

Original Paper

Towards Recovery in Schizophrenia

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Being schizophrenic doesn't mean you should give up your dreams and these needs explaining as a coping strategy when developing the illness for the first time. At this stage the whole thing seems impossible and there will be no concrete evidence for this. It will seem hopeless, so the important thing is to inspire hope. Once calmed down enough you can begin to think of people like John Nash or Elyn Saks who were high achievers despite severe symptoms to reinforce this hope, though it may seem such people are few and far between. We need a narrative that explains what is possible in the mental health system to help get you to a state of recovery, whatever that means to the individual patient.

Whatever your individual goals you need the support of the mental health system so you can both calm down enough to concentrate and get your frontal lobes working again. The new environment will be stressful at first as you have to stay in hospital and might end up in a mental health project. Moving house is one of the most stressful things you can do but overtime you may find your stay in hospital congenial. Then after having being discharged into a mental health you will come to regard it as home.

At first being diagnosed with schizophrenia felt like there was no hope for getting what I wanted as the whole things was so overwhelming. Then later with proper support I got back to where I wanted to be. Sizing up what had to be done created this impression of impossibility. Yet after a while and having taken one step at a time there was the realisation of gradual progress. At this point when looking back you can reflect on how far you have come. This is a very encouraging thought, but no one pretends this path is easy.

Nothing in my life prepared me for schizophrenia. I thought it was a dual personality which I didn't have so I wasn't in any danger. That signified the Jekyll and Hyde image and I knew I wasn't a psychopath. Looking back this was being complacent as schizophrenia affects one in a hundred people and I thought it would never happen to me. yet even with all the publicity campaigns for MIND and RETHINK I didn't think I was in any danger. This lack of social education with schizophrenia is going to make the onset of the symptoms much worse for the new patient.

I was told I was schizophrenic which was a huge shock and I wondered how I would explain it to my family. I was also hearing voices which also sounded dangerous. The stress of the diagnosis and the

worsening symptoms got to occupy all my mind. After that another shock happened as I could not concentrate on my academic work with all the fear and voices I was hearing. I had to give it up and this was the worst part of the changes I was going through.

The next big shock was the stigma. I had a fear rush here which shut down my emotions. The only good side was that the fear also shut down my depression. Yet with proper support I went from going to feel like the whole world was out to get me to being able to learn to live anonymously within the mental health system. This calmed me down and protected me as I was living in sheltered accommodation. I could develop a wise threat system which helped concentrate better.

So long as I could concentrate on my studies this took my mind off my growing sense of losing touch with reality. Eventually the delusions and hallucinations took over my mind and I began to get more and more frightened. This stopped me functioning and my schizophrenia became visible. I could handle a certain amount of pressure from the symptoms but as the illness got worse, I had to give my studies up. I learned later that this sort of distraction is important to dealing with the illness, but it first needed some medication to go back to it.

I liked my stay in hospital as given the pervasive climate of prejudice ignorance and fear surrounding schizophrenia it seemed the safest place to be. This because of the media and the Jekyll and Hyde image. I didn't know how I would manage the fear of stigma when discharged. The choice seemed to be isolation in the community or confinement in the hospital. The answer here was to live in sheltered accommodation so that the fear didn't take over my life again.

When I thought I was responsible for 9/11 the whole world seemed threatening. I felt like a social outcast and the whole world was out to get me. Then an important change happened as when I got admitted to hospital the staff and patients were being nice to me and there was no threatening behaviour displayed. Maybe not everyone had a negative view of me even so and this stopped my amygdala clicking back. I was able to concentrate on the courses in there.

It was much harder to keep a pleasure diary in hospital as it was a mixture of support and confinement which in some ways made the illness worst. There were many factors here causing problems and overall, the positives were not enough to build the frontal lobes up with pleasure as the place felt like confinement. This difficulty didn't become as serious as it might since in modern hospitals there are activities on offer so at least you didn't vegetate, but it was only the day centre that really got my brains going again.

Hospital got my brains functional again and I was discharged. Then the fears of being on my own and the stigma returned. The answer was to live in sheltered accommodation. It was only at this point that the mental health system got my frontal lobes really got going as there was more social contact than was possible in hospital. I started to calm down a bit with this. All the same those first steps of education in hospital were reassuring as the supportive environment made me realise, I didn't have to give up on my goals.

This step also cured the isolation, and I made new friends. It helped that I wasn't sitting around the house all day dwelling on the symptoms. Having been sheltered from the stigma and overcoming the fear of it

both in hospital and at the project this opened up my emotions. Some increased therapy was possible, and I became more motivated and functional. I felt more able to take on academic challenges as I was feeling better about life.

This was helped by developing some insight. That soothed the emotional pain of thinking I was responsible for 9/11. This allowed the prospect of something more pleasurable once more. But then another problem surfaced and I began to be depressed about how my life was turning out. This was out of the frying pan and into the fire. The worst part was that I might have to give up my dreams but with help this too could be put right.

This is where day centres come in more than having been in hospital. You can be motivated by engaging with courses at day centres or in further education. You will then eventually realise you can take on academic study so pursuing your dreams might still be possible. This especially as you start to build up confidence and get qualifications. You may have to build this up gradually both by exercising your mind and overcoming stress. Yet it can be got there in the end.

You can calm down enough to concentrate and conversation at a day centre is enough to relax you there. You start to engage with what people are saying. This is the first step as you can then learn from each other's personal experiences which will help you learn a course in much same way. You can think about each other's problems and your own which will get the brain working. It will then lead to more academic things which will further improve your problem solving for life and other difficulties with the illness.

