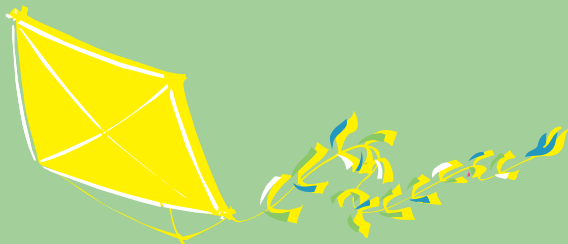


2nd EDITION



Recovery

My Life...
My Way Forward



Introduction

This booklet has been co-produced by people with lived experiences of mental health difficulties, those who support them and people who work in Mental Health Services.

Recovery is a deeply personal experience and no two journeys are the same. What is really important is that people can live a meaningful and satisfying life and feel in control of their own lives in the presence or absence of symptoms.

The stories told, poetry and pictures are all beacons of hope and have been offered as a way of demonstrating that recovery can and does happen and to inspire hope in others that recovery is possible.

Working towards recovery brings up challenges, however it is a journey worth taking. We hope you find inspiration within these pages.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this work including the editors of the stories.

Ann Butler

*Mental Health Recovery Co-ordinator
SHSCT*

Life is Not a Prescription

Despite, negative descriptions,
depression is not an affliction.

There can be complications
with medical implications,
in recovery situations.

But, life is not a prescription.

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“ I stopped looking for
someone to fix me... then I
realised... I wasn't even broken ”

“ What happened to me in the
past doesn't control what happens to
me in the present or future ”

“ Recovery is about
who I can be ”



Give your heart a home

Dear reader may I tell you my story
It started a long time ago
I thought I would never be happy
Yet I still have a long way to go

When I was just a child
And I had a little house
You would have hardly known that I was there
For I was as quiet as a mouse

I didn't like my house
It didn't look that well
In fact it was kind of dirty
Though from the outside you couldn't tell

As I grew I felt more alone
So I allowed the wrong people in
I believed they could share my home
But I couldn't lose that lonely feeling

So I made myself homeless
A choice I made myself
That's when I realised
This was about more than my mental health

Dear reader at this point I must inform you
Of a twist that has been hidden in my tale
For every time I've written home or house
I'd like you to read heart instead

Continued overleaf

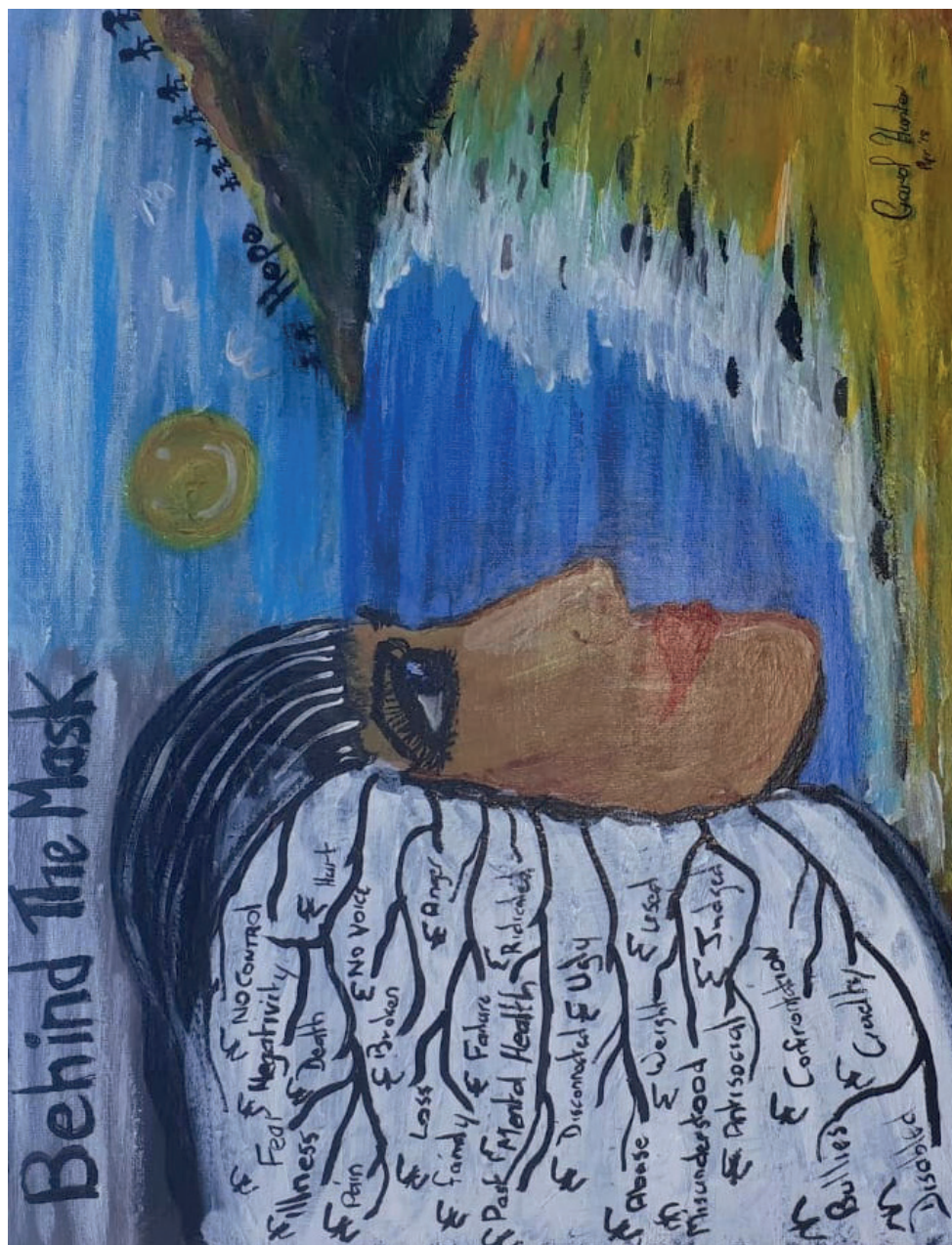
I don't want to be heartless
I'd rather live like each day could be my last
Because that's the best way for me to have a
future One that's very different from my past

