

# Recovery

Promoting hope, choice and opportunity

Issue 7, Spring 2019

## Opportunities



**When I think of** 'opportunity and the Recovery College', I think firstly of all the things I've done over the last year and a half within the Western Trust's college.

I started out attending courses as

a Recovery College student, and after just a few months began getting involved with Olive and the team.

I've co-facilitated courses, I've co-produced and co-facilitated training days for staff and service users. I've spoken at Ulster University's Annual Mental health conference, which was a huge buzz. I worked with others on an information booklet that will be available in waiting rooms across the Western Trust, and I've even been involved with a few creative projects, such as painting a tree for the 'What matters to you' day.

But more so when I think of the Recovery College, I think of how far I've come since I gave my first talk, and how it has given me an opportunity to grow and give back and

learn and move on. I was still pretty wrapped up in my illness when I began working with the Recovery College and struggled to follow my own advice. But the Recovery College gave me a chance to learn from the people I spoke to at courses, the professionals and fellow 'experts by experience' that I worked with, and over time I began to see the value in the work we were doing and I strived to be this other 'me'— someone who was able to use what they'd been through to give back, instil hope and make a difference.



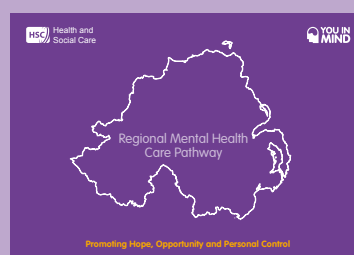
The Recovery College has given me the opportunity to find strength I didn't know I had: in being given a chance, in using my voice, in being part of something and finding a sense of purpose, I found

hope, I began to move on, to strive towards goals I didn't believe I'd ever reach. As I write this, I have a week left on my first placement as a student nurse. Opportunities with the Recovery College began for me as a chance to stand up and tell my story: and it led to me reclaiming my life.

**Brona Dyson, WHSCT Recovery College**

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**HSC** Health and Social Care

**YOU IN MIND**

You can view the Regional Mental Health Care Pathway at [www.hscboard.hscni.net/mentalhealth/Regional\\_Care\\_Pathway\\_Mental\\_Health.pdf](http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/mentalhealth/Regional_Care_Pathway_Mental_Health.pdf)



## Doors open

**They say that when God closes a door, he opens a window in your life. When my mental health reached crisis point in 2009, it felt like that door had been well and truly slammed shut. My career came to a stop, my years of study were wasted, and my relationships were breaking down. It felt like I could barely cope with everyday challenges, how was I going to work as well? My mental health continued to yo-yo until I got a diagnosis of bipolar disorder in 2013. On leaving hospital this time, I took stock of my life and reflected on what was important.**

Shortly after this I attended my first workshop with the Recovery College in Omagh Library. I was hooked from the start and later that year was given the opportunity to complete the Train the Trainer workshop. When the Recovery College finally launched in Enniskillen, I was

ready to co-deliver my first workshop. Now not only do I continue to attend courses but I also co-deliver on a regular basis. This opportunity has allowed me to regain my self-confidence and self-belief in my own abilities.

My good fortune did not stop there... in 2017 I was given a place on the Advanced Diploma in Mental Health and Wellbeing Coaching course. This allowed further growth on a personal level but also enabled me to tie together my skills and knowledge about recovery with my previous training and education. On graduating in September 2018, I took a leap of faith and pitched the idea of Life Coaching to the Oak Healthy Living Centre. They agreed to provide me with clients and asked me to deliver a series of Take 5 workshops to their drop-in centre. I now have an internationally recognised qualification and plan to launch my own company, Positive Mind NI in January 2019 specialising in life coaching and bespoke recovery-focused mental health training. So once the dust had settled on my life, I found the window that God opened with the help of the Recovery College.

