

SANE AUSTRALIA

SANE Australia Online Peer Group

Date: 17/02/2022

Topic: Recovering from our Lowest of Lows

Description: At times in life we can feel overwhelmed, hopeless, or like things will go on this way forever. However, we can decide to change or work through what's going on for us if we focus on recovery. There's no doubt this can be difficult in the moment. But, it can lead - slowly but surely - to improvements in your life, and even profound change.

Welcome everyone to today's Peer Group Chat talking about recovering from our lowest of lows. We really value your thoughts on how it goes, so we will send a link to a short survey at the end of this event for you to complete. While this survey is optional, it is a chance to provide feedback for us to improve our services. In case you might need to leave part way through the event, you can find the survey here now:
https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW

Tonight, peer support workers @ RiverSeal and @ Girasole will be facilitating a discussion around the topic of recovering from our lowest of lows. Whether you have lived experience of complex mental health issues, you care for someone who does, or both, this is meaningful in understanding recovery processes and your peer's experiences.

We'll be moving through 7 discussion questions tonight, and it's entirely up to you how much or how little you are comfortable with sharing. Some of the conversation may be heavy in nature as we talk about mental health struggles. @ Jynx who moderates on the SANE Forums, is working behind the scenes to ensure our safety.

If you're having any technical difficulties, please see our FAQ

(<https://www.sane.org/peer-support/peer-group-chat/chat-faqs#what-if-i-am-having-a-tough-time-and-need-immediate-support>) or message @ Jynx.

**RiverSeal
(PSW)**

**RiverSeal
(PSW)**

**RiverSeal
(PSW)**

We're looking forward to creating a space where we can reflect and learn together and expand our ideas of recovering from our lowest of lows.

RiverSeal (PSW) We will be starting the discussion shortly, and will just allow a bit more time for people to log on and join 😊

Girasole (PSW) Hi @Snowie and @Zoe7 ! :) Welcome

RiverSeal (PSW) Welcome everyone! Feel free to introduce yourselves. I'm @ RiverSeal ...

Zoe7 Hi @Girasole (Peer Worker) @Snowie @RiverSeal (PSW)

Jynx (Moderator)

Hey all! Welcome :purple_heart:

Just a reminder before we get started tonight - this conversation may reflect on really difficult times in our lives. While it's important we can come together to share, learn from, and support each other, we will also need to remember our Safety guideline: As language can be triggering or elicit a trauma response, out of respect for people with a lived experience, please do not publish content that contains graphic or specific details, or any descriptive account, of: -your or anyone else's medication or dosages -eating disorder behaviours (recommending diets, descriptive weight loss/gain strategies or any numbers relating to weight, BMI, clothing size, calories or exercise) -self-harm methods -suicide methods -sexual or physical abuse -or any other content that others may find distressing or harmful in any way Thank you

RiverSeal (PSW)

Zoe7 ...and @Jynx (Moderator)

RiverSeal (PSW)

What's bringing you to tonight's topic? What are you hoping to get out of the discussion?

Zoe7 Hoping to help others see how far you can fall and then finding a little hope to move forward

RiverSeal (PSW)

That's great you would like to help others to move forward @Zoe7 !

My hope is to be able to share some of my experiences, and to hear from other people's experiences of recovery. Whether you're here now or reading the transcript afterwards, together I hope we can learn, and gain inspiration, support and ideas from each other. Especially for anyone who is in a really low point at the moment, I hope that hearing how others have been able to move forward in recovery is inspiring in demonstrating that recovery with complex mental health is possible. And I hope that they can gain some practical ideas of how that might be possible for them

Girasole (PSW)

Jynx (Moderator)

As always am here for support, but I am keen to see how folks have navigated some of the most challenging times in their lives and come out the other side. I know for myself, sometimes I'm still bewildered by how not-terrible my life has become of late.

RiverSeal (PSW)

I'm hoping to find meaning in some of my experiences and share with others who have been or are in a similar space.

Zoe7

@Snowie I would like to hear from you Hon as I know you are very much in that low place right now - what would you like to hear from all of us?

Snowie

Just following along at the moment Zoe, hoping to get out something

RiverSeal (PSW)

What feelings or emotions were present for you in your lowest of lows?

