

Recovery

Promoting hope, choice and opportunity

Issue 9, Spring 2020

Empowering and inspiring people

In this issue we focus on how the recovery colleges can empower students and through the courses inspire people to find hope.

Finding hope

World Mental Health Day 2019 saw the launch of *Finding Hope*, our coproduced guide to help and support for mental health and wellbeing in the Western HSCT area. We decided just over two years ago to work on the Public Health Agency funded project when it became clear to us whilst gathering resources for our courses and workshops, that it would be useful to have all of this information in one place for our facilitators to easily access. We quickly realised that it would also be of great value to our students and anyone else interested in mental health, such as people with mental health issues, carers and supporters, and of course, healthcare professionals.

The college's coproduction committee as always, rose to the challenge and each member undertook researching their particular area of interest – definitions were agreed upon, telephone helplines contacted to make sure they served the Western HSCT area, websites checked for accurate and easy to understand information and advice – and slowly this vast amount of information was amassed that had to be condensed into a usable and useful (big) pocket size guide!

Our students, volunteer peer educators and service users bravely shared their real lived experience of

managing, and in some cases recovering from, a range of common issues such as addiction, loneliness and self-harm with the intention of empowering other people to hope and believe that they too have the ability to better self-manage and assert control over their recovery. It is also likely that through reading the guide some people will be empowered to seek help at an early stage and prevent the worsening of a particular issue – a real cause for celebration.

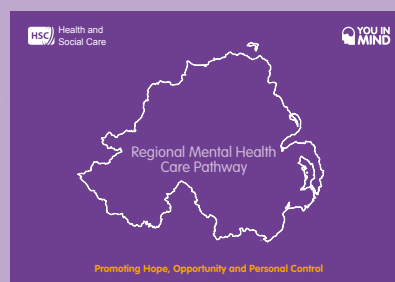
Our sincere wish is that everyone who reads the guide will take some comfort and hope from the knowledge that they are not alone in even the most difficult of times, and that everyone has the potential for recovery.



Western Recovery College members at the launch of *Finding Hope*, a guide to local mental health and wellbeing support

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HSC Health and Social Care

YOU IN MIND

You can view the Regional Mental Health Care Pathway at <https://pha.site/youinmind>

Song for the soul CD launch

The 'Song for the soul' choir from the Rosstown recovery team was formed in 2015 with the aim of bringing staff and service users from the Derry/Londonderry area together. The aim is to benefit from the well documented positive effects of singing, such as promoting connectedness, and enhancing wellbeing – all members of the choir have benefitted immensely.

The choir has performed in many venues and has taken part in major festivals such as the Annual Foyle Maritime Clipper Festival. The Song for the soul CD was launched on World Mental Health Day (October 2019) in the Playhouse Theatre and marks a significant milestone in the life of this vibrant choir, which continues to grow from strength to strength.



New service user consultant in WHSCT

The appointment of Brian Toner to the post of Consultant in Service User Experience in August 2019 has enhanced the ability of the Western HSCT to involve service users, carers and community partners in the design and delivery of Adult Mental Health Services.

Brian comes to his post with a background as a Peer Support Worker and Lead Peer Trainer in the Southern HSCT. Prior to this, Brian worked for many years in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Sitting on the Senior Management Team, Brian is able to bring the voice of 'lived experience' to the highest level. According to Brian, "The landscape of mental health services is changing rapidly. In the nearly six years since the You In Mind Mental Health Care Pathway was launched, the region has seen paid roles for people with lived

experience created at Band 3, Band 4, Band 5 and Band 7. Opportunities for coproduction are opening up within every Trust. These are challenging times for mental health teams and innovative approaches are required to meet the increasing demands on services.

"In my role as service user consultant, I want to ensure that the knowledge and experience of service users, carers and community partners forms a vital part of the design and delivery of mental health services in the Western Trust."