**Patricia Mohan, WHSCT Recovery College**

**Thanks to the BHSCT Recovery College I was able to write this poem about recovering from depression, which is ongoing in my life. Thanks for a great six months. I couldn't have asked for a better group of people to begin my journey back to work after 10 years absent from the workplace. All I can say is a great big thankyou!**



*Like a black withered tree  
Barren no fruit  
Reflection staring at me  
How the many did loot  
Stripped me bare  
Ready to crumble  
But I guess it ate up my pride  
Left me humble*

*A shoot I see  
Sprouting out  
From the dry aching ground  
Fighting at doubt  
It's growing it's growing  
I stretch out my hand  
Hope arises  
No longer like sand*

*I can be well  
I can be strong  
Like a mighty oak tree  
I can belong  
Flourishing  
Planted by the rivers  
Walking upright  
No longer slithers*

*Opportunities  
Present themselves  
Control of life  
Joy delves  
We can make it  
Death an option not  
I have ongoing recovery  
It I've got*

**Rickie Currie, BHSCT Recovery College**

# Belfast Recovery College coaching

**In a short sentence, I would say that coaching has dramatically changed my life! It is the most positive thing I have ever done. As a man who lives with bipolar and anxiety, I face many obstacles in life and coaching has taught me how to break down the difficulties into manageable levels and face the pressures that present themselves to me and challenge them rather than allow them to overcome me.**

It has also not only encouraged me in my work life but has also filtered into my home life and where I lacked motivation in the home I have found myself doing tasks like cooking and fixing small jobs. It has also entered into my social life, challenging me to contact old friends and the joy now of singing in a band has also come from coaching. I did not think I would be able to sing in a band at all but through encouragement and breaking down the positives and negatives I was able to see my

full potential and I am currently practising every day, hoping to perform soon.

I would describe my experience with coaching as someone who was like a caterpillar morphing into a butterfly. It has brought me hope, control over my life and the possibility of seeing and seeking opportunities that have presented themselves to me. Without coaching I do not believe I would have been able to attend a recent interview in which I was successful in getting a voluntary job placement. I have noticed also that my anxiety has decreased dramatically and my motivation has increased. These difficulties I have faced for many years and it is only through coaching that I have seen success in these areas.

What else can I say? Other than I would highly recommend coaching for every person in life as it is highly beneficial.

***Rickie Currie, BHSCT Recovery College***

## The road back



**I recently became Senior Peer Educator with the Belfast Recovery College. There my diagnosis (schizophrenia) becomes not a hindrance, but a cause of strength and experience.**

When 18, I thought university was a chance to get away from an unhappy home life but you can't get away from yourself. The only person that I could not be was myself. You change when you become who you are, not when pretending to be someone else.

I gradually lost insight and became convinced the neighbour, a policeman, had bugged me. By this stage I was crawling with worms. I thought it was a biblical punishment. Overcome by this, I dropped out of university.

Yet there was a road back. I began to write a book that started as a suicide note. I imprisoned the bitter sickness on a page. The book, without changing pitch or tone, changed from a cry of agony to a cry for hope. At this stage I saw a psychiatrist who prescribed medication.

The book was well received. I graduated, and even got a bit part on Game of Thrones. While on set, somebody in the queue shouted, "John has arrived in a stretched limousine". Charles Dance looked me up and down and said, "more like he arrived in a stretched motorbike!"

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Yet still the emptiness followed me. I upskilled and took a course in Belfast Recovery College and met a girl. At the same time I became an Advocate. It gave me a sense of purpose when I returned to the ward not as a patient but someone who was there to make the patients' voices heard.

My first client was a young person who could have been me when I was 20. I wanted to listen to his voice. But how could I when he did not have a voice? So, I shared with him. He stopped and took a deep breath, shocked that I had been where he was now, he agreed to engage with services. I had become an expert by experience. Perhaps that is hope – hold on, pain ends. I had found my defining commitment. A cause now defined in my new post in the Belfast Recovery College.

I deliver courses such as understanding schizophrenia. They are free and available to everyone in Belfast. Their essence is hope, control and opportunity.

Oh, and that beautiful girl I met in the Recovery College? I married her!

***John, Senior Peer Educator, BHSCT***

## **NHSCT partnerships with schools**

Looking back over another successful college semester, there are many events that stand out as being particularly positive. One such event was the invitation to come and work alongside pupils from a local secondary school. This was an extremely exciting and rewarding piece of work for the college to be involved with.

Following much discussion with the school on which courses would be beneficial, we decided that whatever we delivered had to highlight the importance of self-care and looking after our physical and mental wellbeing. It was also important to us that we teach coping skills to these young people that they could use within different challenges they may face in their lives. The school agreed that this was not going to be a compulsory session for pupils, instead they would choose to attend or not. With this in mind, four facilitators headed off unsure of how many, if any, pupils we would be delivering to. We were completely overwhelmed by the uptake of the sessions. Two filled halls, and two days later, we had delivered both the 'Five ways to wellbeing' and an introduction to the WRAP programme to almost 90 teenagers!

