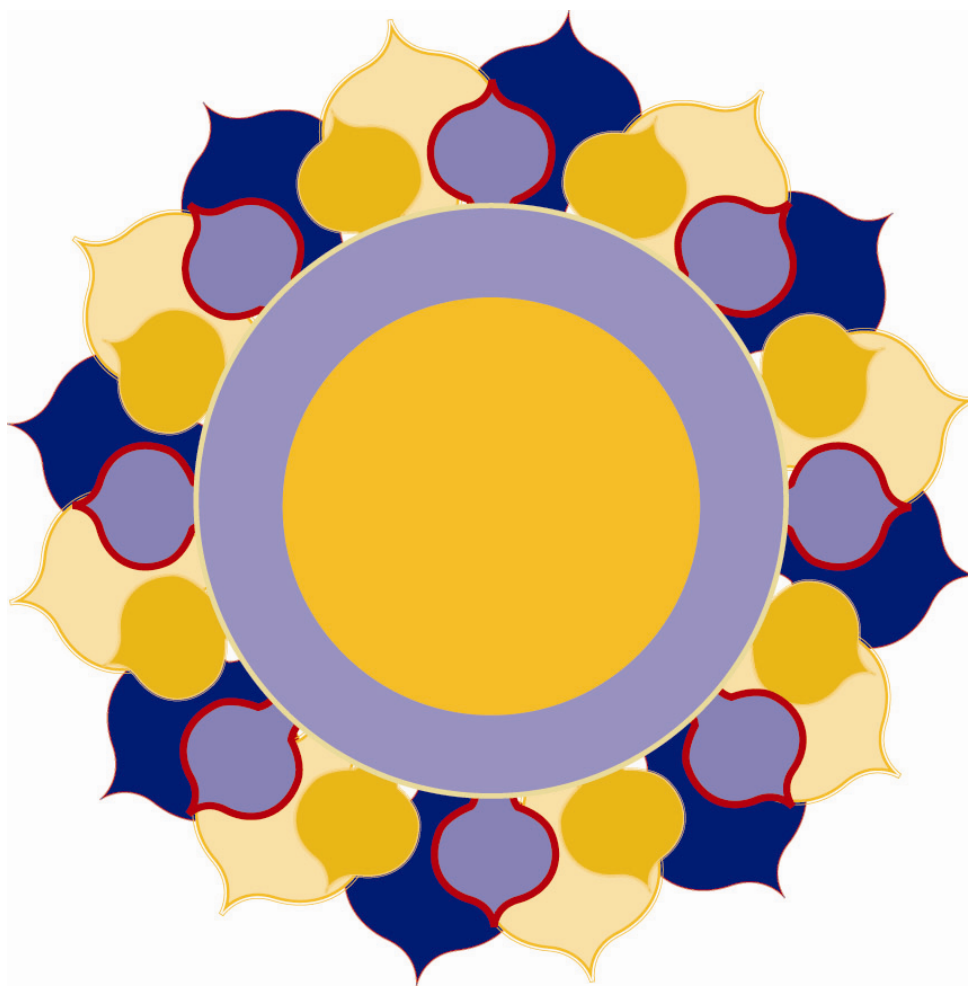


A New Beginning

**Recovery and minority ethnic women in
Edinburgh**



**Outside the Box Development Support
March 2008**

A new beginning: minority ethnic women and recovery

“I’ve come a long way from where I used to be”
(Member of the group)

Background

About this report

This report has come from a project looking at the experiences of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in Edinburgh. The project was initiated by the National Resource Centre for Ethnic Minority Health (NRCEMH) and Scottish Recovery Network (SRN), which are developing awareness about recovery for people from the BME communities. The project is funded by the National Programme for the Improvement of Mental Health and Wellbeing through NRCEMH.

The project brings together 3 small projects, based at Men in Mind, the NHS Lothian Minority Ethnic Mental Health Project, and Saheliya, which is a women’s project.

