

FLIP SIDE

The Association of Participating Service Users



Recovery and Peer Support

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There has been a lot of formal and informal discussion around recovery based treatment within the alcohol and drug sector recently. Such discussion often opposes recovery and harm reduction.

APSU's view is that there is no fundamental opposition between these two philosophies. A possibility of opposition derives from lack of a formal definition of the term recovery, as the term harm reduction has been defined.

In this issue of Flipside we wanted to showcase the variety of experiences and meanings that recovery has for people who use or have used drugs. We stress that people who use alcohol and drug services need a variety of options.

APSU welcomes any new approach if it means more variety, less stigma and better support for people in need.

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For Both of Us

When I started to deal with my son's drug addiction all I wanted for him was recovery. I had heard about other people recovering and that meant for me in the early days, no drugs and being nice to his family, getting a good job and paying back some of the money he had taken from us.

I learnt very quickly that recovery was for me too!! Shock! Horror!! Me, I thought. What did I have to recover from? I did everything now and I had to add recovery as well. Not a good idea, I said to myself. So I continued on with my self righteous and self centred selfish attitude of telling him and everyone else how to behave, act and live their lives. After all, there was nothing wrong with me. I got up each day and had a schedule of what everyone had to do, even the dog.

I was a walking example of hypertension, stomach pains, hair loss and fits of rage at others...even the dog hid from me when I was like that. However, I wouldn't be like that if I didn't have so much to put up with and do for others.

I suffered from the "3M" disease. Mothering, martyrdom and manipulation. And I wasn't travelling too well because of it, but I persevered until I was on my knees.

I reached my rock bottom. I needed help. I needed recovery.

My journey has been long and gentle. I have learnt slowly over the years to look at myself and examine my behaviour, my attitudes and actions towards myself and others. It has taken counselling, groups and education for me to "get it"!!

I too have had relapses and started my "stink'n think'n" with the committee of management that lived in my head. However I have learnt to challenge these behaviours and thoughts patterns and get back on track. Just as my son is learning and growing, so am I.

Recovery was for both of us and I am ever so glad I had to learn this stuff. I have a great relationship with him and most other people today because of what I had to learn and experience, and I am a more loving and caring person because of it.

Anonymous

Truck Driving

I used to push a semi
Up and down the road;
And many a lonely night was spent
Miles away from home.

I've travelled all around this land
Through towns both big and small;
I thought I could go on like this
And never mind at all.

But when you are away a lot
Something has to give;
You see I lost the ones I loved
And didn't want to live.

The booze, the pills and all that junk
Was messing up my life;
I tried the best I could
But ended up in strife.

Now life has turned around for me
I have a brand new start;
To all the people who have helped
I thank you from my heart.

George Hall

6 weeks...

I commenced the Catalyst Program earlier this year. It is turning my life around, it is affecting my old unhealthy thought processes to new, enjoyable thinking and habits across daily living.

My memory has improved, I have hope and motivation, better concentration. I am a lot happier and even enjoy my own company (which I could not unless medicating myself).

I have joy, new ideas just popping into my head, plans ahead of me, spontaneity is emerging, previously lost in my sadness and drinking.

I believe to get ultimate gains from this six week program one must immerse themselves fully and 'live it'. These are not 'lessons', they are long lost vital life 'practices'.

Cementing them in six weeks is just the beginning, as changing a 17 year habit in this short time is quite resistant in me, it takes work, action, patience, I feel stubborn at times, even out of sorts.

I am beginning to enjoy new activities, plan my days ahead and will get the old easel and new paint set out.

Thank you to the wonderful staff who imparted such vital tools and reinstating living skills. Not only that, the program was highly enjoyable!

Angela

Surrender

So I am still recovering from a decade of drinking, and a few years of taking prescription medication...never as prescribed.

Thanks to my apathy for self care and a few doctors here and there, the anti anxiety drugs were easy to get. Where the hell did my life go?

Alcohol and benzos....mix the two together and here's what you get: aggressive relationships, undignified events in alley ways, abortions, detoxes, car accidents, fights, blackouts, drink driving, destroying the parents' house, stealing, one night stands, relentless shame, guilt, anxiety and depression.

The only thing I can say about the ten years is that now I look back and I was there in person but fairly well unconscious most of the time and hurt the people I loved most. The family was in counselling and my mates had all disappeared because I was a nightmare.

