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# Abraham Low SELF HELP SYSTEMS NEWSLETTER

**SUMMER 2013**

*A Community Mental Health Organisation That Offers A Self-Help Method Of Will Training*

## Setting out Recovery's stall for Minister for Mental Health, Kathleen Lynch

We were given an opportunity to present a glimpse of the work that we do and the services that we offer. Mary FitzGerald our PR Specialist choreographed the event. The meeting (on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012) kicked off with gathering for photographs at Buswell's Hotel. Later Minister Kathleen Lynch took us to her office where a meeting followed with 4 from Recovery-Dermod Grennan (Chair Management Committee & GL Drumcondra), Rosaleen Fitzpatrick (Treasurer), Paddy Harding (GL Baldoyle) and Suzanne White (Athru Solutions).

Dermod gave an over view of our activities and programmes: Rosaleen and Paddy spoke of their personal stories and how the Recovery International programme had become a stepping stone to their wellness. Suzanne spoke of the excellence of the "Power to Change" programme and of it's potential to enhance the quality of life among young adolescents. Minister Lynch listened attentively to our presentations. She was interested in both programmes: mental health and social adjustment among adolescents was a theme of particular concern for her. She was very interested in our Power to Change programme and exploring its potential role in addressing societal needs in this area.

It was a good day and an opportunity to spread the word and, hopefully, a good chance to engage a wider audience.

### Keep endorsing

**Dermod Grennan Chair- Management Committee**

## Peer support for those with mental illness

For many centuries those with mental illness spent their lives in hospital and were viewed with fear and incomprehension by the public. Of course things have changed and psychiatric institutions have been pulled down and most of those with mental illness live productive and fulfilling lives among their families and communities. This focus on rebuilding life and relationships after an episode of mental illness is now what is termed "the recovery model" of mental illness. This is to distinguish it from the more traditional approach which focused on symptom reduction and control rather than quality of life.

One aspect of this shift in focus has been the role of those with mental illness in supporting others with similar illnesses. This is something which mental health professionals support as an adjunct to treatment from the psychiatrist and members of the multidisciplinary team. Peer support has for decades been central to the continuing sobriety of many alcoholics and drug misusers through AA and other organisations. Recovery Inc. is one of the oldest peer support organisations.

The belief that those who have been through mental illness would bring an additional sensitivity to helping others deal with it, has merit. There is also the real possibility of their being able to share



*Pictured from (L-R): Mr Dermod Grennan, Ms Rosaleen Fitzpatrick, Ms Kathleen Lynch, Minister for Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People; Mr Paddy Harding, and Ms Suzanne White, celebrating the 75th Anniversary of Abraham Low Self Help Systems/Recovery International, the Community Mental Health organisation in Ireland.*

insights and advices from a perspective that is not available to the general public, no matter how philanthropic it may be. Meeting with those who have adjusted to their illness and found purpose and meaning in their lives and in their communities will encourage and assist those who feel ashamed or stigmatised. What better role model for a person recovering from a mental illness than a peer who has re-established his/her role as a parent, an employee or as an ordinary member of the public.

It is recognised that discharge from hospital after an episode of illness is, for many, a challenge and the role of peer support in building a bridge between the hospital environment and the community to which the patient returns is of major benefit in easing this return. The assistance may be emotional in that personal experiences can be shared while the individual is enabled to make sense of his/her illness experience. The help provided may also be supervisory, albeit informally. For example if there is an indication that the person is relapsing or is having trouble with accommodation he/she can be encouraged to approach the appropriate agencies. Most important is the hope that can be instilled by peers, acting as role models, that there is life after mental illness. In some countries these organisations have become professionalised and integrated into the multi-disciplinary team although this has not happened in Ireland. Indeed there is a question as to its desirability since their strength is their voluntariness and the personal element inherent in such groups.

One of the benefits of peer support organisations such as Recovery Inc. is that they tear apart the negative stereotypes of those with mental illness by providing positive role models and in so doing assist others in achieving recovery. Long may their work continue.



