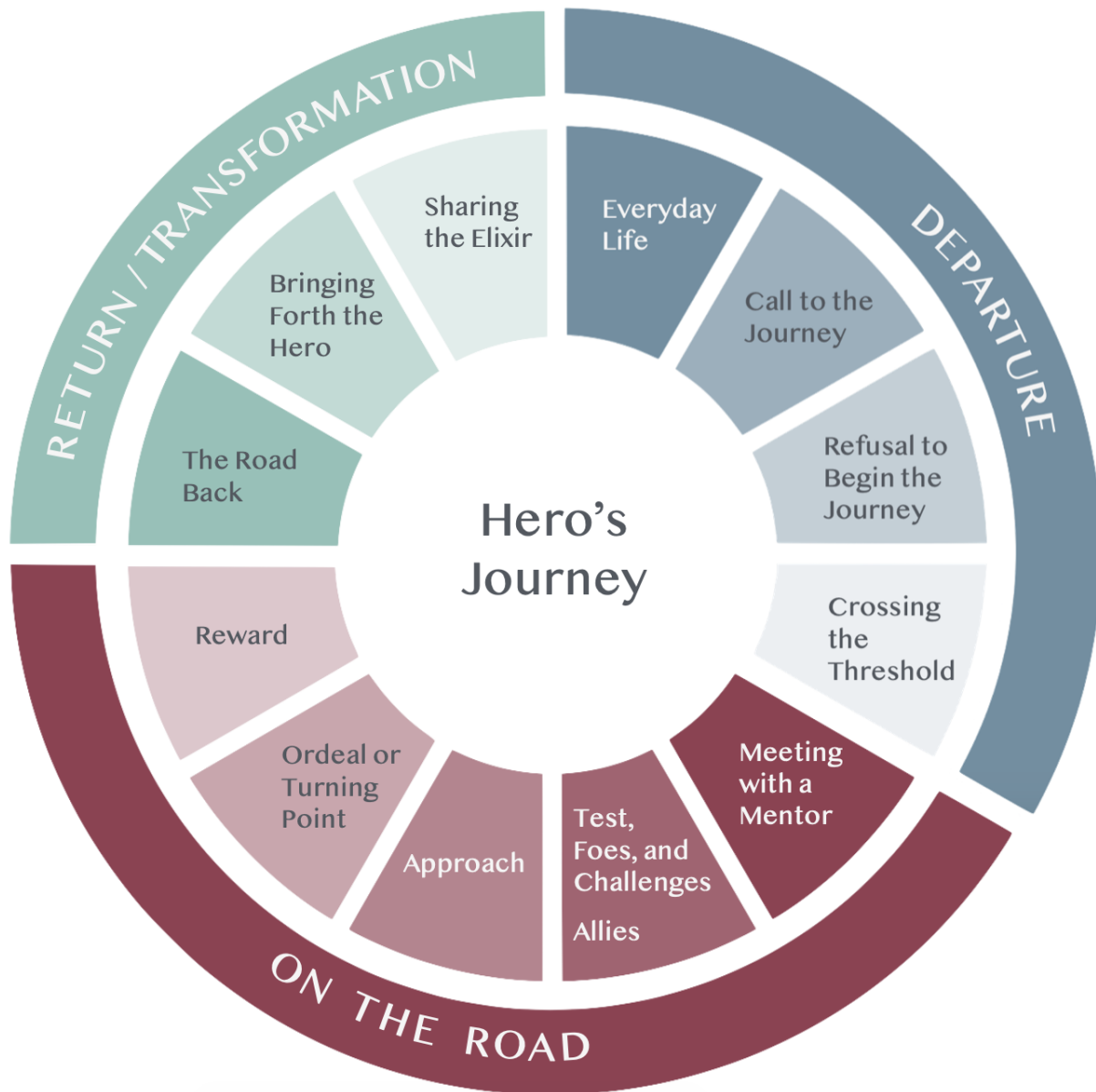
Figure 1 This diagram visually depicts the cyclical stages that make up the Hero's Journey.

