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# Recovering Mental Health in Scotland

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**Report on Narrative Investigation  
of Mental Health Recovery**



Scottish Recovery Network

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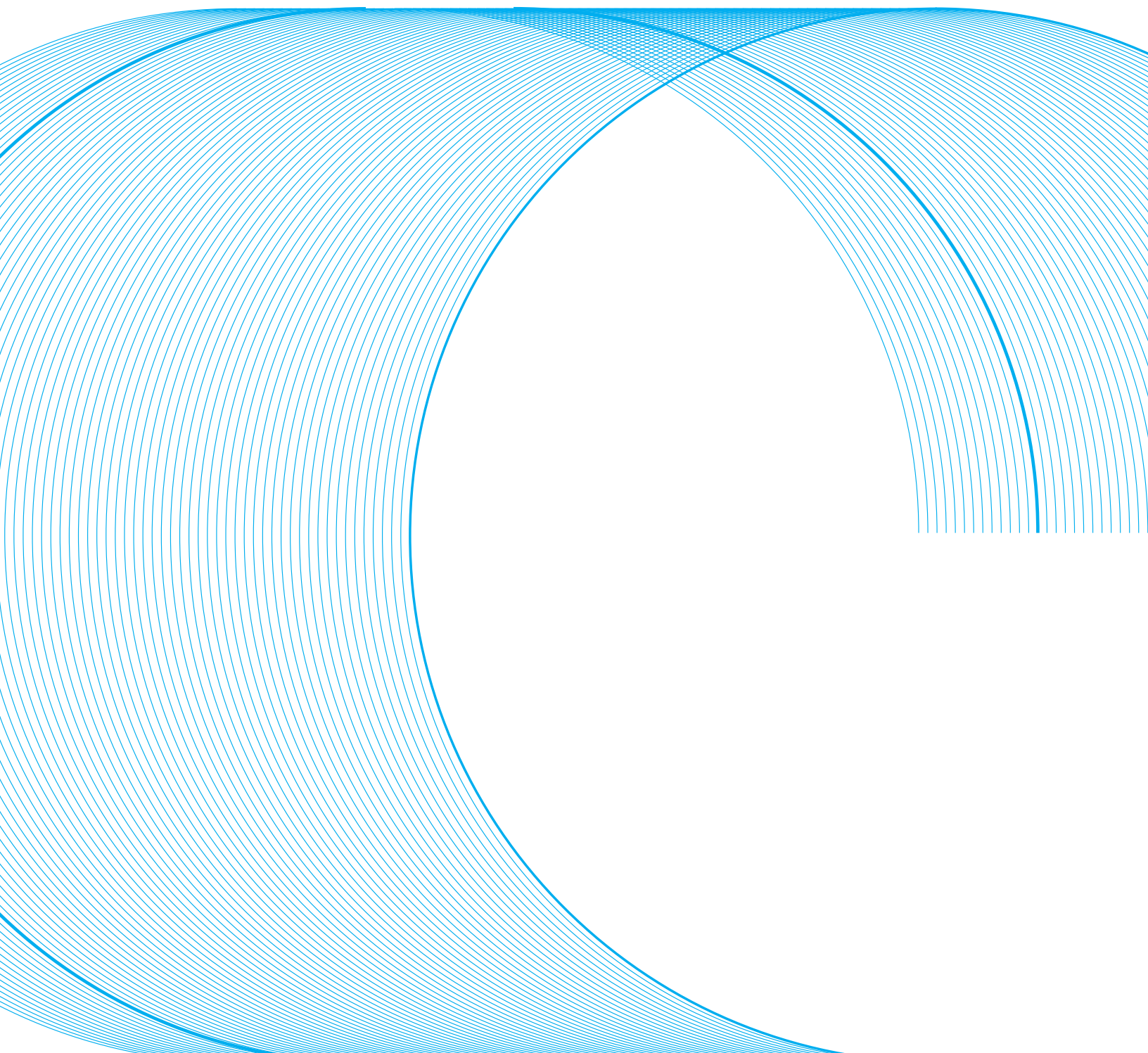
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# Foreword

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**Our Programme for Government includes core commitments to build a Healthier and a Fairer Scotland, and health improvement and social inclusion are key parts of these commitments. We want to help people in Scotland to help themselves in sustaining and improving their health; to help support healthier homes, communities and environments; and to enhance individuals' quality of life, including the mental wellbeing and health and social connectedness of those living with mental ill-health.**

One of the four key aims of the Scottish Government's National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing is promoting and supporting recovery from mental health problems, including severe mental illness. This key aim recognises that the majority of people can and do recover from periods of mental illness; and that many others learn to live with their symptoms and lead full lives.