Zoe7

No worries Hon - whatever you need @Snowie :heart_eyes:

Zoe7 Hopelessness, numbness, despair at the world, hating life and myself, not feeling there was any point to anything and certainly no future I wanted to be part of

Snowie My lowest of lows is feeling like nothing will help. Feeling like the only option I have left is to remove myself from this world

Girasole (PSW) At one stage my mental health interfered with my relationships, friendships, education, work, leisure- everything, really. Even when I wanted nothing more than to be able to do certain things, chronic anxiety (a result of relational trauma) held me back. I felt really dissatisfied with my life, alone, and not very hopeful for the future. I didn't know anyone who could show that recovery was possible. And I felt very frustrated at myself, like it was a fault of me as a person that I struggled to do the things that I wanted to do.

Zoe7 Yep - know that one well @Snowie 😞

RiverSeal (PSW) I was challenged with ruminating thoughts about my past and the hard times created by not understanding my mental health experience and feeling like it was out of my control.

Jynx (Moderator) Same @Snowie it's a rough spot to be. Sometimes for me it has felt like there's a gaping chasm in my chest that gnaws at me. Emotionally hollow.

Girasole (PSW) Feeling like it was out of your control - I can really relate to that @RiverSeal (PSW)

RiverSeal (PSW) **Was there a moment of awareness in time for you where you realised that you needed to make changes in your life? A "turning point" motivated you to start making changes, where you didn't want things to continue the same anymore?**

Zoe7 No there really wasn't @RiverSeal (PSW) For me it was more a matter of surviving, having support, finding the right medication to help me begin to 'feel' anything again and for those constant thoughts of suicide to diminish

RiverSeal (PSW) Mine was getting my diagnosis and finding myself in a low position with employment and life in general and not being able to sustain the way I was living due to my mental health.

Jynx (Moderator) I think I had a lot of little 'turning points' - small moments where something would really hit me in a way that in hindsight, I realise were factors that helped to instigate change. Being confronted with deeply challenging realisations, having close friends observe certain maladaptive beliefs in me, having others believe in me, and realising I did have capacity to change, are all examples.

RiverSeal (PSW) I had a long journey finding the right medication too @Zoe7 and a very common story in mental health spaces

Girasole (PSW) Even though I'd struggled for years, there reached a point where I'd just missed out on so many things that I really, really wanted. It made me contemplate and look ahead towards the rest of my life, imagining not being able to do the things that I wanted - constantly missing out on opportunities, relationships, friendships- life itself. I felt so overwhelmed, frustrated, and hopeless thinking of that. I decided I didn't want that for my future. I really didn't want to have a life filled with regrets and what-ifs. I wanted to be able to live life; I wanted to be able to be happy.

Zoe7 At my lowest there was no 'looking forward', no 'looking to the future', nothing I wanted to do, achieve or want for myself

Snowie I am hoping my turning point is my family. Trying to continue for them

RiverSeal (PSW) @Zoe7 It's that cloud that seems to come over you when your mental health is not in a good place, challenging to overcome at times.

Zoe7
RiverSeal (PSW)
Jynx (Moderator)
RiverSeal (PSW)

It was more than a cloud @RiverSeal (PSW) Everyday I was continuing to drown over and over again and I was not looking to swim at all

@Snowie Your family can be really positive support and something to really hold onto

@Snowie A wholesome motivator for sure. Our connections are so, so important.

Often at these times we can benefit from the support of others more than ever – whether that support is professional or personal. What supports helped you to get through these difficult times in your life?

My support team, the SANE counsellors and above all - my friends on SANE ...cannot thank them all enough for being with me for months on end, holding me up when I could not do that myself and continuing to believe in ME

Zoe7
Zoe7
Jynx (Moderator)
Jynx (Moderator)
RiverSeal (PSW)

Without SANE I would not be here tonight

One big factor for me was the day I decided for myself to seek therapy, as opposed to the multitude of previous occasions where I had been pushed into therapy by well-meaning friends. But also, finding the right friendship support has also been a huge factor.