Departure Stage: Everyday Life; The Call; Refusal; Crossing the Threshold

During the first stage, the Departure stage, the hero is called out of their everyday life to embark on a journey. The call to journey may be planned and intentional, spontaneous or serendipitous, or unwelcome or unwanted (Williams, 2016). The individual may feel prepared or

caught by surprise. The call may involve external or internal circumstances such as starting a new career or losing a job, falling in love or the ending of a relationship, dealing with health issues and hospitalizations, contending with legal issues, becoming a parent or caregiver, or having a gnawing sense that something is not right with their life. Regardless of the circumstance, an invitation has been made and the individual must grapple with whether to accept the invitation or decline. Each type of journey will require work on the internal, cognitive-emotional level associated with these areas as well as facing challenges on the external level—the real world. The unwelcome and unwanted call is similar to the pre-contemplative stage in the Stages of Change Model (Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, 1994) whereby the hero may not be considering making any changes in their life. The person may feel comfortable, complacent, stuck, uninspired, or afraid to move forward. Fear, anger, resentment, and anxiety may arise as the person becomes aware of the risks and sacrifices they may face if they embark on the journey. For some, the decision to accept the invitation comes easily. For others, it may take months—even years—to step into the journey. Some may even refuse the call, only to be called again and again until it is answered and the journey is begun. Regardless, the call to journey may become the wakeup call and emotional arousal necessary to consider a new way of living life.

The start of the journey may come with a multitude of emotions, coping strategies, and limiting beliefs including denial, ambivalence, fear, self-doubt, confusion, grief, blame and excitement—all to be acknowledged and normalized. Although the hero may want their "life to be different" and claim they are "sick and tired of being sick and tired," they may take the stance that they "can't do" what the journey may entail or feel that the journey seems impossible (Williams, 2016). The desire to change can exist simultaneously with the feeling of threat to one's safety and security. The person may also refuse

to take responsibility for their life and blame other people, things, and situations for what has occurred. Individuals may take the risk and cross the threshold due to an array of external or internal motivational factors. For some, a mentor may appear at this stage of the journey, offering encouragement and guidance. The mentor, having been on a similar journey, may be instrumental in helping the individual cross the threshold.

Inspiration Club—Departure Stage: As part of the discussions, members are invited to reflect upon what their "call" to the recovery journey looks like. Members have reported feeling their "life is out of control" and disconnected, and ask themselves "what's wrong with me?" One member stated emphatically she "doesn't want to be at this treatment program her whole life." Others nodded in agreement. Another member talked about conducting a "life audit," as he wants his life to be different. "I don't want to live like this!" he stated. They watch the opening scene of the *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Adventure,* where Bilbo Baggins grapples with "the invitation"—presented by Gandalf the Wizard—to join his adventure. Members can relate to the feeling of fear and anxiety when one is asked to step into the unknown. Members identify a host of reasons fueling the resistance: lack of support, denial, blaming others for their problems, dealing with the pain of unpacking emotions, and lack of confidence, abilities and energy. These echo reasons every hero has used to speak out against their call to journey. We talk about "comfort zones" and acknowledge that ambivalence and resistance are always present and a normal response when considering making significant changes in one's life. In this stage of the journey we explore what it means to take risks and how members were able to "cross the threshold" onto the recovery journey. Relying on inner strength, trusting themselves and others, becoming vulnerable, having support, "over-riding the comfort of stuckness," and having a strong desire for a quality of life are just some of the factors members identified in moving

forward. Onward they go! Specific goals are developed and commitments are proclaimed. They feel inspired as they watch Dorothy, from *The Wizard of Oz,* embark on a trip down the yellow brick road as they too step into the unknown.

On the Road Stage: Meeting with a Mentor; Test, Foes and Challenges; Allies; Approach; Ordeal or Turning Point; Reward

On all hero's journeys, once the decision is made to accept the call, the journey begins. The hero meets people along the way who become mentors and allies—receiving guidance, encouragement and support from them. Inevitably, the hero encounters numerous challenges and foes that test their resilience, strength, and their commitment moving forward. Foes and challenges may come from external events, or they may arise from within. Tests, foes, and challenges become opportunities for individuals to bring forth the heroic qualities from within themselves that they did not know they possessed. Over time, the individual develops a change in their perspective—seeing tests, foes, and challenges as possible sources of learning and growth.

