

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*

It took me a long time to understand that recovery doesn't mean cure, that it is actually a journey; it took the support and encouragement of others to get me started and many of these people are still walking the journey with me. I can't name all those who have somehow brought hope into my life but I recognise that for each of them it was a deliberate choice – they embedded the message in everything they did and... little by little... I began to believe it too. My illness no longer defines me – hope does – allowing me to not only survive but thrive.

Elaine Fogarty



“I never believed I could recover...
now I do”

“I now have a sense of purpose
and belonging”

“I went to bed the world was black
and white...
I woke and it was colour...”

“I can, so can you”



What Recovery Means To Me

In 2003 my life turned upside down when I took physically ill. I had to constantly battle to get up and face each day with the pain in my body and this sudden darkness that had crept into my head. I was suffering from severe depression. My previous hopes and dreams had disappeared as each day was a challenge. I isolated myself from friends and family as it was so difficult and painful to talk about my mental health. My mood had become so low that I was suicidal on a number of occasions.

Finally I cried out for help and the mental health professionals very quickly came on board. What a relief to finally be able to speak openly about my depression and those dark thoughts, this helped me to make sense of why I was feeling this way.

I slowly started to realise there were things that I could do to help myself and take some control back into my life. Education was important. I attended classes and mental health courses, learning about conditions and learning about myself. It made sense to share this learning and in 2012 I completed my “Niamh Advocacy Level 2”. I found that



I could really help others with my lived experience and this new training; this also helped me to embrace my recovery. I am now completing my "Level 4 Understanding Advocacy and Capacity"

Although I still suffer physical pain, I now have hope. I have learnt what works for me and grasp it with both hands. Without this hope and belief it would be impossible to regain a meaningful life. Recovery is a journey and this path helps me to have a positive outlook and vision.

Recovery to me is ongoing and never ends and I am determined to use my strengths each day.

Service User

This Moment

As I look into the eyes of this new day,
I see the colour of peace and the light of love.

As I rest in the arms of this new day,
Hours embrace and minutes offer up the sweetest kiss.
As I walk hand in hand with this new day,
My breath echoes the music of creation.

All that exists, exists here.
All that is possible, is possible here.
Eternity pours into this moment.

(Anonymous)

In appreciation of each new day and its potential as I
emerge from the all-consuming darkness of depression
and suicidal crisis.



The Journey

Imagine the scene, a tranquil beach
Embedded footprints in the sand
Lapping waves soothing the soul,
A dawning realisation that surely there is a god.

Imagine then the horror of a tsunami
Engulfing the sanctity of the moment,
Drowning my spirit in tempestuous waters
Casting doubt on the very existence of a creator.

These dual forces mark features of depression,
One minute in harmony, the next all at sea.
Recovery cannot come from prescriptions alone
Rather a lifeline from others and the inner self.

Tom McGrath

Taking Control of my recovery

After a prolonged period of stress at work and looking after my mother, in 2004 I was diagnosed with depression by my GP. Absolutely determined not to be a victim I attended a psychiatrist for 3 years and returned to my job in the bank. I worked until 2012 when a second instance of bullying and a relapse of depression caused me to re-evaluate my employment.

I was referred back to services and that was when I discovered WRAP, it made perfect sense to me as I had used action planning with trainees in my career in the bank. I trained as a facilitator and I have facilitated in excess of 8 courses. I love it!

WRAP looks at education, accessing support and speaking up for yourself. The most important things in my recovery journey are HOPE, taking control of my life and humour. This was brought home to me in 2009 when I took a trip to Adelaide to visit my sister-in-law who was dying from cancer. About two weeks after I returned home I got a call from her, she said "I cannot remember much of what we talked about when you were here, but I can remember that we laughed a lot". This remains to me one of the most important events in my recovery journey!

Through WRAP I manage my illness and it has enabled me to take one day at a time, ask for help when I need it, but most importantly I dare to look forward to a tomorrow which is for me, full of good things.