It all still hurts, but this is the stuff I have to forgive myself for so I can actually move on with my life.

When I finally gave in to the drinking I was desperate and eventually found the right supports, people who could empathize with what I was going

through, and with that came forgiveness, new friendships and a busy schedule within supported accommodation. I felt everything change. The fog lifted and I felt more and more normal everyday and the hatred for myself was going away.

The first month or so of being sober and drug free, I cried like a pregnant woman most of the time...feelings came back and I hated it. But I started to feel an amazing relief over a couple of months where I didn't obsess about using drugs...incredible! The feeling of guilt and shame was slowly lifting and I went through what my mates call a 'honeymoon period' where almost everything was pretty exciting. Even going to Centrelink wasn't that bad.

So I don't know if I have 'recovered', but today I am happier, more focused, I have amazing friends, my family trust me and want to be around me. I am completing a degree at university and I work for myself as an artist. I know I wouldn't have any of this if I didn't receive the care that I did. Everyone is different, but what we perceive to be impossible is only holding the hands of our addiction: where we are our own worst enemy. We are capable of anything if we really want it.

Anonymous



Lost and Found

For years I'd wake up in the morning, start my day with a bong, and then hate the universe for keeping me alive for another day. I was trapped. I felt so alone. The inside of my head was a dark place from which there was no escape. My thoughts constantly harassed me, and no matter how much weed I smoked or booze I drank, they wouldn't stop.

Growing up in an alcoholic family, and swearing black and blue that I'd never turn out like my parents, it was a simple case of monkey see monkey do. I watched the parties, the arguments, the drinking and smoking, the divorce, the family friends and the relatives dying drug related deaths, and lo and behold, I turned out just like my folks. Feel bad? Have a drink or a drug, you'll feel better. Feel good? Have a drink or a drug, you'll feel even better. Yeah well, that only worked for a while.

Suffering through a range of traumatic things during my upbringing – various forms of abuse and neglect – I evolved into a professional victim. I blamed all the people, all the places and all the things in the world for how I'd turned out. I especially blamed my parents. I was so full of misdirected rage and hurt that I never bothered to take a look at myself. I was always too busy pointing the finger at other people's behaviour, so I wouldn't have to look at my own. Albeit I'd had poor role models, I couldn't blame them forever. But I sure as hell wanted to, because that way I wouldn't have to take responsibility for my own life, I could just sit in judgement of everybody else's.

Drugs helped to ease that 'wrong' feeling that I had inside of me. My drug use progressed from pot and booze to acid and speed, and then various combinations of all of them. I ended up in psychosis before I was 21, but that didn't stop me. I just laid off the acid for a few years and increased my use of pot, booze and speed. By the time I was 25 I was unemployable, resentful, lonely and using in total isolation. I tried stopping a few times, but couldn't stay stopped.

My first real attempt at getting clean was in 2006. I went to a detox unit then to two rehabs back to back. While I was waiting to get into the first rehab I started going to Narcotics Anonymous meetings. I floated around the rooms of NA in a bit of a daze, not really knowing what it was all about, wanting to fit in but feeling like an imposter. Feeling ashamed that my far from glorious life had come to this: sitting in a room full of junkies and alco's and listening to them talk about how screwed up their lives were.

"Hi, my name is Ben and I'm an addict." Wonderful. Are you kidding me? My lack of self acceptance was rather high.

A few people talked to me, and I tried to listen, but I was too busy judging them, and noticing the differences and not the similarities. I couldn't hear the message of recovery at all. I looked at the people with multiple years of sobriety and thought: whatever. How the hell am I ever going to achieve that?

The rehabs I went to were like chalk and cheese. The first place was cottonwool-wrapped harm minimisation with three squares of comfort food a day, and the second place was 12 step based deconstruct you until you scream type stuff. Needless to say I freaked out. Towards the end of my stay I kept telling the counsellors that I missed my family, which was true, but in hindsight I was terrified of this new way of life and just needed something, anything, to take the edge off what I was feeling.

So I ran back to my dysfunctional family. Within two hours of being back in Melbourne I had a line of speed up my nose and I was off again. I managed to stay off the weed for over a year. But I just drank more to make up for the lack of weed: swapped the witch for the bitch, as they say. But eventually I got back on it, and continued my ride on the downward spiral express. Next stop: rock bottom.