Tests, foes and challenges come in many forms, and a sign that the hero may be up against them is when the body's stress reaction—fight, flight or freeze response—is triggered (Williams, 2016). The framework prompts discussions that can increase awareness about what one avoids and can help the hero identify fears and limiting beliefs (internal foes). Fear of rejection, fear of connecting with others and experiencing intimacy, fear of speaking one's truth and standing one's ground, fear of failure or success, fear of taking responsibility for one's life, fear of asking for help, fear of being overwhelmed by feelings, and meeting needs are all examples of what the hero may confront on the journey and what the framework helps identify. Similarly, the framework helps members learn that courage, confidence, resilience, and self-esteem grow and strengthen as the individual faces these fears and challenges.

In this process the framework helps members identify and evaluate their present strategies and

coping mechanisms (e.g. using street drugs and alcohol, avoiding conflict, isolating) that may not support the journey. Evaluating strategies and coping mechanisms allow for learning and incorporating new strategies.

As witnessed in every hero's journey ever told, regardless of where the challenges originate, the hero must find effective approaches and develop strategies that will aid them in their recovery. Part of the journey will involve trying different approaches and determining what is useful or not. Again, the framework emphasizes it may take years to develop and master skills, strategies and approaches in dealing successfully with challenges. Through trial and error, many internal (psychological) strategies will similarly require the hero to do the "opposite" of what they have been doing (Williams, 2016, 2017). These new strategies may include tolerating difficult emotions rather than avoiding them, facing fears rather than running away from them, challenging limiting beliefs rather than accepting them, being risk tolerant versus risk averse, finding one's voice rather than remaining silent, learning to trust rather then be suspicious, taking responsibility for one's life rather than blaming others, things and situations, and finding one's true/authentic self. External approaches/strategies can include developing more effective interpersonal communication skills, deciding to use medications, seeking the support of mentors and allies, joining a self-help group, engaging in meaningful activities and work, identifying and having needs met, caring for oneself and living from one's authentic self. As the hero takes risks and empowering strategies take root, old habits start to fade.

The framework reminds members that ordeals, turning points and set-backs are part of the journey, which may appear to take a person back to the Departure Stage. Such setbacks, however, can prompt the hero to re-evaluate the approaches that they have been using and gauge their effectiveness. Different decisions about changing their approach may be required. Accessing support and using mentors may be needed to help the hero stay on course. Such reflections assist members to realize they are not back at

the Departure stage—that failure is required in mastering new skills. This increased awareness then helps them maintain a healthy attitude and stay motivated, which are critical aspects to continuing their journey.

Thus, the program also teaches members that ordeals and turning points on the journey will also help the culmination and crystallization of the knowledge and skills obtained on the journey. They offer the opportunity to strengthen and utilize supports, knowledge and skills at critical points. Like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, they allow the hero to do something they believed they could or should never do. The impossible becomes possible through repeated attempts (Williams, 2016). Setbacks occur, yet this highlights the commitment one must make on the journey and prompts the individual to recommit to life goals, so that the hero does not fall back to earlier stages of ambivalence and refusal. An individual may become complacent about maintaining their momentum towards their goals yet heroes must stay the course despite feeling unmotivated, fatigued, or disillusioned.

Importantly, the framework teaches that the hero eventually experiences rewards despite the hardships and setbacks faced. We pose the question: can you recognize the benefits of your journey that may be tangible—such as new friends of a job—or intangible—such as increased self-confidence? The hero must navigate their newly achieved accomplishments, expectations, responsibilities, and identity and steer away from self-sabotaging behaviors.

Inspiration Club—On the Road Stage: For many of the members, "crossing the threshold" occurred when they decided they "needed to being doing something different in their lives," because what they were doing "wasn't working." For others, the crossover started when they felt "totally exhausted," reached out and called the help line, entered treatment, or filled their first prescription for psychiatric medications. Once the member "crosses the threshold," they are

encouraged to identify their mentors and allies and to share how they deal with challenges, tests and foes. Their list of challenges, tests and foes is lengthy and contains items such as their mental health symptoms, their self-doubt, their fears, people not believing in them, drugs and alcohol used, guilt, shame, "shoulds," ruminating, previous trauma, failing to do self-care, encountering personal limitations, lack of energy, difficulty staying motivated, discrimination, and finding they lack sufficient support. One member spoke of being "afraid of her mind" in a group of people with long term mental health concerns. Group members paused and became silent. Another stated "I cannot recover unless I overcome the self image I have of myself—that I'm flawed, broken and crazy."