To do this we need to deactivate the brains threat system and getting the amygdala clicking forward again. And being stabilised on medication can help too but it cannot be all down to tablets. You can build pleasure circuits in the frontal lobes in many ways which should reopen them. The Important point is not to give up on your dreams and there are many coping strategies that can help with this. At this point there was more than just hope with this.

The day centre was teaching relaxation classes which was a useful first step before trying something more academic. The safe place image calmed me down and helped open the frontal lobes. This was done at the same time as using some aroma therapy oils which were and effective combination Nature can be calming, and the centre organised some country walks during which I learned by noticing how lovely the birds were. That meant I felt the pleasure circuits start to build.

When I saw the bird my pleasure circuits started to build but I still wasn't enjoying life. Then with the support of the mental health system this began to change. I made new friends and girlfriends, and I began to see the sun again. Life returned to normal, and I could get out and do everything normal people can do without the stigma. Once you calm down you stop clicking back with depression. Next you need much emotional support and family contact is vital here.

All these fear shocks can be overcome to concentrate better but this is greatly helped by compassion. This soothes the emotional pain and paranoid fears which both will stop you concentrating. It cannot all be down to emotional support and pleasure though these are combined in compassion therapy.

Compassion is a powerful treatment for schizophrenia and more than anything will click the amygdala forward again. Here achieving your goals looks very possible again.

Yet compassion was not the only technique that was employed. It was combined with other approaches. One was to use all your senses to focus on a strawberry including how it looked and tasted. This gave the mind a focus which help open the frontal lobes again. From there it was possible to build them up through pleasure circuits and exercising your mind by day centre courses.

That still left a role for confronting the fear to stop it shutting all this progress down. Courage and supported graded exposure helped open the frontal lobes. To do this you first needed to stop the system overload to be able to confront it. Then you can begin to gradually build the frontal lobes up as you start to calm down. This will be difficult at first as everything seems so frightening. Yet tackling the milder anxieties with schizophrenia first should get you started.

When distracted by the academic work at day centre I could build up my concentration again. I began to naturalise into the organic community of the day centre and felt a part of things. This feeling again was very pleasurable as was the course work. This especially for me as education was my thing. From there I could go back to the further education college where there was more choice of courses. There I felt it natural and pleasurable to be a student again.

Opening up the frontal lobes and being able to think academically saved me form the boredom that could cause a relapse. The boredom can make you realise what you are missing out on in life including jobs, and better housing. Then it will be a very negative experience, so you need to focus on all the good things in your life to try and make up for this. Sadly, this will not be true for everyone and keeping a pleasure diary can be very difficult.

You need a plan for the week to stop the 24/7 feeling of threat. This also with some variety so you don't get sick of things. This included a mixture of hobbies, socialising, physical exercise, time by myself and educational activities. I was fortunate to see my mother three times a week and to go walking or shopping with her. In addition, I had my friend visit one night and we could share food together as well as going to the archery. I mapped this out so that there was always something different happening every day and that kept me distracted.

You cannot concentrate on academic work 24/7 so the sense of achievement and confidence doing a course only goes so far. Then it needs to be balanced by other pleasures, especially emotional support. You also need to treat yourself. Also even just having a chat with day centre or project staff can be pleasurable and soothing as with finding a hobby like archery. These have all been important here.

After being lost you need to find your way in life again as all this gives a strong sense of purpose. For me this meant finding a way back. Yet I couldn't go back to my home area or to the university where I had studied politics. Yet I was able to pick up some the threads of my life. This included some material quality of life and further education though it was nothing as good as what had been there before. It was as about as close as it was going to get but was enough to have an interest in things again.

You need to get your life sorted out before you can settle down to the academic side of things. There are other things in life that will need your attention too. Then as you begin to solve life problems and things return to normal this is the time to start thinking about academic challenges. You will be handling other stresses as well as tackling the illness so you are getting motivated to take on life problems. The good side is you are building strength and stamina to handle life's challenges whether they are academic or not. This is a lot of pressure and stress which is what you need for study.

If you need to occupy yourself 24/7 sheltered accommodation is very helpful here. Outside a project you cannot rely on friends and family 24/7. So the distracting friendships of living like this become very important. You can have activities together 24/7 and have a chat as and when you need it. So, I found it useful staying up late sat night playing computer games. Then the emotional support and keeping busy together could be combined as very distracting. This was enhanced by pleasurable things like ordering takeaway food or having a few drinks. There are more problems with living on your own as it is isolating. So there is less distraction from the voices and the feelings of threat remerge.

Staying indoor concentrates, you mind on the threat which will click you back. So, there is a need for constant social contact to stop associating the place you live in with the paranoia. This is harder to deal with living independently although having something more going on full time could fill the gap here. Yet many people I know in this situation end up socially isolated even so.

All the same you cannot just work all the time and there is a need to enjoy life outside of this. Leisure pursuits become important here. There is a need to rekindle a sport or activity you had before the illness or else develop an interest in something new. Either way is always possible but you have to be prepared to take the risk of being ill when you do this. This is especially in contrast to the further education college there will be no mental health support assistant to help with it.

In my case I went back to an archery club which was my first love and knew I would enjoy it in the ways I always had. It was an easy and natural environment to be in so the possibility of a stress induced relapse was limited. I felt I fitted in and was less visible than in other places when out and about. Hence, I could do this sort of thing without it triggering my threat system too much. Having to concentrate on the target exercised my brain in other ways which was helpful too.

