

FLIGHTS OF HOPE

Stories of Hope and Inspiration with the Mental Health Forum
in partnership with Southern Protect Life Implementation Group



2023 Edition



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Welcome to the 2023 edition!
This booklet of featured stories and messages of hope is our gift to you as we launch our new peer-led project.

“Flights of Hope will help bring a positive and hopeful balance to the mental wellness and suicide-awareness narrative online, and will also offer direct encouragement, inspiration, and hope to anyone who feels alone or helpless in the face of struggles”

We'll do this by curating a living archive of stories and media on our website, social media posts, and by providing a free downloadable booklet featuring some of the encouraging, inspirational and hopeful submissions of everyday people from the Southern Trust area.

Copies of the latest digital edition can be found at www.thementalhealthforum.co.uk.

For more information, or to get involved, you can contact our team: 028 3025 2423

You can help others by sharing something of your own wellness and resilience story.

Email elainefogarty42@gmail.com to learn more, request a submission form or to access support to create your piece. All personal contact information is handled with confidentiality.

The 'Flights of Hope' project is completely designed and managed by service user and carer members of The Mental Health Forum, and that authentic experience will nurture and grow this public resource with sensitivity and peer-understanding.

Thank you for being part of it!

*The Flights of Hope
Project Team*



Circles

Days became nights,
weeks lasted months.
Harsh reality buried
its head in brittle sand.

False promises stole golden
hearts. Medusa turned
empathy to stone.

Safe talk outed tangled
thoughts, squatting
in layers of gloom.

Melancholy faded.
Normal life: reengaged.

Sean

A Lifelong Journey

I was working as a secretary in Belfast and life was great or so I thought. Then one day, I started to have panic attacks and didn't realise what was happening to me. Eventually, I went to see my doctor and was diagnosed with anxiety.

This continued and I had time off work and then ended up in hospital with depression. This made me feel hopeless and worthless as mental health issues were not talked about so openly in the early 1990s. When I came out of hospital I was able to return to work. I believed I was cured but had a relapse over 2 years later. This time, looking back I was very unwell and handed in my notice at work. It was due to a build up of various things all happening in my life at the one time. I was hospitalised again but this time I got more support and a diagnosis of Bipolar Affective Disorder. Over the years I have learnt how to live with Bipolar and to cope on a day to day

basis. From 2010 I started doing community courses and learnt new skills such as mindfulness. I have made some close friendships through doing voluntary work with Marie Curie, The Conservation Volunteers and SHSCT Recovery College. I enjoyed doing the WRAP* Course as it taught me a lot about myself and how to use coping skills in my everyday life. I was helped greatly by my CPN and my confidence grew and as a result my outlook is more positive. After completing Stage Two of the Mental Health Forum's Capacity Building Programme I feel more empowered and many opportunities are opening up to me. I am enjoying life again and have more self-belief. I believe that Recovery is a lifelong journey with its ups and downs and there is always hope.

Pauline

* WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Planning) is a copyrighted Personal Awareness and Wellness Skills Programme, developed by Dr. Mary Ellen Copeland.

“ I believe that Recovery is a lifelong journey with its ups and downs and there is always hope. ”





my health challenges and anxiety, I have since been told I came across confident and competent. So don't be afraid to push yourself but know your limitations.

I've realised the importance of looking after myself and doing what I am physically and mentally capable of and I will also try to lose the weight at my own pace. I know this is work in progress, and I'm proving to myself that there is a light at the end of this.

To help my recovery, I recently got a Daith Piercing to ease my migraines and Shen Men to help with stress and so far, it seems helpful and positive.

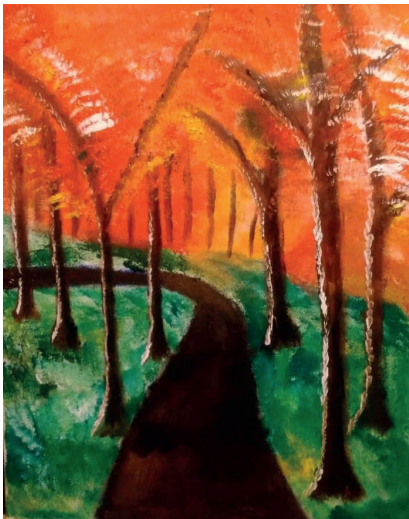
I feel I will always have side effects from Long Covid but can honestly say it helped me slow down and go through life at a better pace for me. I know my boundaries and that its ok to say No or to do what my body will allow me to do.