Just as long is the list of how members deal positively with their challenges, tests and foes: increased self-care, letting go of limiting beliefs, reaching out to supportive people, journaling and self reflection, using medications, working on countering negative critical thoughts, taking small incremental steps towards goals, staying in the present moment, and persisting. One member shared, "when I help people, I become asymptomatic." Members learn from Dory in *Finding Nemo* to "just keep swimming" when life seems hard. One member shared the consequences of stopping her medications when she was feeling good. She still regrets that decision and talked about the long road back to health. We acknowledge that ordeals, turning points, and setbacks are part of the recovery journey, and we may need to "walk down another street" as suggested in the poem by Portia Nelson, *Autobiography in Five Short Chapters.*

The members of Inspiration Club have become allies to each other by supporting and cheering each other on. One member listened to another member as she recounted her weekly past activities and stated how she is "making progress by relying on herself more." He says "that's good," and adds he's "so happy she's coming into her own." Many times you will hear

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members state they feel the same way when one is sharing a difficult life experience. One member stated he "didn't finish his adolescence" because he was hospitalized at an early age. People listen with compassion and understanding. They can relate as those with similar experiences often do. Several of the members have connected outside the Wednesday group time and have become friends.

The On the Road stage ends by talking about our rewards from being on the recovery journey. Members can identify a multitude of internal and external rewards and share they are: "feeling proud of themselves," "getting back to me," "having more hope about the future," "gaining more insight and realizations," understanding that "I can make mistakes but I've learned that doesn't mean I'm a failure," being "less self-centered," and being honest and "outright with her illness." Members are engaging in more meaningful activities; one member volunteers at a local assisted living facility and spends another day at a food bank. Another has submitted several of her poems to national magazines and has had several published. One member is taking a class at the local community college after years of being out of school. The rewards do come.

Return/Transformation Stage: The Road Back; Bringing Forth the Hero; Sharing the Elixir

The hero, fully realizing their hero within, returns to everyday life with a renewed spirit, a deeper understanding of the journey, and more confidence in their abilities to live an authentic life. A transformation has occurred, and their perceptions of self, others, and the world have changed. The realization that one can never go home—that things will never be as they were— becomes a reality. Expectations from others and oneself may be different when the individual

returns home. The hero moves forward with acceptance, strength, and the knowledge that they have enough confidence and courage to face future tests, foes and challenges. Our hero is stronger and more resilient as a result of the obstacles they have surmounted.

It is in the final confrontation with their dragons that the hero comes to a place of acceptance and self-compassion. The hero sees what may have been truly holding them back and keeping them stuck. Many times drawing out and identifying the dragons diminishes the power they have over the hero, creating useful allies rather than enemies. Deep-seated fears and limiting beliefs, living by societal "shoulds" and "don'ts," being fearful of living from their authentic self, feeling they don't deserve or are not worthy of happiness, and experiencing self hatred are just some of the inner dragons the hero may need to face.

At a critical point in the journey, the hero learns to befriend their dragons and not run from them—developing self-compassion, acceptance, forgiveness and kindness towards themselves. The hero learns that using mindfulness, acknowledging and understanding our human connectedness, and developing compassion for others softens the struggle that one has had with their dragons.

Once the hero has faced and befriended their dragons, the hero may share their adventures with others and may become a mentor to those newly invited on the journey. The transformation of the individual has been so powerful and significant that they may choose to offer what they have learned—the elixirs (knowledge and the gifts) they have received—to help others just starting out. Acquiring a different perspective in life, developing new skills and strategies, discovering and living from your true/authentic self, engaging in life more fully, having hope, trusting and connecting with others, learning about the power of acceptance, and forgiveness are examples of elixirs.

