

# Simon Voices



Simon Speaking

## Seem Familiar?

Many people have experienced homelessness and many are currently homeless. It is so difficult when you are homeless, looking at other people's houses, their homes and thinking 'maybe someday I will get out of this'. By reaching out and accepting the support that is being offered to you, change can happen.



REACHING OUT

Don't give up – Keep trying.

This is what  
it's all about.



HAVING A HOME

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## IT REALLY HAPPENED...

# Recovery is a hard subject to deal with...

I can only speak from my own experience, I've been told I'm doing well within my recovery.

I had a few things I had to recover from. Mental Health was one of the biggest problems I had within recovery. I had over twenty admissions to hospitals within ten-fifteen years. The shortest I've been in hospital was my last stay in a Psychiatric Unit that is known as GF ward in Cork University hospital, that was over three or four years ago. I was voluntary for three weeks which was stress related. Usually I was temporary, I would have been signed in because Guards would have been called to my house and told I was off my medication and I needed to be put into hospital which would have been a Psychiatric Unit. I would have to wait hours to see a specialist who would question me on various questions that could relate to my way of thinking at the time.

From the effect of my family's reaction, the Guards calling to the door, and the long waiting for the specialist, I would be pretty angry and I would act in bad state of mind from the stress and the feeling of the waiting. And thinking I was being signed into hospital again. I found it very hard to accept I had a mental illness over the years of fighting with nurses and doctors who were determined to give me medication which sedated me. I felt as if they were trying to control my life again.

Eventually I would give in and take the medication and I'd feel myself getting better. After a number of months of lock-up units and open wards I was ready to go home again, still sedated on medication. I would feel out of

place after leaving hospital as I felt I didn't look or feel alright and I blamed it all on medication. When finally I had the courage to stay out of hospital, taking the medication properly and feeling some way normal. Eventually I would give up taking medication again, which always led back to the same situation. I would have to be admitted again.

Sometimes when I used feel unwell I would try to get into

## I found it very hard to accept I had a mental illness

hospital on my own accord, voluntary. I used to feel very low in myself and had very low self esteem. I often had thoughts of harming myself as I didn't want to go into hospital anymore, and go through the same thing over and over again. Eventually it came to long term fighting alcohol and drug Addiction on top of mental illness. I decided to pack everything in and just stick to my medication. Eventually I was diagnosed with Bi-Polar in 1998. I was on various injections and medication over the years. Not knowing what to stay on or what medication would suit me, my doctor made all the decisions. I had to cop on myself or I wouldn't stay out of hospital. I have learned to accept my illness, up to when I got over my alcohol and drug addiction. Over the past four or five years, I have stayed on medication as it is prescribed, I still see a doctor who monitors my medication. I learned to trust the doctor's decision when I learned to accept my mental illness and how

## HELPLINE NUMBERS

**Alcoholics Anonymous**  
01 842 0700

**Narcotics Anonymous**  
**East: 086 862 9308**  
**West: 086 814 9004**  
**South: 087 138 6120**

to cope, as I had to come to terms with the fact that I was mentally ill. I was told by a doctor that bipolar was a physical illness not a mental illness. I am now taking my medication regularly and getting my Respidol injections every two weeks.

As I said it's been three or four years since I have been admitted into hospital. I will never fully recover but it is all about acceptance to me. I have made such a recovery because I wanted a better life than what I had already. I am now living independently; I monitor my own medication and see a doctor and a nurse every two weeks when I'm given my injection. I turned my life around and realised I am happier to take my medication willingly outside of hospital than to be forced medication in hospital. I have a good quality of life. I have overcome my addictions, accepted my illness and have a stable job. This all came about in my recovery.

If I could advise any other person on the best line of recovery it would be not to abuse drink, drugs or medication. And to talk to psychiatrists. I would also recommend to take your doctor's advice and learn to look after your physical and mental well being. If people want to help you, take their help, as there are a lot of good people who could of went through or cared for a person who has experienced similar conditions, as what you could be going through.

