Making Recovery Real

What can we do with our stories?

Summary by Cathy Sharp, Research for Real

research for real

The Scottish Recovery Network (SRN) invited interested areas to work with them to increase the focus in mental health on recovery and involve people with lived experience at the centre of decision-making, service design and practice development. Known as Making Recovery Real (MRR), this approach was taken forward between 2015-2018 in Dundee and Moray.

A recent review of MRR in each area has highlighted how people with lived experience and those with professional skills can learn together to achieve the best possible wellbeing for people. There are also some general lessons for those seeking to change ways of working in partnership in public services and communities. This summary provides an overview of the learning from both areas.

What is Making Recovery Real?

Making Recovery Real is an approach that focuses on the creation of the conditions in which a group of people including professionals and people with lived experience can work together to set the priorities and identify what should happen.

It is not a single intervention or brand, but a form of intervening, 'of getting involved' that continues, rather than a specific intervention or project that ends. Whilst there were some common elements of the approach adopted in each area, what happened was different because it reflected the interests and priorities of those most closely involved.

There was a mix of people and organisations involved in each locality, including people with lived experience of mental health problems and recovery and statutory and third sector organisations. In both areas local priorities brought a strong focus on sharing stories of recovery and developing peer support.

SRN played a facilitation role in each place and brought structure, focus and coordination. SRN had the skills and experience of hosting, facilitating and modelling a different approach to engagement that helped to channel, rather than direct, the work that was being done locally. Working with 'designed informality' they worked alongside the local partners to create a welcoming and engaging approach to conversations that enabled people to share their experiences and views and identify what was important to them.

Making Recovery Real in Moray Review

Making Recovery Real in Dundee Review

# As a flavour, in Dundee, key activities have been:

- A series of events bringing people together to shape priorities, enable effective participation and deliver a range of activities.

- Sharing and collecting recovery stories from over 40 people and production of a film "Recovery Stories", where 18 local people shared their personal stories of recovery.

- Development and sharing online resources to support discussion of the film and encourage wider story sharing.

- Development and delivery of peer training using the Peer2Peer vocational training resource developed by SRN through a European project.

- Support for the development of peer roles in local organisations and services.

Watch the Recovery Stories film

In Moray, key activities have been:

- A series of Conversation Cafés and other events to shape the specific objectives and priorities, including the MRR Roadshow, a series of 13 events in more remote rural communities across Moray during one week in November 2016.

- Coordination and a framework to inform, support and provide a boost to a range of activities that were part of the local strategy, including:

  - Establishment of Moray Wellbeing Hub, a peer-led social enterprise and the process of recruiting 'Champions'.

  - Commissioning of the new Peer Support Service and the Moray Mental Health and Wellness Centre, a new peer-led service run from shop-front premises in Elgin.

 - Establishment of a team of Mental Health Link Workers in GP practices across Moray.
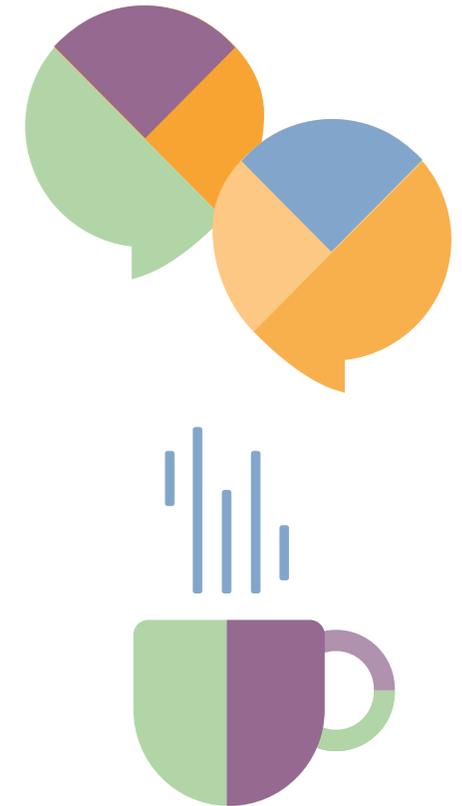
Sharing Our Learning

As 'co-production in action', MRR has helped to realise a genuine change in power dynamics where people with lived experience have the right to be at the centre of decision-making, service design and practice development.

Key elements of this approach are highlighted in this report:

It's helped me get my head around co-production. It can be a bit scary because you don't know where people would take it. But it doesn't feel so scary now.
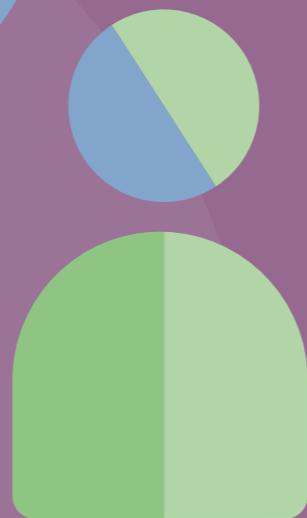
Create space for inquiry
and learning together

The deliberate design of an informal and nurturing environment, including considering where people meet and how the meetings themselves are run, has allowed different kinds of encounters to take place. Paying attention to creating a welcoming environment helps people to have what can be difficult conversations and to stay involved, all with significant impact.

