

Staying connected Podcast

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Louise Scottish Recovery Network: Hi, welcome to the Scottish Recovery Network podcast. This episode contains some fascinating insights from people who joined our online conversation cafés to share their experiences of mental health, wellbeing and staying well during lockdown.

I'm Louise Christie, I'm from Scottish Recovery Network. Scottish Recovery Network have had a long history of bringing people together to share their experiences, talk about what helps them stay well and what helps their recovery.

With the lockdown, we realised that lots of our plans were put on hold. And then we thought, well, should they be? So we decided to try out a programme of six initial conversation cafes, which would give people the opportunity to come together through technology and share what's been happening for them during the lockdown - and their fabulous insights into how to stay well and how to help others.

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Louise Scottish Recovery Network: One of the positives is that people talked about realising just how built into their lives managing their wellbeing is and all the tools and techniques and skills and knowledge that they have. And I think people feel that they often didn't realise that they had those strengths because they aren't being tested, but lockdown did really challenge people. The other great thing is that people feel that they had a lot to offer wider society about how we can manage our wellbeing during really challenging times.

CC participant: I think it's about remembering the reason why we're doing it. And it's about our own safety and making sure that us and our family and everybody's kept safe.

Café participant: I definitely... it's a scary time for a lot of people but there's lots of positive risk-taking out there.

Café participant: Yeah, we'd never have thought in a million years that we'd be in this situation, but here we are and look how quickly people have adapted to it.

Café participant: Lockdown has allowed me to kind of reflect on things and slow the pace down and things, so it hasn't been an entirely negative process for me.

Café participant: I've always been sensitive, but I've always been a bit scared about my sensitivity, but now I'm fully embracing this, it allows me to be more sensitive towards my own emotional needs and I want to keep this. I want to keep this attitude.

Café participant: Yeah, I really appreciate one of the benefits of the lockdown is that, yeah, I'm more aware of resources.

Café participant: Things that have been there all of the time that I've just been too busy to take note of.

Café participant: Yeah, yeah.

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Louise Scottish Recovery Network: The people who joined the cafes obviously were quite comfortable, some more than others, with technology. But people have told us that while in the past they may have been more reticent about using technology to stay in contact with people, that lockdown has really pushed them to do it and they've seen the value of it. It may not be the same as face to face, but it's certainly better than not feeling connected with other people at all. And some people are quite enthusiastic about the benefits of technology.

What was really interesting, was people's experiences of local services moving very, very quickly online or to telephone, So people were still getting support from local organisations over the telephone, they were going to peer support groups that were now all online. They were using WhatsApp and Facebook groups to keep in touch with each other. So while some services have really experienced difficulties, what's been great is how adaptable and flexible and quick other services have been about moving what they do online or onto the telephone to make sure that people have the support they need.

Café participant: It's difficult at the moment because we can't maintain the social distancing if we have all the service users in office at the same time. What we done was a piece of work with each service user asking them if there was kind of one-to-one things that we could do with them such as arts and crafts in their flat, baking, going out for local walks, so some exercise.

Café participant: I am incredibly lucky, I do get regular phone calls from services, to say "how are you getting on?" and it takes about two minutes and I say I'm fine or I'm not fine. I do find those phone calls vital when I look back over the weeks and see how much structure they gave me, it let me break all this time into various weeks and it also gave me the opportunity to stop and measure- how did I get on?

Café participant: The lockdown has angled me towards looking at technology and how that can support me in my daily living, whether I'm in lockdown or not. Previously, before the lockdown, I was in numerous groupings online and with the lockdown happening, people are organising and developing zoom sessions around different health issues that I have and they've been great.

Café participant: I have a bit of a concern about it, I think it's a useful tool for sure, but in the sort of line of work that we do with people with mental health problems, we have to be careful that we're not using as a way to, as another barrier to getting people back into society or whatever.

Café participant: Em, there's about 180 people with really varying needs but we discovered that by using zoom, quite a lot of people who couldn't afford to travel to attend a course are finding it much easier to just turn up online.

Café participant: I had two NHS appointments by Near Me, NHS video conferencing. Do you know, it actually was better by Near Me than it was face to face? Something about doing it by Near Me has made the consultants more aware and therefore make more effort about being person-centred, about being personal and about it being about you.

Café participant: It doesn't matter what technology you use, or whether it's face to face or whatever, it's about connecting heart to heart with people. And if this technology has come forward and people are not so scared of it, then let's utilise it, but for the people who are scared by it, let's still make that connection with them.

