



Scottish Recovery Network

The following story is an example of one person's experience of recovery. This story shows how volunteering and employment can be important to recovery. It has been written based on the individual's interview for the SRN Narrative Research Project.

The House that Recovery Built

I was never ill, never had anything wrong with me. Then suddenly I wanted to go to my bed, pull the covers over my head and just stay there. I couldn't figure out why this was happening. In some ways I feel I must have led quite a sheltered life - you knew that there were people round about you with mental health problems, but it never came into your mind too much until you were involved in it. The first time my doctor said to me that he was going to send me to see somebody at the local psychiatric hospital, it was shock, horror, panic – hang on a minute, I don't need to go there, I'm not going to kill myself. Before I became unwell I was quite sceptical about stress-related illnesses; the old attitude of well, he just needs to give himself a good shake, it's just an excuse for two weeks on the panel, that kind of thing. But when it hits you as an individual you realise that it is real and you sit wondering, how did I get like this? It's easy enough to get there but it's a long climb back.

I ended up so unwell that I was signed off work for quite a while. One day when I went out for a walk with the dog we saw a wee house in somebody's garden. Just using stones, they'd built a house with wooden window frames, perspex windows and slate on the roof. For the next few days I kept thinking I could do something like that because I've always made things and been creative. Eventually I spoke to my wife and she suggested I give it a try, so I did. You can only do so many rows at a time because you've to let the cement set. So I started that and then I would do wee bit of something else and the next thing there would be a knock at the window with my wife saying that the dinner was ready. I couldn't believe it; I'd go out there, close the shed door, and for maybe two hours I was in my own wee world and time seemed to disappear. I feel that was my turning point. Gradually from there I then started taking a wee bit more interest in the garden again, and I started to enjoy going back to a bit of reading. Then after a couple of months something came into my head that maybe I was moving in the right direction, this is maybe going the right way.

One afternoon I saw an advert in the local paper looking for volunteers to help with clubs for people with mental health difficulties. I thought okay, I'm going to try this now that I'm feeling a wee bit better, I might as well put my life to some purpose. I

applied, and was taken on as a volunteer. After I had been there a few months I was asked if I would like to do some paid sessional work. I went along to my regular check up at the doctors and spoke to him about it and he said, "If you think you can handle it have a go." I started to do sessional work up to the 16 hours I was allowed to without affecting my sick benefit. And, as these things tend to do, it grew and other parts of the organisation started to get in touch asking if I'd do work for them. At that point I had to make a decision, because anything over the 16 hours affected everything, so I went back and had another lengthy chat with the doctor and again he encouraged me to give it a go and any problems, to come straight back. That led onto full time work with the same organisation and it's developed into a complete career change, even at my stage in life! I've now done my first aid course, attended all sorts of other courses and lectures, and I'm possibly starting to do my SVQ shortly. Every day my job is different and I enjoy my work. Realistically, at my age, I'm not planning to become the director or anything like that, but I'm pleased with where I have got to from where I was. If I keep on going, earning a living, and helping somebody as I go along the way, I figure that it's probably as good as it's going to get. If I'm contributing just a wee bit to somebody getting back to where I am now, I'm quite pleased at that.

I've learned that you really have to look for support to recover, you can't just go to the doctor and get a magic pill and be better. You have to be prepared to go half way and meet the people who are trying to help you. Whether it be medical help, friends and family, counselling whatever, you have to be prepared to make the first step yourself and be prepared to work from then onwards. Other people can't cure you, and you can't cure yourself, but the two sides working together can help. In my case, it's not that my problems went away completely, but I learnt to cope better with the stresses in my life. When I was low, if something simple went wrong like the TV breaking down, that was a major disaster. But now I just think okay, phone somebody and get it fixed. I think I learned the capacity to cope rather than instantly panic and get myself back into a state again. My recovery hasn't been about one individual aspect; I think that it's been a series of things coming together that have allowed me to recover. I've had a huge amount of support from my wife, the kids, friends. I had the counselling, access to a psychiatrist over a period of time, medication, my hobbies, the garden and my new career. I think that all of these combined to help me to recover.

I feel my experiences over the past few years have made me a better person, a more understanding person for having come through that. You don't want to come through it but, now that you have, it does give you a better understanding of what is happening to some people and how to support them.

If you'd like to share your story of recovery then email info@scottishrecovery.net attaching your story. You may also want to attach a picture though this is optional. If you'd like to discuss this further then phone 0141 240 7790.