

Recovery Corner

Spring seems to come slowly to the Valley. The season is half way through and while the grass has turned green, the trees are still bare. Days are growing longer, warmer, but now it is snowing. I turn up the furnace and think of coastal Mexico.

Seasons require their own time. I know that the land is gradually soaking in the days, energizing itself for Spring's renewal. The elements are in place, and beneath this latest snow an extraordinary transformation has already begun. Spring comes slowly to the Valley, but when the trees reclaim their blossoms and then burst into green, I will find it hard to say that it took too long.

Recovery from severe mental illness can be like the coming of Spring. It is a movement from darkness into light, from being overwhelmed by an illness to reclaiming a self-determined and meaningful life.

The process, at times, can seem to move slowly, with difficult days gradually giving way to better ones. Hope, determination, and support are the basic elements for transformation.

It begins with a diagnosis by a knowledgeable doctor who will then suggest possible medical approaches to symptom management. Medication is not a

cure, but can be a powerful support, helping to reduce emotional distress and symptoms while a person works on important changes.

Counselors can help with those changes. They can teach a person to better understand their disorder, and how to identify and change behaviors or thoughts that adversely affect the person. They can also help a person learn better problem solving skills and other forms of stress reduction, or process experiences in a better way.

If the person is struggling with basic needs, they may be assigned a case manager who can help them reclaim or learn new life skills in order to meet those needs. Peer specialists can offer another layer of hope and support.

When a person has his or her symptom management strategy in place, and his or her basic needs are being met, he or she has reached the equinox and enters into the second stage of recovery, where psychosocial rehabilitation begins.

Here, the person begins to look closely at how hopeful, confident, and motivated he or she is and begins choosing or achieving a valued role. Personal barriers to change are identified, and consideration is given as to how to move past them.

Now the person is ready to set an overall goal. He or she may consider achievement in various areas of life, like living, learning, working, or socializing. Assessments are made concerning strengths and needs in relation to the goal, and a plan to acquire needed skills is made.

At every step of this process there is much work to be done, and occasional setbacks can be expected, but as the person develops a well rounded life he or she becomes more resilient. It can seem, at times, like the recovery process moves slowly, but as a person reclaims his or her life and personhood step by step, who can say that it takes too long?



By

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This year....

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