@Zoe7 The wholesomeness is overwhelming! :heart_eyes: :purple_heart: :green_heart:

My professional supports were amazing and I had a really good experience with some dedicated workers who made a big impact on my recovery. Though I couldn't have made the progress I made without the support of my family even though they are interstate. I find it hard to speak to supports when things are difficult. It is like I close up and am inside my head all alone. But my psychologist does help me in different ways. Also my friends on SANE help by understanding without me having to put a lot of it into words.

Snowie

Zoe7
Girasole (PSW)
RiverSeal (PSW)

@Snowie 👍😭💙

For me, that at that turning point was when I finally made the decision to re-connect with professional support. I found regular professional support to be incredibly helpful. Slowly over time, I came to develop good friendships and build community connections, and these are also really important in my ongoing mental health recovery. My life didn't drastically improve overnight; I don't think that's how it works. Simply by keeping on going (with even just one good support), it allowed more and more good things to come into my life with time

@Snowie It can be challenging when you close up and can't get your thoughts into words. Great that your psychologist is working well with you!

I personally had around the clock support from my GP. psych and to a smaller extent my pdoc but I could also always rely on the support of the members and moderators/counsellors on SANE - anytime of the day or night ...without them all it would have been a very different story...

Zoe7

Girasole (PSW)

Yes @Zoe7 I'm appreciating how important it is to be able to have good and reliable supports!
It took some time to get everyone in place @Girasole (Peer Worker) but my GP went above and beyond to do all that for me. I did not have to contact or talk to anyone - she did that all for me - I just attending appointments when I got them and it worked out my GP had found exactly the right ones for me... she also got me onto SANE - so I owe her everything...

Zoe7

tyme
(PSW)

That's so great to hear @zoe7!

RiverSeal
(PSW)

It's amazing how our community of peers has such a positive influence on our mental health and we share our experiences and successes with each other.

Girasole
(PSW)

That's amazing @Zoe7 !

RiverSeal
(PSW)

Have there been any other things besides personal/professional support that have been formative or helpful for you in your own recovery? E.g. a book, a youtube video, a song, artist or album, an artwork...?

Zoe7

Art became a massive impetus to do things ...and getting back to work made a huge impact

Girasole
(PSW)

Amazing @Zoe7 - I'm curious to hear what kind of art had that impact on you? :)

tyme
(PSW)

For, being in nature was a huge benefit

RiverSeal
(PSW)

Yes definitely YouTube (some amazing channels) and google as a source of information in general
Actually - it was connecting with other like minded peers and we began doing the same projects but in our own styles.

Zoe7

That then led me to getting back into my own art

Honestly, at a time where I was quite isolated, online spaces became really helpful. As an example, to be able to see regular reminders through this blog <https://gentle-reminder.tumblr.com/> of statements like "you deserve kindness and respect" - at a time in my life where I wasn't being treated that way... these gave me food for thought, which helped to nurture my sense of self-worth over time. I also was inspired by some music with similar themes. Now I see my relationships as a key part of my recovery - to have people in my life treat me with respect, to feel safe - these are critical to my recovery, compared to if I were surrounded with people who otherwisedisrespect me or bring up trauma

Girasole
(PSW)

Jynx
(Moderator)

Learning to take joy in the little things - in the smell of a thunderstorm, in dancing to a song I love, in watching a dog play, stuff like that.

RiverSeal
(PSW)

Art is a really grounding activity and great that you found it helpful! @Zoe7
In a strange kind of way - being unwell gave me time to do the things I had always wanted to do but never had the time - so it was healing being unwell lol

Zoe7

Jynx
(Moderator)

@Zoe7 what a beautiful way to see the light through the darkness :partly_sunny:

RiverSeal
(PSW)

It can give you that space @Zoe7 to grow and achieve things that you otherwise wouldn't have time for

RiverSeal
(PSW)

What were some of the things you have learned from these experiences?

Zoe7 What experiences exactly @RiverSeal (PSW) ?

RiverSeal (PSW) I've learned that I have a strong drive and will that I always had but didn't give myself credit for having.

Jynx (Moderator) I think to answer, I'll share a line from one of my favourite Alt-J songs - "Like all good fruit, the balance of life is in the ripe and ruin."