The two days proved to be lively, fun and, most importantly, a positive experience for all involved: pupils, teachers and facilitators alike. Feedback was extremely positive with the pupils noting the "relaxed and friendly approach of the facilitators made the session worthwhile" and they "didn't feel like this was school, more something they were doing for themselves". Teaching staff also reported the "positive learning environment" that was "inclusive for all pupils in the room."

As a college we believe it is so important to begin to educate young people on how to look after themselves. To recognise that we all experience difficulties in life, but with the right support and resilience we can cope with these tougher times. To think about our self-esteem and confidence and how we engage with those around us, as this will all have an impact on our wellbeing. To conclude, this was a really important piece of work to be involved with and as a college something we hope to further develop for the next semester.

***Janice Gray, Deputy Manager, NHSCT Recovery College  
and Margarette O'Donnell, Peer Recovery Trainer, NHSCT Recovery College.***



## Trembling flowers

*As the sun wakens the flowers  
So colourful and bright  
They tremble in the breeze  
Soaking up the rays of sunlight  
Hoping that a drop of rain  
Could fall from the sky  
Quenching their thirst  
Before they become too dry*

*By Suzanne*

## Moving on...



**I have been employed for just over three and a half years in the Northern Trust Recovery College as a Peer Trainer and before employment I was a volunteer at the college for almost two years. In the beginning, the staff team was but a few and I watched the Recovery College grow in strength and numbers.**

We started with a handful of courses as well as a few hundred students. Knowing I was part of the team, that when finishing the job we had co-produced and co-delivered over 50 courses in total and delivered these to almost 4,000 students, gives me a real sense of achievement and job satisfaction.

It was by no means all easy: I had my highs and lows and with the help and support of the manager and team I was able to grow in strength and confidence and develop resilience which enabled me to progress.

The biggest challenges for me were: would I be accepted as a member of staff in the same hospital where I was treated as an inpatient? Was I making the right decision? Was I taking on too much, maybe causing me to become unwell again and not be able to stay at work? I was able to assert myself and ask for help and support when needed, whether it was additional training or 1:1 support.

During my time in the Recovery College I have developed new skills as a facilitator, the highlight being trained as an Advanced WRAP facilitator and co-producing and co-delivering a Train the Trainers course for the Recovery College, and having the course accredited by a recognised awarding body OCN NI.

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For me, job satisfaction was seeing our students grow and take back control of their recovery and developing skills to enhance and improve their quality of life.

I soon realised I had achieved a personal goal of my own, as at 38 years old I was told I was permanently unfit for work. So not only was I a volunteer, I was in part-time employment, I was now ready to achieve my final work-related goal, which was to move into full-time employment. I applied for a few jobs and some I was interviewed for, some I wasn't. My resilience helped me overcome the rejection and my stubbornness helped me move on.

The long awaited CAWT jobs were finally advertised and there were two peer trainer roles. I decided to go for the lead role and to my disbelief I got the job. Wow, I did it!

I am now only in the first week of my new job and I look back to where I was six years ago and I realise just how far I have come, from being an inpatient to being in full-time employment. I couldn't have done it without my manager who encouraged and supported me to reach my achievements and who saw the potential in me. So as I move on to the next chapter in my recovery journey, thank you to all in the Northern Trust for all you have done for me.

***Eileen Bell, Peer Trainer,  
NHSCT Recovery College***



**Moving on is a scary thought but also exciting. When you have mental health difficulties things seem impossible, but I began my journey volunteering for the Recovery College, never thinking that employment would be possible, but in 2016 an opportunity arose within the Recovery College for a Peer Trainer. To my delight I secured employment, something which I never thought would be possible for a person who had been described as “broken”.**

My opportunities began to grow from there as I became involved in many groups, able to have my say as a service user and be heard, as well as loads of training opportunities opening up. I received the chance to complete my Mental Health and Wellbeing Coaching and I suppose this has led me to where I am currently as a career mentor for Network Personnel.

You see, there comes a time in recovery when you feel ready to move on and I seized this moment. With the full support of

Rosemary Hawthorne, the Recovery Facilitator, and the team at the Recovery College, throughout my experience, I was able to take the big step of moving on. Thank you for my time at the Recovery College: you have helped me grow, helped my confidence and self-belief that it is possible to move on.

To begin as a volunteer and grow as a person helped me to take personal responsibility for my life and develop a 'can do' attitude.

