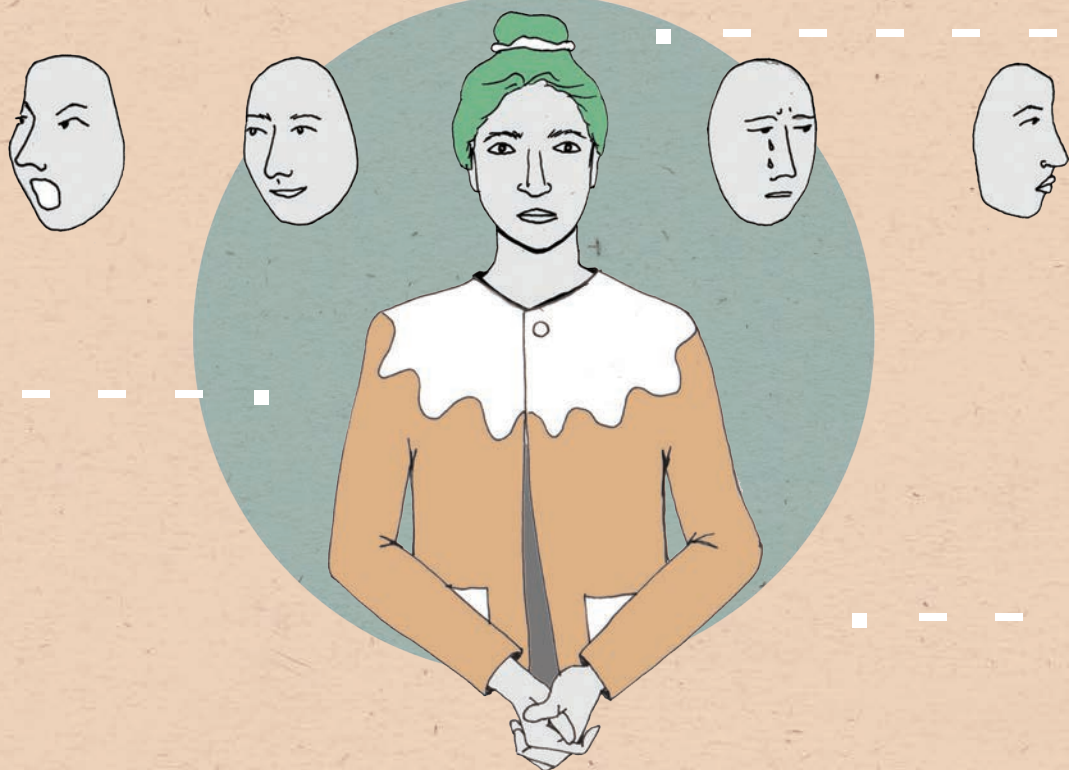


# JOURNEYS THROUGH MENTAL HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS



INTERVIEWS BY SARAH WISHART  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY SABBA KHAN

I am very proud to be Chief Executive for Recovery Focus, a group of charities who provide specialist support services to people living with the effects of mental ill health, drug and alcohol use, gambling and domestic abuse. We know that one size cannot and does not fit all, and we pride ourselves on working with the people we support to create a plan that works for them. Every year we provide support to more than 18,000 people when they need it most. We know that people's recovery journeys are rarely short or straightforward, and often require long-term support that will need to come from many places. We are honoured to be a part of so many people's recovery journeys, and especially proud of our staff and volunteers who deliver this vital support. We are always looking for new and different ways to bring people's recovery journeys and the support they receive to life. We want people to recognise themselves in other people's stories and to know that there are pathways ahead. Many of our services are for or directly impact young people, and so we leapt at the chance to work with EachOther and young people who've used our services to tell their stories in a new way. These comic strips are utterly absorbing and compelling. We thank the young people involved for sharing their stories, and EachOther for bringing them to life in this remarkable way.

