



Pictured left: Stephen Pocklington of the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery at the "Partners in Recovery: A Community Conference on Wellness and Recovery" organised by National Learning Network and RehabCare.

Rehab Conference Marks World Mental Health Day

ONE IN FOUR PEOPLE in Ireland will experience a mental health difficulty at some stage in their life. To mark World Mental Health Day on October 10th last, National Learning Network and RehabCare organised "Partners in Recovery: A Community Conference on Wellness and Recovery" in Galway.

The guest speaker at the conference was Stephen Pocklington, Executive Director of the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery in Arizona. Pocklington has worked within the mental health system for over 21 years and has personal experience of both mental health and substance challenges. He described how people with mental health

difficulties could prepare for their own recovery by focusing on what keeps them well using the WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Planning) recovery tool.

Speaking to *Rehab News*, Pocklington said: "WRAP opens the door to recovery through a shared learning process and empowers people to plan the life that they want. The key concepts of this are hope, personal responsibility, education, self-advocacy and support. A crucially important part of the process is the involvement of family, friends, peers and health professionals."

Unlike other forms of recovery, WRAP is based on the philosophy of "wellness". Based on insights

developed by the Copeland Center, participants take control of their lives by gathering information on what helps them to feel and stay well, identifying the signs that indicate they are becoming ill, and then determining methods for coping. Each plan is therefore specifically tailored to the individual and their situation. The WRAP process takes 12 to 18 weeks to complete.

WRAP was developed by Mary Ellen Copeland of the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery in America with people with mental health difficulties and has been translated into Spanish, French, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese and Maori.

Speaking at the conference, Marie Kelly, Rehab's Director of Training and Employment Services, said, "This conference provided a valuable opportunity to highlight the many challenges experienced by people with mental health difficulties and how WRAP can help them recover and stay well. WRAP approaches have seen very positive results for people in the US, Canada, the UK, Japan and New Zealand, and should also have positive outcomes for us here in Ireland."

RehabCare and National Learning Network were among the first organisations in Ireland to introduce the WRAP programme. Currently 20 trained facilitators deliver WRAP at Rehab centres in Arklow, Cork, Tullamore, Bantry and Dublin, as well as in conjunction with the Health Service Executive in Balbriggan, and there are plans to roll it out to other centres in the near future.



Pictured left: At the “Partners in Recovery: A Community Conference on Wellness and Recovery” are (left to right) Adrian Ahern, Health Service Executive, Lucianne Bird, Regional Director, National Learning Network, John Moloney TD, Minister of State with responsibility for Equality, Disability and Mental Health, Stephen Pocklington, Executive Director of the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery, Laura Keane, Assistant Director of Health and Social Care Services, Rehab, Mick Coughlan, Principal Psychologist, National Learning Network, and Marie Kelly, Rehab’s Director of Training and Employment Services.

Stephen Pocklington – in his own words

How did you hear about WRAP?

As part of my own path to recovery, I explored every avenue that presented itself and embraced work that was obviously making a difference. I had both a personal and professional interest – I was a recovery educator and I was looking for new, effective ways to empower people. I had a colleague who introduced me to WRAP as a powerful means to promote self-determination. I talked to Mary Ellen Copeland and did the project locally which quickly led to my becoming a WRAP facilitator.

What makes WRAP different?

Firstly, it’s accessible. The facilitators have already done WRAP for themselves as part of their training so they can say how it has helped them. They can relate as equals with clients. Secondly, WRAP can be used by anyone, not just people with a wide range of mental health challenges. It works equally well for people struggling with substance abuse, grief, divorce or general malaise. It allows you to harness your own power to get what you want. The skills and strategies it helps you develop have universal applicability for the wider community.

Thirdly, WRAP is a facilitated process – clients can engage with the support of their classmates. It’s

self-directed so it can be approached from a lot of different perspectives. WRAP is not a commodity. Facilitators create a safe, learning environment where clients can do self-exploration. It’s a process of discovery.

What are you hoping to have achieved with the conference?

I hope we stimulated some critical thinking about how we think and talk about mental health issues. Some things are presented to us as a given. Assumptions about illness aren’t consistent with our own experience if you look through the lens of “wellness”. For example, madness is part of the fabric of our lives – it can be the natural response to horrible things but you have to address the root problems that caused it.

A person can think, “I’m a very fragile person and the world is a scary place.” But you still have the freedom and the power to choose your response to whatever life throws at you. You can’t control the world but you can control your responses. You are an agent of change and an agent of control in your own life. You grow in your power and you start to take control. You can use WRAP’s strategies and tools to do that. ■