Going to the cinema was something else I tried as sitting in the dark around the other people would mean I was less aware of them. So they couldn't trigger off a paranoia. I thought if I could focus on the screen, have a few drinks and go with someone who could sit through a movie with me it would mean I could enjoy this in my life too. The problem was I was not so lucky in trying this out as I kept hallucinating things about 9/11 on the screen. So, I had to leave fairly pronto.

This experience really overloaded my threat system as I thought there were many people watching this. This was not a graded exposure approach. Instead, was rather more like a baptism of fire, so it didn't work as compared to other similar challenges when out and about. So although confronting things gradually helped clear my head about 9/11 when out and about, practising this in the cinema meant there was no escape from watching the screen.

Another problem was If you have been ill somewhere this can trigger off the threat if you go back. Overtime these associations wear off and you forget about them. You can enjoy getting out an about then as you cannot sit around the house all day. Once you start to enjoy going out you will associate places with pleasure instead of pain. You will have happy memories, and this will improve mood. It will be important to enjoy going back and this will stop it feeling stressful.

That opens the door to some other things which are also better than sitting around at home all day. I was lucky to have a friend to go out with me. Again, this helped with my pleasure diary as we could go out shopping together or to a restaurant. I began to feel that Durham was my hometown even though I was not form there. Then going on holiday to the coast or on a day trip was important here for a further change of scenery. A change was as good as rest this calmed me down a bit more.

I think it is important to get out once a day before the associations of place start to build up at home again. Then you can clear your mind of these associations so when you get back to the house, they don't automatically come back to you. All the same that did not cure the schizophrenia and the therapeutic benefits of the struggle to get out and about were being balanced by the threat of being at home. Overall, there did seem to be some improvement in my life.

When you are back this has broken the day up a bit so it is then possible to spend some time to be distracted round the house. Getting out will have cleared your head for a while with its distraction but you need to take the opportunity to keep busy again afterwards. Being more able to concentrate at these times should allow for some such activity before the symptoms start creeping back into mind. Having an early night with the clozapine might be the best way here but where this is not prescribed you need an evening activities like archery or the rifle range which as in my case to stop the thoughts reoccurring.

Often when relaxing on an evening and not needing to break the association of being ill when at home I could settle down to the writing which took my mind off things. I could then start replacing the negative associations of home being a place I was ill. I could give it another feel as it was somewhere I could write and feel safe in. Then instead of safe place imagery I could actually live in my safe place when at home. Doing something useful might mean I would be let off for 9/11.

You need something pleasurable to stop the pain. Again you must plan something every day at these points before the voices start becoming painful. So instead of just distraction you will need something to cheer up as the problems with emotional pain got me stressed out to the point, I couldn't concentrate on distractions. Some emotional therapy from the voice was needed here too to get my life back on track. I had to remember I was a worthwhile human being and my family support also helped with this.

Getting out of bed can be a problem with the lack of motivation the illness may cause and again the fearful thoughts can catch you at this point. If there is nothing else going on in your mind to distract you, especially if you have dreamt about the illness during the night, then you are not motivated to be distracted. So the threatening thoughts will come back. You need to get up and force yourself to face the day and after a while if you have established hobbies and interests the motivation will come back to you.

Keeping a pleasure diary can be important here. As we have seen the initial pain of schizophrenia can be replaced by pleasure and the longer you spend in the mental health system and get used to it the better this will be. One problem is that the going out for this is threatening so there needs to be a push before the pleasurable experiences can happen. Then at home after this it is better to be completely immersed in something pleasurable so the paranoid thoughts don't creep back in. Then you can keep them at the back of your mind.

The threat of going out was also that the stress of it could cause a relapse in the schizophrenia and a nervous breakdown to boot. But with the prospect of getting my brains back this gave me a tremendous push which got me over the psychological barrier of going over the doorstep. Then I kept going out despite the occasional terrors this was causing. Often, I was once bitten twice shy with this, but it was the only chance of getting my life back. It wasn't all correction.

Some help also came from the cognitive therapist who was able to reduce threat through developing insight. I told him about people reading my mind about 9/11 and passing the information back to the CIA. So, he suggested a test where I had to write down some thoughts and see test if people could see know what they were. Then if I thought people couldn't read my mind they couldn't pass the information on. This only worked so far, and the threat didn't go.

The other moment of insight was that if people were really doing this why hadn't I been assassinated, like President Kennedy or John Lennon. Then I felt I might not be going to be killed which reduced much threat. If the neighbours were spying on about 9/11 and again being informants, why hadn't I been identified. The problem was there was only so much insight here again and I still felt paranoid.

Another problem that kept activating my threat system was the voices which were criticising me for 9/11. This became life threatening. The answer here was tried by my psychologist who was drawing on the work of behaviourism and was able to give me positive reinforcement. Having negative voices criticising my delusions about 9/11 reinforced the terrible feeling of guilt and responsibility I was having, so knowing myself in a more positive manner was essential to reducing threat.

The problem with terrifying delusions and voices is that even if you do calm down with the fear about being tortured for 9/11 it is still going to activate the brains threat system. For this you may still need medication and the need for distraction may also never go away as well. Life might be easier if you are not so frightened all the time but without insight this might still pose a difficult problem to the amygdala and the brains threat system.

With my delusions I began to think if I did something useful to the society, I might be let off from 9/11. This meant being intelligent enough. That put me under a lot of pressure when going back into education because if I failed the CIA would get me. Yet it also acted as a drive which overcame any trepidations such as those I might have in when sitting a further education class which might arise from the stigma of the illness. That drive forced me to turn up whether I didn't want to or not. Again, there was much threat here still.