*Leading Psychiatrist, Professor Patricia Casey endorses Recovery's strength as its voluntariness and the personal element inherent in Recovery Groups*

**Patricia Casey FRCPI, FRCPsych, MD.  
 Professor of Psychiatry,  
 University College Dublin.**

## Your stories and examples of how Recovery has helped you

### Catherine - My Recovery Story

I became ill in 2005 and I was in St. Patrick's Hospital for a few months, I was diagnosed as having Clinical Depression. My family were surprised as they knew I had been going to see a counsellor, but they felt I was complaining a lot and I had also lost a lot of weight but I hadn't told them how I was feeling. I had worked all the time and it was only when I went to my G.P. and told him I had been feeling suicidal for a few months that he sent me into St. Pat's.

I was really relieved to be there as I felt I couldn't do anymore myself and I realised I needed professional help. I felt I was really well taken care of and was grateful to have such a good service available to me. I stayed well until 2007 and then I was in hospital for another few weeks.

During the following few years I had a few major changes in my life and even though my family are very supportive of me they felt that I needed support outside the family as well. I had heard about Recovery when I was in hospital but I just went to it now and again and didn't really take it too seriously. When my mood was good I wouldn't go to it. I realised in 2011 that I needed to go regularly to the meetings, read the book and put the tools into practice. At first I decided to look after the tea and biscuits to give me an incentive to go. It soon became second nature to me and I began to look forward to meeting the people and sharing their experiences with me. It is lovely to meet people who are going or who have gone through similar experiences to me, there was no need to wear a mask I could be myself warts and all.

It took me awhile to give an example as I am normally a quiet and reserved person but I got great support from the group leader and eventually I started to become average and to deal with the trivialities of life as average occurrences instead of a dire emergency. I have learnt that the no. 1 Rule is to make my mental health my priority because as Dr. Low says without good mental health all other efforts are frustrated. I think of Recovery in the following way:

Before Recovery my mood went down quite a bit and I also got quite anxious about doing things myself and so I became quite isolated and my world became a lot smaller for myself. Now it's like I'm in a race on a track, jumping over the steeples as they come and doing it at an even pace. Before it was like climbing a mountain but not seeing the summit or any light at the end of the tunnel.

Catherine, Group Leader Tuesday, Rathgar.

### EXAMPLE OF RECOVERY PRACTICE - 06.06.2013

Preamble: Many of my recent trips to mainland Europe have entailed two flights, usually involving a change of planes at a London airport. This event occurred recently.

#### Step 1: THE EVENT

I was travelling on the second leg of my journey departing from London. I entered the baggage check area. I displayed "liquid" items in a transparent freezer bag. The security man opened the bag took out a bottle containing my prescribed medication for a skin condition and said "you can't take this on to the plane: it has more than 50 millilitres". I said "this is a patent medication prescribed for me by my specialist it's less than half full so it contains less than 50 millilitres". He refused to engage in any discussion, took the medication. I left the counter and was worked up.

#### Step 2: THE SYMPTOMS

My physical symptoms were a heated feeling, palpitations, shaking, and lowered feelings. My racing thoughts were angry

thoughts towards the security man: bad language and the thought "...when these fellows get a little power they act like little Hitlers. they try to apply Gestapo tactics on the public. I'm going to squash that guy: he's just a form of low life... I'm going to compose a long letter to his boss that will put him in his place..."

*I also had fearful thoughts against my self: "...Travelling is stressful enough without having to put up with this kind of thing. I should have handled that encounter better. I should have asked to speak to the supervisor and put my case to him. Why am I always too nice and letting people walk all over me, ... I should have had my ducks in a row on this one. I'm going to have symptoms for a few days about this now..."*

*In my mind, I was composing an e mail to management about the event: I noticed then that my symptoms were increasing. So I said to myself I'll have to start spotting and use my Recovery training.*

#### Step 3: MY SPOTTING

I spotted that my supreme goal was my own mental health and that I should go for peace within and peace without.

I spotted that temper is the sworn enemy of peace and health. I spotted that I had been feeding my mind both angry and fearful thoughts and that this was prolonging my symptoms. I spotted fear, temper-embarrassment, self blame, self pity, self importance, self disgust and fear of authority: Angry temper-resentment, indignation, antipathy plus the judgement of right and wrong.