**Derek Caren, Chief Executive, Recovery Focus**



EachOther is a charity which uses its online platform to amplify the voices of those affected by human rights issues in the UK – not to speak for or over them. Our focus on people's lived experiences means we can show, not just tell, how important our rights are to all of us. We use different formats to showcase these stories, including animation and illustration, but this is our very first comic! As I've an obsession with comics, I've long wanted to use this exciting format to tell stories in a new way to new audiences. Thanks to the Lankelly Chase Foundation, who funded this project, we've been afforded this fantastic opportunity to work with Recovery Focus to tell the stories of some of the people they support. I was thrilled to get to work with the incredibly talented artist, Sabba Khan, and create something really special out of interviews I did with young people involved with Recovery Focus during lockdown. Young people came forward, keen to tell their stories. All of them did so because they hoped it might help other people to see support was out there. The comic strips will be released on EachOther's website in the run-up to Christmas and over New Year – a difficult time for many people. We're hoping to reach people who might not have come across our content otherwise and we'll signpost visitors to a range of mental health resources and link them up with other relevant charities.

**Sarah Wishart, Creative Director, EachOther**





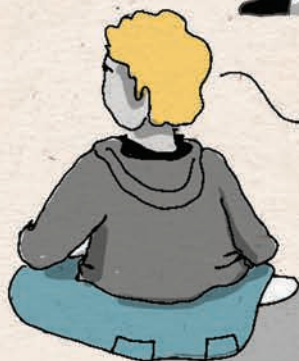
# hello!

How are you?

I haven't felt happy  
for a while now.  
But other than that,  
I guess I'm fine.

I don't know how I feel,  
I feel stuck, like no-one  
has my back and I'm on  
my own. Who knows  
what's going to  
happen next...

Life is a grind.  
But I'm trying to  
stay focused and  
taking each day as  
it comes.  
Slow and steady!





Our mental health is a huge contributing factor to our sense of self.



And how we see ourselves and in relation others.



Since our thoughts are private, it can be so easy to overlook and dismiss the signs when things aren't going well.



We know that one in four of us are going to have struggles with our mental health in our lives.



And there are lots of different situations and circumstances that can affect our access to help.

We might struggle to ask for help because it feels like it might just go away any day now,

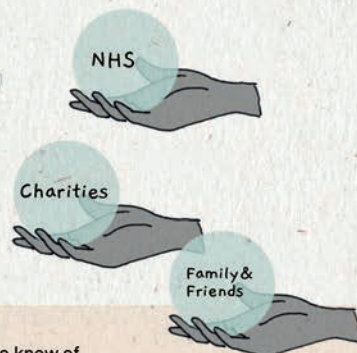


or perhaps we don't feel worthy of getting it.

Despite the cuts to mental health services, we all deserve support and protection - our human rights ensure that.



But in order to get help at the right time, we need to know what is available to us...



...to know of communities and organisations that are able to support us in difficult times.

We need to share our stories so that everyone can see that recovery is possible, and that we are not alone.



We spoke to three young people about their experiences on their mental health recovery journeys, and the different ways they navigated getting help.







Tia's story started when there was a tragedy in the family.



I'm one of 14 siblings. I'd rank myself in the middle. I'm not the youngest but I'm also not the oldest.



My mum and dad are still together. Still married. It is quite unusual but they're still together.



I was really bad in-between 2011 and 2012.

And ever since then it's just been a struggle.

I'm 21 now.



The first time I remember when things were starting to go wrong was when I lost my nephew.

He was my sister's first. The first nephew out of all of the siblings.



A couple of days before he passed away,

he was running around my mum's front room,

jumping from one side of the sofa to the other side.

He was only five.



I was probably about 11 maybe 12. I remember it like it was yesterday.

It's something that's always been over my shoulder.

Something I can't forget.



I remember one of my closest best friends came to see me after school. She had no idea what had happened.