Inspiration Club—Return/Transformation Stage: The recovery journey can be long and arduous for many of our members. Even when rewards have been realized, the journey continues. Similar to when the Wizard—in the Wizard of Oz—asks Dorothy to bring him the broomstick from the Wicked Witch, members are yet again asked to bring forth their inner hero and confront the very things that have been part of their most difficult battles. Their newly-gained confidence and strength is put to the test.

For many of our members, the dragons are disguised as fear, self-doubt, self-hatred and self-stigma. It is only when members begin looking into the mirror with new eyes of insight, acceptance, and compassion are they ready to step into the fighting ring, run the race, and stand up for their truth. Members realize it is their inner dragons that have held them back on the recovery journey. Inner peace and strength is achieved once they befriend their dragons and let go of their inner struggles. For example, one member spoke regularly about her practice of self-compassion and catches herself when she uses negative self-talk. Laughter fills the room when she states "we're all bozos on the bus." When talking about "tolerating aloneness," another member shared that they "have to accept all parts of themselves." Yet another member vocalized how important it is that we "be kind to ourselves." Finally, another member talked about her "little girl self" and her need to "nurture that me." Such insights reflect various journeys of personal transformation!

Further examples of personal transformation were also offered with several members contemplating becoming Peer Support workers as a way to bring the elixir to others. One member, motivated by her own Hero's Journey® of recovery, shares that she went through the Peer Support certification program and is now wanting to realize her dreams of becoming a

probation officer and is returning to college. Another individual shared that they want to have a "positive effect on the outside world and giving and doing something meaningful for others."

As a universal myth, the hero's journey faithfully reflects the recovery experience and should be considered a valuable lens through which to understand and guide this process. While the term "journey" means different things to different people, a hero's journey can last a day, a week, a year, a lifetime. Similarly, one can have several journeys occurring at once and therefore be in different stages of different journeys at the same time. When described in order the stages may seem linear, but akin to the recovery experience itself the stages of the hero's journey are interchangeable and one can repeat stages over and over again. The hero may feel they are back at the Departure Stage when feeling stuck, and may meet challenges and foes over and over again. The return home does not signal the end of recovery, nor can any hero or person in recovery from mental health challenges ever return to the life they lived before this event occurred. The circular structure of the hero's journey signifies that every time one journey ends another begins and that individuals may pass through similar stages but in different times and in different ways. Journeys seem to build, as one ends another begins.

Using the Hero's Journey® mythology, individuals are given an opportunity to create a new narrative, allowing them to envision their experience as one of hope and empowerment. Self-stigmatizing beliefs and attitudes that once were obstacles to their recovery are now replaced by new beliefs, allowing the person to feel more capable, effective, and confident as they move forward in their life. The Hero's Journey® of recovery was not for naught!

Finally, creating positive external experiences through group discussions as observed within the Inspiration Club can help negate any stigmatizing experiences from society. As an

empowered collective, individuals may mobilize to stand against stigmatizing beliefs and attitudes, and together embark on a new hero's journey.

Onward!

This work is still in a development stage, and the authors recognize the need for more research on the application of the Hero's Journey® narrative as a cross-cultural therapeutic framework. As a strength the framework utilizes a universal and timeless myth postulated by Joseph Campbell after years of research and study. It is an engaging, affirming, empowering versatile framework that creatively uses the archetype of the hero's journey in describing the recovery journey. It also is a powerful tool for practitioners for evaluating coping strategies, areas of strength and challenges and identifying the journey stage where individuals presently abide. Although the archetype of the hero's journey seems to resonate with many young adults with long term mental health challenges, there are always some that do not relate to this concept due to their personal experiences or due to over personification of movie "super heroes." Some individuals may find it hard to acknowledge their "inner hero," because of low self esteem and depression, while others may over identify with this concept. It would be important for the practitioner to lead discussions that help define the qualities of the "inner hero." Finally recovery means different things to different people. The intent of using this framework does not imply that the stages will necessary lead to a "cure" or symptom free life. The framework allows for the organization of experiences but is not prescriptive nor does it imply value of those experiences.

The authors welcome input from those in recovery from long term mental health concerns about their hero's journey.

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