Stephanie Holmes

Service User



The power of recovery and Peer Support

When in my mid 20's I suffered from severe depression. My life seemed pointless, my future looked very bleak and I could have given up hope, but I'm glad I didn't. Today I enjoy my life and do things that back then I never would have thought possible.

Recovery wasn't easy. I had become so dependent on doctors and medication that it was difficult to take responsibility for my own health. But once I made the decision that I wanted to turn my life around, I took my first steps towards recovery.

For me, getting better involved educating myself about mental illness and my condition. The more I learned, the more I was able to manage my health and enjoy long periods of wellbeing. I also became more confident in the process and was able to ask for treatment rather than just being told what I should do.

Joining a support group was a key moment in my recovery. To be able to speak to other people who understood what I was experiencing was such a relief. Today I am employed as a Peer Support Worker and use my experiences to give HOPE to others suffering from mental distress.

In my role I emphasise that recovery is a "way of life". Achieving and maintaining mental wellbeing requires work, but the benefits to be gained from putting in this effort are enormous. It is a privilege to use my experience to help others rediscover their zest for life, from going go-karting to making short films, I have joined service users taking their first steps towards recovery. It's very fulfilling to be able to help!

Brian Toner

Peer Support Worker



“Talking to someone who has been there helps”



A carer's journey of HOPE

My Son first displayed signs that something was wrong in his final Year at University. Mental illness never entered my head; I just thought it was the pressure of his finals. I suggested he come home to complete his dissertation as he was at University in England.

Over the next five years our son became very unwell but we were unable to get help as he was an adult, he had no insight into his illness.

I believed that education was important and would play a big part in our Sons Recovery; it was a long and slow process.

He was started on a large dose of medication and slept a lot and had no desire to wash or engage with anyone. However, the medication was the start of him getting some insight into his illness. It was only then that I and his social worker could work with him to promote recovery. This was truly working in partnership and I am very grateful that my son had a really good social worker who saw the benefit of working with the family. At this point I must stress the importance of love and support. Our son's self-esteem and self-confidence were non-existent but we kept telling him how much he was loved and valued as a human being.

Over a period of five years our son came back to us as the lovely human being we all knew and loved. We slowly reduced the medication and he is only on half the original dose. His self-confidence and self-esteem is now at a normal level and he has not had another admission into Hospital in 15 Years.



Professionals have a duty to foster recovery

I've never had a mental illness, have never required medication, mental health services or hospital admissions however I've endured distress, times I didn't want to face people and when I've needed the support of others.

From a professional's point of view Recovery is a new concept. We are trained to care for our service users, to use skills gained to identify and understand the problems presented and try to identify ways of solving them. My first introduction to recovery was Wellness Recovery Action Planning; enlightened, I could fully appreciate the value of each individual having control. Having completed training delivered by a service user, I can say the power of involvement, their views and experiences was sold to me.

Services have in the past been dominated by the medical model. By sharing our skills and knowledge with individuals as "experts" in their own lives we hope to provide a more holistic service and a recovery ethos can become every day practice. Recovery colleges must play an important part in our future, opportunity for everyone to learn is intrinsic in the success.

There may be concern about staff having to move from "doing to" to "working with" however the Southern Trust has invested in co-production successfully. The 'Recovery in Action' DVD provides service users' stories; each increasing understanding of what it is to live with and "recover" from mental illness. The hope that can be given to someone from a peer is something professionals can't underestimate.

Recovery led services are breaking down barriers to social inclusion and are challenging stigma. I will continue to listen, to learn about what recovery means to service users individually and share in their hopes for the future.

Ciara Campbell
O.T Mental health

" There is a gift in every situation...

I believe there is no such thing as a 'bad' situation...