One threat that never went away was the fear of relapse and going back into hospital. The fear of the negative experience of both was something I had to live with. The only difference second time round was that you had made new friendships in the system that could soothe the fear and pain. This could make things easier. Then you know you will be able to go back home and to the day centre when it was over. So you can then go back to your new life eventually which helps you get through the worst times.

Once you get out and about in a class you can start to deal with threat when in your home where things in your mind are more concentrated. Then the real opportunity for study can happen. My flat began to feel like a studio apartment and was a very congenial place to study. I really enjoyed the time at home combining it with the classroom when out. Having been out on my own prepared me for being alone at home when back.

Sometimes when hiding from the surveillance of the neighbours I could catch myself at a calmer moment and engage myself with the writing. My home became my safe place for a number of other reasons, and I found I could concentrate. This was more immersive than being distracted and I could do a bit each day. This also gave something to look forward to and was a reason get out of bed. At this point I could get back to where I was before the illness.

All the same that led to getting back to academia and the further education college was the next step here. This proved vital as there you can gain qualifications with exams and certificates. This was in contrast to the day centre where it was thought this was putting too much pressure on people. Back to research was a lot of pressure too but you had to build this up gradually again.

The course I did qualified me to get on the access to higher education course. I started by doing a city and guilds in maths which. This at least was a start as I had not exercised my brains during a number of years of being in the system. The thought here was that I had learned something new which was encouraging. I found something where the emphasis was on problem solving and that really made me think.

Doing this on my own was a frightening but my need to get back into academia spurred me on. In addition, if I displayed delusional fears or problems with voices this might have got in the way of thinking about the course. So, a classroom support was put in place to keep me calm and with some insight so this helped a bit. The graded exposure to the fear of getting out and about then came in useful in class and I was able to keep a lid on things. Some Valium was also essential, so I didn't flip out around the other students.

Next, I sought the help of a clinical psychologist with this who suggested starting with some logical puzzles like sudoku. I found I could do this on the difficult level as well as crosswords in the national newspaper. That meant I could see I was working things out and that my brains hadn't gone altogether. I began to realise it was the same skills I was using for the puzzles that I had used in my academic work at the university. This came as a great relief. Later I began to write using the same.

Other things I discussed with her were about that I had done some information technology. I realised I had a technical side for the ECDL word processing and a creative side with the desktop publishing. I

learned there was some variety with my brains I had and with the functional skills in maths I had learned something useful and new.

With the writing I began to make contributions to academic journals. Then again I could add mental health to the variety of subjects I could do. All in all, there was a lot of new stuff. I began to feel like my old self in life once I had achieved that. It was also the same skills used in the writing as I had learned from the maths and information technology. This including how to organise the material which was very similar to doing an academic essay.

Then when looking back with her on the academic side of things I found that I had been using many parts of my brains to understand the questions posed. This included things like inference, induction and deduction, language and meaning, perceptions, creativity, intuition and others. I then found with her help these faculties had not gone in and I found many were working normally. Yet it also became apparent that it was the logical abstract side that needed some work. This was satisfied first by games like sudoku but in the end the logical side required some problem-solving ability that seemed to have been lost. This was going to require some practice with her.

The psychologist was able to point out some of my thinking style was using things like identifying conceptual areas and being able to map them. This in order to do the writing and thinking process required to produce an essay or article. She tried to teach me some problem-solving techniques such as posing the initial question and the pros and cons of every possible solution. This helped so far but I was still having some difficult about solving the problem which needed addressing.

Then we tried to test this out by starting to work through some academic areas on mental health together. She got my brain up to speed with this. Then the clinical psychologist was able to intervene again and discuss some of these ideas with me. This felt like being back with a supervisor at university. Again, I felt this was a step in the right direction, but I wasn't up for full or part time study at this point. Again, I found the system could help inspire hope.

When at the day centre I met other people who had been to university and had gone back even when getting symptoms of the illness. I found this inspirational and thought maybe at some point I could go back, and I was still having ideas for a research topic. The problem was that after so many years of being locked away in a room I was very rusty so any further progress towards my goal was going to be very gradual. The maths had come in very useful here with its abstract logic which was something I felt I had lost. At the current time although I had made much progress with writing and study, I still was not ready to go back so am unable to give this account a completely happy ending.

Conclusion A

It is thought by psychiatrists that recovery does not mean the total absence of symptoms. Rather it is asked what does recovery mean to the individual service user. For me as long as I can pursue my academic pursuit and qualifications this would mean a state of recovery. If the illness does not hinder what you want out of life despite the stress and depression it causes, then that would signify such a state. The fear

symptoms weren't going to matter. The state of recovery allowed me to have a sense of direction and some meaningful purpose in life which is exactly what schizophrenia destroys.

Lived Experience of Recovery in Psychoses

Recovery might not be the momentous event everyone thinks it is. When you are schizophrenic all you want is the fear and pain to stop. Yet recovery brings significant new problems and that again can affect your mental health. Many of these problems and solutions are the same as schizophrenia and as with that illness the experience of recovery can go both ways. We may enjoy life more or encounter an experience no different to the illness we had.

Getting better will end the suffering so if this was severe you will be thankful you came through it and survived. The last thing you will expect with recovery is more of the same. By this time, you will have learned what to do about it so you won't overreact the way you I when you first got the schizophrenia. You may also be getting sick of things. This makes your new life much more difficult in the same way getting schizophrenia first did. Yet as we start to measure up again, we can have the same sense of hope. Ordinary life can cause fear, pain, alienation, nervous breakdowns, severe depression and suicide. The combined effect of these could be as bad as the schizophrenia we have left behind. It may also cause a relapse. Life is hard and is not a bowl of cherries as the saying goes. This true for work and relationships in that both take much effort though they can also be rewarding making up for the negatives. These aspects in life after schizophrenia are equally important and will be examined here.