A young adult's perspective of Belfast Recovery College



For the last few months, I have been volunteering at Belfast Recovery College and I love it. I really recommend the recovery college as all the staff are so friendly and understanding and the courses are just amazing. They run so many courses, which cover a wide range of mental health illnesses such as bipolar and eating disorders. They also run courses such as WRAP and advocacy which help you to learn new skills, both of which I have attended.

My challenges all began around two to three years ago when my school noticed the sudden drop in my weight and concentration. My friends were watching everything I ate to make sure I was eating something. My weight kept going down so mum took me to the doctors where I was offered a referral to Beechcroft's eating disorder team. I managed to put on a little bit of weight so avoided it but this didn't last. On 22 August 2017 I first saw my eating disorder team where I was assessed by the dietitian and one of the psychiatric nurses. The news came out that I was severely underweight and had anorexia.

Things were still up and down but luckily after six months I was discharged from inpatient so I got to go home and only had to come up once a week to see my outpatient team who I can't thank enough

for their support throughout my journey. I hope my story has helped some people who are going through similar things or even just helped you realise how it can be life threatening.

I heard about the recovery college through my Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) team and I'm so glad they recommended it. I hope to do my five day WRAP soon so that I can run WRAP courses. Advocacy gives you a level 2 OCN, which is equivalent to a grade B GCSE– with having to cut down my GCSEs due to illness, I was really grateful that I could add another one.

At the beginning of my first WRAP course I was very shy and wanted to go home but I stuck it out and really enjoyed it. So if you decide to do a course with Belfast Recovery College, make sure you stick with it and don't just go by what you thought of the first hour. It would be great if we got more people to join in on our courses and so I hope this will encourage you to join.

Anna Kirkwood

A hat-trick for Belfast Recovery College in 2019

Following on from winning the ANTOUS All Ireland Adult Education Awards for Health and Wellbeing and becoming the first recovery college in the UK to receive Gold Star CPD Accreditation Award, now Helen Anderson, Belfast Recovery College recovery coordinator, has won the prestigious WOW Award in the 2019 Belfast HSCT Chairman's Awards hosted at Belfast City Hall.

Chairman, Peter McNaney CBE, presented Helen (supported by the college team and student representatives) with a silver perpetual trophy, certificate and a cheque for £1,000 to reinvest in the services. This followed success in the 2016 Chairman's Awards winning first prize in the people category, winning £10,000 for reinvesting in services.

The WOW award was about going the extra mile. A compelling vision was to open access to mental health education opportunities to all our people in the Belfast community to improve the wellbeing and mental health of everyone: staff, carers and service users. Helen was committed to placing the Belfast Recovery College in the heart of the Belfast community. Another aim was to involve people from the community with lived experience of mental ill health together with mental health professionals to share their expertise together to inspire hope, promote control and give opportunities for learning about mental health recovery.

Helen was supported and championed by Mary O' Brien, Head of Social Work, and Martin Daly, Service User Consultant, and has grown the college from 40 students

in 2016 to over 2,200 students in 2019 (and over 5,000 applications for courses). Examples of best practice include:

- over 400 students attending WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) courses;
- a peer student placement coaching and mentoring programme being implemented this year with six students gaining employment as peer support workers in the Belfast HSCT, returning to education, employment and voluntary work;
- feedback on the high quality of programmes that are being shared across the community;
- 15% rise in applications because of its partnership in the community and voluntary sector;
- a project with Child and Adult Mental Health Services to engage young people, increasing applications by 20%;
- harnessing the Belfast community to learn together and welcoming everyone to learn about mental health;
- exploring our attitudes to mental ill health to reduce barriers to reaching our potential and engaging fully in society;
- engagement together in the life of the college by over 500 service users, 500 staff, 110 carers, public, private and community and voluntary sectors.



Helen Anderson, Belfast HSCT Recovery College coordinator



Empowerment in the South Eastern Recovery College



I have had had my own struggles with my mental health for a number of years. When I was diagnosed with bipolar, my world was turned upside down. I felt confused, hopeless and full of fear. All I knew about myself changed, or so I believed, and I continued to battle my diagnosis. I felt labelled, defined by my diagnosis, and I struggled to cope.