I decided to be better
I decided to be me
It took years for me to understand
It took years for me to see

That I don't have to be in that place again
But I'm grateful that I came through
The hard times that made me a better person
And if I can change so can you

Anonymous







Owning Your Story...

This was made for me by a group of very special South African lady friends who have shared the ups and downs and continue to support me from afar. Without people like this in my life I wouldn't be where I am today. It's lovely to celebrate life again!

Lisa Morrison

What Recovery means to me

I've never had what most would term a mental illness, that is I've never required medication, mental health services or hospital admissions. I've certainly had times where I have endured distress, times when I have felt sad, times I didn't want to face people, and times when I've needed the support of others.

From a professional's point of view, we are trained to **care for** service users; we have a **duty of care** and are bound by professional **codes of conduct and ethics**. We use the knowledge and skills gained in the classroom or on the wards to identify and understand problems presented by our service users and we try to identify ways of solving them. From an Occupational Therapist's point of view words like enablement and independence dominate vocabulary but, what about recovery? Doesn't that mean recovered? Cured? How does that fit with conventional, psychiatric services and treatment?

I was first introduced to recovery through Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) in 2011. I was enlightened by the power of education and the importance of individuals having control. Completing five days training delivered by a service user made me realise the value of facilitating more holistic and recovery orientated services. The power of service user involvement, views and experiences was sold to me.

Services have in the past been dominated by the medical model and as the Trust moves toward different professions working together in teams it's

time to consider how that sits with recovery to enable people to achieve health, wellbeing and life satisfaction. This means accepting that professionals may not always have the answer but by sharing our skills and knowledge with individuals who are “experts” in their own lives and by listening, we can provide services that are more holistic.

Education is fundamental to recovery and Recovery Colleges must play an important part in the future of services. The hope that can be given to someone from a personal story or from a peer is also something we as professionals can't underestimate.

Recovery is a personal journey and no one can prescribe it or dictate how it should be done because it is about coping with illness and having a meaningful life. Using key concepts of hope, personal responsibility, education, self-advocacy and support, professionals can provide a service that is truly recovery orientated and help people with mental health difficulties go on to lead lives full of hopes and dreams for the future. Recovery led services break down stigma and barriers to social inclusion.

We can't measure recovery in the way other things are measured. It is not a journey with an endpoint, it is being in the present and having hope, knowledge and being in control of our own wellness. Professionals have a duty to foster recovery. This means **really** hearing the people we care for and what matters to them.

Ciara Campbell



What my recovery means to me

My wellness, mental and physical health.

Today I am on a journey of 'Recovery' one day, one moment at a time, the best ever way to live.

Today I am alive. I know who I am, where I have been, where I am going and who is with me. I am a totally a confident and capable woman. I love me, I believe in me and I trust me. All the important people in my life know, trust and love me.

Life is for the living. The only person that can take my recovery away is me.

Bernie



What recovery means to me

Recovery means the heading out of the painful situations and places I did not want to be in, but alcohol led me to. Now without alcohol I have the choice to enjoy a simple and contented life in the places I want to go.

Davy



Checkered past

The life I used to live and the recovery journey I continue to be on, it's a new life from the past life I used to live with addictions. I could not have done this on my own without the help of addiction team and my support group which I still attend. Life is Brilliant.

