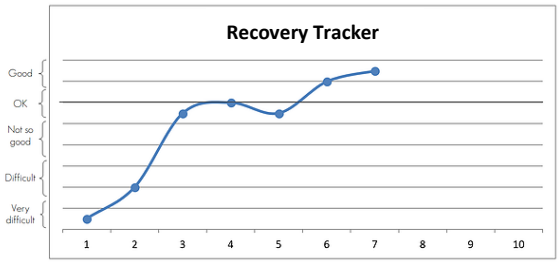

Gearóid's Recovery Tracker

Gearóid's Story

I had been well for 5 years and then I had a major mental health relapse. Looking back now I can see that some of the symptoms had been beginning to return a few months before that and that I had stopped focusing on my recovery and taken it for granted about a year before that. I had broken my collar bone and stopped cycling, something I enjoyed that kept me mentally and physically healthy. Also, at the time I was going through a lot of stressful difficulties at work and personal difficulties that contributed. When it happened it was like a complete system collapse.

So I went off sick at work. I was unable to function. The next day I went to see the doctor. Because I was so unwell I feared I would not be able to articulate my symptoms and was afraid I would not get any support so I wrote down all my symptoms. One of the delusions I suffer from when I am ill is that no one will believe me that I am genuinely unwell and unable to function. I believe that people will think I am just making it up and milking it because people have said that to me in the past. When I am ill I need help. I need people to support me so I can recover. And when I am ill one of my fears is that I won't get help and I won't get better and I will lose my job and family.

So I shared my concerns with the doctor and then a mental health nurse and then she consulted with a psychiatrist. They really supported me. They understood how unwell I was. I got some good medication that helped me to relax. Sometimes they just helped me sleep. They kinda grounded me so I could get some relief from the symptoms. I am not saying medication is for everyone but it was a really important part of my recovery for those first few weeks when the symptoms were really bad.

I guess that everyone's mental illness is unique. Here is a list of the symptoms that I wrote down that day. I am just sharing them so you get an idea about how horrible it is to have a relapse. Physically I felt dizzy sometimes, exhausted, unable to rest, waking up early - between 4am and 5am - and unable to get back to sleep, feeling sick all the time, not able to eat during the day, psoriasis spreading over my body, physically feeling pain all over, legs feeling very weak and being dehydrated. Mentally I had poor concentration, repeating thoughts, dark thoughts, unsure of myself, delusions, brain fog and afraid I would never get better. Emotionally I felt dread, sick, very irritable, confused sometimes, not able to face things, avoiding people and places, staying away from everyone, afraid people would realize how unwell I was – I didn't want people to know, feeling overwhelmed and not feeling right in myself.

Fortunately, I got a lot of help from the hospital. The next month and a half was really just rest, focusing on recovery and slowly trying to figure out how to start again. The most important thing

was holding on to hope during the difficult days. I refused to believe that I would not get better. I kept hope alive somehow. And bit by bit I started to feel not so sick all the time. Then I started to work on my recovery process. I just started to focus on me a lot more and taking care of myself. Trying to sleep better and being mindful of my thoughts. The most important thing was that I started prioritizing recovery in my life on a daily basis. Focusing on being well today and making that the priority each day. And I am doing well again. I am back at work, getting stronger and the symptoms are very much less. I feel good a lot of them time. I am able to enjoy life, hobbies and relationships. I am able to think clearly. And I rarely have the delusions that used to trouble me so much. Now they are more like passing thoughts that I quickly realize are not true.

It was 5 years before this that I had had a previous mental health episode. This time I was able to use the Recovery Tracker. I remember that the first week of my relapse I had a very low score. It was the day after I went to the hospital that I started using the Tracker. I found it helpful to see the low score on the graph. It made me realize that what was happening to me was real, that this isn't me making this up, that I was very unwell, and that I needed to work on that basis. The next week I was still low. But I stayed true to the commitment that I made to myself that I was going to keep hope and not let the illness take that from me no matter what. I refused to give into the fear that I would never be well again, even if that's how it seemed to me at the time. And the next week I was a bit better and this gave me encouragement to keep working on my recovery. Over the following weeks I kept using the tracker until I was in a good place. Subsequent to that I moved on to some wellbeing trackers. I like the Healthspan Tracker and the Highest Possibilities Tracker. I really like to the Highest Possibilities Tracker. It helps me focus. It is a comforting thought to me that if I need it I can go back to using the Recovery Tracker.

Using the Recovery Tracker during my relapse helped me find direction and have a process I could believe in. It helped me move forward and keep hope. It helped me to acknowledge when I had made progress and I took encouragement from that. And it's good to know that it's there for me if I ever need it.