Just because you have recovered doesn't mean the schizophrenia wouldn't have had long lasting effects. The impact of schizophrenia can be shattering, and you have to pick up the pieces on recovery. You will have to rebuild your life from what is left and there are many problems in doing this. Yet you may be depressed with what has happened to you on top of the depression many normal people suffer with from the stress they experience with life.

Schizophrenia is a struggle much like life is and in both cases there are therapeutic ways of dealing with it. Life can be a healing process, but it is not easy and as with schizophrenia some people give up and question whether it is worth it. Like schizophrenia the struggle may cause depression in the same life often does so and again as with the illness there are medications and therapies that can help with it. There are survivors with emotional distress, but life can also get in the way of the healing process.

The loser psychology might create particular problems that get in the way of happiness and if your dreams haven't been realised it is too late for the material side. This may cause some pain with or without the schizophrenia. Losers see the world as out to get them anyway so this will duplicate the paranoia they have experienced with schizophrenia. They are also living in a world they could never be a part of so the possibilities for emotional therapy are very limited after the illness.

You can still fail in life as if you have schizophrenia, and this is also true once you have recovered. In both cases it is necessary to come to terms with this whatever other problems we may face. Again, the choices as with schizophrenia are similar as you have to see what you think of what else life has to offer.

Again, in both situations there is hope as for example high achievers like John Nash. This can continue to be inspirational on recovery as again the situations are very similar.

Yet you might feel you have been through too much in life and end up bitter with what has been lost. This will affect your outlook with the people who have caused the stress induced schizophrenia in the first place. Again, this will be a negative reaction to the society which again may isolate or exclude you. Alternatively, you can tell yourself you have had an illness and like a physical ailment you have just got to get on with. Where schizophrenia is stress induced this might be less possible.

It does give you the chance of coming out of shock and this will make you more receptive to life though again this may cause some pain. Together with what has been lost this development can make you acutely aware of both. With schizophrenia you can be so caught up with the symptoms this aspect of the suffering tends to take a back seat but when you realise what a waste it has been it will prey on your mind more.

The pleasure diary stands more of a chance, and this was recommended by my psychologist during my treatment for schizophrenia. But again, it is needed for recovery since as we have noted the two experiences are very similar. Again, in both situations the possibilities for pleasure are limited by the new restrictions in life. They are not always effective as they must be balanced against the suffering involved. Pleasure needs to be combined with a compassionate approach if it is to stand more of a chance. Alienation and unemployment may cause much emotional pain.

At first you will be glad just to be free of the suffering but then soon problems will set in. You might get back to a sense of normality which is what you have been missing. This sense can be satisfying or difficult dependent on what usually happens in life. You will need to make a list of things and try and solve them but not all problems have solutions. All you can do is to try your best. Many of these issues will depend on your outlook on life which may or may not provide an answer.

If you have been institutionalised by community care and dependent on the system learning to stand on your own two feet is going to take some time. This will cause much anxiety. You will not be able to work straightaway so recovery could be very stressful. After years in the system being more independent also means you will have been uprooted again and being on your own in society is tough. Whether the social skills needed for moving on will come right on recovery depends on how long you were in the system for.

Being protected from the society as in sheltered accommodation may mean we have forgotten how to fend for ourselves. So, being victimized by the voices means being defenceless. This means losing the knowledge about how to fight. We need to learn how to stand up to the voices so we can stand up for ourselves in the society. Often people will criticise us like the voice does and finding our own voice against the hallucinations might help prepare us for this too. Otherwise fending for ourselves may not be possible after decades on being dependent within the system.

Starting again with life means being at the bottom but you might have ended up with being a stronger person with schizophrenia. A lot of people display courage with the illness which comes in useful for the

fight with life. If either the schizophrenic stresses in life or those apparent on your recovery make you snap then this outcome is going to be more difficult. Yet you can come through such things, depending how many breakdowns you have had. Compassion can help with recovery stresses and might avoid the same thing happening again.

Compassion is also useful again with recovery as it allows connectedness with other people. You could use it to make friends at work and a night class is good for meeting new people. If you are socially isolated with schizophrenia these are good places to start for getting back into the society. Yet meeting people in our large impersonal society is difficult. You may also have vegetated from being in the system all those years so this way might not be possible. The answer might be you may have friends from the mental health system if you weren't isolated there too.

Some life events can criticise you with schizophrenia as they do in normal life. I knew a case where someone was hearing voices of her boyfriend criticising her. Just as you have to stand up against a person doing this you will also have to stand up to the voice. People can be hostile to you and having overcome the voices will allow you to confront other people. In both cases compassion might give the strength to do this but it means coming into conflict in this way.

Yet the dog-eat-dog way of life under capitalism could trigger a relapse and may cause the anxiety you had with the schizophrenia. Like a paranoia it is difficult to trust people and as David Bowie sang "it is the terror of knowing what his world is about." All the same your friends will rally round you, and you can handle things together which will reduce the stress. Even so some people get very tired of being hurt by other people which leads them to reject society. The answer for Bowie is that "love makes you care for the people on the edge of the night."

The paranoia is often as with capitalism that people will hurt you and there is always someone at your back. Working may not be as therapeutic as it could be. Having people out to get you feels a lot like the paranoia with schizophrenia. So, for working, like standing up to a voice you have to stand up for yourself. Yet after everything you have been through this might not be possible and you may have been submissive to the voices. Compassion might answer this problem as with schizophrenia.