I have met a lot of people in and out of hospitals. There are a lot of organisations that help you cope with mental illness in today's world. There has always been a

stigma attached to mental health but it is slowly disappearing due to more understanding of mental illness. Family are not always against you, they will stand by you, but as they say it's the people closest to you that hurt the most through mental illness. I can't force anybody to accept or deal with things the way I have, but I hope it might give a bit of insight into recovery and what worked for me. So hope you don't have to go through what I went through as it was very difficult and took years to get where I am today. I leave it here, hoping if you read this you might get something out of it that could help you through recovery. I hope you do as it's great to work things out.

*James*

## Bridge Over Troubled Waters



As I sit down to write this, I am thinking of that very lonely place I have been sitting, on the banks of the river, with tears in my eyes as there was no hope or life. I was all caught up in addiction. As time slipped by – days, nights, years, I was beaten.

I had to ask for help, and that was hard, to me that was a huge thing to do. I found out I didn't have to be alone, and recovery was there if I wanted to do the right thing.

So I reached out. I got all the help. People listened to me and they taught me a better way of life. I could see around me. My fears got less and I could keep my head held high.

I got involved in little things – courses, gardening, running and new friends, and keeping it very simple.

I love nature and to see all around the beauty of it all. Life is a precious gift, and to listen to the rivers flowing, wild and furious, or waters flowing, slow calm and gently. To hear the dead of night. I am so glad Simon found me in my lost and lonely days. But now life has changed in a way I don't have to be alone. Having gratitude for where I am now. Simon helped me to build a bridge between my past life and my present life, and all I can do is just take it.

One Day At A Time

Thanks to Galway Simon

*Trish*

## 11th Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, Brussels 10th-11th May 2012

Hi my name is Mike I work with both the Galway Simon Action Group and Simon Involvement and Action Group.

In May I participated in the 11th meeting of People Experiencing Poverty where the theme of the meeting was 'Homelessness and Housing Rights in the context of the Crisis'.

Some of the issues that were raised at the meeting included more people presenting with complex needs i.e. dual diagnosis, mental health and addiction. Also there are more homeless people now, particularly 18-23 year olds with a history of being in care and becoming homeless due to the closure of care homes.

**My experience at the Conference was that it was the best work I have ever done. To this day I am still overwhelmed with our delegates' commitment to the process and their input, also the friendliness of the delegates from each country.**

**Michael O'Gorman**

At the meeting we discussed good practice, including ongoing support that leads to independence at the individuals own pace and also bad practice which includes the lack of quality service provision in some services. We also discussed how best to design policies by listening to people who have themselves experienced homelessness. They should be involved in all decision making.

The meeting finished and I then went to a meeting of HOPE. HOPE is a group for people who are or have experienced homelessness, from all over Europe. Their aim is to become an organisation that will encourage policy makers and politicians to listen to their valuable experience.

The other group that participated was European Union Homeless (EUH). EUH is a separate organisation which will work with HOPE towards the common goal of giving homeless people the right to have their voices heard.

I would encourage all people who use the services of the Simon Communities in Ireland to get involved and participate in what is going on in your Community.

*Michael M*



## ARTIST'S CORNER

### *Artist's Corner*



Kathleen Ward



Kathleen Ward



Kathleen Ward



Trish



# I ♥ Barcelona

When I first arrived in Barcelona I caught the train from the airport, and coming from Ireland that was pretty impressive. I finally got to the train station which is called Barcelona Sants and I had directions to go to Sagrada Familia station but I ended up being stranded in the underground for about twenty minutes, it was hot down there and slightly confusing. I finally got the right train and ended up at Sagrada Familia station. One short walk and in front of me towered architect Antoni Gaudi's masterpiece. The church has been under construction since 1882 and will be completed in 2026 which will be the hundredth anniversary of Gaudi's death.

