

Concepts of Recovery

(as summarized by the Belleville Recovery Discussion Group)

Our message of recovery is a simple one: there is hope. We are not alone. We can help ourselves & we can help each other. No matter what our diagnosis may be or how long we have suffered from mental illness, we can choose to pursue recovery. We can be involved in recovery no matter what stage of the path to healing we may be on. So, what is recovery?

Recovery has often been misunderstood to mean a "cure" or complete absence of symptoms. Medical models of treatment focus on symptom relief (mainly through medication). The recovery model casts a much wider spotlight on restoring self-esteem and creating total wellness. Recovery involves a deeper process of personal growth in which medication and therapy are only one part. Recovery comes from **inside**. It is in our hands and depends on our choices, awareness, beliefs and practices.

Recovery is an individual process, so everyone with a psychiatric illness develops their own tools and methods that feel right for them. There isn't just one accepted definition of recovery nor a single way to measure it. Recovery is an expression of hope, a willingness to try and a process of developing a sense of self that is apart from illness or limitation. In recovery we come to understand that **we are not defined by our diagnosis**. We are more powerful than our illness. We can take full responsibility for our lives.

Mental illness can be a frightening, disconnecting experience filled with losses. It can also be a passage of self-discovery leading to compassion, empathy, inner strength and a deeper appreciation of life. Some of us choose to call recovery a "journey" or "path". Recovery is a holistic, self-determined, ongoing process. It isn't linear and can include setbacks, relapses and "bad days", as well as gains and breakthroughs. We all have different types of mental illness and different degrees of disability. The recovery process is likewise a unique experience for every individual.

Some **key principles** have been identified by consumers as being vital components of their recovery. Ten of these concepts are outlined in this handout.

Hope

Hope is defined as "desire accompanied by confident expectation". Having a sense of hope has been recognized as the cornerstone of recovery. Hope is based on our belief that recovery is possible and our desire to get better. All of us can work on feeling better than we do now. A "confident expectation" can grow from being part of a group of people who are working on recovery and managing their disorders day by day. If others can **do**, can **be**, and can **manage**, then so can you.

Acceptance

"The more you resist, the more it persists." acceptance is the first step in going beyond a problem. This means being at peace with our circumstances, not living in denial and not looking to blame anybody (including ourselves). Self acceptance is an agreement to appreciate, validate and support ourselves at this very moment: exactly as we are. Accepting what is and who we

are today is a giant step towards peace of mind. In our support group we practise acceptance of all our members and their problems. We strive for self acceptance of **who we are today** rather than dwelling on who we "used to be" or who we "wish to be".

Spirituality

Spirituality is a relationship with a higher power. Some identify their higher power as god. Others choose to call it nature, the order of the universe, the infinite, etc. For some, it comes from spiritual concepts like love, honesty, charity & service to others. Some look to the literature of recovery and self help for their spiritual connection. Others find their "higher self" through meditation and personal growth. Spirituality provides hope, solace during our times of crisis, peace and understanding, acceptance and a source of inner strength. Whatever spiritual concept works for you, it is a valuable part of recovery. Mutual support, acceptance & sharing in a safe environment are spiritual principles which we practise in this group.

Responsibility

We are not to blame for our conditions, but we are responsible for managing them to the best of our ability. We are accountable, in the same way everyone else is, for our actions. We are responsible for our attitude, our conduct, managing our therapy, and self-directing our thoughts, beliefs and habits. Responsibility breaks us out of the trap of being victims, feeling helpless and depending solely on outside help for all the answers. In this support group, we encourage people to own their problems and take charge of managing their lives.

Support & connection

Support from peers, family, friends and professionals is important to recovery. Participation in support groups can be vital. Consumers often report that interacting with others who understand their feelings and experiences is the most important ingredient for their recovery. Support doesn't mean being overly dependent or expecting others to have all the answers. Support is about being involved in a helping network and a partnership of healing. Support and connection are the basic foundation of our recovery group.

Education & insight

It is important to learn as much as possible about our disorders, our medications, the best treatment practices and available resources. Having a disorder can be our motivation to educate ourselves. Given the information we need, we have the capacity to make the decisions that are best for us. Our illness can also be an opportunity to gain insight and develop empathy for others who suffer. Some of our experiences are painful or difficult, but having gone through them helps us relate to others who suffer in similar ways. Sharing resources, doing research and consulting with professionals are parts of the learning process that can give us the knowledge and insight to help ourselves and others. Our support group is based on shared resources, empathy and experience.

Self-care

Self-care is about how well we look after ourselves. All the things that we do to protect and nurture our well-being are part of self-care. These include getting proper rest, good nutrition, regular exercise, daily relaxation and nurturing ourselves with things that we enjoy. It means learning to recognize symptoms and taking action to manage them before they get to the crisis stage. It means taking our medication regularly, applying coping skills, attending groups and developing a support system to rely on when necessary. The recovery discussion group encourages members to look after themselves and maintain a healthy lifestyle as a foundation for recovery.

Empowerment

Empowerment means believing that we have power and control over our lives. Empowerment is about the courage to take risks, face our fears and symptoms and challenge our limitations. This includes acting as our own agents or advocates and taking charge of our own healing process. In this group we are learning that keeping peer support active and available is a concrete example of empowerment.

Healing

Healing is a process of working **through** our illness, learning to manage it and make the most of life in spite of living with an ongoing disorder. Healing means making the choice to move in the direction of health and positive energy. Like recovery, healing is a journey that is unique to each person. We heal by discovering the roots of our distress and cultivating the things that lead us to happiness, peace and well-being. Healing goes beyond symptom control to the deeper level of transformation and complete wellness in body, mind and spirit.