With continuing support from the Community Mental Health team, I then attended cognitive behavioural therapy. This helped me gain an insight into my condition. It was my therapist who recommended the recovery college, and it was at that point life changed. Confusion turned to control, hopelessness turned to hopeful and fear turned to fulfilment.

Being a student in the college meant that I no longer felt I had this label, I was me again – not defined by my diagnosis. I was not alone. Through listening to the experiences of fellow students, I felt truly empowered that recovery was not only possible for me but achievable. I was able to learn more about myself,

nurture what is important to me, and ultimately better self-manage my condition. I will be forever grateful for those valuable connections I have made, and it really has been pivotal in taking me on to the next step of my journey in becoming a peer trainer.

Empowerment is at the core of my values when I deliver any course. From my time as a student I always felt truly listened to and this helped build my confidence and desire to become a trainer myself. I believe that each and every student makes such a valuable contribution to the college, and to see students develop and build confidence, make connections with their learning, and witness friendships being made, is one of the most rewarding parts of my role.

I am so grateful to the South Eastern HSCT Recovery College for many reasons, but primarily for the empowerment I have felt, which made me realise the person I am and my self-worth and this has given me the opportunity to empower others.

Kathryn Fletcher, SEHSCT

On attending a WRAP course

*With this course comes self-reflection
Will it give me the satisfaction?
Of having prepared a personal WRAP
To assist me in future if I snap.*

*There's daily maintenance I need to do
Specific things to follow through
Even the act of taking a nap
I need to record on my personal WRAP.*

*Hope, education, self-advocacy,
responsibility and support
This structured approach will help
me sort
How I am feeling when I am well
As opposed to the days when it all
goes to hell.*

*When I leave it'll make more sense
Help me to get down off the fence
I guess I'm a convert, yes a fan
Of having a wellness recovery action plan.*

By David Murdoch, SEHSCT

Creative writing and recovery



I'm Paul Mc Carroll and I have been a Peer Recovery Trainer with the Northern HSCT Recovery College for nearly a year, which is a role I thoroughly enjoy. It gives me an opportunity to inspire hope and encourage, to educate others about mental health and recovery and with the appropriate sharing of my own story, illustrate that recovery really is possible.

To date, I have cofacilitated courses such as 'Living with and understanding depression', 'Building resilience', 'Internet safety' and 'WRAP'. I have enjoyed delivering these courses; however, quite surprisingly to me, one of my favourite courses to deliver is 'Creative writing'. Prior to preparing for this course, I thought that I didn't have a creative bone in my body. I thought creative writing was for those with a flair for the arts and for literature and only accessible to some as opposed to all. I couldn't have been more wrong! Creative writing covers a range of mediums from words and pictures, poetry, journaling, keeping a scrapbook and collaging. The course aim is to inspire and encourage creativity for producing your own recovery story.

In my own life, I have found that writing about my own recovery through poetry and storytelling has been incredibly healing and freeing. The students who attend the course have stated that they enjoy it and they often state that they have found new and exciting ways to document and express how they feel and to articulate their own recovery journey.

Photos of artwork completed by service users and volunteers in the Oasis cafe (a drop-in centre for service users in Holywell Hospital, NHSCT).



Hope

Late afternoon.
The breeze so light upon my skin. I feel so alive
Surrounded by these people I do not know.
Yet we belong as one, united
To remember those we've lost,
The lives now done.

The tears drip down
They lost their hope, I know that place
And yet I'm free.
Look up -
It's like a dream, I can't explain
This feeling here
Entwined with pain
This vibrant, pulsing life and
Hues
I could not see before.

We need to catch within our web
This pain, despair and loneliness,
And weave as one unique design for those still
lost,
We all can shine.

The light grows dim, I'm getting cold
The candle flickers in the wind.
But hanging there our dreams are caught and
held.

Despite the changing tide of time
We will hold on, the dream is real.
In time, all things can start to heal.