I spotted that temper is a blindness to the other side of the story, the staff member was just doing his job as he had been trained to do so. Perhaps staff training had been more on "rule enforcement" rather than on "courting the customer". I spotted that it was a trivial event- that it would be in-expensive to replace the confiscated cream (less than €5). I made a decision not to process the event any further: it was now in outer environment. I dropped the judgement: I had been treated like other customers, which was in an average way. I endorsed myself and read a book. My symptoms quickly subsided.

#### Step 4: PRE-RECOVERY

I would have processed the event for days and then if I had put the complaint into an e mail it would have been abounding in temper and temperamental language. I would have been awake until the small hours processing the event in my mind with thoughts like "I should" and "why didn't I" for a couple of nights afterwards. I would have been symptom led not self led and wouldn't have realised that I had a choice.

#### My History

I first became acquainted with Recovery Incorporated\* (as Abraham Low Self Help Systems was then called.) in 1976. The catalyst was my late wife Nora: she was diagnosed with a condition called schizoid affective disorder. Recovery Inc. came up on the radar as an aftercare support available when she was discharged from St Patricks Hospital.

I went along with Nora to the weekly Recovery meetings then held in Fairview. There I was introduced to Dr Abraham Low's 4 Step Self Help Mental Health programme. Initially I was an observer, and a companion. Later I was sitting some professional examinations. I developed a panic attack – an acute case of examinationitis! I tried out some of the Recovery techniques and they worked. I became a convert, studied the writings of Dr Low, attended meetings regularly and tried to use the system in my daily life. This had a transformative effect on my life. It provided me with coping and reframing skills that were applicable in every situation in my life.

I was very grateful to Dr Low and Recovery and have continually tried to pay back in various capacities over the past 34 years.

Dermod (Drumcondra)



*The Deansgrange Recovery Group at a recent meeting. Pictured from (L-R): Ciara, Mandy, Claire, Gerry, Breed, Caroline, Dez and Julia, Group Leader.*

## **“Brian’s story” and how Recovery gave him hope**

In 2003, at the age of 37, I was working as senior manager in a large company which was facing financial difficulty and had a new Chief Executive. I got on very well with the new Chief Executive; but ended up taking on two additional roles as part of a new management team with 30% less managers. I became very stressed through working long hours, under a lot of pressure while occupying very responsible positions in the company. After a while, I found it difficult to get to sleep, I woke up during the night and I felt tired all the time. I worried about whether I could cope with my work and I feared making the slightest mistake. I was a perfectionist. I also suffered panic attacks and ended up at A&E more than once as I was afraid I was having a heart attack. I dreaded going to work on Monday mornings and was sometimes physically sick at the thoughts of work. It was even worse going back to work after holidays.

I went to my GP and found I was suffering from depression and anxiety. Despite medication and the assistance of my GP, the excessive work load and responsibility led me to end up suffering a nervous breakdown. I was out sick for two periods totaling nine months within a year and the second time, I thought I would never be able to go back to work again. I was afraid to walk through the town my workplace is in when I was sick. I was afraid of being seen by colleagues and also became afraid of being close to the building where I worked. I also felt hopeless because I didn’t think I would ever recover my mental health. I was afraid to talk to friends about my mental health and feared I was inferior because of my mental illness.

I have nothing but praise for the way I was treated by my GP and Psychiatrist; they were very helpful, especially during my second absence from work. I co-operated with their treatment and medication and I began to get well. I attended a talk in St John of God’s Hospital, Stillorgan about stress and dealing with it. Leaving the meeting I was handed a leaflet about a mental health self-help group called Recovery International, which I had never heard of before. The leaflet mentioned a number of the symptoms I was feeling: ‘anxious, depressed and fatigue’. I went to a Recovery International meeting close to my home and I met other people who had nervous conditions similar to mine. The most important thing I got at first was hope. If these people in Recovery had gotten well, then maybe I could get well also. When I learned how to practice Recovery’s Method and spotting tools, I began to get well. I still use my Recovery training on a daily basis. I haven’t missed a day’s work through mental health problems since I returned to work the second time in 2004. I cope with my work and daily life today. I learned that my nervous symptoms were distressing but not dangerous and that I could do the things I feared and hated to do. For me, that meant that I could return to work and gradually get back to full-time work again. I could cope with my work and do my job perfectly well even when I experienced nervous symptoms. I was told and began to believe that a return of my nervous symptoms didn’t mean I was having a breakdown again.