This informal and welcoming ethos of engagement has extended to the way that wider community events have been run to create dialogue.

"At events... everyone walks out a little bit changed, and a little bit different – it impacts on every interaction they have going forward."

"Events were always pretty accessible, there are tables with loads of colouring stuff, you can doodle, you can talk, you can write, you can do none of that! You can just be part of it, there is no pressure to do anything. It is informal, but it is a very thought out approach, it might look great fun but actually you get a significant amount out of that, when people feel that comfortable."

Seek both practical change and a change in approach
co-production in action

MRR has worked intelligently with formal and informal power through attention to the ways of working and the processes and habits that form within any partnership, whilst remaining focused on purpose, possibilities and actions.

The experience of being in mixed groups and working together has given people a feeling of 'equity and equality' which has been important for people's confidence:

> For me the biggest thing is seeing that change over time – where the power level has really changed – from the very beginning it was very much like a 'them and us' sort of thing and people really not believing they could do anything... when you look (now) at all the hopes and the fears, all the things that we wished for are all the things that have happened.

> It's actually pretty simple. People worked with us to decide what they wanted, how they wanted things to be, and now they're saying they're willing to help us make those things happen. How can you say no to that?

The desire to see both practical change and a change in approach has been taken seriously. Initially people didn't always know where it was going or what it might look like. An important shift in thinking has been understanding the difference between consultation, being asked for your views – again, and being asked to share your story.

Being open to hearing stories has helped to overturn expectations amongst professionals that they would be asked for things that would be 'unrealistic' to provide.
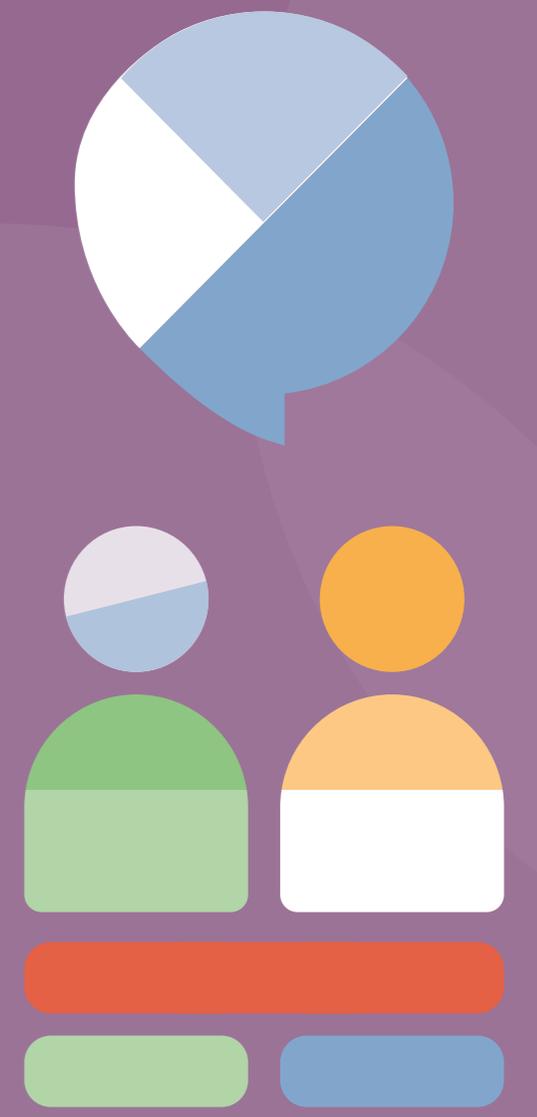
Deepen understanding of recovery and create connections for change

The accounts of 'lived experience' shared in MRR show how it is possible to help others to understand what recovery, wellness and resilience might mean to different people and that there is no single model of or pathway to 'recovery'.

People with lived experience value meaningful connection with other people, having some degree of choice and of control over their circumstances, being able to pro-actively seek support rather than having to be referred, and speaking to people who also have lived experience, and have 'walked in their shoes'.

Informal peer support is invaluable and can be a significant personal resource to help people to manage their own mental health. Contributing to the recovery of others by sharing stories breaks down isolation, increases hope, builds confidence and pride. In turn, this creates a virtuous cycle of greater understanding and acceptance of recovery amongst those most closely affected, people in a professional role and the wider community.

This focus on relationships and dialogue has very practical outcomes as it helps to uncover local knowledge and enhances access to resources. In both areas, new services including peer-to-peer support have been established.

Discovering shared passions and values to 'make recovery real' through story sharing is a positive and practical starting point for collaborative development. No one organisation can have all the insight or all the answers. A focus on strengths and assets underlines that each individual and partner organisation has a part to play. Being both peer-led and diverse has provided more 'levers' and resources with which to initiate change.

Show what we can do with
our stories

Sharing stories of lived experience has played an inspiring, enabling and ultimately, indispensable part in both localities.