There are also reports covering the other parts of the project:

- Sharing the Routes to Recovery: Report from the Minority Ethnic Mental Health Project
- Celebrating Friendship and Diversity: Recovery and ethnic minority men in Edinburgh
- Finding Strength from Within: Report on three local projects looking at mental health and recovery with people from some of the black and minority ethnic communities in Edinburgh

This report describes the points raised and the issues that were discussed by the women from Saheliya.

We hope that this report will be used in many different ways

- NRCEMH and SRN will be able to draw on the experiences and ideas here when developing work across Scotland in the future.
- Saheliya and other local projects across Scotland which work with people from BME communities will be able to use the report when planning how they can continue to raise awareness about recovery.

- Mental health services working with people from all parts of the community can get ideas about how they can reach out to more women from BME communities.
- Individual people as well as workers in projects will be able to follow up the contacts and get useful information to help people plan their own recovery and have a good quality of life.

About Saheliya



Since 1992, Saheliya has supported the mental health and wellbeing of women from the black and minority ethnic communities in Edinburgh. This includes women from the refugee & asylum seeking and migrant communities.

They strive to help all women from the Black and Minority Ethnic Diaspora in Edinburgh to realise their full potential as themselves, within their families and the wider society. Using a holistic approach Saheliya supports and advocates the mental health and wellbeing of their clients through:

- Counselling: by trained and experienced counsellors in a range of minority languages
- One to One support : practical support within Saheliya and other settings
- Groupwork: women meet in themed or language groups to build social support and networks, skills and confidence
- Complementary therapies: massage therapy, aromatherapy and reflexology
- Befriending: befrienders are trained volunteers who offer social activities, home and hospital visits
- Young Saheliya: works alongside young women and girls to promote their mental health and wellbeing.

About Outside the Box

Outside the Box provides community development support to people and groups who tend to be marginalised, including people who live with mental health problems. The projects often centre on working with people to explore ways for them to have more say in the matters that are important to them.

Outside the Box has been asked to give community development support to the projects, in a way that reflects the circumstances of each one.

The input to the project with Saheliya has been:

- To encourage the forming process of the group.
- To facilitate feedback meetings of the group.
- This interim report.

Over the next few months, we will be working with the projects to hold an event at which more people can feed in their experiences. We will also be feeding back to staff in the mental health services.

About the group

Formation: a process of development

Client participants at Saheliya's 15th anniversary celebration in November 2007 took up the challenge of the event's theme, Finding a Voice. They clearly stated that personal development, particularly in group situations for an element of peer support, was in demand. Out of this came an idea to facilitate greater client involvement in their recovery processes through a programme of skills development, confidence building and voluntary action.

The result: a fledgling client/user 'movement' within Saheliya, made up of clients past and present. To even get the idea off the ground, it was crucial to have a clear understanding of purpose, of recovery, of hopes and expectations.

Fifteen clients attended introductory meetings in December 2007 and January 2008. Some had voiced their interest in developing skills. Others wanted to speak out more and share their experiences of mental health and wellbeing. Yet others had wanted to become volunteers with Saheliya. The group had the vision of becoming stronger and more confident. It was anticipated Saheliya would provide a supportive, respectful environment in which the women could grow, both as individuals and as a group.

During the early meetings, it proved difficult to find a suitable time for all to meet, different women attending each discussion session. Individual experience and understandings of recovery were explored but it was hard to establish a shared purpose and equally hard to *form* the group. By mid-January, the original 15 settled into a core group of six women of different ages, backgrounds and ethnicities.

It was at this point that Saheliya's involvement in NRCEMH'S project to look at the BME experience of Recovery took shape. The first development activity of the client/user group would be six foundation meetings to establish what Recovery meant to the participants, to hear what each had to say about her own process and to consider what may or may not be useful to share with others about their experience of mental health and wellbeing.

One session was facilitated by the Scottish Recovery Network to give the women more information about Recovery and what this term means. By the 3rd week they felt more confident to talk about their hopes for the group and what direction they would like to take. They shared stories about their lives; all the women felt more comfortable about coming to the group and what it was all about.