When first I came to Recovery, I found it difficult to sit in the meeting circle for the hour and a half the meeting lasted. I didn’t

think I could last that long sitting in one place. I found it difficult to speak in the Group also, but I got used to it. I learned from the other group members. By attending meetings, reading Recovery readings and practising the Recovery method, I got well. When I had been a member of the group for a few years I volunteered to be an assistant leader, which was uncomfortable at first, but I got used to that too. When our Group Leader retired, I took on the leadership of the Group, despite feeling that I mightn’t be able to do it and feeling inadequate compared to our veteran leader. I have benefitted tremendously from Recovery and from being a leader in Recovery. It saved my life and I would recommend it highly to anyone with a nervous condition or mental illness. As Recovery says, ‘there are no hopeless cases’.

I still get nervous symptoms today, but I now know how to cope with them.

**Brian, Recovery Member.**

## **Creative Recovery Member!**

Here is a poem written by **Sharon Ryan, Recovery Leader Beaumont** in a Creative Writing group that she still attends in Blanchardstown. She said she enjoys being in the group and has written a lot of stories/poems and it’s great for breaking preoccupation/discouragement. She also said it helped her a lot as an outlet when her husband was diagnosed with brain tumours and passed away in January 2012.

Sincere sympathy to Sharon on the death of her husband in 2012.

On a happier note, this particular poem was commended and read out at a Creative Writing awards night. Congratulations to Sharon on a very insightful poem!

### Starry Eyed

When I am in love I get a strong heartbeat  
This vibrates down to the soles of my feet,  
I like receiving all the kisses and hugs  
It’s such an obsession this love bug!

Years ago I loved all my boyfriends with a passion,  
Since then I acquired a husband and young children  
And have lost that special glow,  
Cinema trips, lovers walks holding hands  
have gone out of fashion,  
Replaced with Oil of Olay/Grecian 2000  
The pace has got quite slow!

Maybe after all this middle aged confusion  
There is still a spark of hope  
That we will be able to cope,  
Love is blind as I continue to wash the dishes  
Still believing that my knight in shining armour  
Will fulfill all my wishes!

**Sharon Ryan, Beaumont Leader**

## **Humour is Our Best Friend!**

**Here are some light hearted moments with thanks to Rosaleen Fitzpatrick. Church Ladies With typewriters are at it again!**

They’re Back! Those wonderful Church Bulletins! Thank God for church ladies with typewriters. These sentences (with all the BLOOPERS) actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services:

The sermon this morning: ‘Jesus Walks on the Water.’ The sermon tonight: ‘Searching for Jesus.’

Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What Is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.

The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7pm. Please use the back door.

Weight Watchers will meet at 7pm at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

### And for the men in your life....

Q: What do you call an intelligent, good looking, sensitive man?

A: A rumour

Q: What do you call a handcuffed man?

A: Trustworthy. .

## Recovery News

### New Recovery Group opens in Tallaght, Dublin, April 2013

A new Recovery Group opened in Tallaght, Dublin in the Parish Room, St Martin's De Porres Parish Church in April 2013. The Group meets every Monday night at 8.00pm and is lead by Group Leader, Ed Mahon.



*Annette Mahon, Group Leader Lucan, welcoming a new member to the newly opened Tallaght Recovery Group. Nothing like a cup of tea to make you feel welcome!*

An opening evening was organised in April and Ed reported that "they had a brilliant opening night with 21 people dropping back to 16 last week. We are doing great and three people are picking up the Recovery really fast, one woman Mary said she could not wait to come along she loved it so much and found a change in her attitude all ready."

Ed went on to say he had great support from other groups; "Gerry from Lucan and Willie from Lucan and Catherine from Rathgar (Tues Night Group)." He also said he hopes it will go from strength to strength and that "we would really like to thank the priests and office staff who have being so kind to us at St Martin de Porres".

So spread the word that there is a great new Recovery Group in Tallaght. We wish them the best of luck with it and look forward to hearing more good reports from Tallaght.

### No Saints or Heroes?

While driving to my meeting on Wednesday, the thought struck me.....

