

**Tell other**

**opportunities to contribute and to learn**

**Have a range of activities**

**Bringing people together**

**Reflecting on how you are doing**

**Practical organisation**

**Putting a network together**

Outside the Box is working with the Scottish Recovery Network to support the development of local recovery networks. This is one of a series of resource leaflets which have been developed to support local recovery networks in Scotland. The material in these leaflets comes from the emerging experience of the people in the pilot areas, feedback from people in other places, and what we know about the development of any network which is supporting change.

The companion leaflet is ***Starting from people's experience***. There will be further leaflets in the series over the course of 2006.

Some of the examples and quotes in this leaflet came from a session which Outside the Box organised for local recovery networks in June 2006. Material from this workshop will be on the website.

The aims of SRN give a good starting point for the ethos and approach of local recovery networks.

1. Raise awareness of recovery from long-term mental health problems and mental illness and of the things that help and hinder this process.
2. Develop a better understanding of recovery by gathering and sharing information about the factors which people identify as having helped or hindered their recovery.
3. Highlight approaches which we believe to be particularly effective in the way they promote recovery and to support and encourage local action towards recovery.

## Bringing people together

***"The process matters.  
How people work together and learn is  
part of what we are doing."***

All the accounts of people's experiences point to the wide range of people and activities that have helped people along their recovery.

A recovery network complements other organisations and informal groups by bringing together that wide range of people to enable them to share their experience and potential.

The people who will be involved in a network include:

- people who use mental health services
- people who are no longer in touch with formal services
- carers and other family and friends
- staff from local mental health services - NHS, local authority and voluntary organisations
- staff from national voluntary organisations, who have links with what is happening in other places
- people who work in other settings and projects, which help people into employment, education or housing
- staff from the mainstream services provided by the local authority
- people from community groups.

A recovery network may well start with some people who use and work in mental health services coming together. You then work to extend the number and range of people involved. The experience of other networks is that each time you have an event, have an article in the local newspaper or send out a mailing, more people will get in touch. They then tell their friends and colleagues if they hear things that are important to them.

A recovery network must be based on and driven by the lived experience of recovery. This is one of the underpinning principles. A network which does not have the input of people who describe themselves as in recovery or recovered at its heart is of little value.

Recovery networks reflect a recovery approach. So the aim is not to leave people out.

At the beginning, you will want to check that you have the people there who will contribute to understanding and promoting recovery in your area.

- Think about what will be comfortable for people. What makes people feel welcome and at ease, especially if they are feeling a bit anxious or don't know many other people?
- Does the group of people who are getting the network going include people who use services or people who have lived with mental ill-health? If not, find a process that is right for them.

- Are there people here from ordinary community activities, such as libraries, leisure centres, community education? If not, who do you know who has good contacts with people in these settings?
- Are the staff from the hospital settings and members of the Patients' Council (or similar groups) there? If not, someone can contact them and ask what process would help them be involved.

***"We need to reach out to families and carers."***

**The members of a recovery training group organised training sessions. They wanted to keep costs down, so used places that were free – all in hospital buildings. People who used services did not come to the training, because the venue made them feel uncomfortable. The next round of training is happening in other places.**

**For any activity, people get involved if there is food, it is fun, and they meet friendly people – old and new friends.**

***Starting with people's live experience has practical suggestions on community mapping.***

How to reach people who have experience of mental health problems, and how to reach a wide range of people:

- Talk to user-led groups.
- Put an advert in the paper and invite along anyone who is interested in the topic to an event.
- Talk to community groups.
- Talk to women's groups.
- Contact local groups which bring together gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.
- Contact groups in touch with people from ethnic minority communities.
- Put up a poster in a local shop or post office.
- When people first come together the discussions will probably range very widely. This usually happens at the start of something new. And recovery is a big subject with lots of issues and strands. So give yourselves time to have the conversations and remember that listening to people's experiences and ideas is part of the process of building a network.

***“Make your information bright and friendly.”***

***“Go to where people are.”***

***“The fact that local recovery networks hope to be inclusive and not concentrate only on traditional services but include housing, employment, leisure etc allows the holistic element of the recovery approach to be a lived experience.”***

## What you do

***“A recovery network embodies recovery at every step of the way – celebrating people’s lived experience, and creating opportunities for people to contribute and to gain confidence at their own pace.”***

The activities of a local recovery network will reflect the values you want to encourage – welcoming a range of people, spreading the word, giving people good experiences.

