

THE CHICKEN ON THE ROAD: FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON RECOVERY

BY STEVE WHITE

In this second installment in the series on Chickens, Roads and Recovery in Mental Health we will look further at the 'Road'.

In Part One, we were introduced to the road, and saw that recovery in mental health has been likened to a road or journey. It is also interesting to note that the analogy of a road is used repeatedly in both fictional and non-fiction literature to describe a journey towards enlightenment, understanding, personal development, happiness and wellbeing. Consider for a moment the stories of Dorothy's journey down the yellow brick road to the Emerald City and the Wizard, the Pilgrim in Pilgrim's Progress, Bilbo Baggins in The Hobbit, or the writings of M. Scott Peck, and many other self development writers. And what about the numerous songs that pay homage to the road in so many ways.

So what do we know of the road this far? We know the recovery journey is 'non-linear' – it is not a straight open road, and around each bend you will encounter both opportunities and obstacles. Whilst we may all embark on a journey of recovery each road travelled is also different to the next, meaning that the road you travel will be different to the road travelled by other tangata whai ora. Personally I don't think this necessarily means that we cannot, or won't, travel the road with another and share similar experiences, but I do think, however, that the opportunities and obstacles that will present themselves on the journey will be specific to you!

OBSTACLES ON THE ROAD

Anthony (1993:15) writes that recovery is a deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life even with the limitations caused by illness. [It] involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness. Therefore the notion of recovery can seem illusive, an unobtainable dream that one might never achieve. Recovery dreams and goals can seem so far out of reach that the journey does not get started. It is fog or mist on the road that can obscure or cloud the dream, and the result is that a tangata whai ora (i.e. the chicken) may not begin the journey as the view ahead.



When taking a road trip into unknown territory one usually consults a map. The recovery journey is indeed a trip into a new phase of life, of redefining oneself in the presence or absence of a mental illness or psychiatric label. However there is no road map, or prescribed pathway for the road of recovery, even though research confirms that the recovery is a possible outcome for people who experience significant mental illness (Sullivan 1994). Each recovery journey taken is, as we have discovered a unique to each individual.



A central tenet of recovery is the concept of hope. *"Hope springs from a sense of what is possible"*. It is the belief that in a positive outcome with regard to circumstances and events in life, and gives rise to the feelings that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best. But with the road being covered in mist and no map being available the journey is uncertain, and this uncertainty can lead to fear, and this fear can contribute to the loss of the hope that is so important.

If you do feel stuck at the start of your journey or fearful of what the future may hold I would encourage you to be strong and take heart, because the fog and mist does clear, and the road ahead becomes visible and each mile travelled brings with it a wealth of experiences and opportunities. Deegan writes of refusing, collectively and individually, to succumb to the images of despair that are often, and readily, associated with mental illness. She speaks of a 'conspiracy of hope' and of how tangata whai ora "can become the experts in [their] own self care, can regain control over [their] lives, and can be responsible for [their] own individual journey of recovery" (p.2)

You are in the driver's seat, which means you are in control, Deegan makes that very clear. As the driver you get to choose your passengers, and it is these passengers that can make the journey easier, or unfortunately more difficult. The passengers that I am referring to are those people who we have in our support network. 'Recovery needs a supportive environment to thrive' so states one of the principles of recovery. Blanch et al tell us that interpersonal barriers are perhaps the most significant hurdle in promoting recovery, so it become important when considering who you choose to ride with you on the recovery journey – are they family, whānau and friends who love you and accept you for who you are without judgment on account of your mental illness,

they people who put you down, and see you being incapable of making change and living the life you dream of?

The notion of a supportive environment also extends to the external factors that have an impact in recovery like the services that are provided for tangata whai ora, and the views and attitudes of the community towards people who have, or do experience mental illness. I wish to address those factors in part 3 of the series.

If I was to ask a personal question it would be:

"Do you feel capable of undertaking this recovery journey?"

A personal belief in oneself, combined with the hope that one feels, is another key to a 'successful' journey. Self Stigma however gets in the way. It is known that stigma and discrimination of tangata whai ora is very prevalent in the community and the harm and impact of it on tangata whai ora has been studied extensively. Part 3 will address this in depth but I want to consider here the impact of *Internalized Stigma*, as it quite clearly affects the answer of my earlier question. Internalized stigma, or self-stigma, are the internal perceptions, beliefs and emotions that are held by tangata whai ora, and it manifests itself in demoralization and lowered self esteem, which in turn can lead to difficulties in social interaction, withdrawal, and a reluctance to sit in the 'drivers seat' because one does not see themselves as worthy or capable. Internalized stigma occurs when tangata whai ora start believing what others say about them.



So in preparation for the journey check your vehicle, never mind the weather, and fill the seats with supportive people who will encourage the driver when the road is long and maybe treacherous at times. In closing I want to leave you with a quote from Nelson Mandela:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Notwithstanding the overt Christian connotations I encourage to get behind the wheel and take the journey. For those of you further down your roads just remember to stop and help those who may be stuck or stranded along the way, assist each other through any obstacles that may present themselves.

In looking forward to Part Three I want to focus on some of the challenges of the journey, the obstacles on the road ahead.

- i Baum, L. Frank. (2002). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. London: Pavillion
- ii Bunyan, J. (2003). *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- iii Tolkien, J.R.R. (2001). *The Hobbit*. London: Harper Collins
- iv Peck, M. Scott. (1990). *The Road Less Travelled: A new psychology of love, traditional values and spiritual growth*. London: Arrow
- v Anthony, W.A. (1993). Recovery from mental illness: The guiding vision of the mental health system in the 1990's. *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, 16(4), 11-23
- vi Sullivan, W.P. (1994). The long and winding road: The process of recovery from severe mental illness. *Innovations & Research* 3(3), 19-27
- vii Russinova, Z. (1999). Provider's hope-inspiring competence as a factor optimizing psychiatric rehabilitation outcomes. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 65(4), 50-57.
- viii Adams, S.M. & Partee, D.J. (1998). Hope: The critical factor in recovery. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing & Mental Health Services*, 36(4), 29-32
- ix Deegan, P. (1996). *Recovery and the Conspiracy of Hope*. Sixth Annual Mental Health Services Conference of Australia and New Zealand, Brisbane, Aust

Do You Want A Recovery That...

- * **Supported**
- * **Is led by you**
- * **Set to your pace**
- * **Promotes self responsibility**
- * **Encourages minimal reliance on Mental Health Services**

Then you need to see

Shane, Lena, Chris, or Fiona
from our

Mobile Peer Facilitation Team
Centre 401 or
Phone 8380199
to make an appointment

You Choose The Venue!