By Lisa Morrison,
Lead Peer Recovery Trainer, SHSCT

Twitter: @LisaTMSA

Empowered to bring my skills back to life



I first heard of the recovery college in late 2016 from my then occupational therapist. Little did I know what a change it was going to make in my life. I registered with the college and began to do courses in 2017. I trained as a WRAP facilitator in April 2017. At the time I made a remark to the coordinator that there was still a bit of a secretary in me (I had previously been employed as a private secretary in Belfast). I continued doing courses and the college offered me the opportunity to help with some administration work so I helped to set up a registration system which took me a few months to complete. It gave me a real sense of empowerment because I realised I could still do what I had done so long ago.

I then started to do scary things like putting things onto the college database and answer queries via phone. Earlier this year, I coproduced and codelivered a course on living with bipolar affective disorder. I didn't know what to expect and it was a steep learning curve, but I found it very empowering and it filled me with hope. My experiences as a student and a volunteer at the recovery college have taken me out of my comfort zone and reignited a belief in myself which I thought was long gone. I am part of the team and have a meaningful role, the staff in the college believe in me and my confidence is restored. I will be eternally grateful for the opportunities offered and would recommend anyone to try the recovery college for themselves. I have a new sense of purpose in my life and it is totally different from a few years ago.

Pauline Reid, volunteer with SHSCT Recovery College

Empowerment through the recovery and wellness college

I'm Lyndsey, a 34 year old mum of two amazing kids who walk hand in hand with me through life and the personal recovery and wellbeing that is my family heartbeat, the life-breathing thread woven through everything of importance to me.

From age 17 I periodically received help with my mental health challenges. While this taught me how to endure symptoms and build life back up from crisis point, I couldn't endure living for long before becoming exhausted and hopeless again. Despite knowing how to access external supports and having awareness of internal strength, I always felt powerless... unable to take personal responsibility. I remained stuck.

In 2018 I began engaging with my local recovery and wellness college and learned a whole new language. I can clearly trace today's freedom to developing my personal WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) and I live by those key principles - hope, personal responsibility, education, self-advocacy and support.

My journey has brought me new opportunities within SHSCT Recovery College, recently completing Level 2 WRAP facilitator training, studying an Advanced Diploma in Mental Health and Wellbeing Coaching, and becoming a Stage 3 mentee on the Mental Health Forum's capacity building programme.

I'm truly blessed to begin a new journey of learning and personal and professional growth in an organisation



that encourages and acknowledges continual work on personal recovery. I'm privileged to pass on what was so freely given to me in hope others may feel empowerment, freedom and change in their lives.

**Lyndsey Laffins,
student and sessional
trainer, SHSCT
Recovery College**



Recovery college evaluation

To help inform the development of a sustainability strategy for recovery colleges, the Public Health Agency (PHA) commissioned Ruth Flood and Associates to carry out an evaluation in December 2018. There were two overarching aims for this work:

- To evaluate the processes by which recovery colleges are implemented in HSCTs across Northern Ireland; and
- To explore stakeholders' requirements for a wider evaluation framework that will measure the impact of recovery colleges.

A final written report was submitted to PHA in June 2019 and a summary of some of the key findings are as follows:

- There is consistency and clarity around the purpose and activities of all five recovery colleges. It was striking how passionate everyone involved with the recovery colleges was about the positive impact on students and how consistently peer trainers and mental health professionals described what the recovery colleges do.
- The coproduction model runs through the ethos of all the recovery colleges and students emphatically remark on how positive it is to engage with those with 'lived experience'- giving them a real sense of hope that they too can further recover and even volunteer/ become a peer trainer. The message of giving hope, opportunity and control to those with mental health conditions and their families/carers comes through very strongly. Recovery college teams are working hard to deliver education that aids recovery.
- Mental health professionals identified a number of impacts on them personally of being involved in the recovery college:
 - different way of working, challenging for them to work outside clinical context
 - liberated by being able to deliver their expertise differently
 - positive to be in a non-clinical environment and engaging with service users on a human/equal level rather than as a patient
 - the learning and opportunities can inform their clinical work, helping to deepen their understanding of the service user experience.