I did learn a lot in both those rehabs, but I soon tried my best to forget. Denial is a powerful thing. But ever since I went to rehab, my drugs had been cut with recovery. It's the same as having a shandy instead of a beer, the same as smoking leaf instead of buds, the same as snorting street quality instead of pure: the desired effect is only half

there, and you need more and more to reach it.

But still, that relapse lasted for three years. For about two of those years my denial was working quite well. I was catching up with friends on the weekends. I was having fun. But then things started going bad. My social using turned into bingeing and blackouts, which turned into using in isolation, and I couldn't keep deluding myself that things were okay. I withdrew further and further from life until it was just me, my booze, and my bong.

So in December 2009 I booked myself into detox again. I had no intention of going back to NA: I just knew I had to stop using drugs. While I was in the detox a couple of NA members came and did a Hospitals & Institutions presentation. I recognised one of them from when I hung around the rooms four years ago. He recognised me too. He was just over one year clean when I met him in 2006 and now he's five years clean. He seemed genuinely happy and spoke very highly of NA. I don't think I could have found a better example of a recovering addict if I tried. He talked about keeping it simple and not using one day at a time.

I left detox later that week and sought out an NA meeting. I was anxious about going back after such a long time, but I knew that if I wanted to stay clean I had to get back to NA and start listening. I had to take the cottonwool out of my ears and stick it in my mouth, as the older, cleaner, members say. I was welcomed back into the fold.

Within my first 30 days I'd gotten a sponsor and bought a copy of the Step Working Guide. And so began my journey into recovery. Through fits and starts, rage and pain, procrastination and progress, I worked the program to the best of my ability. My sponsor has helped me immensely, I've shared my Step work with him even though my trust issues are still there, and he hasn't judged me, rejected me, or humiliated me. He's had faith in me when I had none, he's told me I'm worth it when I didn't think I was, he's been patient when I wanted to cured already. He showed me love even though I didn't know how to receive it.

I went to small meetings and big meetings,

healthy meetings and sick meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings, and I shared when I was asked to share. An older, cleaner, member asked if I'd ever knocked back a drug, when I said no, he said I should have that same attitude toward sharing. I agreed with him, because I realised that if I put half the effort I put into scoring into recovery, I'd turn out ok.

One of the major hurdles I encountered in my recovery was a belief in a Higher Power. I'm a staunch Atheist and hold massive resentments toward religion and its Gods. The word God still gives me the creeps. So, in order to get my head out of the way, I chose to hand my will over to the program. I did the suggested things (step work, service, sharing). Faith was a foreign concept to me, but I have learned that the program works if you work it, and it doesn't if you don't, so I chose to put my faith into the program and work it to the best of my ability. I'm grateful that each member has the right to develop their own concept of a Higher Power.

I was told that service keeps you clean, and after about four months of washing dishes at various meetings, I took on a service position. I became a Group Service Representative and a Treasurer. It was a bit daunting at first, but I soon realised that my service positions were doing me good: they got me out of my self-obsessed headspace and forced me to think of others.

So I've held on to my service positions, continued my Step work, reached out to other members when I needed support and supported others when they needed it. Today I'm over two years clean, today I have awareness around some of my self-defeating thought patterns and behaviours and don't have to point the finger at everyone else, today I feel like I'm a part of Narcotics Anonymous, today I have compassion for the still suffering addict, today I like myself and today my future looks brighter than it ever has before. Life on life's terms now seems livable.

BenJ

Recovery: the big umbrella

Recover — *verb*. 1: get something back again after losing it; regain. 2: get well again after being ill or weak.

Above is the Oxford Dictionary meaning of the word recovery. Notice, it's about getting something back after losing it, regaining control, power over your life, improving your health, rejoining the community in general. Recovery is a BIG word that means lots of different things to people. As we all go on a different journey with our addiction problems so to the road to recovery is very different for everyone. Health care has come a long way these days and we now know it is important to include all aspects of our lives not just the physical or obvious symptoms of our disease. According to the World Health Organisation addiction is classed as a chronic relapsing condition. That means recovery is a very long and varied process which can be very different for each person.

For me it has been an interesting journey. I do not subscribe to any one sort of programme or idea. A mix of many different things has helped me regain my position in society, including peer support, pharmacotherapy, counselling and in general a non-judgemental attitude from the people

I involve in my life. I do not look at abstinence as the only way, especially at the start of the recovery journey. It's an amazing amount of pressure to place on a person in this condition, and when they inevitably fail they can give up hope and the inclination to try. One must seek what works for them and harm reduction is a great place to start. The process allows you to gain some control over your addiction while engaging with services that understand and support you. It may take a few hits and misses to find the service for you but once you have, the relief is massive.