Ronnie

The Mask I Used To Wear

It was never nice behind that mask, it was always dark and full of horrible nasty things

Pain, worries, fear, guilt, negativity, illnesses were all swirling around like crazy demons screaming obscenities at me.

Many nights I had lain awake, afraid to sleep because they were there, ready to creep.

I always felt the tears sting my open eyes and yet, all I could do was continually cry.

They always overshadowed my thoughts, with the pain and suffering, that they often brought.

They used to play a game, behind the mask, called "Press the Button" the one that should not be pressed because in doing so could cause such an awful mess.

Low self-esteem, hatred, cruelty, the bullies were all there, the havoc they were causing, not one of them did care.

Why O Why did I feel the guilt? All I wanted them to do was quit.

I never asked to have M.S or mental health issues.

But why should I, feel bad, sad and be misunderstood. I do not wear a label because of my health and anyone can suffer, even with their wealth.

Now the time has come to get rid of the mask and it's horrible, cruel, traitorous, unknowing dark creatures.

I, with the support, help, and resources of the Recovery College, am starting my road to recovery.

It does take strength, determination, you have to be honest with yourself, focus on your own Individual needs.

I am beginning to know who I am, what I am capable of and what my own intentions are. Life is life, we as individuals have the right to live and learn.

There may be many mistakes and lessons to be learnt but that's what makes us stronger.

Believe in yourself, listen to harmony, not the squealers. Hope is always going to be there, maybe distant at times, however do take that journey. I am still travelling, I am getting there but I shall be back to guide you along.

Remember Freedom is FREE.

Carol Hunter

Going outside the battle

Kayaking has been my salvation throughout my mental illness. It has always been there for me and helped give me something else to focus on. I've loved learning new skills, working through the awards, and finally becoming a qualified coach.

I look forward to kayaking in the sea twice a week and enjoying the serenity, tranquillity and peace that it evokes. It helps me go outside of the battle that I face every day with my mental health.

I've been on many wonderful expeditions abroad and have circumnavigated N. Ireland by sea – a real challenge but totally enjoyable with a great sense of achievement. I feel part of the kayaking fraternity in N. Ireland and have made many great contacts and friends. I've even been a volunteer with the Special Olympics and I'll never forget my experience with the Special Olympics at the World Games in Greece. I feel fortunate to have been involved in kayaking for the last 21 years.

Susan Cull



Liquid Hope

The clouds when heavy open,
Each to their natural time.
Potential within each jewelled raindrop.
Energy sublime.

Rivers, seas and mighty glaciers
Expressing themselves anew.
The very same and yet so different.
Hope itself imbued.

Fully without a hint of judgement,
On to and into the world it drives,
And by the beat of its refreshing tune,
Hope begins to thrive.

Rivers, seas and mighty glaciers
Transform without essence lost.
Nourishing then and nurturing
Held Hope returned – no cost.

Eibhlín

Recovery

... I don't think I found it
I believe it found me
The stars were aligned
I was where I was meant to be

Direction unknown
Searching for something more
Not quite sure how or where
And then... an open door

I walked through
Nothing left to lose
And there through the door it was
The opportunity to choose

Choose life, choose dreams
Explore new ways of being
Self love, acceptance
I learned new ways of seeing

Now awake
Aware of every day
The daily grind is now full of meaning and purpose
There is a reason I will stay

Stay to inspire
And stay to hold hope
To show to others
That they too can cope

With the challenges and obstacles
That stand in our way
And control in our hands
We can face them each day

And I am reminded in work as I go
That people are searching for something they know

Finding a voice and finding new friends
Connecting with others
And making amends

Ann

Psychosis, the word

What do you think of,
When you hear this word 'Psychosis'?
The madman raving on the street?
The young addict overdosing on drugs and drink?
Or maybe the free thinker, pondering much too deep?

What if I told you, there's more behind the tale.
More behind the word,
and more behind the story of the one it comes to meet.

The word depicts the actions,
of one who's thoughts aren't real,
But the one who has psychosis,
Has a knowing which will prevail.
You see the madness is a blessing,
Not a curse for all to see,
Not a joke, or a shortfall,
Or a blemish on the family tree.

Psychosis is a journey,
One filled with light and dark,
Psychosis is a way for one to truly see,
The workings of the heart.
To leave the 'fixed mode' world behind,
And to accept what it is to just be.
The darkness teaches what to fear,
The brightness keeps our loved ones near.
The chaos brings the mind to weep,
To cleanse the memories that we keep.

So this word isn't just a word,
It's magic is in its mystery.
The madman may not be so mad,
The young man may not be so bad.
And the free thinker, his thoughts may make him glad.

So Psychosis as a teacher,
Was pretty good to me.
I finally have that feeling,
Of what it means to be free.