- Many respondents identified that the recovery college has the potential to have a significant impact on mental health services and the wider health services in terms of an educational model which also breaks down the barriers between professionals and service users. There is an opportunity for recovery colleges to have a greater presence / higher profile outside of mental health services and across the wider health service, particularly primary care services.
- All recovery colleges share the same ethos and approach to coproduction. However they are not operating on a level playing field as they have diverse resources which impact on their ability to deliver the number and variety of courses.
- Recovery college teams have a broad sense of the demographics of who is attending their courses from the enrolment forms, and whether students are new to the recovery college or an existing student, but it is not clear to what extent they have all been able to analyse the information on the forms and interrogate the data further.
- It is clear that there is appetite for improving evaluation systems and frameworks. Recovery colleges know that they are having a positive impact and they would welcome the opportunity to communicate this.

Further to this report, a facilitated evaluation workshop was held in October 2019 to help HSC recovery colleges to progress evaluation work on a regional basis to further develop the sustainability of recovery colleges.



Nursing student's perspective in the Northern Recovery College

1. What stage are you at in your studies?

I have a year left to complete at Ulster University and I am studying on the Magee Campus.

2. What year were you when on placement in the Recovery College?

I was on placement in the Northern HSCT recovery college in the first year of my training. This was my final placement of first year and I spent nine weeks with the college team.

3. What activities were you involved with in your time here?

During my time in the recovery college I was fully involved with all activities and courses that were available at the time. I attended many courses as a student and also was involved with the coproduction meetings for developing new courses for the prospectus. During this time at the college I completed the two day WRAP course and was encouraged to think about my own wellness and tools that would support me throughout my training.

4. How was your overall experience, and did it empower you?

I really enjoyed my nine weeks within the Recovery College, I gained a much better understanding of the recovery ethos and how the recovery college courses can empower and support individuals to finding their own solutions. My placement empowered me to think differently about service user involvement and emphasised that individuals are the experts on themselves.

5. Did your placement here impact on future practice?

I feel my placement really helped me to appreciate that individuals can live very fulfilling lives despite having mental health challenges. I spent lots of time with the peers hearing about their personal experience which has given me an understanding that I don't think I would have got from reading a text book. I feel the recovery college enabled me to have more empathetic towards individuals to support them whilst keeping their wishes/choices at the centre of my decision making. I foster the concept of hope and try to promote this on a daily basis. I feel my time at the recovery college was brilliant and resulted in me becoming a true champion for recovery and recovery colleges.



**Kelly Williamson, nursing student,
University of Ulster, Magee**



Coproducing recovery college courses in the NHSCT: experience of an occupational therapist

The recovery college is a fantastic, holistic facility actively promoting openness, inclusivity and wellbeing. It mirrors and fully embraces all of the qualities and ethos of my chosen vocation, putting positive principles into practice every day. Working with the college in this proactive environment has been a real privilege.

My name is Claire Stuart, I am an occupational therapist with over 30 years' experience working within the Northern HSCT. About a year ago I had the opportunity to embark on a new, rewarding journey as a trainer for the NHSCT Recovery College. Co-working with people from both lived and learned backgrounds, whose passion and dedication are evident, we come together as a team to coproduce

and cofacilitate the courses we deliver. Everyone has a voice. This collective wealth of knowledge and experience is translated into all of the courses delivered.

I have reflected often on the power of shared learning and shared goals that the recovery college offers to all who come for support. A welcoming environment designed to impart knowledge and understanding, build coping skills and confidence, encouraging self-empowerment. Seeing the personal journeys, the personal outcomes and listening to the positive feedback from students has been truly inspiring.

Clare Stuart, occupational therapist, NHSCT

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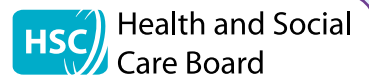
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