Nearly every night, somewhere in Ireland, a Recovery Leader leaves the comfort of home and hearth and travels to some location, to provide a Meeting for their local community. Then I realised that all over the globe Recovery Leaders are doing the same. This action is unprompted, unrecognised, un-lauded, yet the Leaders are constant and faithful to their commitment and their groups. This is no small achievement, providing such a positive and healing service to Society. Do we recognise our own value? Do we give ourselves proper endorsement?

Something to think about.

**June  
Leader, Bray**

## Recovery International Ireland Weekly Meetings in Ireland, Summer 2013

Recovery International meetings are held weekly in the following locations:

<b>Baldoye</b>	Baldoye Forum, Main Street, Dublin 13 (Beside the church)	<b>Mon 8pm</b>
<b>Ballyjamesduff</b>	Kilnacrott Abbey, Ballyjamesduff, Co Cavan.	<b>Wed 8.30pm</b>
<b>Beaumont</b>	Parish Pastoral Centre, Montrose Park, Beaumont, Dublin 9	<b>Sat 3pm</b>
<b>Blanchardstown</b>	St Bridget's Community Centre, Church Ave, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15.	<b>Fri 8pm. Sat 2pm</b>
<b>Bray</b>	Holy Redeemer Parish Centre, Herbert Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow (Ring the bell marked Recovery)	<b>Wed 8pm</b>
<b>Clondalkin</b>	Health Centre, Boot Road, Clondalkin, Dublin 22	<b>Mon 8pm</b>
<b>Clontarf</b>	Clontarf Methodist Church, St Lawrences Rd, Clontarf, Dublin 3	<b>Wed 8pm</b>
<b>Deansgrange</b>	Holy Family Parish Resource Centre, Kill O'the Grange, Deansgrange, Co Dublin. (Baker's Corner)	<b>Tues 8pm</b>
<b>Drumcondra</b>	Dominican College, Griffith Avenue, Drumcondra, Dublin 9	<b>Fri 8pm</b>
<b>Dublin City Ctr.</b>	Dublin Central Mission, Abbey St. Lower, Dublin, (RI condensed format-young people)	<b>Wed 7pm</b>
<b>Killester</b>	St Bridget's Boys N.S. Howth Road, Killester, Dublin 5.	<b>Tues 7.30pm</b>
<b>Letterkenny</b>	Cheshire Apartments, Long Lane, Letterkenny, Co Donegal	<b>Wed 7.30pm</b>
<b>Liffey Valley</b>	Rowlagh Church, Community Room, Collinstown Road, Clondalkin North, Dublin 22 (Side Entrance)	<b>Mon 8pm</b>
<b>Longford</b>	St Mel's Family Centre, Chapel Lane, Longford, Co.Longford	<b>Mon 8.30pm</b>
<b>Lucan</b>	St Mary's Parish Church, Lucan Rd, Lucan, Co Dublin	<b>Fri 8pm.</b>
<b>Navan</b>	Dalgan Park, Navan, Co Meath (Entrance at rear)	<b>Thu 8pm</b>
<b>Newbridge</b>	Dominican College, Roseberry, Newbridge, Co.Kildare	<b>Tue 8pm</b>
<b>Newry</b>	Newry and Mourne Carers Assoc., 6-8 Savages Tce, Newry, Co.Down	<b>Wed 7pm</b>
<b>Rathgar</b>	Parish Centre, 52 Grosvenor Road, Rathgar, Dublin 6.	<b>Tues 8pm Thu 8pm</b>
<b>Swords</b>	Brackenstown Adult Education Centre, St Cronan's School, Swords, Co Dublin	<b>Thu 8.30pm</b>
<b>Tallaght</b>	The Parish Room, St Martin de Porres Parish Church	<b>Mon 8pm</b>

You are welcome to bring a friend or family member to the meeting.

### Telephone Meeting

For those unable to attend a local meeting there are telephone meetings. You can find a full list on

<http://www.lowselfhelpsystems.org/meeting/chat-schedule.asp>

### Further information contact:

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**Editor's Note:** Many thanks to all who contributed to this issue of the newsletter. If you would like to contribute to the next issue, please send your articles, examples, personal stories, news, creative writing, including poems and stories as well as photographs to [info@recovery-inc-ireland.ie](mailto:info@recovery-inc-ireland.ie).

Editor: Mary FitzGerald, PR Consultant, Recovery International Ireland.