

WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT PERSONAL RECOVERY

Mary O'Hagan

Quite a lot of research has been done where people with a diagnosis of mental illness have been asked what helped them recover. See the list of publications at the end. All the research has come up with similar answers. Here is a summary with some quotes

Hope: Most important part of my recovery

People often see hope as the foundation to their recovery. Hope is the belief there is a future worth living for, a future that may be better than what's happening right now. Sometimes, even when we don't feel hope it's important that others have it for us.

None of the doctors, nobody said to me, 'You can do better, you can get well, you can beat this, you can still lead a normal life in spite of it'. If someone had said that to me, it would've made all the difference.

I was terrified that I'd never use my abilities or have a good relationship or children, because of my mental illness. If I'd known, in my moments of despair, that I was going to be as fulfilled and successful in my life as I have been, I wouldn't have believed it. My fears back then turned out to be totally unfounded.

After a while I was lucky enough to be around people who had survived mental illness. I would look at them and think 'Well, you're OK, you're living your life, you have a family', and that gave me some hope.

Self-esteem: My personal growth, confidence, mana.

Recovery for people is closely associated with growing self-esteem and confidence. Sometimes people do this through reframing their experience of distress from being a sign of weakness to a crisis which they can grow from. Many regain self-esteem through resuming old activities or trying new ones and succeeding. For Maori the concept of mana may be important, where the people around you bestow you with esteem

After my first episode people who I thought were my friends were no longer there for me and the doors were slammed in my face. I felt very ashamed. I couldn't cope with one day being happy, active and popular, and then suddenly feeling like I was at the bottom of a pit.

I now realise that I have to respect myself; I'm a valuable human being who has had problems, but I can give something back.

I think those of us who have survived severe mental distress deserve a medal. Why add insult to injury by beating ourselves up about it?

Resourcefulness: My determination, self-care, making choices.

For many people recovery is about discovering new strengths and being determined and persistent. It's also about understanding our human limitations and taking care of ourselves. It's about making choices, learning from our mistakes and trying out new approaches when needed.

For 20 years I let other people control what I was and wasn't doing...I let the symptoms of my illness be the centre of the universe.

I think sometimes the thing that prevented recovery was that I didn't know anything else. I'd got a mental illness. There's some safety in being ill – even though I hated every minute of it.

I remember experiencing despair. I had no concrete hope during those months and years. It was just a matter of keeping on keeping on, and discovering an inner strength which I had never discovered before.

I suddenly feel like a free person making my own decisions. It's really neat living here in my own home. Everything that surrounds me is mine.

I realised that only I could help me. That's where I get my strength from - from the knowledge that I can create my own solutions and that I'm not incapable.

Relationships: People who believe in me, and who need me.

Relationships of many kinds are important to people's recovery. People need people around them who believe in them and respect them. Getting acceptance and support from others is important but so is being needed by others. Many people talk about the importance of good relationships with families, partners and close friends in their recovery.

I remember one trainee doctor in particular who really listened to me...she gave me a sense of hope and made me feel like I really wasn't much different than she or anyone else.

My peers and friends in support groups did understand, and they never tried to "treat" me. Instead, they gave me love, understanding, kindness, and support . I started to heal.

I couldn't do without her...it doesn't matter what I say, what I do she believes in me...she likes me just the way I am.

The hardest thing about having a mental illness is feeling that you're constantly taking, that people are always giving to you...Actually just to give back rather than constantly take...gives me self-respect.

Contribution: Work, education, being relied on to do things.

A crucial part of recovery is taking on valued roles where we make a contribution to society or other people's lives. Education and work are significant for many people but even when these are not available people need to contribute in other ways to the lives of the people around them by being a good friend, doing chores or helping someone else.

Work gave me back my own self-esteem, the ability for me to stand up, work and provide for my family.

I graduated in my gown and as I was about to go on the stage I felt I had really recovered...I was proud and pleased and happy and triumphant.

I've got into various service user groups and have found that extremely beneficial...made me feel less isolated and that I could help others

Income: Not too much money stress or debt.

Adequate income is essential for recovery – to have enough money so we don't feel stressed about the next meal or paying the rent and we don't get into unmanageable debt.

Finances are something that can hinder and help recovery...a comprehensive benefit keeps you stable while you're ill. But for a lot of people they get comfortable on the benefit and that can maintain their illness.

It was fantastic to get a job and know I could pay all the bills and live in a place on my own. It took a huge lot of stress out of my life.

Transitions: New understanding, identity or circumstances.

Many people talk about the significance of transitions, turning points or big changes to their lives. Some people say they came to a realisation that they were the key to their recovery and this gave them motivation and hope. Some people convert to a religion or a spiritual practice while others may decide to come out as gay or stop taking alcohol and drugs. The transition may be the decision to end a relationship, start a new career to move to a new town.

The whanau better understood what was happening for me than I knew myself, and they guided me through a process of kaupapa Maori healing. Mostly, reconnecting me with my whenua, my moana, my maunga and my marae, and guiding me through tikanga and matters of wairuatanga. Because it was lost to me...I was totally out of balance in terms of who I am, and by returning to my whanau I learned what it is to be Maori.

Coming out as gay was a really important step in my recovery.

Finding a partner and having children has really helped me sustain my recovery.

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