Starting on something which is realistic and achievable is a good idea. There should also be a range of activities happening, so different people can make the type of contribution that is comfortable for them.

How you decide on where to start is also important. It should be a joint decision, and the discussions should value a range of ideas and points of view.

The experience from other networks is that it helps to have a range of activities, so people can still take part if they don’t have much time and when they are building up their confidence. Contact through newsletters and email is good, because people keep in touch even when they can’t meet up. But it is important to have some occasions when people come together and have time to enjoy each other’s company and meet new people.

It also helps to have some early successes.

These are some of the activities which can give you that mix.

- A time and place for people who are interested in recovery to just come together and talk about recovery.
- Create opportunities for people to learn about recovery and to meet people – a couple of speakers and then tea and buns.
- Get posters or leaflets into places like libraries, leisure centres and shops.
- Training for staff – in mental health services and in other settings.
- Gathering people’s recovery stories, thoughts and feelings.
- Parallel events or spin-off events from SRN’s national events, so more people in your area can hear about these ideas and experiences.
- Coming together to plan how to follow on from national events.
- People in services – any service – looking at how they can support people towards recovery.

- A book club – sharing books where people have described their journey and other books that you have found helpful or enjoyed.
- Have a party, or a barbeque, or some other event to celebrate what you have done, enjoy each other's company and meet new people.

You will have others.

These are some of the ideas from the networks taking part in the pilot.

- Putting together a collection of art and poetry which show people's recovery journeys.
- Gathering recovery stories from people who have had mental health problems, from families and from staff who work in services and who have learned from the people they support.
- Taking a stall at a car boot sale, to raise some money and spread leaflets about recovery.
- Putting on training events based around people's lived experiences.

- Inviting people from a wide range of local services – mental health and other types of services – to hear about recovery and think about what they can contribute.
- Giving talks to young people at the local High School, so they hear the message of hope for themselves and for friends.
- Making links with older people's groups.
- People who use a Resource Centre organising an event to raise awareness about recovery for other people with mental health problems.
- Putting leaflets about recovery and other mental health initiatives into local libraries and post offices.
- Putting up posters in all the Resource Centres and clinics.
- Putting up posters and the SRN postcards in the in-patient wards, so people with mental health problems and their families can see them at a time when hope is especially important.

## Opportunities to contribute and learn

***“Everyone has something to contribute and something to learn.”***

It will help if many people are involved in different things – planning, organising and taking part. This reflects the values of recovery. It also helps a network thrive and be sustainable.

These are some of the ways you can build in opportunities for people to learn.

- Involve people from a mix of organisations and roles to organise activities, so you can learn from each other and have access to a wider range of contacts.
- Each time someone is organising an activity, invite someone who has not done this thing before to be part of the team.
- Think about the members of your network in terms of their skills and experience in all parts of their lives, rather than what jobs or roles they do. Examples will be writing a newsletter, planning a conference, doing a mail out, being good at listening to people,

making tea, keeping track of spending for small amounts of money, doing funding applications, throwing great parties.

- Find out what training courses are available in your area. If they are run for one group of staff, or for members of voluntary organisations, ask if a few other people from the recovery network can come along.
- Invite people who have done training that some of you have found useful to come and do this for members of the recovery network.

***“Our recovery group is planning to put on an exhibition of people’s art and poetry as well as having a book of people’s stories. That way people can choose the way they want to express themselves. Some of us will help with the technical side, so people who don’t want to share their experiences will also be part of it. Some of us have done this sort of thing before but most haven’t, so we’ll be learning new skills. We think it will be good fun.”***

## Tell other people

***“A recovery network shares the message of hope.”***

You will want the recovery network to raise awareness among people who are not familiar with the ideas.

Some of the people you meet will still think of mental health problems in terms of someone being ill for the rest of their life. Other people will assume that ‘recovery’ means a cure. Recovery is about having a good life – ‘living well in the presence or absence of symptoms’. People will need time to get used to this idea.

One reason is to change the way they think and how they behave, so they do more to support people towards recovery. Another reason is that this gives the network access to more people who can join you and contribute their skills and resources.

***“Talking about recovery can itself promote recovery. Just hearing other people talk about recovery and what helps them keep well gives you hope.”***

These are some of the ways you can use to spread the word.

