

The Uninvited Guest

Over the last few days I have been a little more tired, grumpy, uninterested and irritable than usual. It wasn't until I was reading in bed last night that I realised it was the return of the uninvited guest. He sneaks up edging in, a little at a time, until once again I find myself in a place of hopelessness and self doubt.

There is no quick fix to PND, no amount of medication, therapy or groups will make it go away. It takes a willingness to work on it yourself and know that there will be good days and bad. Just when I thought everything was running along nicely the unwanted guest slips back in to my life. I certainly didn't ask him back, as the one thing I have consciously made a decision on is that, I will never get to that place again where my life is not worth the effort everyone else is having to make to keep me alive. The one thing I am positive about is I will live, and I will live even if it annoys everyone else. But that doesn't mean that it is any easier. It doesn't mean that the feelings of worthlessness, distress, or hopelessness go away. It just means that I'm willing to make an effort to manage them.

The best way to describe how I feel right now is like I have jumped off a cliff into the ocean without taking a proper look at what the water was like. I am struggling and fighting for air as I have been caught in a rip and I'm so, so tired of fighting against the oceans downward pull. As I get tired I stop for a moment and wonder if I could just give up and drown as I don't feel like I have any fight left. Then someone reaches out and offers some support and I catch my breath

and start to restock. But as the hands start to let go I realise I am still in the cold, dark, wild ocean and I still have to fight. At this moment hope of being pulled to shore seems so far away that I can't imagine it even happening.

Depression is a struggle with the feelings you have inside even when you know that there is no valid justification to the feelings. I know I am a good mum, friend and wife. But depression some how fogs this over having me check and recheck myself as the feelings of self doubt flood my thinking. It is just so tiring to fight it sometimes, to keep putting my thinking back to the positive when the negative route is so well carved. I am struggling to find the reasons that I deserve to be happy and that I am worth some self care. Depression is the biggest liar you will ever meet. It tells you that you aren't worth the time, effort or money. That you aren't doing a good enough job to be appreciated and when someone over looks the things you do manage to struggle to do, it reinforces the feelings of guilt and lack of worth.

So today I find myself arguing with the uninvited guest, telling him I never asked him to come visit. Asking that if he isn't leaving, to please find it in his heart to be kind to me this time. And asking God for the strength to face this again. I know I need to find a way to live with this unwelcome visitor as I will not let him own my life again, but it is hard and it scares me. But I will live, even if it annoys everyone, that I am sure of. And even if that is all at this point in time, that is enough for today.

Jess Hopkins

Coming Soon on Access Radio...

9.30am, 8th and 15th September



Tune in to hear an interview with Don Paratene from the **Taranaki Consumer Advisory Group.**



Rongoā Kākāriki
GREEN
PRESCRIPTION

Be healthy, be active...

Do you have a green prescription from your GP encouraging you to increase your physical activity levels to help with a medical condition?

Then the "Formula 4" classes may be just what you need.

F4 is a FREE 10 week programme that helps you to create positive lifestyle changes—gradually increasing your physical activity levels as well as improving your nutrition to help improve your health.

The programme allows participants to come along and do 30 minutes of aqua exercises followed by an educational discussion group. Session run for 10 weeks. Contact Nicola, 06-759-0930 Ext 714

Thought for the Issue:

We are all born ignorant, but one must work hard to remain stupid.

Benjamin Franklin





Whakaitia te Whakawhiu i te Tangata



PHILLEN'S STORY

COUNTERING STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

Philleen's Story

Ngati Rereahu (Tainui), Tuhoë (Wairoa/Waikaremoana)

Philleen Macdonald's experience of unfair treatment has been extensive. She was first diagnosed with postnatal depression in 1997 following the birth of her second child, then later re-diagnosed with bipolar affective disorder and has also experienced psychosis, anxiety and *mate Maori*. Since then she has faced a catalogue of difficulties.

"I have been declined accommodation opportunities; I was unable to sit on the board of trustees at my children's school; I am the one that felt uncomfortable because I had to disclose my mental illness when I applied for a bank loan after graduation; I have lived with the stigma of people avoiding me because I have become unwell in public settings; I endured the torment of being told no one would ever want to be with me.