***Jillian Lennox, Peer Trainer,  
NHSCT Recovery College***



### **The beginning**

*As the sun starts to shine  
I know a smile will be mine  
As the birds start to sing  
Beginning the sound of spring  
Butterflies start to fly  
In the bright blue sky*

*With the heat of the sun  
Melting the ice on mountains high  
The fresh water flows free again  
Watering the mouths of many a creature  
Isn't a mountain spring a beautiful feature?  
Especially to a thirsty creature*

*As the tiny birds leave their nests  
Away from the tenderness of their mother's chest  
Happy and free in their new lives  
Staying far away from bee-hives  
By Suzanne*

### ***The weather within***

*The wind howls  
The rain falls  
In the darkest of night  
So frightened and small*

*The dawn is upon us  
A new day begins  
The wind settles down  
And sunlight shines in*

*Just like the weather  
Our thoughts also change  
Sometimes there's sun  
Sometimes there's rain*

***By Caroline***



# Mental Health Forum celebrates 25 years



The Mental Health Forum in the Southern Trust has just celebrated its 25th anniversary. Established in August 1993 in Newry, it provided an opportunity for service users to engage directly with service providers around a range of issues. Similar groupings evolved in the Armagh/Dungannon and Craigavon/Banbridge areas through the years. After the establishment of the five HSC Trusts the individual groups then merged under the banner of the Mental Health Forum. Today it is a Trust-wide organisation with almost 100 registered members and is recognised as the official voice of the lived experience community.

As a registered charity, the Forum seeks to provide social and recreational opportunities for its members and acts as an information exchange provider. However, its primary function is ensuring the lived experience voice is at the heart of service planning and delivery.

Through its bespoke capacity building programme, the Forum provides a range of

opportunities for individuals who wish to take a more active role in co-production activity. Examples of what's possible include participation in consultation data collection, project work, becoming trainers in the Recovery College, peer support workers within the Trust and members of local committees and steering groups. The key role within the Forum is to become a member of the Forum's business group working with senior managers and practitioners within mental health services at local and regional level.

The Forum continues to grow its capacity to engage individuals in improving health and social care services and to ensure the voice of those with lived experience is at the very heart of service design and implementation.

## Website:

[www.thementalhealthforum.co.uk](http://www.thementalhealthforum.co.uk)

## Email:

[lobby@mentalhealthforum.co.uk](mailto:lobby@mentalhealthforum.co.uk)



**Karl Hughes and Elaine Fogarty, Mental Health Forum**



## Quality improvement in the Southern Trust

**Since October 2017 members of the Mental Health Forum in the Southern Trust have been actively involved with the Quality Improvement Team in developing and delivering accredited quality improvement projects. This is the first time across the region any non-HSCT staff have been afforded such an opportunity and it has been warmly welcomed.**

Each individual is required to develop a piece of work directly related to their role within the organisation. Since my work involves helping to develop opportunities for service users engaged in recovery within mental health services, I am very focused on ensuring that good quality information sharing drives the work we do. I have previously acknowledged the poor presentation and lack of relevant and accurate information within waiting areas at mental health facilities across the Trust and I have decided my project should focus on directly addressing the situation at Trasna House in Lurgan. My vision is for service users and others to have access to a comprehensive range of material and resources to help navigate themselves, with greater ease, through mental health services.

In order to achieve my stated aim and to reflect the three key stages of the project, namely engagement, enablement and empowerment, I have sought to recruit the help and support of a range of others across services. I have been very aware of the importance of identifying the right people from the outset, and to include Heads of Service, team leads and practitioners along with service users, in seeking views, comments and guidance where necessary. Such a collective approach in taking ideas forward will enable the testing of new approaches and ideas in an efficient and effective manner. Collaborative working and co-production will greatly enhance the quality of the project and will contribute to a wider acknowledgement of the value of the work undertaken.



With a shared aim of seeking to provide the right information, in the right place, at the right time, the project's key objective is to ensure service users are much better placed to make informed choices. The positive impact of the project in the wider sense will demonstrate that co-production helps with shared learning and improved outcomes for both parties thereby resulting in better communication and understanding between staff and individual service users, who will feel greater confidence and better supported in the choices they make.

***Caroline Ferguson,  
Service User, SHSCT area***



## My vision board for my role as a tutor

This is my vision board for my role as a tutor in the Recovery College. The buttons represent connections with people. I believe connections help me learn more and develop as a trainer. The arrow represents me – learning and developing my knowledge so that I can be a better tutor.