I went straight up to my room, and she came upstairs with me;

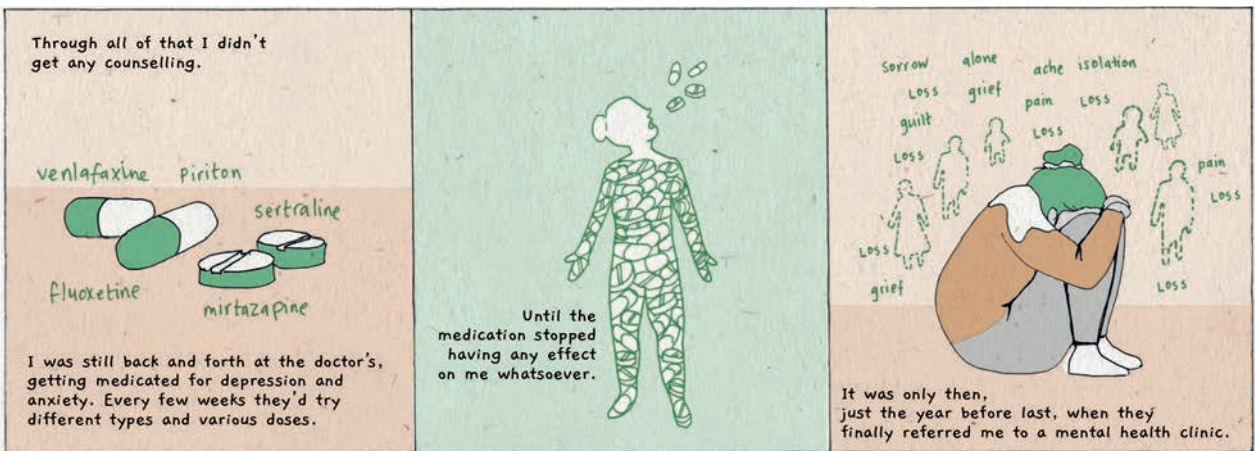
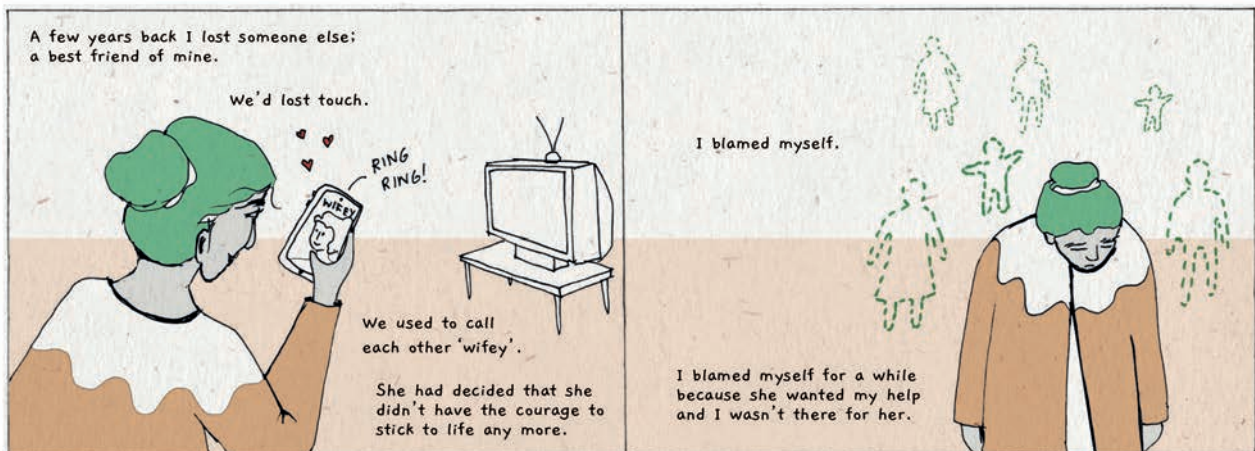
"Everything's gonna be ok"

"No, it's not okay. He's gone. He's not coming back"

I sat down and cried for hours and hours.

His name was Jay.







It was the mental health clinic that diagnosed me with a borderline personality disorder.



There's no medication that can treat a personality disorder.

I was given distress tolerance support, and I was shown lots of coping mechanisms.

But none of them actually helped.

I met someone not long ago. And we've been together for a little while now. He asked me to marry him a couple of weeks ago.



I thought that would have changed things. But I still feel part of me is not...

...I guess



... I don't feel enough for anything.



I've tried to walk away so many times. I've tried throwing everything away, because I don't feel good enough.

But I'm trying to stay supported. I've gone without it for too long.

I'm with a BPD support group now.

In some ways we can all understand each other, we can all relate to how we feel.



It has its ups and downs. Sometimes it can be triggering, but other times, it helps to make you feel less alone.



