

Quality in practice: relationships, respect and recovery



Ebonyrose Lyons

At the heart of this story of recovery and personal growth are two things that capture the essence of Mind's practice: respectful, compassionate relationships and solid practical advice. These two elements of our practice combine to create safe spaces where people can regain hope that things can and will be different, and that they can work on the aspects of their lives they want to change.

Of course, things do not always go to plan. For Ebonyrose, some years after she left the Narana youth residential rehabilitation service, her mental health began to deteriorate. Fortunately, she was able to reconnect with Mind through the Personal Helpers and Mentors service (PHaMs) and found someone who was "always ready to listen, encouraging and supportive." Being there for people when they need help, and sticking with them through thick and thin has been a part of Mind's approach for the 40 years of our history.

In the early 2000s we started to try and articulate this way of working. In 2012 we published our *Model of Recovery Oriented Practice*. Updated and renamed in 2016 to *Mind's approach to recovery oriented practice*, this remains our guiding framework for all our services today.

Regardless of what service people use, they will experience non-judgemental, caring and uplifting support and practical guidance from staff who according to Ebonyrose "remind you that you are responsible for your care going forward. They don't want to take credit for it. And it's amazing, how they gently set boundaries."

We are constantly evaluating our methods to ensure that we're delivering on our promise to hold the hope for our clients. Our customer research has helped us to confirm what is at the heart of what people value about Mind: the relationships between clients and staff, and the combination of care, professionalism and practical assistance we offer – regardless of what service or whereabouts. As Ebonyrose explains, what we do works: "with the support of my worker, counsellor and family, I'm living a good life and being a good parent." ■

When Ebonyrose Lyons gave the opening address at this year's Mind Community Conference in Victoria, she described her recovery journey in stages: "change was slow, with many ups and downs." She told a story of nearly twenty years of engagement with Mind, starting as one of our first residents in Narana, a youth residential rehabilitation service. Ebonyrose remembers arriving "just as they were doing the finishing touches and laying down the grass."

The staff appeared happy and excited about the new service and told her she could stay two years. While she didn't trust them at first, eventually, "we did lots of group work and began building trust." Ebonyrose started to feel accepted by the staff and the other residents and confident that they knew what it was like to live with mental ill-health.

“

"Staff remind you that you are responsible for your care going forward. They don't want to take full credit for it. And it's amazing, how they gently set boundaries."

– Ebonyrose Lyons,
Former client

”

But they wouldn't accept her old behaviour, and Ebonyrose found she wanted things to change too. Feeling accepted but also accountable for her own actions was a major turning point in her recovery journey.



Families and friends

Families and friends have always been a crucial part of the Mind story. We were founded by the efforts of people who wanted a better life for their loved ones affected by mental ill-health, and to this day are guided by their knowledge and experience.

In 2013, we merged with the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Emotionally and Mentally Ill (ARAFEMI). We were pleased to do this in recognition of the importance of family and carer perspectives in the development of support services, but also to ensure carers' needs continue to be addressed too. Families and friends have been under-recognised and under-supported for too long and left on the brink of burn out.

“

“Being a carer is a difficult job. We can be on call 24/7 and no amount of money can cover that. But I don't do it for the money. I do it because I love my daughter. ...sometimes she just needs her mum.”

– Jo Pallant, Community Mental Health Practitioner and Carer Champion ”

Our recently commissioned report, *The economic value of informal mental health caring in Australia* (University of Queensland, March 2017) made clear the size of the load family and friends carry, the care work they

do and the significant challenges they face to get the support they need to stay engaged in their own lives. This breakthrough research was funded through the Carer Development Fund, a legacy of the merger with ARAFEMI, and is a powerful illustration of why we have committed to a focus on families and carers in our new advocacy program.

Through this fund we've also worked in partnership to develop the *Practical guide for working with carers of people with a mental illness* along with our own resources to promote family sensitive practice. Mental Health Carers Australia (MHCA) is another partner with whom we promote carer focused approaches nationally. Jenny Branton, Executive Officer at MHCA says “Mind's focus on families and carers is unique amongst the big service providers, so they were the first organisation we approached when moving to our new national membership model. Having Mind on board significantly extends the network's capabilities in research and policy analysis on issues that matter to families and carers.”

Mind has sought to be more sensitive to the needs of family and friends, and ensure their experiences of the services we provide to the people they love and care for are inclusive and positive.

Mind has established Carer Champions, a group of staff who in addition to their paid role at Mind also advocate internally for the importance of being 'carer aware' across the whole organisation and beyond. We also operate a national Carer Helpline, a volunteer led call back service offering advice, counselling, linkage and support to families and friends who are supporting someone with mental ill-health.

The helpline is staffed by people who have a lived experience of either mental ill-health or caring for someone on a recovery journey. People have told us they can “talk to them about stuff that we wouldn't even talk to our own family about.”

At Mind, we also make proactive calls to new clients' nominated carer or important other, reaching out to them to say 'welcome to the Mind community' and informing them of the support they can access in their own right.

“

“Mind's focus on families and carers is unique amongst the big service providers, so they were the first organisation we approached when moving to our new national membership model.”

– Jenny Branton, Executive Officer, Mental Health Carers Australia ”

As one family member explained, “mental illness is a casserole-free condition...” because rarely do people arrive on your doorstep offering practical help. Not like they might if you had a physical illness. At Mind, we do our best to bring carers and families together, so they can share their experiences and feel less alone in their concerns. We do this through support groups, education evenings, social activities and also by hosting the online SANE forum for carers. ■