

Holly's Recovery Story

After accessing various services for many years it was life-changing for me to find The Edinburgh Self-harm Project where people genuinely understand self-harm. Working with people there has really helped me to understand myself and ultimately to finally stop self-harming. I decided to run the Edinburgh Marathon (26.2 miles) to raise money for Penumbra. I raised a total of £1300, far more than I had anticipated. The more I think about it, the more analogous a marathon is to recovering from mental health problems so I have written some key points below that I learned along the way. To be strong in body and mind feels great and it is a privilege to be able to give something back to Penumbra

Lessons from a marathon:

The nature of a recovery journey...

It can't be done overnight, it won't be easy and you will need a lot of self-determination. There will be times you feel you have come a million miles and other times you feel you are right back at square one. At some point on your journey you will 'hit a wall' - you will feel that you cannot go on anymore and you will want to give up. But persevere and you will come through this!

Unexpected things will happen. For example I wasn't expecting the temperature to be 25 degrees on race day! Whatever challenges you are confronted with, you will have to find a way of dealing with them. You will need to make changes. To prepare for the marathon I completely gave up smoking and drinking for 4 months and had a very limited social life because of all the training. The changes I had to make in my recovery journey were a lot harder though!

The importance of peer support...

You will need a crowd of supporters! It is essential to have someone who believes in you and can give you hope along the way. It's important to remember that there will always be people cheering for you even if you can't see them. You are not alone and you will find a unique understanding from those who have been through similar experiences. My most generous sponsors were those who have also run marathons and the people who have helped me most in my recovery are people with experience of mental distress.

Every journey is individual...

Other people may think you are crazy but it is your journey and you are the expert of your experiences. Recovery means different things to different people just as every runner has their own reasons for doing a marathon. People also have their own coping strategies such as running to particular music, a lucky pair of shorts or particular mental strategies to get you through the miles. Similarly, we all have to find the coping strategies that help us to maintain good mental health – for example one of mine is keeping active.

In the end...

Only YOU can cross the finishing line.

*Remember you are the only person on earth who can use your ability – **Zig Zigler***