It makes you feel like you're part of something, that you're not the only one struggling in this way and that there are others out there too.

I've always had my mum, dad and sister by my side too.

Mum has always been there.



Wow, she's never given up on me.

But sometimes I just like to be on my own. If I'm at my mum's, and she has a spare room, I'll just sit up there.



They don't understand why I want to be alone.



Well, I think if you're in a family of 14 like me, being by yourself can be a healing space sometimes too, right?



I'm with the Castle project now, which is part of Richmond Fellowship.

If I could speak to a person who is feeling like I felt, in my honest own opinion,

I would advise you to get help before it gets to the point where you can't.



People's experience of mental health might be different at different times in their journey.

Marcus' issues began when he was excluded from school, spiralling as he lost the structure school provided.

The first time things started to go wrong was when I got permanently expelled from school.

I was 11.

It was like losing out on a main structure in my life.

I had to leave my mum's home because I was already doing bad things at that age.

I had no real family connection.

I didn't know how they felt.

They didn't know what I was doing.





I can now see  
why I didn't do  
my mum's health  
any good.

She didn't  
really know...

...how to  
cope with  
me.

And my  
family just  
wanted to see  
me do well.

I thought  
I knew  
everything.

I thought  
I knew best.

Perhaps its  
because I started  
smoking weed  
when I was 11.

The same year  
I got excluded  
from school.

I was put into complimentary  
education. It's full of  
permanently excluded children.

That's when it started  
getting worse.

I was there  
until I was 15...

...and then I didn't  
go back to school  
after that.

I was dealing.  
Yeah little bits.  
Nothing major.

Then I started  
selling coke.

For a young person  
doing nothing...

...the only thing TO do was to  
make money, you know.



We had a little van  
we used to use.

It was the best  
little van ever.

We used to drive  
about all the time.

Because we were  
sniffing so much coke,  
we didn't really sleep  
that often.

I was  
also  
smoking  
major  
amounts  
of weed.

And my  
head wasn't  
all there.

I can't really  
remember...

...the heroin  
overdose.

I nearly passed out and had  
to get an ambulance.

I stayed in hospital  
for a few days.

I think it was the next day that Jim came  
from NGAGE with Aquarius, an early  
intervention drug service for young people.

At first -  
I'm not going to lie -  
I didn't care  
who he was.

I didn't care about  
myself. I didn't care  
about anyone else.

That was it.  
The only thing I cared  
about was making money.

And that was the only thing that was  
gonna make me happy and keep me  
satisfied in life - that's how it felt.

I like having  
money so I never  
have to worry.

Because my mum was  
a single mum and she  
never really had money.

You get  
distracted by  
the light...

...because  
everything is so  
amazingly flashy.



Jim was like a gift from god when I look back at it now.



He was someone that was constant. He was always there for me every week.

Every single week.



I could ring him or text him any time I messed up.

Jim helped me re-engage with my family.



And helped me see that I could rebuild my life and know I wasn't trapped.

I wanted to be someone for myself. A drug dealer isn't really someone.



So, I went back to college to learn to be a carpenter.

And now I am a carpenter!



I was so involved and distracted by drug dealing that I screwed myself over.

I could have been earning good money.



I'm making more money now than I ever was selling drugs.

I guess my perspective is that if you make skilled work attractive then people don't go down other roads.

I understand it costs money. But, you know...

...so does taking drug dealers off the streets.



If I could say one thing to my 11 year old self, I'd say don't give up on education.

Give yourself as many opportunities as you can. Learn, train up, build things, fix things...

...expand your horizons.