Deirdre

Finding control

I had a hospital admission in my early 20s for a psychosis episode and back then I saw my future as lonely, bleak, and dark.

I began listening to those closest to me and the nurses as I started to realise that they wanted to help me and I could trust them. They brought me back to my love of art and I was able to use it as a way of relaxing. I slowly changed my outlook on life. I found the importance of slowing down and being patient. I started



taking more time for self-care. My connection to my family became stronger.

My recovery journey was slow and steady, but these small steps eventually created big leaps.

I created goals and reflections and took one day at a time.

I have discovered self-care, positive self-confidence and a sense of purpose. Today I am positive and hopeful. I can live a fulfilling life. Recovery for me means being in control. Being in control means the chaos of psychosis can become manageable and slowly fade away. This has helped me look after my wellness and happiness.

The message I'd like people to hear is "Remember your self-worth and purpose and you can live a fulfilling life even with psychosis."

Andrea





Choice

On medical papers I was diagnosed with PTSD, anxiety and depression. I have experienced sexual, physical, emotional, mental and financial abuse throughout this life.

People who live with the above diagnosis can fall into, without even wanting to, a lot of unhealthy outlets to release pain or the feelings that you're going through and coping with. People see vulnerability so take advantage.

Even showing empathy and understanding, it is the bread and butter to a manipulative person to use to their own advantage.

WHAT CHANGED?!

I reached out for help in the right direction. My doctor connected me to mental health care and led me to helpful skills and tools such as WRAP and more, which could be tailored to my needs.

I started see things from

a different perspective. I started to see I could take control of my reaction to other people and their negative thoughts, actions, and words. I have the choice whether to react or not.

I learnt the best way to react to them is no contact (if with children involved, then as little as possible). These people are emotional vampires, and you are a source of food to them when you get upset and react.

My understanding and healing have begun. I've started to want to grow. I've been given the tools to a new way of seeing, living and learning in life. I want more. I'm excited for the future. My Keyworker unlocked a new world to me.

I have a choice. I've learnt that no-one can take away my choice and I've learnt to reframe my reactions to situations or life experiences. I have the choice today and everyday moving forward...



“ Walking in the country next to lakes and nature is an amazing experience. ”

This like a seed, needs regular maintenance, love and care. It's a long-term relationship with yourself. No quick fixes. Be patient and kind to yourself. Do self-care and know even through the dark days with no sun... tomorrow

is a new day... and the sun will come out tomorrow and persevere.

“Tomorrow is always a new day. Feel the Fear and step out into a new you.”

Anonymous



I survived addiction. So can you!

I was stressed for years because of my management job with a large car firm and my failing marriage. I started to have severe pain in my lower spine, which led to loss of job and an opioid addiction. I had to get drugs like morphine every day to help with the 'pain' but it was the drugs that fueled the pain!





In 2016 with loss of my job, marriage, and children, I took to buying opioids on the dark web, and was in and out of hospital due to overdosing and breathing difficulties. My lowest point was when I was intubated and on oxygen for one week. I decided it had to stop or I would die!

My daughter is a doctor and she got me into rehab in Bristol where she lives. She saved my life! After three months in rehab I was put on Subutex and I am getting better slowly. I still have good days and bad days, but I am alive!!

I'm starting to socialise more now due to help from the team at St. Luke's, my GP, and the Mental Health Forum. Surviving addiction is possible. You need to work hard. You can't do it on your own, but you CAN do it!

Jeff

Wellness Wheels

It took two years of being stuck in the house for me to finally realise I could and should take more responsibility for my own wellness. Lockdown sucked and the Covid pandemic was a horrible thing but something good came out of it for me.

