

CHICKENS, ROADS AND RECOVERY IN MENTAL HEALTH BY STEVE WHITE

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Programme Manager for Mental Health.

He holds qualifications in Social Work, Psychology
& Te Reo Māori.

As a result of his own experience of the recovery
journey he would like to support and encourage
tangata whai ora to be active participants in their
own recovery, and see mental health workers
become recovery oriented in their practice.

number of writers as a journey. In these articles, road
and journey will be used interchangeably in reference
to recovery.

Curtis (1998) writes that "recovery is a process, not a
place Recovery is about getting there", and the
Blueprint for Mental Health states that

"Recovery is a journey as much as a
destination. It is different for everyone.
For some people with mental illness,
recovery is a road they travel only once
or twice, to a destination that is relatively
easy to find. For others, recovery is a
maze with an elusive destination, a maze
that takes a lifetime to navigate"

Recently a member of Centre 401 asked the age old
question "why did the chicken cross the road?" to
Planet 401. As a result I was approached to provide the
answer in an article. For the purposes of this article I
will change the question slightly to "why should the
chicken cross the road?" and taking this adapted
question I hope to link it to the concept of recovery in
mental health.

As we know, recovery can be defined as "the ability to
live well in the presence or absence of one's mental
illness". But what does this have to do with chickens
and roads? I hope that through a series of articles I can
shed some light on the question.

There are two key metaphors in the question – 'chicken'
and 'road'. A metaphor is a figure of speech, which
makes a comparison between two unlike things,
without using the word like or as. For example, "like a
bull in a china shop", where the bull is a reference to a
large, or clumsy person, and the china shop is some
kind of fragile or sensitive task or activity.

This first article sets the scene through developing an
understanding of the metaphors and their relationship
to mental health. The remainder of the series will focus
on preparing to cross to the 'road', the dangers on the
'road', the 'road' rules, and the other side of the 'road'.

THE ROAD:

In the question the chicken has
to cross a road. The concept of
the road is suggestive of a
journey to be under taken or a
path to be travelled, and like
a road there are potential
Dangers to be encountered
and overcome. Recovery has been described by a



The road to be travelled in recovery is non-linear, in
other words, it is not a straight line and you may have
to dodge, weave and negotiate your way through and
past various obstacles or challenges. These obstacles
can be likened to things like traffic, road works and
other hazards on the metaphorical road. In reality these
things can be represented by factors such as
discrimination, changes in our mental health, and
contact with mental health services and so on.

No one journey is the same as the next, each road is
unique, but there are some rules for the road that can
be shared regardless of the length or complexity of the
road being travelled or crossed. The road is, as Deegan
(1998) reflects, a "lived experience". It is your own
journey and your own experience, growing in
understanding of your illness, label or diagnosis, a
developing awareness of yourself, a discovery of ways
of coping and living that you may not have used before,
and learning new ways of approaching daily challenges.
Finally one last, beautiful, reflection that recovery is
indeed a journey not simply a destination to be
achieved, can be found in the use of the term 'tangata
whai ora' to describe or refer to mental health service
users. For those of you unaware of its meaning it has
been described to me as 'a person seeking wellness'!

THE CHICKEN:

Contrary to what may immediately
spring to mind if I was to call you a
'chicken' (i.e. a wimp or coward)
consider the idea that chicken is used
in reference to youthfulness or young
age. This notion fits well with the
earlier discussion about the road being
like a journey. Growing up or aging is
in essence a journey, and therefore it
is an appropriate description of

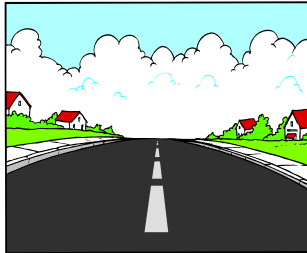


tangata whai ora beginning their recovery journey, who is not unlike a human being who develops and grows through the various stages of the life.

Following the common themes in recovery identified by Ralph (2005) we see that the tangata whai ora, like the chicken preparing to cross the road, is often faced with denial, despair, withdrawal, isolation, passivity, a loss of a sense of self and alienation. The road that lies in front is a journey away from those things. Hope fuels the fire and feeds the desire to cross the road and embark on the journey. It is hope in a "future with the promise of continued satisfaction and achievement despite the limitations that life may bring". Life can be different, and hope "springs from a sense of the possible", a belief in a positive outcome.

THE ROAD AHEAD:

Each one of us is the proverbial chicken crossing the road. Each road is as long as it is, some of us may travel a lifetime and for others it may be shorter. Some of us may feel we have reached the other side, and then perhaps, discover that we only made it to the median strip and the road goes on. There may be some of you at the beginning, but regardless of your place on your road to recovery I encourage you to remain firm in the hope that each day will be a little brighter than the next.



Kia kaha, kia maia, kia manawanui.

Be brave, be strong and be steadfast. Hold on to what you know is true and right.

i Mental Health Commission. (1998). **Blueprint for Mental Health Services in New Zealand: How Things Need To Be.** Wellington: The Mental Health Commission.

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iv Deegan, P. (1998). Recovery: The lived experience of rehabilitation. **Psychosocial Journal of Rehabilitation 11(4)11-19.**

v Ralph, R.O. (2005). Verbal definitions and visual models of recovery: Focus on the recovery model. In Ralph, R.O. & Corrigan, P.W. (Eds) **Recovery in Mental Illness: Broadening Our Understanding of Wellness.** Washington DC: American Psychological Association

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