

Recovery

Recovery is a deeply personal, unique process of changing our attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills, and or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life even within the limitations caused by illness. Recovery involves the development of a new meaning and purpose in our lives, as we grow beyond the destructive effects of illness¹.

This concept has arisen not from clinicians but from people with personal experience of illness and problems. The word “Recovery” is often given to those with psychological problems, but now also includes those with bodily problems such as diabetes, pain, and to those with addictions to food, gambling, drugs and alcohol etc.

The four areas of recovery which make up the Personal Recovery Framework are:

- **Hope**, as a frequent self-reported part of recovery
- **Self-identity**, including current and future self image
- **Meaning in life**, including life purpose and goals
- **Personal responsibility**, the ability to take personal responsibility for our own lives including our illness or problem

Successful recovery, often referred to as being “in recovery” can be infectious. Those with personal experience of the journey (we call them peers), can be excellent guides to personal recovery and are every bit as helpful as the clinicians / service providers.

As the role of the person with the problem changes from dependent to independent the role of the clinicians and service providers must change also. Providers best become guides/supporters, providing appropriate guidance and services whilst all the time keeping an intense focus on the individual’s path to personal recovery. Clinicians and providers must give space to friends, family and peers, whose help in recovery though less structured, is usually more important than their own. There can be arrogance in expert knowledge; there can be wisdom in the humility of privilege observing the progress of another.

The three main principles to guide peers and service providers in helping are:

- **Wellbeing**, to consider the person’s strong points rather than weak points
- **Citizenship**, helping towards full participation in the life of the community
- **Freedom**, from dependence, illness or problem, to be a goal of the support / treatment.

¹ This definition is an adaptation of the writing of AW Anthony “Recovery from Mental Illness: the guiding vision of the mental health system in the 1990’s.