All the same there is a lot of good in people and they will help instead of hurting you. Sometimes these problems might have an answer. The good in people might mean you are not cut off from them by being alienated and will provide a motivation to help others. This may help with the depression and motivate us in life more as well. It might stop you being so anxious about them and less paranoid. All the same people reject this way of life and are very disillusioned. You may turn to alcoholism which might make you more depressed. Yet as Dire Straits sang "just when this world seems mean and cold our love come shining red and gold."

Nightmares and delusional fear with schizophrenia can be exhausting. Yet ordinary life is the same as when Bowie's terror is experienced by many people who simply cannot cope with it all. Yet while this is out of the frying pan and into the fire again there are more opportunities for therapy in ordinary life. Also providing the fear of the big bad world doesn't shut down your emotions there is more chance of finding

emotional fulfilment than with schizophrenia. So there are many other things you can do to help with the anxiety.

So ordinary life is still very stressful. The relax classes stand more of a chance as the stress will be at more moderate levels though this again is depending is also dependent on your ability to cope. Rock rose is sometimes needed to help with Bowies' terror. Yet here there is another danger of relapse with the stress. You will need a wise threat system as having experienced fear with something like this makes you prone to wondering what else is going to happen to you. Then once calmed down with life you can begin to address your new emotional problems.

At first you will be glad just to be free of the suffering but then the same problems will set in. In particular life may have seemed like a waste with schizophrenia. You may get to the point when you feel there is nothing left. Then being unemployed is a waste too so you may have to deal with this as well. It is not clear that emotional contact will change these feelings and they can result in a lot of emotional pain. This is analogous to the severity experienced with schizophrenia.

Unemployment is depressing but if you get a job you can live it up it might be de-stressing. This in addition to having a partner to rely on. Yet one source of emotional pain maybe being substituted for another. Then years of unemployment can be very depressing and like sheltered accommodation you can get dependent on benefits. It can make you lazy to the point you cannot help yourself just like living in the mental health system. So with years of absence you might not be up to doing a job.

With having a job, it might mean more money than when on benefits and it will be possible to treat yourself. When you are feeling down or overwhelmed by life having a wish list could help here. You will need to sort you house out to makes it homely but if you cannot afford this life will be less therapeutic. Without this you might be more alienated so finding your voice will not be so socially inclusive. You will oppose society rather than become balanced and harmonious with it.

Again, some of the same problems with the schizophrenia will reoccur. You will lose the feeling of social exclusion but being unemployed might bring this back. This too is out of the frying pan and into the fire. Then in contrast to when the schizophrenia was mild the jobless depression could be more serious. Yet with a job you will still feel a part of things, and this could be the start of enjoying other things in life.

If the schizophrenia was mild and you could have coped with the stress this is useful for getting a good job. The problem is that if you have had a couple of breakdowns this might not be possible. You may still feel you are labelled as weak and be excluded again just as you are with schizophrenia. This could lead to depression even though you know that anyone subject to enough pressure will crack up. You cannot simply snap out of it.

You can be bored again here, and the stress of unemployment could cause a relapse. This is something to be frightened of. It might be possible to find something else interesting to do like a love of art or music but with time on your hands this may not fill the gap. Boredom is a serious problem as it signifies a lack of interest in other things that might have been therapeutic and derives from a loss of sense of purpose.

There might still be time for a career depending on how old you are. So, you can put up with things so far. For instance, they might be answered to go into full time education. But you cannot study forever and sooner or later you are going to need some money. Then there will still be more self-determined possibilities more than were possible for schizophrenia. This again will result in a sense of freedom. The problem is unemployment can be a lifelong problem, so these questions do not arise for many.

With a job you can contemplate your dreams again and make a more realistic assessment on how achievable they are. Depending on your age there maybe more time to try for this but it is a fact of life that although they will keep you motivated you may not get there. Most careers just turn out to be jobs and many people are accepting of this. Some may not be. Yet all the same it is still possible to be inspired with life. On the other hand, if you are older it might all be too late to realise your dreams.

If you are young enough you there is also still time for everything like having partners and families. You won't have experienced such a sense of loss as less of your life will have been taken up with the illness. It is easier to be hopeful when your younger and you won't have been so worn out with years of suffering. You will be in a stronger position having experienced psychoses depending on its severity. That should come in useful for coping with life. Otherwise you may be too old to have kids.

Starting again with life may result in some alienation as you will be the last in line here. You might feel oppressed and downtrodden as is also possible with schizophrenia depending on your finances. Living on the dole means poverty as does the minimum wage but if you meet a partner and both of you work you might escape this. Years of unemployment with the schizophrenia will add to this feeling as such things may get worse on recovery.

As for a career you have an opportunity to concentrate and go to university. Though again this is a lot of work so the problems with stress levels may prevent this as after a breakdown. Other courses may be less demanding, but you may be frustrated by not achieving your full potential. I was pleased to have gone to university before I was ill as this avoided the problems of having to prove yourself. It was not possible to go back and start again with this which could be a significant problem for people.

So, you might be too old for a career, and this might be combined with the other problem as with having kids. Schizophrenia runs in families so this is difficult. This puts the emphasis on other family members who have had them, and this can make up for this sense of loss so far. It is never too late to fall in love, but you still feel a sense of loss here. All the same even with close family relations unemployment can be a very negative experience and destroy your quality of life.

Voluntary work and ordinary work can both give a sense of meaning as you are serving people in the society and doing something useful. This again is a good feeling as it provides a useful activity and you relearn the people skills which may have not been possible where schizophrenia has caused much social isolation. You may learn from this that you may like a job with a lot of people contact so instead of hiding away you can come back into contact with the general public. Yet voluntary work may not change your financial circumstances.