I have a mental illness and for years that's all I had focused on... coping best I could and not ending up back in hospital. Life was just a jarring

cycle of good mental health and poor mental health and that's all I had the ability to see.

Looking back, it was like trying to drive a car with square wheels!

My car runs better now. I'm going places. I've got my 'wellness wheels'. I finally figured out that there were five ways to round them out, and by this year I'd gotten good at checking the pressure in the tyres too.

Who'd have guessed it. That 'Take 5' thing actually does work!!

Eunan



WELLNESS WHEELS

The Starfish

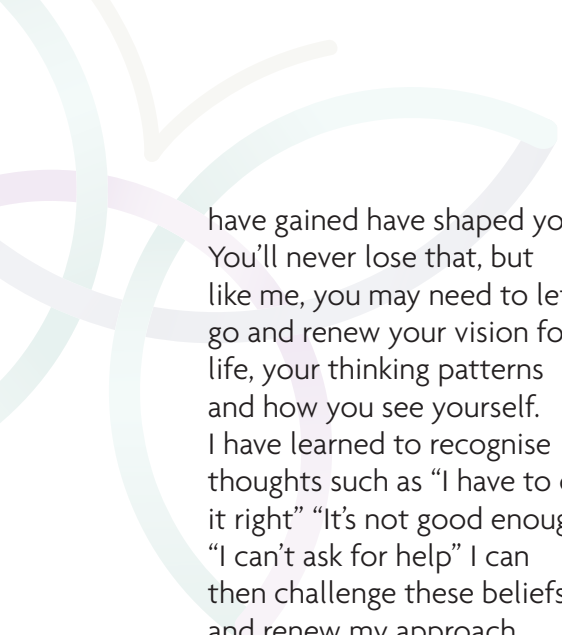
When I was a little girl, I loved searching for starfish at the beach with my Granda. I was mesmerised by their beauty. As an adult in recovery, I learned the true meaning of the starfish and their strong message of hope is deeper than the ocean itself!

A starfish embraces a process of letting go. When attacked it detaches from its limb in order to escape and survive. The resilient starfish isn't worried about what is lost because it trusts in the journey ahead; when it loses a limb it can grow it back. How incredible is that? As people in recovery, we also have the ability to heal and transform. In some situations, the lost limb can renew and become a completely new starfish altogether. I think that is an important inspiration in recovery. From a state of brokenness and loss we can find hope and possibility in a new beginning. Over time we can rewire our brains in a new

way that allows us to thrive rather than merely survive. I realise that although my Bipolar Disorder is a lifelong illness, I can manage it by putting positive habits in place.

My recovery journey has not been straightforward. Over time I have had to adapt. This wasn't easy with an all or nothing mindset. I often felt I should give up altogether because my original goal wasn't possible. I didn't adapt after my hospital admission and Bipolar diagnosis. Repeatedly I would dive in head first and then I would crash. This self-sabotaging made me feel even more hopeless each time.

The thing about recovery is you learn about your limitations, you learn the importance of being honest with yourself. You may go through setbacks like I did but please know you are never back at square one. The wisdom and experiences you



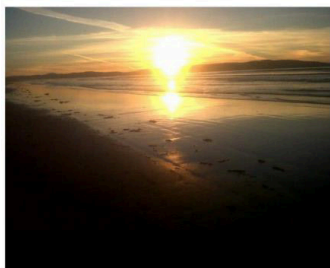
have gained have shaped you. You'll never lose that, but like me, you may need to let go and renew your vision for life, your thinking patterns and how you see yourself. I have learned to recognise thoughts such as "I have to do it right" "It's not good enough" "I can't ask for help" I can then challenge these beliefs and renew my approach. Mindfulness meditation has given me new appreciation, that my mind and body are doing the best they can, they have kept me safe, kept me breathing and alive, surviving crisis and challenge. With a new suspected diagnosis of

chronic fatigue syndrome last year, I have had to learn to let go of the need to be working, I don't need to earn rest and recovery. I deserve it just as I am. I have learned to let go of strict routines for the day and adjust to how I am feeling mentally and physically. I have learned a new coping skill called pacing (balancing periods of activity with rest so that I can reduce burn out.) Having a purpose is important to me so I have renewed this through volunteer work. I am currently volunteering with The Mental Health Forum in an administrative role and I am involved in other projects as a service user representative. When you renew your definitions of healing and purpose you focus on what actually gives you hope on the inside rather than it looking good on the outside. It's a very personal thing.