The raw experience of it can be distressing but reflection will always reveal the gift. Sometimes it is a lesson and sometimes it is the one thing you most need but had no idea how to achieve. A few days ago I was holding back tears of frustration and pain in the face of someone's words... words that echoed those I'd heard before that led to a troubled time. My mind made the connection and rushed to live the future pain and the effort of friends, colleagues and my inner therapist merely brushed the surface of calm.

I went home. I practised some self-care. I worked through some CBT as if with one of my own clients. I paused. I thought. I wrote in my Personal development and reflection journal. I meditated. Years ago this situation would have had me ringing for an emergency appointment with my psychiatric nurse... this time an almost identical incident found me dealing with it myself and not only that but in 24 hours emerging from the mists with clarity and a fixed plan. If that isn't growth and evidence of Recovery, I don't know what is. I didn't know I had come so far.

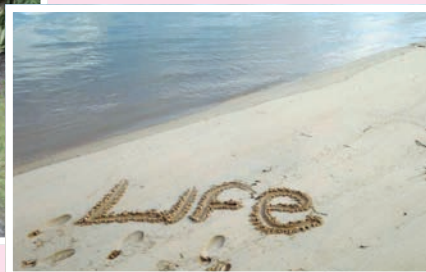
The issue, the 'situation' will not go away and I accept I can not control that but I can control what I do about it...

Someone I respect reminded me of a truth I already knew but had not thought to apply... I can't expect the outcome to change if I'm not willing to find a way to react differently this time. So react differently I did. Details are not required but the people involved in this will not see me rush to anger or revert to my old shy and deferential shadow – I will keep being me, the same me who only a few days before the incident was extolling the virtue of that very same environment. I haven't changed so why should I let it change me?

I will however take it's teaching. I will most certainly take it's gift – the gift this distress has bestowed is clarity around an issue that was deeply troubling me and causing personal and professional internal conflict – now the pendulum has stopped swinging and I know EXACTLY where to rest my priorities. For that, even when the incident itself is still so raw and the details of dealing with the fallout so unclear, I am already deeply grateful.

THAT is the best gift I have been given this year!! "





“Mental illness
is what I have not who I am”



Recovering my Life

When asked to write about my recovery journey, I remembered how another service user's story had inspired me. Hearing someone's experience planted a seed within me that recovery was possible. As a result, I have gone from not wanting to live at times to there not being enough hours in my day!

I have been a service user for over twenty years and had been involved with mental health services from my teenage years. Depression and anxiety crippled me for a very long time. I had no confidence and very low self-esteem. Poor mental health led to lack of opportunity. But somewhere inside me I still had HOPE. I had a dream to get up, dress in nice clothes, with my hair and makeup nicely done and head out to work. This dream has now become a reality in so many ways. I began voluntary work a few years ago, and I now facilitate mental health support groups within the Southern Trust area. Volunteering has brought a sense of purpose into my life. Giving something back helps validate my role in society. I haven't been in paid work for over twenty years but I am now looking for a job!

As part of my recovery, I recognised the need for service involvement when it was required. I also accepted the importance of taking responsibility for my own well-being. Today, have I recovered from my illness? No, I have recovered my life!

Service User



Wellness

I hope this box speaks to you
of a journey towards recovery
Signposting Pillars of Support
That propped me up in adversity.

The very process of gluing materials together
Mirrored different therapies undertaken
The act of choosing cherished items
Symbolic of a replenishment, a reawakening.

Tool Box

I feel again like a work in progress
Chiselled by all life's experiences
Sculpted by all lives with whom I interact.
Moulded by a higher power.

In healing there is always a story
Of timeless endeavour in pursuit of perfection
Let us each leave our imperfect imprint
On the Book of Life

Yes Paved by Jill M. Wilson

Poem by
Jill M. Wilson

Recovery for me is...

A good
relationship with
my Key worker

Determination,
perseverance and
resilience in pursuing
my recovery journey

Connecting
with the
world

From a long stay ward
to being my own
boss and being
a good mum

Remembering who I
really am and using all my
strengths to become the
person I was always
meant to be



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