

## Making Recovery Real in Dundee: 6 years on

### Podcast transcript

#### **Louise:**

Welcome to the Scottish Recovery Network podcast. This podcast is an opportunity to reflect on the impact of Making Recovery Real in Dundee. My name is Louise Christie, I am the Director of Scottish Recovery Network and was involved in Making Recovery Real in Dundee and have been sharing the learning from it, with others.

Making Recovery Real in Dundee is a collaboration of people with lived experience of mental health challenges, local third sector organisations, the Health and Social Care Partnership and the local NHS. It was launched in 2015. Making Recovery Real has significantly changed the dialogue about mental health and recovery in the area. As co-production in action, it is helping 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 delivery and practice development.

Today we are chatting with Ruth Brown, Manager for Mental Health and Substance Use at Dundee Voluntary Action. Ruth has been a driving force in Making Recovery Real since 2015. It would be really interesting to start by reflecting on what the early days of Making Recovery Real in Dundee looked and felt like Ruth.

#### **Ruth:**

We decided to bring people together in a large scale event. We invited as many people as possible that we knew had recently used mental health services or experienced mental health challenges, to come along to an event. We did that by involving a lot of the local third sector services and the community mental health services, to talk about what

our intention was going forward. And most importantly, to listen to what they thought about the idea that we were proposing.

So alongside those people came a number of others who worked in services and supports. It became apparent that those people had been really wishing that they could spend more time listening to people with lived experience. What recovery looks like to them, what kind of things they felt supported recovery, what kind of things got in the way and just to have really quite relaxed conversations about that.

As a means of finding out what was important to people, we used a conversation cafe style approach, to inviting people to talk. We didn't socially engineer it in the sense that we said "if you meet these criteria you sit here and if you don't, sit there", but we invited people to include in their conversations someone who perhaps they didn't know already. We did not use labels, so folk were not labelled as a service user or a staff member or a support worker or carer or whatever. We were just a group of people with first names talking about what we thought recovery was. And that was what set the scene for us moving forward.

**Louise:**

And how has this process evolved over time?

**Ruth:**

We like to have inclusive conversations where people are not labelled, but invited to share their own lived experiences, whatever they are. We did set some guidelines of what we thought a good conversation would look like, based on those early discussions, because we wanted to make sure that everybody had a voice, but also not to put people under pressure to speak if they didn't want to.

I remember one of the things that we started to do quite early on was use paper tablecloths and the meetings and put a variety of felt pens and stickers and things down, and invite people to doodle, so that they could write messages or they could express themselves artistically, as well as or instead of speaking and feeling like everyone was looking at them. And then we used that work that had been produced on the tablecloths to prepare quite visual reports of the events as well.

So it wasn't just the holding of the events that was important, I think it was the recording and feeding back from the events. We did not produce lengthy verbatim reports, but we produced colourful representations of what had taken place, which were quite engaging for everyone to remember and enjoy looking back on.

**Louise:**

What do you think were some of the things that supported Making Recovery Real in Dundee to have successes?

**Ruth:**

We didn't stress really about who wasn't there. We worked with the people who did come together. We always had quite a, without artificially creating it, quite a celebratory feel to events, so it was a pleasurable experience participating in the events. They were light touch, there were fun activities. We've used means through which people felt comfortable expressing themselves, but we've also had good engagement with, in particular the health and social care partners, who have enjoyed and always made apce to focus on what was created by those events.

We have a local strategic planning group that is responsible for producing a local mental health improvement plan. It's a five year plan. Within the agenda for the meetings, there is a space, high up the agenda, a space for any lived experience contribution that people want to bring. So there's always a slot there and space in which people could talk about what was coming forward from the Making Recovery Real events.

There were a number of other pieces of engagement work going on at the time. We had the independent inquiry into Tayside mental health services, we had the Poverty Truth Commission, which was taking mental health as one of its focus areas of activity. And we found that there was a strong chime in all three engagement strands in terms of what people were saying about what they wanted to be different about mental health and recovery in the city. There was always a space to talk

about what that meant for planning and commissioning services and supports.

**Louise:**

What are some of the real examples of change that you could share with the people listening?

**Ruth:**

Third sector organisations have attracted more resources, because when the commissioning group heard that people found peer support really impactful in terms of their recovery, they wanted more fully in peer support in the city and one of the quickest and easiest ways to do that was to give money to third sector organisations to do that. Having said that, they also gave to some of the statutory teams as well around the table. So it's helping us to tip the balance away from the expectation that if a mental health challenge appears in your life, you require medication and clinical treatment to address it. Because actually, most people experience a mental health challenge at some point in their life, were mental health challenges better understood and the sharing of responsibility around how to talk about that, if that were more prevalent, we would be able to prevent some of the mental health crisis that arises and of course that's what we're ultimately trying to do. It's to reduce the incidence of mental health issues becoming problems and illnesses.

**Louise:**

I think more recently there's been some examples of where the Health and Social Care partnership have shared power and decision making with the Making Recovery Real partners, not just in peer support but maybe around the services for people in distress.

**Ruth:**

These situations can arise to anyone in their life and there was a lot of criticism of how people were responded to, in both of those situations actually within the city. And with a high drug death and suicide rate within the city, it was important to put in place some better measures to support people who are in distress. We are currently working towards

the opening of a community wellbeing centre which will provide 24/7 support for individuals who are in distress. We are aiming to get that open for springtime next year.

This way round, we are going to be starting next month, establishing a stakeholder group where people can bring all their contributions to that service design and when those key questions have been asked then we'll go forward to procurement process, knowing that the specification has been co-produced and that we can be confident that what we're looking create is something that has support across services, commissioners and people with lived experience as well.

**Louise:**

Making Recovery Real in Dundee is over six years old now. What do you think are the three most important things that have changed?

**Ruth:**

When we talk about what we want to achieve now, we already know that, whatever we do, we want it to be person-centred, recovery-focused and trauma-informed. And we didn't know that seven years ago. We would have been scrabbling around for a starting point and even if we'd had that starting point, we wouldn't have known where we were going to go with it.

Whereas now I feel like, those cards are already on the table first. We still have challenges around how to incorporate the lived experience, it doesn't have to be about people with lived experience becoming professionals. We do have professionals with lived experiences as well.

**Louise:**

So for people who are listening to this podcast and thinking "I'd quite like a bit of that or to do things different in my area", what would you share from your experience, Ruth?

**Ruth:**

Don't be afraid of not knowing from the outset what your outcomes will be. Go with the flow. Have confidence in the fact that by creating space for open dialogue and constantly checking things out with people, you'll

come up with a plan which is well supported and going to deliver what people want.

When we started out, we didn't know what outcome we were going to have from Making Recovery Real. We didn't have any expectation of any particular outcome, but at the end what we came out with was this principle that lived experience needed to be central to what we do. We have to just keep working hard at staying in touch with what that looks like, keep checking it out with people. We don't use any kind of representative model, so when we talk about lived experience, we understand that we're all experts in our own experience, we're all different and there's room for them all.

Being comfortable with the fact that you don't know what that's going to bring at the end of the day, but that by involving as many people as possible it will be the best it can be.

**Louise:**

Thanks very much for sharing your reflections on Making Recovery Real in the last six years. From my point of view, it's been fantastic to see what has been achieved and I agree with you that we didn't quite know where we were going at the beginning, but we had a group of people who wanted to work together and have been on a journey and I think gathering more people as we went along.

If you're interested in finding out more, get in touch with Scottish Recovery Network. You can find us on social media and sign up to our newsletter on our website [www.scottishrecovery.net](http://www.scottishrecovery.net)