**The
Starfish**



***Recovery
Message***



**Renewal
Regeneration
Resilience
Recovery**



So the next time you're at the beach pause and remember the starfish within, your ability to go through an ongoing process of renewal and regeneration. Some days in recovery are harder than others and we struggle just to get through the day. When this happens we can choose to be critical of

ourselves or we can take back our power through investing in self-care and compassion.

From one mental health warrior to another lets renew and transform together... who knows what's possible!!

Lauren



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“ Staying well in difficult times isn't about having all the right answers; its more about asking yourself the right questions. ”

Marian



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“ My Mum always said – Never lose hope. You don't know what might be round the next corner. ”

Tracey W



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“ I thought after my diagnosis that it was the end of a normal life, but in fact it was the start of a new journey ”

Eoghan





Woodland walks

When life gets noisy, busy, or over-stimulating, I grab my phone and head out for a walk in the nearby woods.

I walk slowly and drink in my stories or podcasts for a while. Eventually it gets slipped into my pocket and I walk in silent conversation with the woodland. That peaceful shared time settles me and fills me.

When I return home, I'm less anxious and agitated and I feel lighter, and I smile easier.

My woodland walks are my best coping tool right now. The world is loud and busy and my walks help me connect with what is important. They keep me well.

Linda



Figures in a landscape

“ Art has kept my head above water. ”

Mark



The best days are yet to come

The pain of death never changes. It never does.

Yet still, continuing the trying road of day-to-day life. Living on day by day. Surviving day by day. Many undertakings of the mind, of the soul and of the body. Facing the storm with hope of a better and

brighter future ahead.. Superior days ahead, cheerier days ahead. Days of hope, hope of colourful hours instead of shadows and low light beams. The best days are yet to come.

Paul

An extended version of this piece is available to read on the Flights of Hope digital archive.



My Recovery Journey

My journey has been one of discovery & recovery,
A rollercoaster of emotions at times,
Learning new skills like CBT & self care,
And to myself, always trying to be kind.

Reconnecting with nature and a previous hobby,
A passion I shared with my late mother,
The garden became my refuge and safe place,
Allowing me the space and peace to recover.

The fresh air and sunlight always help boost my mood,
As I take notice of the bees, birds and flowers,
The colours and sounds and taste of sweet fruit,
I can get lost in this haven for hours.

Watering the plants helps keeps me active,
There is always so many jobs to be done,
My anxiety eases as I forget work and life pressures,
I pace myself, doing tasks one by one.

My love for gardening grows each passing year,
Sowing seeds, nurturing plants and growing veg,
There is no better feeling than the soil in your hands,
My mind often wanders as I'm pruning the hedge.

And so this is a snapshot of my recovery journey,
Where gardening has played such a big part,
Through sharing my story, I hope to help others,
By giving back a little piece of my heart.

Trudy





She was a lovely patient lady and her calm acceptance meant I finally felt safe to let go. I talked. I cried. I felt exhausted. I slept. When I woke up the world seemed a little less scary and a little less dark. I didn't start using the word hope for a couple of years, but looking back that's what was different that morning. That random helpline card helped me find my hope and from there I found my courage. In counselling a few months later, I found my strength. Now I'm working on trust. I've a ways to go yet in this journey but I'm not even 30 yet – there's no rush. I'm starting to accept that I have something to offer the world and slowly starting to try and trust the people around me. I don't know what the future holds but I feel strong enough to face it and I've recently learned in my support group that that's called resilience. I think I like that, and I'm planning on learning more about it.

