VOICES of RECOVERY
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In 1994, the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University published *The Experience of Recovery*, edited by LeRoy Spaniol and Martin Koehler. It is an anthology of stories and poems by people recounting their own recovery experiences. The book was published at a time when the notion of recovery in the mental health field was a relatively new concept. *The Experience of Recovery* has been read by consumers, family members, practitioners, trainers, administrators, and members of boards of directors. It is a book that anyone connected to the mental health field would enjoy reading. It has been used in academic classes and has been left on coffee tables in residential settings and mental health programs for anyone to pick up and read. The first-person accounts are inspirational, and they have helped many people to feel hopeful for their own future and to make progress in their own recovery journey. Customers who have purchased *The Experience of Recovery* began asking when another book of its kind would be published by our Center.

As a result, *Voices of Recovery* was created as an updated and expanded version of *The Experience of Recovery*. *Voices of Recovery* consists of two different types of “voices” in the mental health field. The first “voice” is a collection of personal accounts that were published in the “Coping With” column of the *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* from the years 2000 through 2008. Since the 1990s, the “Coping With” column was included in each issue of the journal to provide an opportunity for publishing personal accounts of individuals’ experiences of recovery. As more and more people write their unique personal stories, this venue for publication allows these articles to be widely read and shared with others publically in a professional journal. Equally inspiring, these articles describe individuals’ experiences of coping with mental illness and of leading them to their own personal recovery.

The second “voice” is a collection of Photovoice projects that were part of the Recovery Center classes held at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation. The photovoice concept was developed by Professor Caroline Wang, at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, and Mary Ann Burris, from the Ford Foundation. Photovoice is a process that has been used for research, education, social change, and the development of more healthful public policy. Cameras were provided to individuals with serious mental illnesses, and they used photovoice to amplify their visions and experience. Short stories or messages were written to explain the person meaning behind the image from the photographer’s point of view. By uniting the immediate impact of a photograph and the story, it contextualizes and enhances it. Through the power of the visual image, photovoice offers an innovative way to break the silence that often surrounds the experience of mental illness. Photovoice has three main goals:

- To enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns.
- To promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs.
- To reach policy makers.
To these ends, the photovoice process lays out multiple stages for defining the goals of a project, anticipating an audience, taking pictures and telling stories about them, evaluation, and presentation. While photovoice can be done on a more individual basis, one of the most powerful aspects of the technique is the group reflection on and discussion of the photographs. The storytelling aspect of photovoice follows the acronym SHOWED:

- What do you See here?
- What’s really Happening here?
- How does this relate to Our lives?
- Why does this problem/condition/strength exist?
- How could this image Educate the community, policy makers, etc.?
- What can we Do about it (the problem, condition, or strength)?

By stimulating critical dialogue of the issues raised in the photographs, photovoice participants generate awareness, not just of problems or concerns, but also of potential solutions and areas of strength with respect to their lives and communities. The images and stories can be shared with an audience in numerous ways including: presentations, exhibits, books, videos, CD-ROM, and on the Internet. Two advances in photography, disposable and digital cameras, offer inexpensive ways of generating images and a wide range of formats for presenting those images. Thus, photovoice can be carried out in almost any setting with almost any group of people.

Voices of Recovery was created with the purpose to be read on its own or to accompany the Recovery Workbook: Practical Coping and Empowerment Strategies for People with Psychiatric Disability (1994) written by LeRoy Spaniol, Martin Koehler, and Dori Hutchinson. The Recovery Workbook is used by individuals or in groups to help people understand and navigate their own recovery process. The articles and the photovoice projects in Voices of Recovery have been organized to supplement the chapters of The Recovery Workbook. These chapters include:

- Recovery, which outlines the phases and aspects of the recovery process.
- Increasing Knowledge and Control, which discusses the impact of serious mental illness and the services and values of a recovery-oriented mental health system.
- Managing Life’s Stresses, which talks about the symptoms and sources of stress as well as coping strategies.
- Enhancing Personal Meaning, which promotes the idea of acknowledging our accomplishments and personal enrichment.
- Building Personal Support, which discusses connecting with others, basic communication skills, asking for support, and setting boundaries on our relationships.
- Setting Personal Goals, which outlines a step-by-step guide for setting personal goals and developing a plan for achieving a personal goal.

When reading Voices of Recovery, we believe that the personal accounts and the photovoice projects will inspire hope and optimism for recovery for individuals with psychiatric disabilities, their family members, and mental health professionals. In addition, given the heartfelt nature of the articles and photovoice projects, we believe that this book will appeal to anyone in the general community and could be used as an educational tool to help reduce stigma and stereotypes of mental illness.

We would like to acknowledge and thank all of the people who contributed their articles and photovoice projects to this book. We appreciate their bravery and strength they have shown through their lived experiences, their willingness to share their stories, as well as their hopes and inspiration to others. When we asked permission to have their articles and photovoice projects published in this book, most people said that they felt honored to have their experiences shared and felt hopeful that their messages.
might be helpful to someone else. We appreciate this type of caring, giving, and community spirit.

We also would like to acknowledge and thank Bill Anthony for his recovery vision, his leadership in the mental health field and at our Center, and for his encouragement to develop this book; LeRoy Spaniol for his inspiration in developing our first recovery products and for founding both the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal and the “Coping With” column in the journal; Kathy Furlong-Norman for her support of this project as the current managing editor of the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal; Dori Hutchinson for her guidance with this project as director of our services division; Alexandra (Sasha) Bowers for introducing us to photovoice; Derek Fuller for his work in facilitating photovoice classes at our Recovery Center and for his assistance in providing photovoice projects for this book; Andrea Bengston and Jake Briggs for their assistance in gathering contact information for the photovoice authors; and Linda Getgen for her endless support and for her creativity in designing and publishing this book.

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References and Resources


http://www.bu.edu/cpr/photovoice/index.html


