



*Advice to Our Peers
who are just beginning their
Journey of Mental Health
Recovery*

From
Consumers of Kansas
Community Support Services Programs

Almost 400 people who receive services from the seven largest community support programs in the State of Kansas took the time to answer a survey in 2003 called the Recovery Enhancing Environment measure (REE). One part of the survey asked people to share the wisdom they gained on their journey of mental health recovery. The information contained in this booklet came from the open-ended question: *"What one or two things would you want to say to a person who is just beginning his or her journey of recovery from psychiatric disability?"*

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The ideas people shared were analyzed and arranged by important themes by Priscilla Ridgway, MSW, the former coordinator of the Recovery Paradigm Project, with the assistance of Lori Davidson, MSW and Lisa Davis, MSW. If you want to quote from this brochure we suggest you use the following citation: Ridgway, P., Davidson, L., & Davis, L. (Eds.). (2004). Kansas consumers' advice to peers who are just beginning their journey of mental health recovery: Report from a pilot of the Recovery Enhancing Environment Measure. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, School of Social Welfare, Office of Mental Health Research and Training.

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Mental health consumers from Kansas were asked:

"What one or two things would you want to say to a person who is just beginning his or her journey of recovery from psychiatric disability?"

The wisdom that they shared has been summarized in this brochure.

Have hope.

The journey of mental health recovery isn't a simple or easy process. Know that things will get better. It is not hopeless; there is something to live for. Don't give up hope. There is hope. Try to think positive thoughts and have a positive attitude. Spiritual beliefs can keep hope alive. Have faith.

"Recovery begins with hope."

"Just because you have a disability, your life isn't over. There is still hope."

"This journey of recovery may take a long time, but through support, faith [and] grounding, it can be done."

"It may be a long and confusing road, but recovery is attainable. "

"We started out helpless, sometimes hopeless. We discovered there were resources to prepare us for this particular journey."

"There is hope. Things will get better."

"There is hope and the potential to live a healthy and happy life."

"There is always hope, purpose, reason or meaning from every ounce of life... "

"[Recovery] can help [you] grow."

Set goals for yourself.

[Think about the question] "What are you needing, wanting, in your life? You are a person and you are respected. Set your goals (small or big) long term/short term."

"Set goals & don't push yourself beyond what one can accomplish."

"It's always transitional: coming out of one phase and moving to the next, never quite realizing your goals but always becoming something/someone different."

"Be positive, goal-oriented and learn to never give up!"

Know you are not alone.

Other people have been through what you are going through. We can help you; together we can help each other. Find peers and friends and family members to support you. Develop good relationships with positive people. Avoid people who stress or distress you. Be open and honest with supporters. Listen to and learn from others, and share what you learn with them.

"Don't go it alone! Join a support group and/or make friends with others who are on the journey of recovery-it makes the journey easier!"

"Find a real friend to talk to, someone who will listen and tell you how they feel about what you have told them..."

"Trust someone-have a friend to help you take care of yourself."

"This isn't your fault, and you are not alone."

"You are not alone. We are survivors and though the trip is hard, it is well worth the wealth of knowledge, understanding and the happiness you will be able to regain."

"There will be ups and downs on the road to recovery and that is to be expected, but there are plenty of people to support [you] through the good and rough times. We are all here to recover from our illnesses and we want everyone to succeed in that process."

"Life gives us hard knocks but, we can survive by taking a step at a time and by listening to guidance ... look for the pluses in life, stick with the winners."

"You are not alone! When I first [experienced symptoms] I felt so alone. Between my support group and social worker, I realized I wasn't an alien. It was such a relief to hear others, men and women, describe their feelings, and to listen to people living normal lives, who had once been where I was at that time. It gave me hope!"

"You can do it!" Life has many ups and downs for all people. We'll help you when you feel down."

"You, my friend, are worth it all."

Believe in yourself. See yourself as a whole person.

Reject the idea that you should see yourself as your psychiatric diagnosis. Reject the negative messages of stigma; reject other people's negative ideas or opinions of you. Do not be too hard on yourself, or dwell on negative thoughts or self-accusations. Think well of yourself; treat yourself well; believe in yourself. Know you are equal to other people. See yourself as a spiritual person.

"Strive for respect and forgiveness as a give-and-take proposal, and continue to demonstrate those qualities to the best of your ability, even if you feel threatened, or misunderstood, or neglected. Don't think of yourself as a "bad" or "lesser" person because of your psychiatric disability, because actually acknowledging [that you have] psychiatric problems is a sign that you are striving for goodness and healing."

"Do not become your diagnosis. It is just a label for insurance and to appropriate your medications. It is just a small part of you and not you, the person."

"Believe in yourself, as you are the greatest resource you have."

"[See yourself] as a person first, then [your] disability."

"If you try to be something you're not, you truly will [be]. Be yourself and it will flow. "

"Learn to love yourself the best way possible."

"Love and respect yourself."

"Your Higher Power will always love you."

Take responsibility for yourself, your condition, and your recovery.

Recovery happens when we try. We have to take an active role in our own recovery. Recovery takes on-going effort. We have to constantly pursue stability, growth and happiness. Many people have limitations or disabilities, but we can learn to cope with, and overcome, our disability.

*"Keep an open mind and let yourself
grow." "Know yourself."*

"Don't depend on anyone except yourself!!!"

"If you want help, you have to help yourself also."

"Life is life-good and bad, but when you are actively involved in your own recovery, you have a choice (positive or negative) on how your day goes. Life is a journey, and God doesn't make mistakes, He has a reason for what each one of us goes through!"