Stories build connection, trust and create conditions for collaborative action. The stories have generated insights, empathy and trust. They have changed the way that people think and encouraged action by creating the conditions for positive risk-taking, showing what is possible and building momentum.

Story sharing is a tool for collective leadership in which everyone, whether through speaking or listening, is a participant. It helps to develop a new depth of understanding of recovery and create a community of peers and practitioners.

Story sharing shows how it is possible to use lived experience to engage with people involved in a professional capacity and help them to consider their own purpose and role. Stories shine a light into assumptions professionals may have made or aspects of their work of which they were unaware. They provide inspiration and renewed energy for their work and at times, have enabled professionals to share their personal experiences of their own mental health challenges.

The Dundee film is a great source of pride and validation, a form of celebration and useful tool. As a product, it is the result of a series of informal forms of story sharing, distinct from more therapeutic story-based approaches. Story sharing has a stronger sense of purpose and intention; the focus has been on using the stories to build relationships and create a dialogue, so that they act as a catalyst for action.

Filming of the stories enables people to tell their own stories, in their voices, with their accents and in their own words. This helps the stories to be genuinely heard. People's experience is respected, not dismissed or disputed. This significantly contributes to helping 'talking about recovery' to become a more everyday experience.

Together this helps to develop a more "authentic trust" amongst all of those involved, from which a sense of shared purpose, hopefulness and possibility grows. Authentic trust is a mature, articulated form of relating based on reflection, which "recognises the possibility of betrayal and disappointment" and therefore must be continually cultivated.[1] Being listened to and having confidence that you have been heard are key to sharing power and developing this level of trust, enabling different and honest communication.

This may not produce consensus and the conversations may still be challenging and difficult, but they are met without defensiveness, with an open mind and attitude of inquiry, so encouraging on-going and genuine dialogue.

Awareness of language and how it can be an enabler, or a barrier, is also a significant part of a more relational and dialogical approach.

This approach supports a willingness to take risks and try new things, and promotes better partnership working, as the strengths and contribution of each are better understood. In Moray, they have talked about a 'cascadiness' – the critical mass, capacity and energy that creates a positive environment and spills out beyond Making Recovery Real.
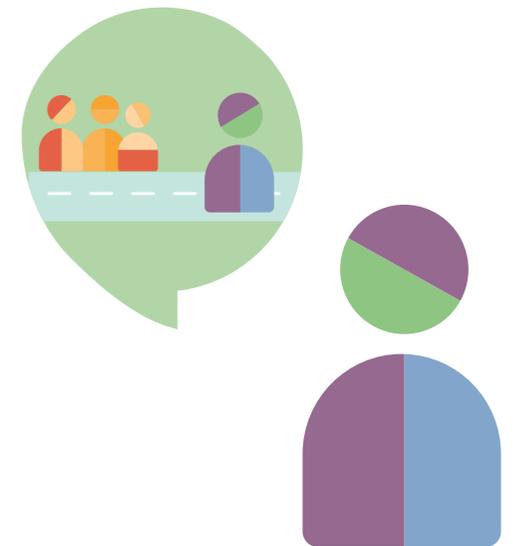
1 Cited in Diane T. Finegood, What does it mean to have a systems perspective on policy development and evaluation? SRA, June 2018 http://piru.lshtm.ac.uk/assets/files/Diane_T._Finegood_1.pdf

How is this influencing the wider system?

Change is happening at all levels: for individuals; amongst wider teams, colleagues, and peers; within organisations and in the wider environment as MRR helps to shape the strategic agenda.

Making Recovery Real was recognised in the City Plan, and in the emerging mental health strategic plan for Dundee. And it felt like that was when key partners were really putting their money where their mouth was.

It is culture change. The new Moray Mental Health strategy would not look like it does without MRR.

There are many changes that are all important successes, and good foundations on which wider change can be built. These changes include:

- new understandings of recovery.

- a developing sense of agency, enabling individuals to act independently and to make their own choices, amongst both peer champions and those in professional roles.

- changes in mindsets that support people in recovery and enable them to offer support to others.

- renewed engagement, greater pleasure in work and wider impacts on professional practice for individuals and wider teams.

- a sense of belonging to a recovery community with shared values.

What we hope you might do

By sharing the learning from our review of MRR our intention is to inspire you to explore your own opportunities to do things differently. Making Recovery Real is not a model that can necessarily be duplicated or "scaled up". Working differently needs to consider that every area and the people involved are different. It needs to be locally co-created to make the most of the existing resources and connections so essential in making things happen.

In our environment where we acknowledge that we cannot continue with more of the same, then the ways of working and the values underpinning Making Recovery Real offer a different way to engage a wide range of people in designing and delivering new services and supports which meet people's needs and aspirations.
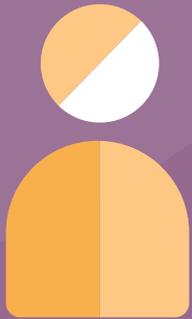
Together we can make recovery real for everyone in every community.

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