Jennie



She saved me

This is 80's me... all denim, permed bob, smiles, and secrets. My photo album shows lots of happy youthful days because they were plentiful and real. My childhood and early adult years were indeed filled with loving family and good friends, but underneath all that occasionally crept a nameless darkness I could only talk about with a Samaritans helpline.

By this age I had already established self-harm as a regular coping tool and had had two suicidal crises – and all of that hidden because I didn't understand it and had no words to try and explain it to the people I loved in an otherwise good life. I look at her now, and I want to thank her. She saved me.

Before people used words like 'recovery' and 'self-care' and before the world saw mental illness with kinder eyes, she had the courage to reach

out and talk to someone. She kept her secrets because those were different days, but she still found a way to keep herself safe.

I've travelled a convoluted and challenging journey in the years since, yet even with diagnosis, treatment, support, further crises, and new recovery-focused skills and approaches, I still trust the strangers on the other end of a helpline phone call now and then. I also have people around me now with whom I can talk about my mental health openly if I need to, and I know how and where to get different kinds of help or information as I need it. I am proactive in my condition management, and I have people around me who challenge me to grow and live my best life.

She gifted me that. She saved me one small phone call at a time.

Elaine



Reflections

I drop a pebble into the water that laps onto the sand. I can see my distorted reflection in the surface of the ocean; it's how I saw myself. It's an analogy of my life, focusing on the warped images instead of what's really there.

It's my calm place, walking on a beach at the water's edge. Wind blowing, gentle ripples – it all energises me. Someone calls my name, I look up. We smile at each other. It's not the distorted reflections they recognise. This gives me hope. When I look back at the water, I focus on my image in the still water and can see myself more clearly.

Self-reflection helps me to work on self-acceptance. Acceptance from others doesn't define me. I need to be me; to continue learning to be true to myself. In this happy place, the feeling of calm and freedom helps to



maintain a more positive frame of reference for my life's journey.

Caroline

About the Southern Area Protect Life Implementation Group

The Southern Area Protect Life Implementation Group (SPLIG) is a multi-agency group with representatives from both statutory and community & voluntary sectors. The primary purpose of the group is to ensure implementation of Protect Life 2, The Suicide Prevention Strategy for Northern Ireland (2019 -2024) at a local level.

Protect Life 2, recognises the critical role that communities have in suicide prevention and our Southern PLIG ensures a coordinated approach in delivering key actions locally. It creates better linkages and understanding between statutory service providers, elected representatives and community and voluntary sector representatives at a local level. It ensures that the voice of lived experience is at the forefront of shaping local service provision and ensures a local input into the Regional

Strategy Implementation steering group and vice versa.

The Southern Area group meets on a quarterly basis and monitors progress against objectives set out in our local 3 year action plan.

The Mental Health Forum is proud to bring lived experience representation to this group, and to partner in community information sharing and support that can help build resilience, promote wellness, and save lives.

To view the current SPLIG action plan visit the Southern Trust website or contact the Mental Health Forum for a download link or digital copy.



The Southern PLIG logo was designed through coproduction, and is intended to evoke a sense of compassion, hope, and positive wellbeing

About The Mental Health Forum

The Mental Health Forum serves the Southern Health & Social Care Trust area and has its office base in Newry. We are proud to be a peer-led organisation and to have lived-experience driving all aspects of our work.

We are deeply committed to building community resilience, and so provide information, signposting, advice, and opportunities to the public, around mental health services, personal wellness, or supports throughout the Trust area.

We are leaders in:

- Delivering Peer-led services, training, and supports
- Developing opportunities for people with lived experience
- Promoting awareness of mental health issues
- Challenging stigma and discrimination
- Championing recovery-orientated practice and initiatives
- Working in coproduction to improve mental health services

- Offering mentored capacity-building for coproduction activity and personal growth
- Embedding the voice of lived experience in suicide awareness initiatives working to prevent deaths by suicide

Our charity was established in 1993 as a pathway for sharing between the service user and carer community and their service providers.

Continuing as that official voice of the service user community, the Forum remains embedded within the MH Division of Southern Trust to this day. This model is regionally unique.

We engage directly with service providers in planning, delivering, and monitoring mental health services both locally and regionally.