Anonymous

Comfortable in my own skin

Unbelievable how time goes by so quickly

I was diagnosed at a very early age with Asperger's syndrome, a form of Autism. A condition most people will have heard of but few will properly understand. This diagnosis however meant very little to me until quite recently in my life.

I began to go through a slight identity crisis shortly after starting University in 2014. Things became quite hectic and while I met some fantastic people and have made some great lifelong friends, my mental health was taking a beating. I felt isolated and alone and could not for the life of me figure out why.

Moving to Belfast was a huge step for me. I decided though to force myself to socialise, though terrifying as it felt, it has been one of the biggest game changers in my life.

I did however find it hard to balance my social life with academics and unfortunately dropped out of my course after much drama.

I'm not one for letting a diagnosis rule my life but I did feel as though it may have posed a factor in the difficulties I had at uni. I became increasingly more aware of it and wanted to know more about Autism... Asperger's specifically.

In late 2016 I joined a group of brilliant individuals, all of whom had Asperger's. We met every Thursday to chat about our experiences living with autism. A year later I can genuinely say I have learned a great deal from them. I even got an award in the process!

Continued overleaf

I know now that Autism isn't a negative trait or something to be ashamed of. It's part of what makes me who I am. I have learned to work with it and accept it. I am proud of who I am and the way my mind works and wouldn't have it any other way.

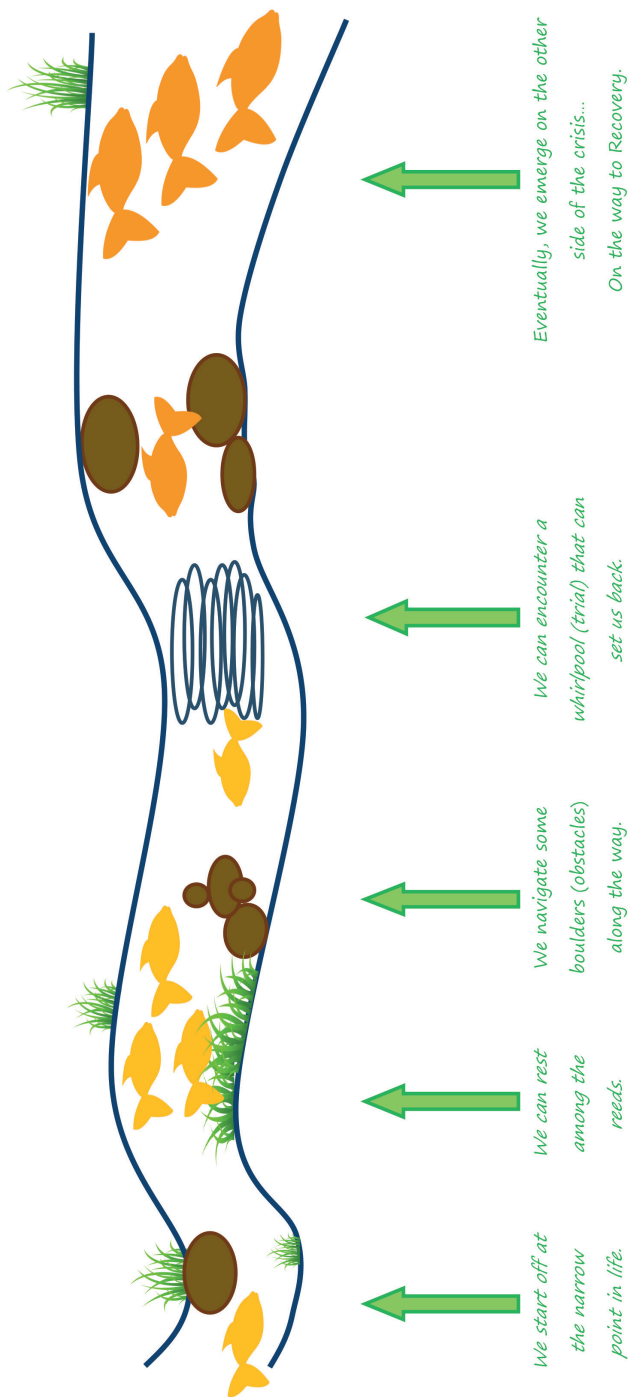
Don't just accept your 'flaws' or 'labels'. Be proud of them. I have learned to be comfortable in my own skin and to those who helped, I am forever grateful. I may be different but I sure as hell won't let that stop me having a good quality of life....

Darragh McStravick



The River of Life

“Life is a journey”



Pauline Reid

This book has been co-produced by the Recovery and Wellness college and experts by experience. We would like to acknowledge the work and efforts of all those who contributed and edited.

All Recovery and Wellness College courses are co-produced and co-delivered and are open to anyone over the age of 16 years.

A copy of this booklet can be found on
www.thementalhealthforum.co.uk