I find knowledge is power and that is why I became involved in the Recovery College because I became passionate about education in mental health. So the words 'recovery' and 'hope' remind me of what I want my job to represent. To me, hope is a powerful belief that you can find your light in the darkness. Recovery is a journey, not a destination, and through learning strategies and more about your mental health and wellbeing, you can develop your resilience. These values are engrained in my own journey and therefore so

important for my role in supporting others.

The quote in the top left is covered in colourful paper and is tough to read, it says "When it rains, look for rainbows. When it's dark, look for stars." The colours are meant to represent the rainbow and I deliberately made it harder to see the quote because sometimes it's difficult to see good things when you are feeling low, so you have to look deeper to find it.

Finally, there is a theme of flowers and flower analogies in the quotes. "The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful." Many students who come on courses have had difficult things happen in their lives and often are left feeling low in self-esteem or confidence. I want to be an example to them, although I was once

feeling the same, now I can appreciate my talents, skills and worth. With the knowledge and experiences I share on courses, the most rewarding part of my job is seeing confidence bloom in people.

The last quote is "Don't wait for someone to bring you flowers. Plant your own garden and decorate your own soul." Something I always say on my courses is: "we can teach you some strategies but it is up to you to make the changes". Although others can support your recovery journey, ultimately it is your choice to make those changes, so I encourage my students to plant their own garden and build strategies that will help them in their recovery.

**Angela O'Hara, Tutor, SEHSCT  
Recovery College**

# South Eastern HSCT Recovery College team building day in Castle Espie

The SEHSCT Recovery College team met in August 2018 for a team away day in Castle Espie. It was an exciting opportunity for tutors, staff, volunteers and partner agencies involved in the Recovery College to get together to review the past year.

The morning started off with a team building exercise involving African drumming. The team did different exercises using the drums that incorporated working together and supporting each other through listening and responding to different beats.

In the afternoon, we reviewed the past year's achievements in the Recovery College, which included attendance on courses running September 2017- June 2018 and the evaluations students completed. Based on all the feedback, we looked at the Outcomes Based Accountability framework (OBA), which we use to evaluate the difference the Recovery College has made to people's lives.



In the late afternoon we looked at how the OBA framework and student feedback could help provide solutions to challenges within the Recovery College in order to improve the programme next year.

It was a motivating and encouraging day that allowed everyone to come together to share learning and celebrate success. The Recovery College will continue to improve through creativity and 'outside of the box' thinking and bringing together different perspectives, skills and experiences through co-production.

## Recovery College evaluation



The HSCT Recovery Colleges and the Public Health Agency are carrying out an evaluation to find out how the Recovery Colleges are working throughout Northern Ireland, and how they can be improved.

The evaluation work has two key objectives:

1. To evaluate how successfully Recovery Colleges are implemented across Northern Ireland;
2. To explore how we can best measure the impact of Recovery Colleges on people's lives.

If you have any questions about this work, please contact your HSCT Recovery College Coordinator – details on the back page.

Thank you,

**Health Intelligence and Mental Health and Learning Disability Team, Public Health Agency.**

# Working as an OT in the South Eastern Recovery College



**My name is Jill Holden-Downes. I am an Occupational Therapist (OT) and have been working in mental health for 35 years.**

I have been involved in co-producing and co-facilitating courses in the South Eastern HSCT Recovery College since the outset, and I have seen it grow from strength to strength. As an OT, we aim to develop self-management by promoting a person's strengths and developing personalised strategies and mental health tools.

Working in the Recovery College as a Tutor therefore ticks all the boxes for me as an OT because in the Recovery College everyone works together in sharing strategies and tools to promote self-management for all. The educational approach taken by the Recovery College gives students the opportunity to build on the skills they already have or learn new skills to enhance wellbeing.

Throughout my career I've been asked by service users: "Can I meet someone who has gone through what I'm going through and is managing"? The Recovery College offers individuals that opportunity, as students can see first-hand on courses, the benefits of self-management and that recovery is possible. Each course is co-produced and co-delivered, which allows learned and lived experience to blend together. Each tutor comes with their own respective knowledge and skills and in the Recovery College there is recognition that both have vital contributions to make.

I really enjoy my role within the Recovery College for many reasons. My main reason has to be that I am delighted to work in partnership with tutors with lived experience to empower students in their own recovery.

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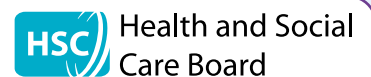
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**Many thanks to the Recovery newsletter co-production team for their contributions and work.**