Girasole (PSW) Recovery from our low points @Zoe7 :)

Zoe7 That we cannot do it all alone but it is only ourselves that can change things also

RiverSeal (PSW) @Zoe7 Yeh things from your experience of recovery and and the challenges you faced
I've learned that recovery for me is an ongoing thing- its not a point that I've 'reached,' after which I don't have to think about my mental health anymore. There will always be new experiences and challenges in life - I see my mental health recovery as an active, ongoing effort for the rest of my life. Which to me means ongoing professional support to maintain my mental health, and not assuming that "I'll be fine" if I completely disengage from professional support. I've also learned that I can get through anything life throws at me- because I have. And that things can improve, even when it seems hopeless

Girasole (PSW) @Zoe7 Yes very true! Believing in yourself while allowing others into your life
RiverSeal (PSW) Learning to take on a more positive approach, letting the smaller things go (feeling them as they are first and not pushing them aside but then knowing you cannot change things in the past) - that was probably the biggest turning point for me in my recovery - choosing to say 'these things have not defeated me' and I can move on knowing who I am and the strength I have

Zoe7
Girasole (PSW) Hi @Apc ! Welcome to the chat :)

RiverSeal (PSW) **If you've made changes and progress in your recovery, how is your life different now compared to before? For anyone not quite there yet, what are you hoping for? What kind of life are you working towards?**

Girasole (PSW) Hey @The Hams ! Welcome :)

The Hams Hi all. Just outside atm watching the massive storm I hear lowest of lows is the theme - storms are appropriate metaphors I guess

Zoe7 My life is very different. I have a much better balance in my life. Work is no longer everything I feel gives me meaning and I am enjoying working much more as a result. I can 'walk away' from situations that I do not want to be in or make me feel uncomfortable/stressed/unsafe and can also voice my own thoughts when needed to say something is not okay

Zoe7 I am also much more able to ask for help and know when I need time to myself or seek that support

Girasole (PSW) That's amazing @Zoe7 , I simply love to hear this for you :purple_heart:

The Hams Good onya Zoe7 :)

Zoe7 Thanks @Girasole (Peer Worker) and @The Hams

**Jynx
(Moderator)**

Amazing @Zoe7 ! And yeah, I feel similarly, that I am more aware of my needs and when I might be heading towards a challenging time for my MH, thus can put supports in place before it gets bad and gets too hard to do so. But also know I'm still always learning and growing and giving myself permission to 'mess up' sometimes

While there are absolutely still things I struggle with, I also can't believe quite how far I've come. From a time where I felt like I had no close friends, to having a close network of deep, supportive friendships. From struggling to connect romantically with others, to having an amazing relationship with my partner.

From being closeted, to being connected to so many people in the LGBTIAQ+ community, and feeling that warmth and acceptance most places in my life. From being surrounded by unhealthy relationships, to only tolerating respectful relationships in my life. I think that little-by-little, with support and enough time and the right motivation & commitment, these kinds of things could happen. Each person's recovery will happen at their own pace, but at any stage if you find yourself frustrated with your progress, I'd offer a suggestion of being gentle with yourself (because it's a lot we're all unpacking and trying to heal from!); recognise all the effort and commitment you've given to your wellbeing; and focus on what IS good that you can nurture- even if it's just one thing.

**Girasole
(PSW)**

So I feel this chat has been a lot about how 'well' I am generally doing but it seems the appropriate time to ask - what do we do when there is not light at the end of the tunnel and how can we 'survive' that lowest of times?

Zoe7
The
Hams

I can relate to those themes @Girasole (Peer Worker)

I am trying to work towards a life outside of my mental illness. It feels like it is taking over every part of me.

Snowie
The
Hams

Sometimes the smallest things can help. In my darkest moments I found that to be quite enriching. Just thinking to myself "so long as I don't hurt myself" it's okay.

**Jynx
(Moderator)**

I think for me it has been helpful to remind myself that so far I have survived 100% of my lowest of lows, and can do so again.