Overcoming

If we see things as tragedies, they become devastating. If we see things as challenges, they become **motivating**. To meet and overcome the challenge of any disability or disorder, we first have to recognize it as our challenge. This means not just seeing mental health problems as a burden, a curse or something awful that has been imposed on us by circumstances. That is "victim" thinking. Overcoming means growing as a person in the process of dealing with our difficulties. Changing core beliefs and moving from being a victim to being victorious is how we overcome. Many of our members can honestly say that they are better people for having faced the challenge of mental illness. We are more honest, kind, compassionate, knowledgeable, accepting and giving. That is one of the most healing realizations in recovery, regardless of whether or not we still experience the symptoms of an illness. Many of us have transcended our symptoms and disorders by becoming better persons and being involved in recovery & peer support.

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From the Document: Brave New Minds – Recovery in Action **Prepared by the Eastern Regional Network**

A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF RECOVERY

"Recovery is a process, a way of life, an attitude, and a way of approaching the day's challenges. It is not a perfectly linear process. At times our course is erratic and we falter, slide back, regroup and start again. . . The need is to meet the challenge of the disability and to re-establish a new and valued sense of integrity and purpose within and beyond the limits of the disability; the aspiration is to live, work, and love in a community in which one makes a significant contribution." Patricia Deegan (1988)¹

- Recovery cannot be defined by the system because it is a highly personal process that is defined by the person and, at a most fundamental level, is a journey in finding meaning in one's life, on one's own terms
- Recovery is not a single model, it permeates the system
- Recovery is not synonymous with cure—but there is always opportunity for a person to improve their sense of meaning in their lives, to be involved in activities they find meaningful—in this sense, recovery is accessible to everyone
- Recovery thrives in hope-filled environments that nurture dignity and respect
- Recovery is made possible, in part, by people who stand by and believe in the person battling with an addiction and/or mental illness
- This journey involves recovery from the secondary consequences of being ill and the object of discrimination as well as from the illness itself
- Recovery can occur with or without professional intervention
- Recovery involves taking risks to try new things, and having the courage to do so

Recovery makes sense for the person and for the system: commitment to this common understanding of recovery entails specific practical details at the service and system levels:

- People in recovery are meaningfully involved in the community at all levels of system and service planning, delivery and evaluation
- We can demonstrate how people in recovery have the power to shift their community and the health care system
- Services can be closely tied to improved outcomes at a person's level, based on the determinants of health, rather than symptom reduction alone
- Services focus on community reconnection
- Respect, inclusion and authenticity form the basis for relationships
- Peer support services are an important ingredient of our recovery-oriented system – they cross all 'levels of need', and have been proven to be highly effective, both as a stand-alone service, or when accessed in combination with other mental health services

¹ As quoted in Nelson, G. & Ochocka, J. (October 2004). The Drive to Move Forward: A New Framework for Understanding Recovery from Mental Illness and Other Life Struggles

A Recovery Frame for the East Regional Mental Health Service System

Domains/Pillars of Recovery	Resources and Basic Needs	Choice and Self Determination	Independence	Interdependence and Connectiveness	Hope
Personal Level Indicators	Physical health goals included in planning Affordable, safe and comfortable housing Adequate income Reliable transportation	Planning is holistic and goals are in the person's own words Timely access to service Person has meaningful input into crisis plan Person has full information prior to providing consent Right to refuse treatment respected	Understanding of rights Employment or meaningful engagement is attained or maintained where desired Opportunities to advance education Community role/s Self Care	Connection to peer-run programs Partnership between service staff and person Involvement in meaningful activity Mutual respect between staff and people access service Strong, self-defined natural supports	Person's competence is believed in by staff Staff have understanding impact of mental health problems Staff believe in recovery
Program Level Indicators	Realistic, appropriate ratio of staff to people accessing service Staff advocate for services/resources needed Resources focus on services identified as priorities by service users Agencies partner with other community resources (eg health clubs) Staff are culturally competent	Range of service options to choose to reflect consumer preferences Staff are knowledgeable about service and treatment options Consumer peer advocate available Consumers and families are involved in and can influence service review and development Consumers part of core board membership	Services reflect promotion of independence and skill building Percentage of inpatient stays that are involuntary commitments Number of Community Treatment Orders	Agencies have affirmative action hiring policy Consumers work as paid employees and are compensated for their time in planning and evaluation activities Level of comfort and security in disclosure across the system Employment policies support affirmative action Training and leadership building opportunities shared across agencies (provider and peer-run), MHITF's	Agencies have explicit recovery oriented mission statement and corresponding expected outcomes Leadership consistently reinforces recovery vision, mission and standards Training/orientation ensures staff understanding of recovery and service implications Hiring practices based on cultural competencies
System Level Indicators	Existence of, and adherence to, person's bill of rights Consumers and families are always involved in system design and evaluation activities The range of service options (core basket of services) is defined and in place across the East Region A core set of evaluation criteria is agreed to across the East – by service option and satisfaction measures There is a standardized planning process across services that is guided by person-centred outcomes There is a free-standing peer-run program available to people in communities across the East, and peer-run programs are funded by MOHLTC Peer-run programs' funding is equivalent to 5% of total community mental health funding Healthy collaborations exist between mental health provider and peer-run programs Mental health services partner with non-mental health settings to promote attainment of personal goals (eg YMCA) Mental health and substance use programs are integrated Trauma services are available and linkages facilitated				