Work stresses and depression could trigger a relapse, so it is very important we don't take on too much. We must consider carefully what jobs are available. Will they be enough reward? Here support from friends and partners becomes important again as we begin to understand we are here to handle things together. Otherwise, the depression could disable you and make work much more difficult so that without work things will deteriorate further.

If you have not been vegetating in the mental health system this can help prepare you. Otherwise getting your brain working again is going to be quite a challenge and you will have to gauge whether you are up to it after so long. If you have been too ill to have concentrated for a long time you are going to be very rusty, and this will affect your chances of employment. After a lifetime of this getting your brains back will be very difficult, and you might so easily give up.

Your dreams will still not be possible even without the schizophrenia and again you might feel like giving up on life. There is hope but depending on this alone can seem a bit unrealistic. John Nash achieved success despite schizophrenia so might still be possible under normal stressful competitive conditions. Yet it might not be possible to say at least I have got something else in my life even if I don't succeed. With all this you may not be happy. Yet you may be content? This level may be more achievable in material terms but might not be enough.

When the loss of employment follows years of being ill you will need to weigh up this part of life as well. You will have to come to terms with the waste the schizophrenia has caused. To do this you will need some time to yourself and contemplate your life. Was it all a waste despite what you have leaned? Many factors need to be taken into consideration so stepping back from the schizophrenia you might be able to come to terms with life after this. The thought process might also make you severely depressed.

You have had an illness which is what can happen in life, and you have just got to get on with it. Being in the mental health system has still allowed you to pursue your education meet new friends and partners and so doing many of the things normal people do free from the excluding stigma. There will have been good times and bad and much offered in the way of therapy. These will ease the impact of our new problems as life has not been all negatives before. So then we also need to balance the new positives recovery can bring us to see if these overall feelings of waste can be balanced by what the future holds.

The Positive Side of Recovery

Still there is a chance to kill all the pain in life. You might still like your job and even be a workaholic. So, instead of being depressed it might give you something to get in the morning for. Instead of pressure and competition you may enjoy being with your work mates which might also open up social opportunities. You have just got to find something you can cope with and really like doing. In the end as Francis Bacon said we work to live and do not live to work. So there will be many added positives with this.

You might like the struggle with schizophrenia, and it could make you feel like you have achieved something. Then if you can cope with ordinary life that struggle could be seen in the same way, and you

will feel better about things. You have not given in, and you will have confronted a challenge for which you should congratulate yourself. Again, dealing with life make you stronger and you will be better able to cope with whatever else it throws at you. This is not always true.

Finding a job is important to your self-esteem and it helps us to self-actualise as Maslow called it. Then without schizophrenia spoiling your sense of self identity you are more capable of being who you are. Getting to know and relax with being yourself is very therapeutic and you can arrange life according to your influences. From this point you can grow as a person and become generative in respect of other people. Self-actualization also makes you more creative.

In severe cases of schizophrenia, you might not be able to live independently or leave the house. So, recovery is better for a while here too. Then you are not confined to the mental health system anymore with what you can do. That allowed me to do archery, meet new people and pursuing higher education. You don't have to hide, and you will enjoy the freedom of going to places you like without the memories of psychoses. That allows doing the things you like without the paranoia.

Here you might regain an interest in life and learn there is so much else out there except the power struggle. That realisation can be very difficult depending on how you see life as to win might be the most important thing. To do this we first have to consider all the other alternatives and how they affect our quality of life both materially and emotionally. Then at least we will know what we think and can take seriously the problems of each outlook.

After the illness you may feel lost as your life path will have ended. So, you will enjoy the feeling of going home. This will help reconnect yourself with where you are from and with the formative influences in your life so this might help find yourself again. Although self-identity may have been lost through voices and delusions and in some ways, there is no going back in life, you might be able to pick up where you left off.

So after the fear shutting all this down you will feel some emotional connection with life and with yourself which could be therapeutic. You will remember your self-esteem and rekindle things you found fulfilling in life. You will start to be motivated by this and remember what you wanted out of life before. These are the good feelings from this time and once you start to have them they can remind you of what made you happy. You might begin to feel like your old self again.

Yet one thing that stayed with me through years of illness for goals with my education. All the suffering didn't destroy my sense of what I wanted to in life as I didn't give up. I still had a sense of direction, so I didn't feel lost. This became very important on recovery as I still knew what I wanted out of life and now had the opportunity to get back to it. The problem with this became if you have been through too much you might not be able to take on the challenge. So in the end despite the hope this didn't work for me and might be a common problem.

After schizophrenia your emotions will return, as for Maslow, so family relations will normalise. Yet if they have been lost through stigma this will emotional awareness cause some pain. Also, then you can start to put down roots again and feel a sense of belonging where you live. For me this didn't involve

going back to my home village as I had lived in a mental health project in Durham for so long, I began to feel some sense of having somewhere new to live. I felt I could settle down to life living there a bit though this was instead of going home.

The stigma will be there if anyone finds out your history such as applying for your jobs or just meeting your neighbours. Again, this means avoiding some people if anyone has picked up on your symptoms before recovery, so you are still going to have to stay out of the way. You might have to move house and start again in a new area which is stressful. So, you may have put down some new roots other than from where you have been living up till that point.

So it might, after schizophrenia, be possible to open up your emotions and you could then fall in love. The problem may be the emotional pain with a loss of family contact could damage this feeling of wellbeing. It also gives you an opportunity to make friends and be amongst people who aren't ill which can be less taxing for you. Yet meeting new people can be difficult. You might be starting out in life on your own here so the isolation may not be initially solved unless you have work mates or join a sports club.