Always remember, you hold the power and the only way to make change is to start.

Anonymous



Crawling King Snake

Crawling King Snake, I've heard it before,
Was Jim Morrison, lead singer of the Doors,
Lyrics escape me, them days such a haze,
Those three words – the feelings they raise,
Embodied, entombed – prisoner of oneself,
Isolated from society, isolated from the wealth,
Crawling King Snake happy at work,
I the hard yards, He all the worth,
Choose the self pity, or get up and fight,
Latter is easier, and the path to the light,
Hard to get started and to make,
Fuck it! I'm over you – Crawling King Snake!



Anonymous

The Ripple Effect

Recovery is a personal journey that escapes simple definitions yet is characterised by some common principles – a sense of hope and purpose, a sense of belonging and the emergence of a positive identity that brings pride and self esteem.

Although addictions are chronic, relapsing conditions, the evidence suggests that 58% of people who have a lifetime addiction will eventually achieve sustained recovery.

This does not just help the addict – recovery is like the ripples in a pool – it

fans out to family and friends and to wider communities and that is why we talk of recovery as 'contagious'.

Recovery is a sense of optimism and change that spreads through the example of recovery champions and is fostered in communities of recovering addicts and their families.

David Best

*Associate Professor of Addiction Studies
Turning Point Drug and Alcohol Centre,
Monash University*

A new way to live

I knew what it was to recover from an injury or a footy game, but until my parents put me into rehab at 18, I didn't know what recovery was in terms of my drug use.

I didn't see my drug use as a disease that I had to recover from, and in the drug and alcohol rehabilitation hospital I learnt that I had to change everything about myself in order to recover from my disease.

From there I was introduced to other tools to use in my journey such as NA/AA and counselling, and in the rooms I was taught about the 12 Steps and how working them could change my life, and I could never have to use a substance again.

I was told if I work the program it will work for me, and it could not just help me with my substance abuse, it would help change my everyday life and the way I act, the way I think and the way I perceive the world.

I knew nothing else but drugs, alcohol, crime and violence before I found recovery.

Today I don't need to do crime, I don't need to steal from my family and friends, and I don't need to lie and scam everyone who comes my way to

get drugs and live the pathetic unmanageable lifestyle I lived when I was in my active addiction.

To me personally, recovery is a way of life, a change in your cognitive behavior, a new way for me to live without depending on a mood altering substance.

Daniel W.



Amy's Story

Alcohol consumed my life. It was like a best friend - always there for me when I needed it. When I got angry, it was there to calm me down. When I was happy, it was there to help me celebrate. When I was nervous, it gave me courage. When I was bored, it helped me fill in time. But the more time that went by the more obvious it became just how much alcohol was hurting me.

My life had become stagnant, I wasn't moving forward. My health was deteriorating, I was very antisocial and I was really unhappy with myself. It was the end of November last year, I had been sober for 4 days and I was confident that I was going to pass my 3 month probation period at work. At the end of the day I was told that I was terminated and I was devastated. I went home and had a drink and I kept on drinking for the next few days. I came up for air briefly, and then went straight back into drinking because I didn't know how to cope. I knew that I needed help and it was time to ask.