Week 4 was pivotal. On a day of deep personal meaning, one participant took the bold step to be first to share her story, her experience and its impact on her mental health and wellbeing. It was a difficult occasion for all involved; but the group formation

process had been sound – any awkwardness was soon dispelled by tremendous empathy and shared support.

To facilitate the process further, the women were encouraged to find individual ways to engage with how they felt about their experiences of mental health and wellbeing, perhaps in a diary or some other creative/expressive outlet such as art, poetry, photography or music. It was agreed the outcomes would be a record of their stories but could also be presented as part of the NRCEMH project, either in this report or at the planned one-day Recovery Conference on 19th March 2008.

Regardless of fluctuations in attendance, the group's momentum continued, each woman finding her voice in her own time and way, to share her story and learning as she saw fit. Each personal contribution found its place in a presentation prepared by the group. There were prose and poetry, photographs and artefacts, meanings and memories, all collated into a slideshow and synchronised to music. Shown to attendees of the March Conference, it was a powerful presentation by the women, for whom the very fact of their presence at such a public event would have been unthinkable a mere few months earlier. They had experimented with a video film but faulty technology meant it had to be left out of the Conference programme, and one young woman performed a poem describing her personal conflicts to a group of BME peers, mostly strangers met for the first time. Quite a process of development and recovery!

Issues raised by the group about mental health and wellbeing

Most of the women recognised that people who have mental health difficulties are treated differently by their communities. People hide their mental health difficulties and try to cope on their own.

The women also stated the communities they come from have a different culture from the mainstream and their customs and culture are not always respected.

How mental health and wellbeing is viewed by the women's communities

"We have different needs from others in our communities; it makes it hard for us."

"The stigma associated with mental health problems is huge."

"It's the criticism that's the hardest to deal with, from my in-laws and from the community."

"My husband didn't understand what was happening to me."

"We don't get the information that we need about the illnesses."

About Recovery

"Hope."

"One day at a time."

"Yes people can get better."

"Everyone has a different road to travel, but they can get better."

"It depends on the individual."

"I've come a long way from where I used to be."

What do the Women get out of the group?

In their own words

"I feel a lot better about myself."

"I can still remember my experience, but it doesn't hold me back as much as it used to."

“I can pick myself up quicker than I could before.”

“I’ve still got the hurt inside me, I just deal with it differently.”

“You get to know other people, that way you don’t feel so alone.”

“You have a good feeling when you leave, like a burden has been lifted from your shoulders.”

“Everyone understands each other.”

“I can now talk to other people, like the other parents at school, instead of standing on my own.”

“The group is very supportive; you can share your feelings.”

“The group has helped us to open up more about our problems.”

“I’m more confident now.”

“It’s a safe place to meet.”

“It raises your awareness of mental health issues.”

What next?

In many ways, the staff and the women feel as if they are still at the start of their journey. This first development activity of Saheliya's client/user group in 'six foundation weeks' easily slid into 9 weeks as the feedback for this report required the extra time. The buzz created by participation in the Recovery Conference in March still resonates. The new practical and creative skills have yet to be consolidated. Already, one group member has attended a young person's training day for Saheliya; many other opportunities are on the horizon. The capacity building, community development goals of the organisation in facilitating clients' potential are achieving positive outcomes. The fledgling BME client/user 'movement' is on its way.

Saheliya staff is continuing to encourage more women to join the group. It is a slow process that inevitably tracks the concepts and pace of recovery. It will be important to follow the clients' lead in negotiating the times and days of the group meeting to suit as many women as possible. Likewise, the personal development activities will reveal their potential as the women see fit.

Funding to secure the longer term future of the group, with support from Saheliya, could be a shared and developmental activity. Further down the road, the social enterprise strategy of the organisation may well offer new directions for the women as a group and/or individually.