The weather during my holiday was perfect, very, very warm and vibrant; maybe if we had similar weather in Ireland all year long I wouldn't be so glum sometimes. I stayed with friends of a friend for a couple of nights and then stayed in a hostel. My hostel was near Las Ramblas, Barcelona's most famous street. The street is full of restaurants, bars, a good few street performers and people selling souvenirs.

There was a nationwide strike in Spain on the Thursday that I was there and when I was in a

supermarket the staff had to lock us in for about twenty minutes. It was kinda exciting. While Bob Geldof was singing about not liking Mondays the radical protestors were banging on the shutters.

## ...the best way to see Barcelona is to go on one of the city bus tours

But the best way to see Barcelona is to go on one of the city bus tours, it takes you to pretty much all of the cities tourists' sites and from the mountain to the sea. On top of Mt. Montjuic sits a castle which has stunning views of the entire city, which I visited on the

bus tour but on the day of the strike I walked up the mountain it was well worth it though. (I had to go back and take some photos)

But my favorite part of my little excursion was the guided walking tour of the old part of the city on my last day. With a Spanish lady as guide, about twenty six of us were led through the gothic quarter of the city; some of the buildings have been around since Roman times.

So as you can tell I enjoyed my holiday in Barcelona, I took plenty of photos, I ate paella (a popular rice dish) but I didn't buy the 'I heart Barcelona' t-shirt. So if you wanna go on holiday, I suggest Barcelona, you'll get by, by not speaking the language which is Catalan, most tourist attractions or restaurants will have English speaking staff and they're all pretty much decent people in Barcelona.



Detail from the Sagrada Familia



## COMPETITION

## Be in with a chance to win a €50 voucher!

All you have to do is answer the following question correctly:

**What is the name of the Spanish waiter in the television show Fawlty Towers?**

- A. Miguel
- B. Manuel
- C. Messi

### How to Enter

Send your answers to Simon Action and Involvement Group c/o Catri O'Kane, Simon Communities of Ireland, St. Andrews House, 28-30 Exchequer Street, Dublin 2. Or text your answer to 087 799 3860 with your name and address.

Closing date: 30th September 2012

# LOOK AFTER YOURSELF BE HEALTHY

## Simple Pizza



4 tortilla wraps (alternatively you can buy pizza bases)

4 tablespoons of chopped tomatoes, with chopped herbs if you like

Your choice of toppings – for example ham, pineapple, onion, mushrooms, pepperoni, sweet corn etc

Mozzarella cheese or any grated cheese you like.

### Method

- Preheat your oven – medium heat, gas mark 4, 180°Celsius
- Place your wraps on a baking tray/s
- Spoon over the chopped tomato and spread evenly
- Add your choice of toppings
- Top off with the cheese
- Bake in the middle of the oven for about 10 minutes until cooked (check throughout its not burning)

*Recipe supplied by Trish*

**If we can do it –  
you can do it recipes**

## Banana Boat – Summer Delight



1 slice of your favourite ice cream

1 banana

1 pack ice cream wafers

Strawberry or chocolate sauce

### Method

- Put the ice cream in a bowl
- Slice the banana in half lengthwise and put in the bowl each side of the ice cream
- Add your sauce over the middle and decorate with your wafer cut in a triangle on top

*Recipe supplied by James Jennings*

## Simon Voices Needs You!

We want to hear from you. Please send your personal stories, opinions, poems, pictures or news to Catri O'Kane, Simon Communities of Ireland, St Andrew's House, 28-30 Exchequer Street, Dublin 2 or email to [catri.okane@simoncommunity.com](mailto:catri.okane@simoncommunity.com)

We may not be able to publish everything we receive. Thank you to everybody who has sent in a contribution. Sorry if it has not been included in this issue.

## 7th Heaven!

It was Simon Involvement and Action Group's 7th Anniversary in May this year and we celebrated with a special meal at the Ashling Hotel in Dublin.



We are proud and happy with the progress we have made since 2005 and the perseverance and strength of the Group.

A special 'Thank You' to all the people who have attended over the years.

Simon Action and Involvement Group is open to people from all Communities and we welcome new members.