

Reflections on Recovery from Sarah Taylor-Robinson.

I have been employed in the NHS for the last 20 years as a Practice Educator and was recruited because of my lived experience of mental illness having spent over two decades in mental health services. Never did I think I would be doing what I do!

Key to my own recovery was being involved in the Worcestershire Mental Health Network (WMHN), which was a network of people with lived experiences of mental illness, either as a service user or a carer. I was introduced to the Network when I was attending a mental health centre, doing a computer skills course with a view to looking for work, although at the time I didn't think that was likely. I didn't really know anything about recovery – it wasn't a term I had heard; however, I now know that what the Network gave me was – connectedness, hope, identity, meaning and purpose and empowerment. This framework of recovery is imbedded in the work of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Wellbeing and Recovery College.

I identified myself as a mental health patient – after all I had spent 20 years in that role – I had few people in my life, was quite reclusive because of my OCD and had no idea what if anything I wanted to do. I will be forever grateful for the opportunities I was given in the Network, I got involved in the 'Spectrum' group who shared their lived experiences with professionals and was employed part-time by WMHN in an admin role. I remember being interviewed for that role in the Covercroft Centre in Droitwich. The first time I talked about mental illness was at Redditch Town Hall, Spectrum had been invited to join a training day of housing officers and four of us went along and talked about our different experiences. I talked about how complicated it was for me at the time to buy a packet of biscuits! Not long after that I was invited to be part of person-centred training for mental health staff.

WMHN worked closely with the Trust, and I remember being involved in the planning for what is now Studdert Kennedy House and being involved in interviews for managers for locality mental health teams.

All these opportunities changed my life – I have a job I would never in a million years have even thought about – I remember when I was at school looking at careers, they suggested I should go into teaching, I rejected that completely saying that I would never be able to stand up in front of people and the very thought of having to be observed as part of the training sent me into a panic.

When I was interviewed along with other people from WMHN for my current job, we were asked to do a presentation about recovery. I included some of the work of Helen Glover and I used this image which at the time really resonated with me



Helen introduced the idea of 'Holders of Hope' and use a quote I have often reused by an unknown author "Hope sees the invisible, Feels the intangible, But knows the possible." Many people are those holders of hope – for me I am particularly grateful for the person who was the co-ordinator of WMHN in 1999 who was that holder of hope for me. "The basic premise of Holding Hope for

someone who cannot hold it himself or herself at that moment is the knowledge and belief that they have the ability and capacity to hold it for themselves one day.”

As part of the Spectrum group, we created a session on recovery and explored words that might be used by people. One of those words was RECLAIM and (anyone who knows me will know I like seeing patterns in words and mixing them up to make another word). The letters of reclaim also spell MIRACLE. I have learnt it does not take a miracle to recover from a mental illness. Recovery for me is not being symptom free (I battle my OCD every hour of every day) how every I have a job, which is more of a vocation, it gives my life meaning and purpose, I have a partner and we have a lovely home, and I am lucky to have some very supportive colleagues. Put me in a social situation and my emotional brain hijacks my rational brain and I freeze, I cannot think of anything to say and appear very socially awkward, but that’s ok, it’s part of what makes me – me.

In 2007 Leon Jackson won X Factor singing ‘When you believe’ from ‘The Prince of Egypt’ musical. The words from the chorus of that song really resonate with me,

“There can be miracles
When you believe
Though hope is frail
It's hard to kill
Who know what miracle
You can achieve
When you believe
Somehow you will
You will when you believe”

As do the words from Joe McElderry’s ‘The Climb’

I can almost see it
That dream I'm dreaming
But there's a voice inside my head saying
You'll never reach it

Every step I'm taking
Every move I make feels
Lost with no direction
My faith is shaking

But I, I gotta keep trying
Gotta keep my head held high

There's always gonna be another mountain
I'm always gonna wanna make it move
Always gonna be an uphill battle
Sometimes I'm gonna have to lose
Ain't about how fast I get there
Ain't about what's waiting on the other side
It's the climb

The struggles I'm facing
The chances I'm taking
Sometimes might knock me down, but
No, I'm not breaking

I may not know it
But these are the moments, that
I'm gonna remember most, yeah
Just gotta keep going

And I, I gotta be strong
Just keep pushing on, 'cause

There's always gonna be another mountain
I'm always gonna wanna make it move
Always gonna be an uphill battle
Sometimes I'm gonna have to lose
Ain't about how fast I get there
Ain't about what's waiting on the other side
It's the climb

The words remind me that climbing is good it’s about the journey as much as the destination and that dreams are important. On that note I will leave you with how Action for Happiness have used DREAM as an Acronym in their 10 keys to happier living. Direction. Resilience, Emotions, Acceptance and Meaning.

GREAT DREAM

Ten keys to happier living

- GIVING**  Do things for others
- RELATING**  Connect with people
- EXERCISING**  Take care of your body
- AWARENESS**  Live life mindfully
- TRYING OUT**  Keep learning new things

- DIRECTION**  Have goals to look forward to
- RESILIENCE**  Find ways to bounce back
- EMOTIONS**  Look for what's good
- ACCEPTANCE**  Be comfortable with who you are
- MEANING**  Be part of something bigger

<https://actionforhappiness.org/10-keys>