Useful Information and Contacts

Lifeline - 0808 808 8000 <https://www.lifelinehelpline.info/>

Call free for Crisis Counselling if in distress or despair. Open 24/7 every day.

Samaritans - 116 123 <https://www.samaritans.org/> Call free for a Listening Ear if in distress or despair Open 24/7 all year.

In the Newry area there are two 'Crisis-Café' services

WELL-Bean Cafe – 028 3044 2326 Open to Adults all year. 6pm-11pm Fri & Mon 12pm-7pm Sat & Sun. Phone or drop-in for conversation, support, or signposting with a counsellor if in mental health crisis 'out of hours'.

Located at 3 River Street, Newry, BT34 2DQ.

<https://www.pipshopeandsupport.org/the-well-bean-cafe>

Crisis Cafe - Open to young people aged 12-18. 1a Upper Edward Street. Newry, BT35 6AX (Sticky Fingers Building).
Contact info@crisiscafe.co.uk or telephone 077 0346 6075 to confirm Drop-In café times.

Find Helplines NI <https://www.findhelpni.com/>

A searchable database of local and regional sources of help and support.

Here2help – An easy-to-use app offering advice and quick support contact info based on entry of a local postcode. Downloadable for free from your app store.

Mental Health Forum – Office: 028 3025 2423 Office hours Mbl: 078 7626 1033
Information, signposting, peer-led services, and opportunities for involvement related to mental health services and supports in the Southern Trust area.

www.thementalhealthforum.co.uk

CAUSE - Advocacy and support for family carers whose loved ones live with the impact of severe mental illness. Helpline: 0800 103 2833 <https://www.cause.org.uk/>

INSPIRE - Advocacy and support for those living with mental illness or challenges. If already known to MH services – Contact Inspire advocates on 078 1134 4723
For community-based information about advocacy options visit the inspire website <https://www.inspirewellbeing.org/advocacy-for-all/>

The Youth Wellness Web <https://cypsp.hscni.net/youth-wellness-web/>

One-Stop-Shop for information and how to access support and services.

Family Support NI <https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/>

One-Stop-Shop for information and how to access support and services.

Advice NI – Freephone helpline: 0800 915 4604 www.adviceni.net

Information and advice on issues like benefits, money and debt, or employment
From here you can get contact information for local community advice offices.

Helpful resources

The Take5 online Interactive Resource

Including sources of support and help.

<https://prezi.com/view/8YVs4VukOjgTjwvt36ab/>

Free access for everyday wellbeing information tailored to your council area within SHSCT.

Directory of services useful for mental health

Available for all Trust areas

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/directory-services-help-improve-mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing>

Self-Help Literature

Booklets about a range of conditions and challenges

<http://www.selfhelpguides.ntw.nhs.uk/southerntrust/>

Free download. (Housed on the Southern Health & Social Care Trust Website).

<https://southerntrust.hscni.net/your-health/health-improvement/protecting-your-mental-health/>

Steps to deal with stress

A simple guide to stressing less and enjoying life more.

https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/steps_for_stress_leaflet_nov_2016_final.pdf

Free download

Apps4healthcare

A vetted selection of health & wellbeing apps for your phone

<https://apps4healthcareni.hscni.net/> *Free access to the searchable site.*

(Some apps may have a small purchase price or in-app fees)

The Man Manual

For Men on the island of Ireland.

<https://www.mhfi.org/challenges2022.pdf> *Free download*

If you need help to identify or access a source of information or support for your mental-wellbeing issue, you can contact the Mental Health Forum.

We are a peer-led organisation serving the whole

Southern Health & Social Care Trust area in NI.

Website: www.thementalhealthforum.co.uk

Office Phone: 028 3025 2423

Office Hours Mobile: 078 7626 1033

Registered Charity: NIC104166



**MENTAL HEALTH
FORUM**



The 'Flights of Hope' project is completely designed and managed by service user and carer members of The Mental Health Forum.

The living archive can be accessed at **www.thementalhealthforum.co.uk** where you can also download a FREE digital version of this booklet.