The
Hams

On that romance topic - it can be hard being young now as the expectation is that we are always in relationships or something like that. It can influence our self perception and it can hurt when we are struggling mentally

**RiverSeal
(PSW)**

@Zoe7 For me it's part of the journey realizing that life has challenges that you need to learn, sometimes how to work through but there are always options or things to learn that can change your life in the now.

Zoe7

Totally agree @RiverSeal (PSW) 🥰

**RiverSeal
(PSW)**

Have you learned anything helpful from others' experiences here tonight that you might be able to apply in your own life? If yes, what did you learn?

The
Hams

In the end we are not defined by our MH - Sometimes it feels we are but we aren't by default. Lows end eventually.

**Girasole
(PSW)**

@Zoe7 I liked a few things you said - "That we cannot do it all alone but it is only ourselves that can change things also" And how it can be good to let "the smaller things go (feeling them as they are first and not pushing them aside but then knowing you cannot change things in the past)" :)

The
Hams

Good night all and thanks for sharing. Sorry i was here only a short time.

To keep holding up those we love (@Snowie for example 💖), holding that space for them and encouraging others to continue to reach out for help and support until they feel they are at a place themselves that they can do that on their own. It is about care, empathy and empowerment.

Zoe7

RiverSeal
(PSW)

I have learned that reaching out to your peers is something common we have and there are some really positive connections in this community
Massive positives in being part of this community @RiverSeal (PSW) ...life changing is not too a strong term from my point of view 🥰

Zoe7

Jynx

(Moderator)

Yes it is a blessing to be witness to the lifting up of others that happens so frequently in this community! Lifts me up just reading along

RiverSeal
(PSW)

@Zoe7 Great to hear!!

RiverSeal
(PSW)

Tonight's topic may have brought up some heavy feelings as we talked about challenging emotions, difficult situation and hard things to remember and talk about. Would some self-care be helpful for you after we finish? If so, what might you do? 😊

Zoe7

Just back to work for me @RiverSeal (PSW)
I will be taking my meds and going to try and sleep. If that doesn't work then I will listen to some recordings my psych sent me

Snowie

Jynx

(Moderator)

Always good to have a backup plan @Snowie ;) I'll be playing with my kitten and finishing a game I've been plodding along through

Girasole
(PSW)

I think I'm just going to focus on some basic things - trying to get a decent sleep, having a shower, maybe having a cold snack (it's very hot where I am!)

RiverSeal
(PSW)

@Snowie Meditation and ground is good when you are having difficulty sleeping if you have any apps you can use

[We'd like to invite you to complete a survey reflecting on your experience in this Peer Group Chat. As we're trialling this service, we'd love to hear any feedback you may have. It will only take a few minutes to complete. Please click this link: https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW](https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW)

RiverSeal
(PSW)

Zoe7

Meditation is quite triggering for me so don't use any of those apps

RiverSeal
(PSW)

@Zoe7 Good you know what works as that can be challenging to figure out
ere are some further resources we recommend having a look at: 1 The importance of a breakdown - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HC3uUGCJpqs>
2 What is post-traumatic growth? <https://www.healthline.com/health/what-is-post-traumatic-growth> 3. Let's talk about recovery - CHIME: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tedjw6nslrU> - What is mental health recovery, and what best supports it?

RiverSeal
(PSW)

Zoe7

Goodnight all - hoping for peace and light for you all.

RiverSeal
(PSW)

Thank you all for a great night!!

Snowie Goodnight, thanks for tonight 💖
[hank you for joining. and we hope you enjoyed the discussion 😊 If you'd like to be informed when our next Peer Group Chat will be taking place, you can sign up to our mailing list here https://www.sane.org/peer-support/online-mental-health-meet-up. You can also ask questions for us to discuss in future peer chats!](https://www.sane.org/peer-support/online-mental-health-meet-up)

RiverSeal (PSW)
Oshun_BI u
(Moderator) Thanks so much everyone! I am new to this space and so just sat back and observed, but it was wonderful to do so and to read such profound lived experiences. Thank you :)

Girasole (PSW) Thank you so much to everyone who joined this space tonight, I really appreciate your presence and what you've shared :purple_heart: I wish everyone the best for their recovery

Jynx (Moderator) Night all!

Girasole (PSW) Take care everyone