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Louise Scottish Recovery Network: Us in the recovery field know that there's things that really help with recovery and connections is one of them. Having good relationships with other people. Feeling connected with them - including peer relationships where you can share your experiences, is so important for people's wellbeing and their ability to manage their own life and wellbeing and recovery.

And just those connections where we can share with others and we can have our feelings validated and people care how we're doing and what we think, is so important to our wellbeing.

Café participant: I struggle with isolation a bit. The whole covid thing, I'm actually more afraid of being isolated than I am of catching the virus.

Café participant: Keep in contact on the phone. Because if you keep in contact with them, then you know everything is going to be alright and all that and it keeps you well.

Café participant: I'm one of the leaders in my church and we've all been given a couple of fold to phone and I just find that really, really beneficial for me as well as I'm hoping that they do to, because I'm phoning up supporting them, but they end up supporting me.

I also think it strengthened relationships at home. I thought I might have got fed up, but it's actually been really nice because you just get more quality time and I think you're valuing time differently, you're listening differently and things.

Café participant: I go to my window on a Thursday and there's people in the house across the way from me- never met these people in my life before - but every Thursday, we all appear, we wave, give each other the nod "hello"- and that's just really nice. That simple connection.

Café participant: Well I think that, in general as well, empathy and solidarity, that's what I'm looking for out of this. For some people who are isolated at the moment, it's actually not as bad as it's been in the past. They've been isolated in the past but there's that feeling of

“I’m the only person that’s feeling like this”. But now that we’re all in it together - and we really are - I’ve actually heard quite a number of people saying “do you know, I’m finding this easier to bear”.

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Louise Scottish Recovery Network: There’s clearly no one experience that people have had of lockdown. It might be the same lockdown for everybody, but it feels very different. How they coped with that is very different from person to person.

What was really interesting is the wide range of things, because you know we’re all different. But things that were coming out were around, you know, just taking time for yourself doing the things you enjoy, whether that’s crafting or baking or keeping fit. The importance of the daily walk to people just getting outside, getting fresh air. People talked a lot about just feeling a lot more connected with nature and with things round about them. But it was all sorts of activities, from playing the guitar, gardening, but it was about what people liked doing and finding time for that because it helped them stay calm and it helped them cope.

Café participant: I find that, you know, just kind of putting my thoughts down on paper helps release some of the emotions associated with them.

Café participant: Some of our service users came in and done some canvases, with positive messages on them, such as “keep safe, stay positive, keep smiling” and we actually delivered them to local neighbours.

Café participant: I actually do dress making and I just totally love, cutting the cloth and fitting it and whatever. It just takes me away from my work and everything else that I do and I recognise that when I’m in that place, oh it’s just fabulous because I just don’t think about anything else.

Café participant: I could see how I could work around everything else, but I felt quite distraught that I wasn’t getting to the gym and doing my stuff. I’ve been working out at home, I’m actually beginning to enjoy it and it’s really helped me feel much more in control, because I like to be in control.

Café participant: I’ve been doing a bit of meditation as well and I’ve found it really helpful to be able to kind of, stay with my emotions and embrace my emotions instead of trying to change or fix what I feel because there’s nothing to be fixed.

Café participant: That’s a really interesting point to make, you know, there’s nothing that needs to be fixed. Accepting ourselves as how we are and how things are.

Café participant: It’s okay not to be okay.

Café participant: In a way, I think, there’s some pressure on people that you’ve got to extra perform. And in a way I think that can sometimes be detrimental, because I think just getting through the crisis should be good enough.

Café participant: And the idea of recovery is there is no place that you need to get to, you're just on a journey, So you're at different places on that journey but I always see this as there's no destination it's just - it's an ongoing process.

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Louise Scottish Recovery Network: We're all different and there's no one way that we can get through this, but I think one of the things that recovery gives us is the knowledge that things will get better and that we are experts in our own experience. It will be different for everyone, but that with the right support and by building our skills and confidence, we can live the lives we want to, even in these really difficult circumstances.

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Louise Scottish Recovery Network: Thank you very much for listening to our podcast. I hope you found it useful and inspiring. For more information about Scottish Recovery Network, our activities and future conversation cafés, you can go to our website at www.scottishrecovery.net

We look forward to seeing you at a conversation café soon. Thank you and goodbye.