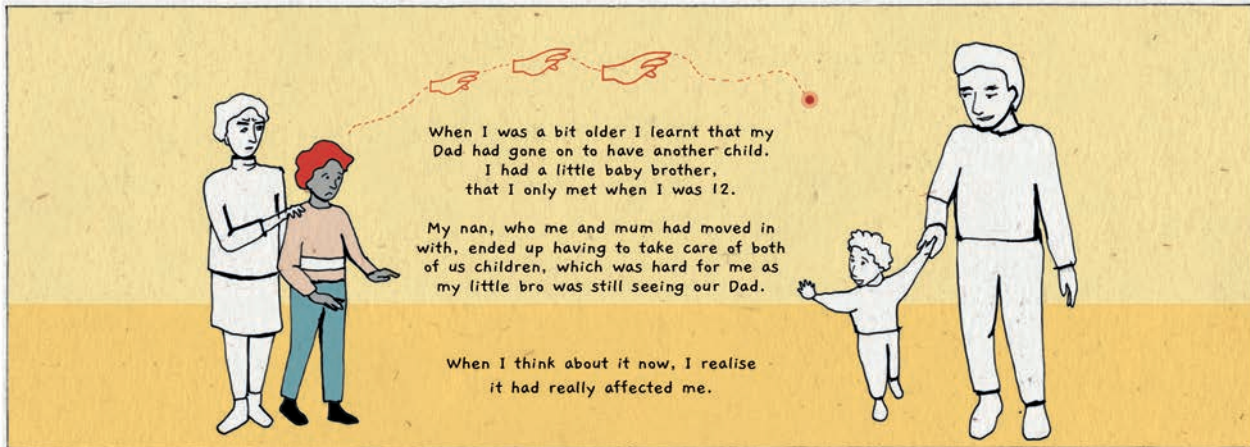
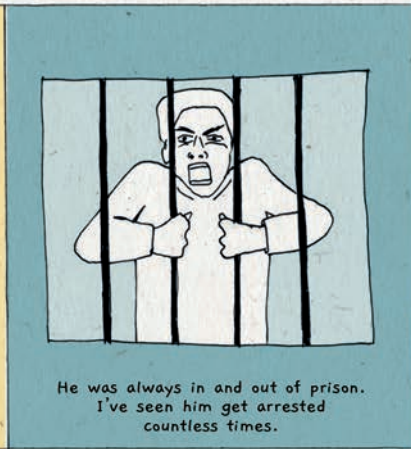
Mental health recovery and what that means is determined by you not by other people - it's possible for anyone!

And you can find things that'll help you in so many places.



Ray found a way through the problems in a very particular kind of sport.







The social services were already involved by this point.



And after a failed attempt at moving back in with my mum, when she ended up being violent with me, I was sent to foster care.

I was in foster care for 6 months. It was awful.



I guess, it could have been worse. I was with an old couple. The foster dad was really lovely...

...but the foster mother was really horrible and mean.



I didn't understand why she'd always yell at me.

I told my school how much I was struggling at home, so that when I went into foster care, my head of year was really able to support me.



They had a separate room for people who are struggling, where you could go to if things were getting too much.

They had two teachers in there, and they were the loveliest. I don't think I would've bothered with school if I didn't have that room.



A place that I knew I could just go. It got me through school.

When it was my GCSE's all my tutors helped with extra tutoring to help boost my grades.



I guess I was really lucky. It was a small school and you couldn't really hide behind anything. Also because they were so nice you didn't want to take advantage of that.

Finding accommodation for myself has also been challenging.



I was in temporary accommodation which lasted 5 months, when it should've only been 2 weeks.

But then Richmond Fellowship's Castle Project got back to me and I moved in here.



It's only four of us sharing. It doesn't feel like a hostel at all. It feels like a house. A home.

My room is big and spacious, and I have a TV, sofa, wardrobe. It's big.



We get some key worker support too, mental health support & even life skills like budgeting. It's a great place to build up from.

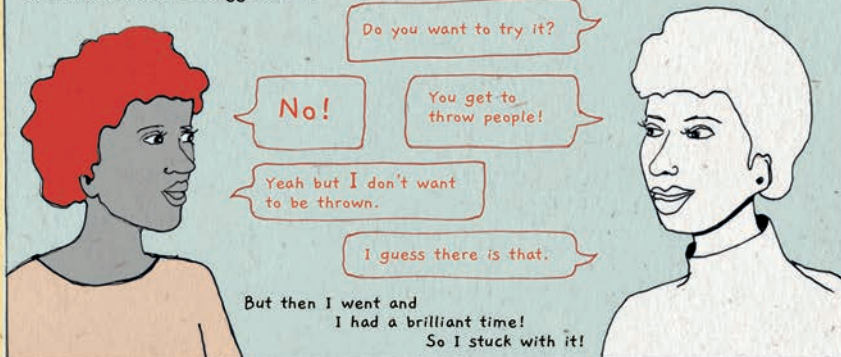
The other thing that has kept me going is Judo. It's my thing.