"My family is investigating the viability of setting up a *whanau* trust to bring together their *Maori* land interests. Trustees must

meet the criteria as a 'worthy appointee' and are unlikely to appoint someone who has 'a mental disability'.

"I have a social policy degree from Massey University, I advise on management, governance and strategic planning as part of my business, it is frustrating that society continues to outcast and exclude those living with mental health issues based on illness, not capacity to participate," she says.

Philleen has also experienced discrimination on a more personal level.

"When I first became unwell, I found people wanted to manage me or the situation without actually including me in the process.

"It is their lack of understanding and ignorance that fuels the discriminatory language and behaviour, maybe, too, it is fear. If I experience 'normal' emotion often it is seen as a symptom of unwellness,

rather than a natural reaction to trauma. My emotions at times, seem to be under constant scrutiny by those living external to my reality," she says.

For people who have a personal relationship with experience of a mental illness, Philleen's advice is simple:

"Ask! Do not assume you know what is best for the person, trust that they know what works well for them and be supportive and accepting. Facilitate a process of recovery, do not take over, build trust, and be firm but compassionate," she says.

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WHAT YOU DO MAKES THE DIFFERENCE



Taranaki Kowhaiwhai panel - The Hammerhead shark, Mangopare - 'keep positive, see it through'

HONOS

Recovering from mental illness is an ongoing journey. As we make progress along this road we notice, from time to time, landmarks which serve to show us how far we have come. These are often personal things including thoughts, feelings, and our ability to deal with life's challenges.

Sometimes these are changes we observe in ourselves, and sometimes they are things seen by people who know us well. Tangata Whaiora are not alone in their journey to recovery.

We are often joined by family and friends, people who want to provide aid because they care about us. Having a strong support network can make the road significantly easier.

This support is one thing that can help during recovery, but this is not the sole form of assistance we have access to; there are others who also play a major role. They provide aid not for emotional reasons, but because it is a part of their job.

These are the men and women who work for the mental health system. Sharing knowledge and professional advice; providing the tools, including medication and other therapy, we need to improve our situation; they serve as qualified guides to help us navigate this path.

But the journey of every Tangata Whaiora is unique—an internal, personal thing. If the mental

health system seeks to guide us on our journey, how do they know if they are following the right course? How can they measure our progress?

One of the tools they have at their disposal is called **HoNOS** (Health of Nations Outcome Scale). If you are a mental health consumer, it is highly likely that your progress is currently being measured using this system.

In essence, HoNOS consists of a series of questions which you are asked:

- When you first enter the mental health system
- At three monthly intervals while you are using the system
- When you leave the system

There are twelve questions in all; each of these questions has a rating of zero to four, with zero indicating no problem and four a severe to very severe problem.

They are designed to provide a “snapshot” of your current status and performance in a number of areas including your behaviour, mood, symptoms you may be experiencing, relationships with others, daily tasks and living situation.

Psychiatrists themselves prefer to gauge your progress through their dialogue with you during an appointment with them; HoNOS is used by support staff that you have ongoing contact with.

What may be of particular interest to consumers is that you have the right to view your HoNOS ratings—they are kept on your file, so you can ask your mental health professional to show them to you.

This could be useful because it gives you a point of reference, at regular intervals, of how far you have progressed from an external perspective—that of the mental health service itself. This could also be used as part of your recovery plan, or for discussion with mental health staff or family members.

If you find you don't agree with these ratings, you have the ability to request that your point of view is recorded on your clinical file.

HoNOS provides more than an indication of your own progress towards recovery. Your ratings will be encoded to protect your anonymity and privacy, and compiled alongside those of other clients both regionally and nationally—giving a picture of how the mental health system as a whole is performing.

Tony Spencer

Useful Websites

- **Te Pou:**
www.tepou.co.nz/page/138
- **PRIMHD:**
www.moh.govt.nz/primhd
- **Privacy Commission:**
www.privacy.org.nz



*“Korero Mai” is edited by Gordon Hudson, “What’s On” by Stephanie Mapley and “Whakaaro Pai” by Tony Spencer—all from Like Minds Taranaki. Your news and views are eagerly sought. Like Minds Taranaki, P O Box 5015, New Plymouth, 3rd Floor, BNZ building, Devon Street West, NP, ph 06-759-0966 mental.health@xtra.co.nz. www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz
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