Next immediate steps:

- Secure some funding for the group to enable the women to build on what they already have.
- The women to advance the client/user group in a Client Development Programme of activities that encourage them and their peers to further their lives and their recovery.
- Confidence building classes and activities such as cookery, photography, self development and computing.
- The women would also like to take part in activities such as visits to galleries and outings to different places.
- Build opportunities to 'give something back' e.g. in volunteer activity. One of the women is already training to be a Saheliya Befriender. Training is also available for other areas of work within the organisation, including as a Board member.
- The women would like to have more information about other groups in the area, including other participants in this NRCEMH project. This could lead to joint activity or partnership work.

“Coming to the group has opened my eyes to different opportunities that I didn’t know existed.”

In our own words

A selection of writing from women who have taken part in the project.

How many times I have had to recover
From what has happened to me in the past?
14 traumas need to be addressed;
Many of them I have not yet recovered from.

How do I start to see the light of hope?

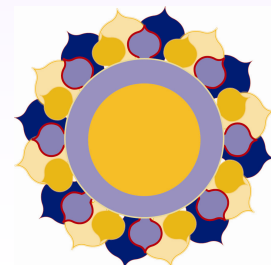
14 Traumas
Make me unstable on my feet
Queasy inside.

The reality is it all happened to me.
Not to my children
Not to my husband
Or to my friends
Or my family
But to me
Just me.

I am strong in my counselling session
Because I think about it like a novel.
I'm reading out a live novel,
Just talking through my life
And the problems.
But I do need to go back
To the moment of pain
To recover.
Or am I recovering
By just talking through it.

I will never be over what happened because
Every story, every news bulletin will have it.
I will feel their pain for them, with them.
Am I privileged?

On one hand, I'm a statistic.
On one hand, I'm inspiring.
On one hand still, I'm reality.
I could go with 14 "on one hand"
But that's for another time.



Nazia (2008)

There were many pressures.

At school. On the streets.

It's growing up in two cultures.

There were many pressures.

At home. From my family.

It's enduring violence in my being, to my soul.

There were many pressures.

Left home. Had to.

It's having a choice to be who I am.

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There's been an accumulative effect over the years.

To my mental health, especially as a student.

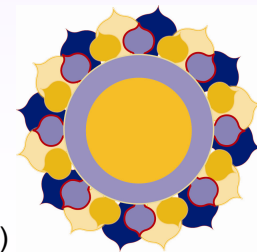
I suffer from depression. Quite serious.

I am on medication.

An injection. Every fortnight. By a community nurse.

Last year I spent some time in hospital.

They say I'm a schizophrenic.



Group Member (2008)

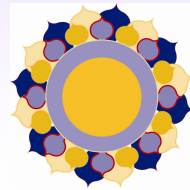
My recovery has been a long and tiring journey trying to put the past behind me knowing I can't do anything about it. I felt my life was on hold. I was living for others trying to please them all the time because I did not have the courage to say no.

Without hope and help I would not be here where I am today. Even when I wanted to give up hope, I couldn't for the sake of my children. I was the only hope for them. I needed to stay strong.

Counselling has given me confidence and made me a stronger person who wants to move on in life.

I still have a long way to go.

Group Member (2008)



In a strange country
with a child
not being able to work legally

Frustrating
very hard to deal with

I trusted.

Brought (here)
on a promise
(n)ever intended to be fulfilled

Worked to the bone
hardly any pay

So I took the abuse.

Afraid
of what might happen
IF

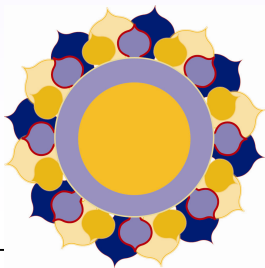
I tried so many things
To get out.

So alone
Depressed
Stayed in
Felt guilty

(Not) taking care of my child ...as I should
All the hopes... would never be realised.

Question: Do you let the bad experiences you've been through tarnish (the) future?

No.
I would end up unhappy, paranoid.
I would let them destroy my future.



Experiences ... cured my naivety ... made me a stronger person.

Theresa (2008)

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