Every experience of recovery is unique. But for everyone who has experienced mental ill-health, it is about having the tools to sustain their own good mental health and wellbeing even where they may continue to live with ongoing symptoms.

This report is the result of an innovative approach to research. By using a narrative method it clearly states that people in recovery from long-term mental health problems are experts by experience and it reminds us that people can and do recover.

This report helps us to learn from the uniqueness of each individual's experience of recovery but also identifies common factors; offer tools and techniques for recovery for service users, carers, friends and families, service providers and the wider community; and establishes a Scottish evidence base of factors that help or hinder an individual's recovery from long-term mental health problems. This evidence base will feed into our commitments on improving mental health services which are currently being implemented and which aim to deliver better outcomes in terms of social inclusion, educational opportunities, housing, training and employment and family and social life. Given that a key aspect of the report's findings is the diversity of factors which help and hinder recovery, this means that in our efforts to provide better services we must continue to emphasise the need for person-centred, recovery-oriented approaches.

What strikes me most about this publication is the drive and commitment of research participants to live well and recover. It reminds us all that even in the most trying circumstances it is possible to develop and harness our inner strengths and this resource should help share these collective strengths and wisdom.

This report provides a message of hope. It does not suggest that recovery is straightforward but it does show that it is possible. For many people a key factor was the belief in that possibility of recovery.

For friends, family members and the wider community alike there is a responsibility to share and support this message of hope – and to raise expectations.

We are committed to maintaining and developing the advances in thinking around recovery which are being encouraged by the Scottish Recovery Network, as part of our wider work for a Healthier and Fairer Scotland.



**Shona Robison MSP**  
**Minister for Public Health**

# Preface

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**Part of the human experience is that we seek to find ways to make sense of our lives. The experiences and challenges that we encounter on our journey through life are often unexpected, sometimes exhilarating, sometimes painful, occasionally overwhelming. Often we realise looking back that the toughest times were in fact those which enriched us most as individuals.**

This piece of research, undertaken by the Scottish Recovery Network, is an inspiring and courageous account of how a very diverse range of people faced mental ill-health and the consequences that followed in its wake. Although the narrators' stories are very different and highly individual, what they have in common is an aspiration to live life to the full, an enduring hopefulness and a resilience of spirit. It is a great privilege to have access to such compelling first hand accounts of mental health recovery.

The narrative research was undertaken with a purpose. It was intended from the beginning to be a means to better understand recovery in contemporary Scotland from a range of different perspectives. That understanding should now encourage each of us to reflect on our values and attitudes and on our expectations and assumptions. It should also help us to consider what we can do to support our own mental health and the mental health of the people close to us.

The narrators in the research have had the courage to share their life experiences with a very wide readership. As the readers of this report, we now have a reciprocal responsibility to make good use of what has been entrusted to us. The Scottish Recovery Network looks forward to the opportunity to discuss the themes and issues raised in this report and to debate the implications that arise from the stories recounted here.

**Allyson McCollam**  
**Chair**

Scottish Recovery Network Strategy Group

**Chief Executive**

Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health

# Acknowledgements

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We extend our deepest gratitude to Allyson McCollam for her time and advice, and for her enduring support to the authors of this research. Finally, we extend a special thank you to the individuals who generously agreed to share their experiences and thoughts in the research interviews. Although they remain anonymous, without their courage, participation and support, this research could not have been written.

We hope we have done them justice.

