

Hope in Recovery - Reflections



Facilitating the Hope in Recovery sessions has been a joy and a privilege for me. It cannot be underestimated how meeting with the same group of people on a regular basis creates a special connection and space in which we all learn and support each other. The Hope in Recovery course is 7 parts and I have reflected on the themes from each session and their impact on me.

Crisis

We started week one looking at Crisis and explored how it felt to be unwell. I recalled the fear and loneliness I felt at this time as I emerged from psychosis, and the realisation that I had lost so much, including myself. We looked at different ways that Hope can be visualised as a form of light – sometimes just a flicker and sometimes all encompassing, and I was very aware that I had gone from a state of complete darkness, and over some years, had moved into a bright sunny day.

Labels

The next session we discussed what it was like to have a mental health label. This was a difficult but, in my opinion, necessary session as the group were able to own their experiences and talk about them freely in a non-judgemental space. I witnessed learners being able to share their diagnosis and experiences in a beautifully accepting environment. For me personally, I have found having a mental health diagnosis that I couldn't relate to quite upsetting, and I felt very misunderstood. Thankfully that is in the past and I now have a diagnosis I can relate to which has given me some peace of mind. We discussed how we are all more than a mental health label and that there are many positive labels we can give to ourselves too. I am so proud to be able to say that I'm an Aunty, a label I willingly accept and a role that brings me much happiness.

Breakthrough

Week three was Breakthrough when we explored our symptoms and the benefits and challenges of distraction. There are times when I have found distracting myself from my mental distress impossible but do recognise it has its benefits. I now particularly enjoy listening to my favourite radio station with a scented candle burning and find it has a calming effect when my mind is too busy. There was a wonderful point in the session when a few people realised they had a shared love of classical music. It was lovely to see how their passion and enthusiasm for music created a special connection between them.

Responsibility

The following week Responsibility was the topic of conversation. We discussed whether we could be responsible for our illness. I found the idea that I could be responsible for my mental health challenges something I could readily dismiss but that I can take responsibility for how I look after myself. I think it's okay for me to feel sad about what's happened to me, and I don't blame myself for my experiences, but I have realised I do have some control over how I look after myself.

Acceptance

Week five we moved onto Acceptance and the idea that we don't just recover and that's it. We may suffer setbacks and hardships along the way and it's how we cope with these that's important. This made me reflect on my own setbacks and although debilitating, after each episode I was able to learn something about my own recovery. We also looked at pictures of trees and plants that thrive in the most difficult and unexpected environments and likened these to our own resilience – despite what may seem impossible, there is always Hope.

Growth

The week on Growth was all about how letting go of past hurts and negative feelings can help us move forward. This session reminded me that I don't have to forgive in order to move forward but that letting go meant my past didn't have to continue to influence my future.

Hope

The final session looked at how we can show and give Hope to others. Over the course of seven weeks, I watched a group of strangers become a group of peer supporters with everyone bringing something unique and inspiring to the journey we shared. I can't thank everyone who attended and co-facilitated the sessions with me enough. My role in the Recovery College is part of my own recovery and I will be forever thankful for being given the opportunity to meet the wonderful people I have. If I can go some way to inspiring and giving Hope to others, then I have turned my mental distress into something positive – I live in hope that I do!

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