Stigma may prevent you meeting people as they may find out your psychiatric history. If you make new friends and partners, you will be asked about your life, so you have to be careful what you disclose. Yet there is growing evidence that attitudes are beginning to change. In my case I joined an archery club and was open about my schizophrenia and to my surprise they knew what it was. There might be some hope here for getting involved with some things again.

Having a job still doesn't necessarily mean you afford to do the same things other people. Not having the same things and what they involve might be another cause of being alienated. As the Verve sang "you are a slave to money then you die." It is not all down to unemployment but depends on your attitude to life. Karl Marx called it being a "wage slave." The rewards in life may not be enough to make you happy with it. So you have to balance the positives with the negative reaction on recovery and see what you think.

Yet there might still be many positives in life like shopping and eating out. You can feel as though you can live a bit and are not missing out on much which will significantly help with the alienation. The therapeutic difference is that with schizophrenia you can only do these in between episodes of suffering but in recovery you can use them to avoid the stressful suffering. So life in general will get better if you can afford these things. Schizophrenia may not be cured but the struggling with recovery can be and this might also prevent a relapse.

One luxury stands out among the rest as during recovery you might be able to concentrate enough to drive, assuming you can afford a car. It opens up the possibility of travel and visiting new and interesting places and gives you a sense of freedom. That should be a very significant impact on your mental health and again improves on what was there with the schizophrenia. Car ownership levels are high in the UK and can be accessed by many people even if they cannot afford a new one.

You will become more functional so you can look after your housework which can be therapeutic. You can also make it homely despite the previous associations of being ill in there. To do this you need to be able to afford furniture and electronics otherwise it is going to seem a bit empty. Then having your friend's round will give the place a housewarming feeling, and you will begin to identify with where you are living and build happy memories there.

You can also drink which is not allowed on the anti-psychotics. Yet this also depends on your finances. If you are young enough you can go to night clubs and get an interest in the latest fashions and music. For older people you can go to restaurants and enjoy some food over a bottle of wine. Or you can maybe get established at your local pub providing you cannot talk about your life and tell people you are schizophrenic. Drink makes you a social atmosphere and is a good way of living things up.

Foreign travel is now possible but is expensive and like a sport this is very distressing. It is much better than having been limited in going places locally. This was because in case anything happened with the illness and needing to call for help. When ill this is also possible, but you are taking a risk with what you are doing. So, once recovered this will ease your mind here and you can go with friends rather than family which at times with the illness was the only way of doing it.

You can concentrate once again as on a sport and education. Not being afraid I found I could hold a bow steady. Focusing on this will take your mind off your problems and is quite relaxing. You will enjoy the feelings of this, and it might cheer you up. You can really get into a sport and competing in it. You can unwind with leisure after work and like the archery it is good to join a club where you can share a common interest with people. Again this is a bit more socially inclusive.

Once your mind is clear of the paranoia it is very stimulating to get the brain working again and that opens the door to learning new things. Solving puzzles really makes you think and can be good for your state of mind to do this as you have to test yourself. Your thinking will improve over time and give you a sense of achievement like passing an exam. This is good for your sense of self-esteem, and you will have learned many useful things in the process. It doesn't replace higher education.

Yet you cannot go on holiday and do many other things on your own, so this puts the emphasis on family again. If family contact has been lost through stigma finding friendship is going to be increasingly important as being on your own without friends is tough. Being completely on your own is a lot worse. If you have made friends in the mental health system this could be a bit of a lifeline here. Yet nothing can replace your relatives.

Feeling down in the dumps means as with everything in life there has got to be something that cheers you up. It is important to treat yourself to something so having a wish is going to be very important on top of satisfying your material circumstances. This is so even when your friends rally round you but depends again on what you can afford. Failing that having a few drinks might again be the cheaper answer here.

Being able to concentrate may lead you to take up cookery and become a foodie. You could also play computer games and take up photography so making home movies. There is more of a chance to do such

things with recovery than when being schizophrenic as that only amounts to going to day centres once or twice a week. Then you will only feel up to study for a limited time with schizophrenia, but recovery provides more opportunity for enjoying this and to a much greater extent. Yet boredom can remain a major problem.

One aspect of my new found freedom was the ability to go out and do some exercise. This after been locked in a room for ten years was a breath of fresh air. It was nice to get out into wide open spaces and enjoy nature without being distracted by psychotic thoughts. This clears your head with life's struggles in a way that might not be possible with schizophrenia and might be a good cure for some of the depression.

If you are interested in life again it might lead to some political activity or living it more fully, you might have views on things and know where you fit. You may feel a part of things instead of excluded from them. You will want to give something back which is a good feeling. Conversely if you are alienated you may lose your interest in such things. Helping others here can still be a good feeling but you may still feel depressed.

In my case I got the chance to know myself as this had been spoiled by critical voices. Finding yourself and self-growth are meant to be interesting. You will hear your voice again and know where you fit which might also create a sense of belonging. Self-growing may lead to an interest in literature or psychology and also to philosophy, sociology and politics. It may lead you back into education and develop a thirst for knowledge while relearning about life experience has the same effect. This may not be enough for everyone.

Conclusion

The experience of recovery has many similarities with the life issues you will have had with schizophrenia and which are going to be important with your mental health. A close examination of these problems does signify more hopeful solutions compared to the time you have had with the illness. It shows on the whole the recovery state is still better than being ill with the schizophrenia despite many of the unforeseen problems that can happen with it. Aiming at recovery should therefore be a hopeful outcome for anyone struggling with a serious mental illness.