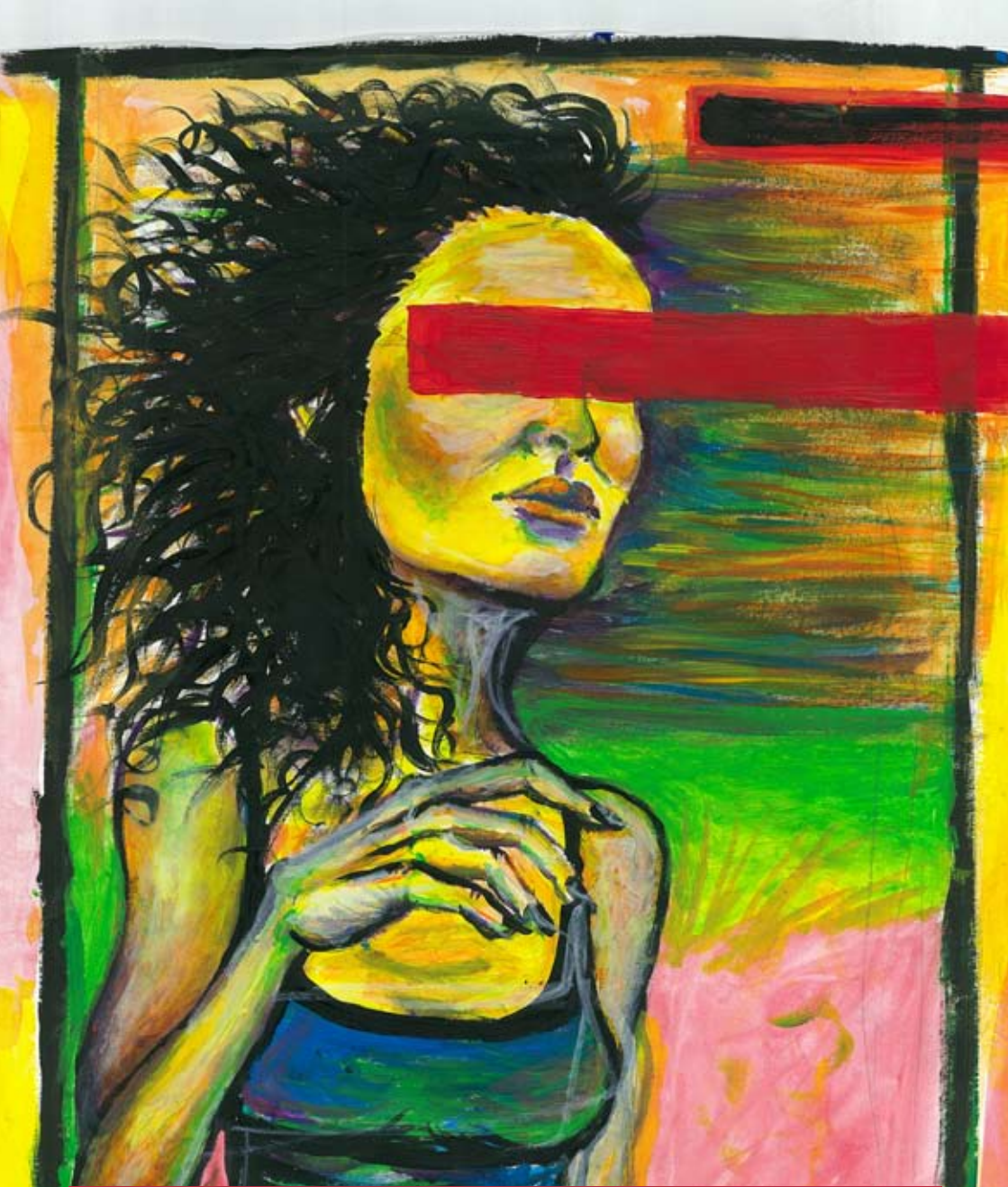
Moreland Hall called me back and organised for me to have an assessment. They also sent me some information, including a brochure on their Catalyst program. I thought: "A 6 week program would be great. I know that I have trouble staying sober for longer than a week and hopefully this will help me. I get to come home in the evenings and learn how to not drink and live in my own environment. I'm not working at the moment so I really hope that I can get into this program".

I took it all quite seriously. I was accountable to somebody else and I wanted to help myself. I went through withdrawal and checked in almost daily with a nurse at Moreland Hall for a week. I abstained from alcohol and I was determined to get into the Catalyst program. I knew that it would be a chance for me to improve my life and it would be crazy for me to pass up an opportunity like this.

The CBT Coping Skills sessions were the core of the program and I gained so much valuable information that I still use every single day. These sessions combined with mood management and the one on one motivational counselling was where I had some of my breakthrough moments and as a fellow participant often said "a light bulb came on". As a result of all these things that I learned, I now know that a lapse or a relapse is not the end of the world. I'm pleased to say that I haven't had one yet, but if I do its okay and I have plans and support systems in place to get me back on the right track. I'm also pleased to say that as a result of the things I've learned in this program—today is four weeks since I had my last cigarette.

So thank you to all the people involved with the Catalyst program for helping me to learn how to live again. I will always remember you and I will always be grateful to you. And I hope that this program is around for many years to come so that other people can benefit from it in the same way that I have.

Amy



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Self Help Addiction Resource Centre

*self portrait
Magpie Neuenhagen*