- People telling their friends and colleagues.
- Getting a piece into the newsletter of organisations – user groups, voluntary organisations, and NHS and Council staff newsletters.
- Local newspapers and local radio – for example, coverage of an event you are running or a feature article.
- Giving talks to various groups.
- Training for staff.

***“One thing we have learned is, use the natural networks to spread the word about recovery. Use the friends and connections that you already have. They are bigger than you think they are!”***

## Practical organisation

*“Change rarely happens by accident. Someone has a vision and someone has a plan.”*

This is how the practical organisation of the network will help you achieve the change you want to see.

- Have a plan that is flexible
- Get lots of people involved
- Get someone to co-ordinate things
- Keep everyone informed
- Identify resources for your activities
- Pace the work

### Have a plan

The aim is to have a plan that is still flexible enough to let you all respond to new ideas and opportunities.

The people who will put your plan together are whoever takes part. It can be a couple of friends or a group of people from various projects and organisations.

- Make sure that people with lived experience of recovery are part of it.
- Check it out with other people, as they will have ideas.

- Be realistic – don’t make life difficult or stressful for yourselves.
- Build on activities that are already part of people’s roles.
- Don’t get too caught up with the details.

The main elements of your plan are likely to be aimed at

- spreading the word about recovery
- getting more opportunities for people to support their recovery.

In each case, you will want to think about what you can do, who is going to do it and what support or resources you need. You will need to ask permission for some types of activities, such as putting materials onto notice boards. Make the planning and negotiating a part of each task.

For each activity, make sure that there are 2 people who are the leads – to give each other company and support, and in case one person has to drop out.

Remember that it is OK for something to slip, or to change your minds about what you want to do.

The plan for your recovery network could be something like this.

	<b>Spreading the word</b>	<b>Supporting recovery</b>
<b>First 6 months</b>	<p>Get SRN leaflets into resource centres and local groups (Sally, Jim)</p> <p>Build up a mailing list of people who are interested – the recovery network! (Paul and Clare)</p> <p>Hold a local event when the SRN narrative research gets published (Pete, Syma, Agnes)</p> <p>Try to get an article in local paper (Steve)</p>	<p>Talk to Leisure Centre about better links with drop-ins (Liz, Morag)</p> <p>Invite lots of people to the event about the narrative research, so they get the idea about what they can do (everyone to come up with names)</p>
<b>Second 6 months</b>	<p>Start to gather our recovery stories (Fiona, Meg)</p> <p>Have a party</p>	<p>Organise joint sessions with Welfare Rights Project, so more people have more money to have more choices (Liz to make initial contact, need someone to be main link or ask if WRP will do it)</p> <p>Check out about Peer Support and what we could do here (Jo to ask SRN for more information)</p>
<b>Second year</b>	<p>Aim for some joint work with Ethnic Minority Support Project</p> <p>Publish something from our recovery experiences – collection of stories or something artistic</p>	<p>Part of joint work with Ethnic Minority Support Project</p> <p>Maybe do something on Peer Support</p>

## Get lots of people involved

As a general rule, networks achieve more and last longer when there are opportunities for many people to be involved.

The advantages are:

- people will bring a range of skills and ideas
- the work gets shared and is more manageable
- different people will contribute in different ways – so you do a wider range of activities and reach a wider range of people
- if members all tell their friends, the word gets spread quickly
- there aren't cliques or an elite group
- it is usually better fun.

The apparent disadvantage is that more organisation is needed – you need to tell people what is happening and plan ahead a bit further. But getting organised is one of the things which keeps the network going.

## Have a co-ordinator

It helps if there is a co-ordinator for the network itself. There are 2 main tasks.

- Keep in touch with the other members.
- Keep the diary – making sure that if various people are planning their own events which will interest people in the network, they don't clash or get in each other's way.

It helps if the person who is co-ordinating the network is not heavily involved in other substantial activities such as training or organising the events.

The co-ordinator tasks can be shared between a couple of people. It is often a benefit if several people take on this role.

You can take turns at this role – one person does it for a year, and then hands over the diary to the next co-ordinator or team. You could do this at one of your events.

Other people plan and organise activities, but they link in to the co-ordinator to make sure that there aren't clashes of dates and that everyone on the mailing list knows what is coming up.

Several local networks have invited people to come along and hear about recovery, meet people and look at how they could work together as part of a network.

