

Vignette twenty-seven

I answered an ad in the paper for one of the consumer advisor groups advertising for a Maori person who had experience of mental illness to work in this field. So I applied and got it. One of the things that amazed me – because it was the first time I'd ever had the opportunity to be around other people who had experience of mental illness and it was for me an absolutely eye-opening experience, the whole three years, because for once in my life I was around people who for them, the stigma of mental illness was not evident. So we used to go to meetings and everyone would be talking about their medication, about their therapies, about the treatments they were doing, and it was so open. I'd walk out of there thinking 'who do I pay for this session' because it was better ... I'd walk out of there thinking I'd been in a therapy session because every meeting was enlightening for me. People were talking about things like respite care. One of the ladies who I worked with said ... these subjects, before I came to the service, were all taboo, you just never talked about things. The advances we've made in mental health over the ten years have been huge, huge giant steps. And when I came to the group, that's what I realized – that the people I was working with were out there talking about things like respite care. One lady said "I know when I'm getting unwell I just put myself into respite care". Well, I was shocked, I was gobsmacked. She was actually saying this. I'd never ever heard in my whole life or been in an environment where people would say those things. Other people were talking about CBT and DBT and things and these were all relatively new models of care. So to be sitting around people ... what it did for me was it made me recover.