Last year I went to Belgium to compete and I got a gold medal.



I also have helped coaching and refereeing in the sport.

When I was younger, my mum was writing about a coach in a university who ran Judo, and she used to take me along. It was then that she suggested it.



Do you want to try it?

No!

You get to throw people!

Yeah but I don't want to be thrown.

I guess there is that.

But then I went and I had a brilliant time! So I stuck with it!



Judo was how I got through most of it. My judo has been the one constant.



Especially when I was in care, I wasn't seeing anyone, and I missed my granddad a lot.

And because we all fight in weight categories and I'm in the open, which means it's all over 78 kilos,

seeing people who are the same weight as me but different shapes and sizes has been an eye opener.



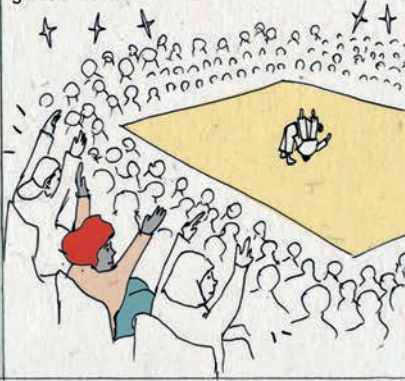
I used to self harm, and I'd get called names, which wasn't nice. Judo has given me the confidence to appreciate my body.

I'd end up training with a lot of university students, which gave me lots of role models to look up to.

That motivated me to do well.



Even if I wasn't competing, I'd travel up and down the country with people just to go and watch.



But the best thing is hearing your name get called out for a win. It's the adrenaline of it all.



I felt so proud, because I'd struggled so much. I was doing it for myself. Exploring what works me, and chucking a few people over while I'm at it!

If I were in charge I'd like to get people to look at alternative ways to deal with things.

I've been on antidepressants in the past.

I've learnt that it's not the case of trying to get over things, but more about understanding what isn't working, and trying to work on that.

Or if things are playing on your mind finding ways to manage it.



I like to put some music on and do my makeup, or get my colouring book out.

Or just go out & spend time with my friends.

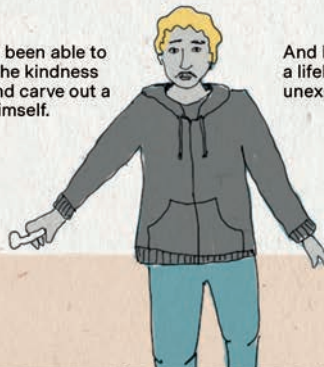
Those are the kind of things that have worked for me. I know it's different for everyone.

We know that finding routes to mental health support is not easy, but there are still ways...

Tia has found solace and comfort in community groups and in shared experiences.



Marcus has been able to hold on to the kindness of others and carve out a space for himself.



And Ray has found a lifeline in the most unexpected of places.





If any of these stories have got you thinking about your own mental health, then do check out the resources around your human rights and mental health on EachOther's website and look at their resource page linked to this comic.


The human condition, in all of its diversity, has so many shared overlaps. Getting support can help us see this.

At the very least, it can be comforting to know we are not alone.

Let's do that again!  
That felt great!







‘Recognise the right of  
everyone to the enjoyment  
of the highest attainable  
standard of physical and  
mental health.’

**Article 12**  
International Covenant on  
Economic, Social & Cultural Rights.

This comic is based on interviews with young people with lived experience of mental health issues. Their names and physical appearances have been changed to protect their privacy.

Thank you to all the young people who worked with us to create these stories. This project was produced with generous support from the Lankelly Chase Foundation.

If you want to find out more about EachOther’s work  
and this project go to [www.eachother.org.uk](http://www.eachother.org.uk)  
If you want to find out more about Recovery Focus  
work and the support they provide please visit  
[www.recoveryfocus.org.uk](http://www.recoveryfocus.org.uk)



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Chase**