In one area, 2 people sent out information about recovery and invitations to an initial meeting to about 70 local services and voluntary organisations. They decided that they would count it as a success if they reached a few people who were not already involved. Over 40 people came along. The session was on a weekday afternoon in the Community Wing of a High School.

In another area, people from a couple of services got together and invited people to a session at one of the mental health projects which was near the centre of town. It was on a Saturday afternoon. There was music and space to talk or just chill out, as well as discussions about what recovery meant to people and what they would like to do next.

***“People who have mental health problems have been saying that peer support is what makes a difference for them. So finding out about peer support and promoting that is going to be one of the main priorities for our network.”***

***“It’s a partnership.”***

***“We’ve come together as a new group.”***

***“There was an amazing buzz.”***

## Keep everyone informed

Think about how you will communicate with each other.

Email groups, websites, and newsletters are all good. Aim for a combination of ways to reach people, so everyone can find the route that suits them.

But make sure that people have time to meet up and to listen to each other.

You can do special updates for any group of people. For example, if a carers' group were new to this, some of you could meet the committee, do a short session at one of their training events, or do a piece for their newsletter.

Some of the people who are part of your recovery network will be involved because of their jobs – nurses, OTs, social workers, support workers, people who plan and commission services, librarians, and so on. It is a good idea to keep senior staff in the local authority, NHS and other big organisations – such as care providers – informed about what the network is doing. That makes it easier for the people who work there to encourage colleagues to get involved or to share the ideas they are learning.

## Find resources

You will need some practical resources, such as access to rooms for people to meet, photocopying and the like. Ask around – can someone give you these as their contribution? For example, is there an organisation which has a meeting room which isn't used on certain days or times, or which they can book?

People who are not employed or are on low incomes will need to get their expenses covered for travel, especially if you are in a rural area. Some people may also need help with childcare or similar costs. You may want to check out whether the local authority can provide help of this sort to anyone who is taking part in community engagement activities, as well as looking to mental health budgets.

You may also decide that you want to pay people who are not employed something for their contribution.

It is useful to have access to small sums of money for paying for things. There will be people in your area who know about how to make applications. Possible sources are:

- Do some fundraising.
- Apply for grants – there are often local funding schemes through the NHS and local authorities.
- Find out if there is access to training money or endowment money through the NHS or local authority.
- Check out the community development sources of funding.
- There are national charitable grants.

## **Pace the work**

### ***“Go at a pace which supports recovery”***

Generally, people want to get a local recovery network started because this is something that they feel is important, and they want to see benefits for people who have mental health problems.

One risk is that you rush off and leave some people behind. The other risks are that you try to take on too much and can't achieve it, or get so caught up in planning things that everyone loses interest.

It's ok to slow down, as long as you don't stop completely.

- Go at a pace which all members of the network find comfortable.
- Have a plan that spreads activities out to a comfortable level and timescale.
- Give yourselves enough time to keep everyone involved.

## Reflect on how you are doing

You need to look up to see how far you've travelled and to enjoy the next stretch of the journey.

It is useful to have a plan for the next 6 months or so for the range of things your recovery network wants to do and what you want to achieve.

But it shouldn't be too rigid. There needs to be enough flexibility to take advantage of opportunities that crop up.

Stop and think every so often.

- Ask other people how you are doing and what would be useful – not just the people who are already involved or most active.
- Ask, is it making a difference?
- Ask, does it feel welcoming? Is it fun?

There are various approaches and tools that can be useful to help you reflect on how things are going.

- PATH is useful for planning.
- A checklist based on this leaflet will help you plan and reflect.
- Neighbouring recovery networks can have review visits to each other.
- You can ask SRN, Outside the Box or one of the other national groups for feedback or advice.

One of the later leaflets in this series will look in more detail at ways to evaluate what the network is achieving.

***“Most of us are used to thinking about ‘them and us’. The recovery network is changing the way we think. We don’t think or talk about ‘them and us’ now. It’s just us.”***

## Essentials for whatever you do

- Encourage people to take part.
- Everybody needs time to reflect.
- Recovery sometimes isn't easy for people, and people need support.
- Remember that there is a person at the centre, and they dictate the pace.
- Remember to check that people feel included.
- Celebrate diversity.
- It's ok to take time out, go at people's pace.
- Recovery isn't a straight line. Developing a recovery network will have its ups and downs and loops, too.
- Look back to see where you have come from and how far you're travelling.
- Enjoy your achievements and each other's company.

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