"Psychiatric disability is not the end of the world-it's just a limitation, and everyone has limitations and idiosyncrasies. Your future is as bright as you want it to be, but you have to work at it."

'...do your part.'

Don't give up on having a full life.

Don't accept the idea that you are permanently disabled. Get involved in life; keep yourself busy. Create a positive structure to your day. Do things that are meaningful with your time. Become involved with productive and meaningful work, social activities, arts and crafts, exercise, and spirituality.

"Be part of the community as a whole ... Respect and obey the laws and rules of our society ...[Be] a productive member of society."

"If you can work, DO. Don't restrict yourself to a disability income."

"You will need a philosophy; I have one for you. It is four words, all action verbs: work, play, rest, love (what you can)."

"Don't give up your life to be permanently disabled.' Keep thinking. "

"Keeping a structured schedule and regular activities is more productive and helpful when battling depression than ANYTHING else I have found. You have to have a reason to get out of bed in the morning or you won't."

"Find something for you to do with your time job, school, or activities. "

"Get a job at first; get training for a better job while you're working."

"...keep busy ... Try to function by doing work, maybe small tasks, but work up to larger. .. Look for positive places and things to do ... Need work life and social life to keep mind busy."

"You can do it. You only have things to discover along the way don't keep thinking all that `dis' stuff."

"Remember that once you recover, never go back to their label of your being `disabled.' If you are able to recover completely from your so-called `disability,' then you are considered a normal person. "

Hang in. Despite setbacks, don't ever give up.

Hang in, don't ever give up. You will experience setbacks; setbacks are a part of recovery. Don't give up on yourself no matter what. Keep trying. Keep going!

"It's hard a LOT (if not most) of the time, and it sucks; but eventually it does get a little better and then it starts getting enough better that your friends and acquaintances can see the improvements. Then you really have something to hang your hat on and can really see it yourself."

"When it can't get any worse, it can only get better. Laugh a lot-it's what'll get you thru the insanity of life. "

"Stay committed, yet expect setbacks."

"Setbacks happen but you will make it."

"...you are going to have good days and bad days. Sometimes you will have more bad days for a while, than good days, but you need to hang in there."

"Try not to be angry with oneself when you have setbacks."

"Never give up on you. Keep your head up. Everyone else might give up. But don't give up on you, because if you do there is nothing else to live for. Do the best that you can do every day. Never quit. Don't say I can't--can't never did anything."

"Don't get discouraged and quit going. Hang in there and you're going to be happy in the end."

"Just keep trying. Always have hope and determination. Everyone falls. You have to be willing to accept a fall back and keep trying your best."

Pace yourself.

The recovery journey takes time. Take it in small steps and take things slow at first. Move toward your recovery day-by-day. It takes time to see changes. Have patience, recovery is possible to achieve.

"Keep at it and take each hour one hour at a time ... Don't give up if this is really important to you."

"Don't expect change overnight, you have to want it enough to do the work."

"Don't look at the huge picture/future. Look at the next minute or hour. What can you handle now? Break it down into `baby steps' or `little pictures.' You don't have to do it all right now, just a little bit at a time."

"Be slow, deliberate, painstaking and patient with oneself. Be persistent."

"Hang in there and work at your own pace, even if it's just baby steps."

"Don't expect recovery to happen overnight. Allow yourself time. Let yourself have some down time."

"Everyone [doesn't] recover at the same length of time. So don't be impatient, work at your own pace. Going on this journey everyone might not need the same amount of baggage. The journey might be long and hard for some, not so hard for others."

"It's a long slow process, put one foot in front of the other. "

"Have patience-it's not the end of life, it's a new beginning."

Accept you have problem/a psychiatric disorder or a mental illness. Get good help.

Educate yourself. Learn all you can about your condition. Ask for help. Trust in people who want to help you, be honest with them, listen to their ideas and advice. Take the advice of helpers, doctors and case managers. Find the best available supports and treatment. Accept help. Find treatment and alternatives that works for you. Allow treatment to work. Find medications that work well for you and keep taking them. Use all of the resources that are available to you. Make sure you are listened to. Become an advocate for yourself. Don't become too dependent on the mental health system.

"This is a big step and a start to a new and better self. Learn about your disability and then work to control it."

"Ask a lot of questions-the more questions we ask, the more we understand and we can deal with our illnesses better. "

"...keep asking, trying, questioning-to get the right kind of services you feel you need."

"Make sure you voice your needs and keep voicing them. If you don't get what you need, go up the ladder."

"Educate yourself about your diagnosis, as well as other forms of mental illness and treatments. Why? Psychiatrists spend very little time with you. The diagnosis may or may not be correct, and the medications you are often forced to take may

or may not help you. The more you know, the better you can evaluate your situation and seek alternative treatment."

"Be persistent in demanding care and resources appropriate to your needs."

"...don't settle for a therapist if you don't work well or feel comfortable-keep pushing until you find the right fit. Take your time and make sure you can really trust the person and be active in your plan of care."

"Help others help you."

"Take advantage of opportunities."

"Explore many and varied options from the medical models to "alternative" methods. Read, read, read about your conditions."

"... be honest with yourself and your providers, to get the best help possible and be able to use it."

"If the initial treatment doesn't work-go back and keep trying... "

"Stick with it. If you're in a good program it will be hard, but it will pay off in the end."

"With treatment and therapy, life becomes more interesting, and if you use your therapy to your advantage, you can really be happy."