

A B S T R A C T

THE PROCESS OF RECOVERY FOR PEOPLE DIAGNOSED WITH PERSONALITY DISORDER: A CASE STUDY OF THE HAVEN By HEATHER CASTILLO September 2010

The study investigates the process of recovery for people diagnosed with personality disorder. This is related to the application of the new meaning of recovery from mental illness as explored by members of The Haven which, as the service setting for the study, addresses the problems of a client group that suffers significant social exclusion, known to impact on demand for health and other public services. It aims to examine efforts which attempt to reverse this social exclusion as an aspect of the recovery process. An earlier inquiry by the author yielded a new understanding of the diagnosis of personality disorder as defined by service users, and contributed to a change in the national agenda when the Department of Health responded by providing new national guidance and funding for pilot projects throughout the country. This resulted in The Haven, the service context for this current study.

As yet, internationally, there is no agreed rationale of recovery for those diagnosed with personality disorder and few researchers have sought the views of service users regarding the issue. The following study is the first internationally known research about personality disorder and recovery. A Participatory Action Research approach was chosen for this study and The Haven Research Group, comprised of the author and Haven clients, formulated proposed research questions and conducted Focus Groups and Individual Client Interviews with 66 participants, over a period of three years. The group has been concerned with the effectiveness of The Haven as a recovery tool from the perspective of service users and carers.

An examination of emerging themes, and the interplay between themes, gives insight into what participants consider to be the key steps to recovery for someone with a personality disorder diagnosis. From this thematic analysis a map is proposed of the journey of recovery for people with the diagnosis. Findings offer contributions to knowledge in terms of the service model and propose a new construct regarding recovery in personality disorder. This is defined as a journey of small steps highlighting recovering as a process, rather than recovery as a goal, leading to the emergence of the new concept of Transitional Recovery. As an alternative to the historically sequential path of rehabilitation and proposed recovery, this study offers a new, socially inclusive way of working with people who have a personality disorder diagnosis where they may choose to retain a haven while continuing to develop and progress on their chosen path in the wider world.

Key Words: Personality Disorder; Transitional Recovery; Social Inclusion