**Simon Bradstreet**  
**Network Director**  
Scottish Recovery Network

# The Scottish Recovery Network

The Scottish Recovery Network is part of the Scottish Government's National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing. It is working to help achieve one of the four key aims of the programme: *To promote and support recovery*. The Network comprises a loose affiliation of individuals and organisations with an interest in researching, promoting and raising awareness of recovery from long term mental health problems and mental illness.

The National Programme's vision is to:

***Improve the mental health and wellbeing for everyone living in Scotland and improve the quality of life and social inclusion of people experiencing mental health problems.***

For more information on the National Programme see [www.wellscotland.info](http://www.wellscotland.info)

The Scottish Recovery Network (SRN) aims to:

- 1** Raise awareness of recovery from long term mental health problems and mental illness and the things that help and hinder that process.
- 2** Develop a better understanding of recovery by gathering and sharing information about the factors which people identify as having an impact upon 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.

It has a number of key tasks including organising and developing local and national events, gathering and sharing recovery stories, organising education and training initiatives and supporting the development of local recovery networks around Scotland. The SRN is also working to develop and maintain international links and to support and encourage the development of more recovery oriented mental health services.

This report, compiled from the recovery narratives of 64 individuals in Scotland who identified themselves as being in recovery or recovered from a long-term mental health problems, has been produced to help us achieve our aims and to support our continuing efforts to promote hope and raise expectations. Additional learning materials taken from the narrative research project which compliment this report include a booklet and podcast of individually summarised narratives called 'Journeys of Recovery' (2006), and a booklet of tips and strategies informed by the research called 'Routes to Recovery' (2007).

# Purpose and Rationale

The recovery paradigm has emerged as a positive approach to mental wellbeing suggesting that people previously diagnosed with long term or enduring mental health problems are able to establish independent and healthy lives even in the presence of symptoms (William A Anthony, 1993; P E Deegan, 1988; Harding *et al.*, 1987). Over recent years, stories on recovery, particularly from the US and New Zealand, have been increasingly reported in professional, academic press and 'grey literature' (Baker & Strong, 2001; DIPEX.org, 2003; Jacobson, 2001; Lapsley *et al.*, 2002; Leibrich, 1999; Ridgway, 2001; Thornhill *et al.*, 2004) The SRN narrative research adds to this evidence base with research that represents and reflects the experience of recovery from mental health problems in Scotland.

Most commentators including Allott & Loganathan (2002), and Hatfield & Lefley (1993), agree that the definition and meaning of recovery will vary for individuals as it will be based on an individual's own system of personal values developed through life experiences. There is an emerging understanding around the basic factors and principles which promote it, suggesting that recovery is a unique process, vision, attitude or life journey (W A Anthony, 2000; Copeland *et al.*, 1996; P E Deegan, 1988). It is about regaining self-esteem and hope for a productive present and future, and recognising that you can lead a fulfilling life (Leete, 1988, p. 52). It is about embracing the identity and self-determination of a healthy and hopeful person, rather than living the life of an ill person. DeMasi (1996) found recovery to encompass economic and interpersonal wellbeing as well as good physical and mental health. Whilst all these factors could apply to recovery in Scotland, this research provides a distinctly Scottish perspective to mental health recovery, allowing comparison with recovery experiences worldwide.

The purpose of collecting recovery narratives across Scotland is to:

- Learn from the uniqueness of each individual's experience and identify common factors.
- Share stories to inspire hope and offer tools and techniques for recovery among service users, carers, friends and families, service providers and the wider community.
- Establish a Scottish evidence base of factors that help or hinder an individual's recovery from long-term mental health problems.
- Use the evidence to contribute to the development of policy and practice across all sectors, promoting a better understanding of what supports recovery and wellbeing.
- Guide and inform the work of the SRN.

This report intends to generate discussion about recovery in Scotland and as such has provided limited direction or recommendations for policy makers and services. We hope that by limiting recommendations within the report, researchers, service providers and policy makers will have more opportunity to deliberate and determine the best means to promote recovery at an institutional and policy level.

We start from the premise that recovery is about much more than an absence of symptoms – it is about having the opportunity to live a satisfying and fulfilling life in the presence or absence of symptoms.