

SPRING 2026 ISSUE 4

THRIVE

Sharing the wisdom of lived mental health experience



Grow
Mental Health

CREATIVITY & MENTAL HEALTH

THE GLOW OF CREATIVITY

**FINDING YOUR
CREATIVE SPARK**

HEALING THROUGH ART



THRIVE is a collection of articles, poems, practical tips, and so much more. Our content has been created BY and FOR people with lived experience of mental health challenges. Sharing the wisdom that we gain from going through hard times together has never been more important. Enjoy!

Written and produced by group members, staff, and volunteers of:



Scan the code above or flip to the back cover to learn more about Grow Mental Health, The Grow Program and the free support we offer to people all over Ireland.

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LET'S TALK!

Let us know what you think and submit your articles, art and ideas for content



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NOTES FROM THE CO-EDITOR

What is Grow Mental Health?

Grow Mental Health is a not for profit that has been running in Ireland for nearly 60 years. We provide a healing space where people can share their stories in a supportive and confidential setting. Our program of hope and recovery is based on decades of lived experience. In these pages, we share that hard-earned wisdom with you. We hope you find inspiration and comfort in our content.

Welcome to our Spring 2026 issue of THRIVE, the Grow Mental Health Magazine. In this issue we are celebrating CREATIVITY. The pages are packed with art, poetry, and so much more contributed by people who have tapped into their creative spirits, often as a way to see them through the difficult times.

*"We can give of ourselves more whether through volunteer work, lending support, expressing our creativity and sharing our gifts and talents in new and inspiring ways." **

The way people express themselves on paper or canvas, through dance, the spoken word or cooking is not only a reflection of themselves, but of the way they see the world around them. It is important to pay attention to what the artist is saying with their work. It is equally important for each of us to exercise our creative muscles in whatever way we find works for us. Sometimes we can find the answers and hidden trauma in a finished piece. We can leave the darkness and confusion in our work. We can use it to celebrate the triumphs and changes in our lives.

The link between mental health and creativity can be seen in art through the ages. In a creative space we might find peace, a quiet mind, connection with others, a refuge, and expansion. Read on for personal experiences of finding creativity, the benefits of creativity in mental health recovery, and ideas for nurturing your creative mind. We hope you feel inspired, this Springtime, to pick up that pen, paintbrush, songbook, or crayon. What do you have to lose?

*"If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing badly for a start and while you're improving."**

THRIVE is born of a community with a vision of promoting hope, kinship and recovery within mental health. We hope the shared experiences and creative talent of our contributors will inspire you to make positive changes in your own life.



SINCERELY,
Jenny Synnott
CO-EDITOR, THRIVE

**A phrase commonly used in a Grow Mental Health support group setting. You will find these peppered throughout Thrive.*

HEALING THROUGH CREATIVITY

Have you noticed that many people become creative when they run into mental health difficulties? They often begin to write poems, sometimes in rhyming couplets. It's almost as if a person's soul is shouting to be heard and normal ways of communicating have proved ineffective or there just are no words available to describe the inner turmoil and terror experienced in mental illness.

When I was young I was in a hippie colony in Goa and became extremely paranoid. It was frightening and yet also exhilarating. Poems, ready written began to arrive:

*When I am dead let me lie in the bed of the sea
safe in my shroud of translucent green
let only the bubbling surf remember me.*

*A small dog lies getting used to hunger
fleas promenade a puppy's sad back
with old eyes searching for days much younger
a small dog sighs from perpetual lack.*



“ IT'S ALMOST AS IF A PERSON'S SOUL IS SHOUTING TO BE HEARD

I also had access to a guitar and knew a couple of chords, and one day while I was strumming away, a tune sprang from the guitar almost as if another hand was playing it. It was scary and intoxicating.

Fast forward to joining a mental health support group called Grow, a place where, amazingly, I could enter a healing conversation about myself, my mental health issues, my terrors, dreams and even my talents in an atmosphere of hope, expectation and encouragement.

When you are ready, Grow encourages you to join social groups that 'fit' your needs and talents and help you discover the valuable and gifted side of yourself. Grow and its members can help look at yourself through "magic glasses". One lens identifies areas of a person's life that need compassion and healing, and the other the innate and unique giftedness of each of us that needs to be developed.

And so it was in Galway that I joined my first creative writing group. It was immensely "growth-ful." Here were other creative and often very introvert people all daring to reveal themselves through their writing. Since then I have been a constant member of different writing groups.

CONT.

HEALING THROUGH CREATIVITY, CONT.

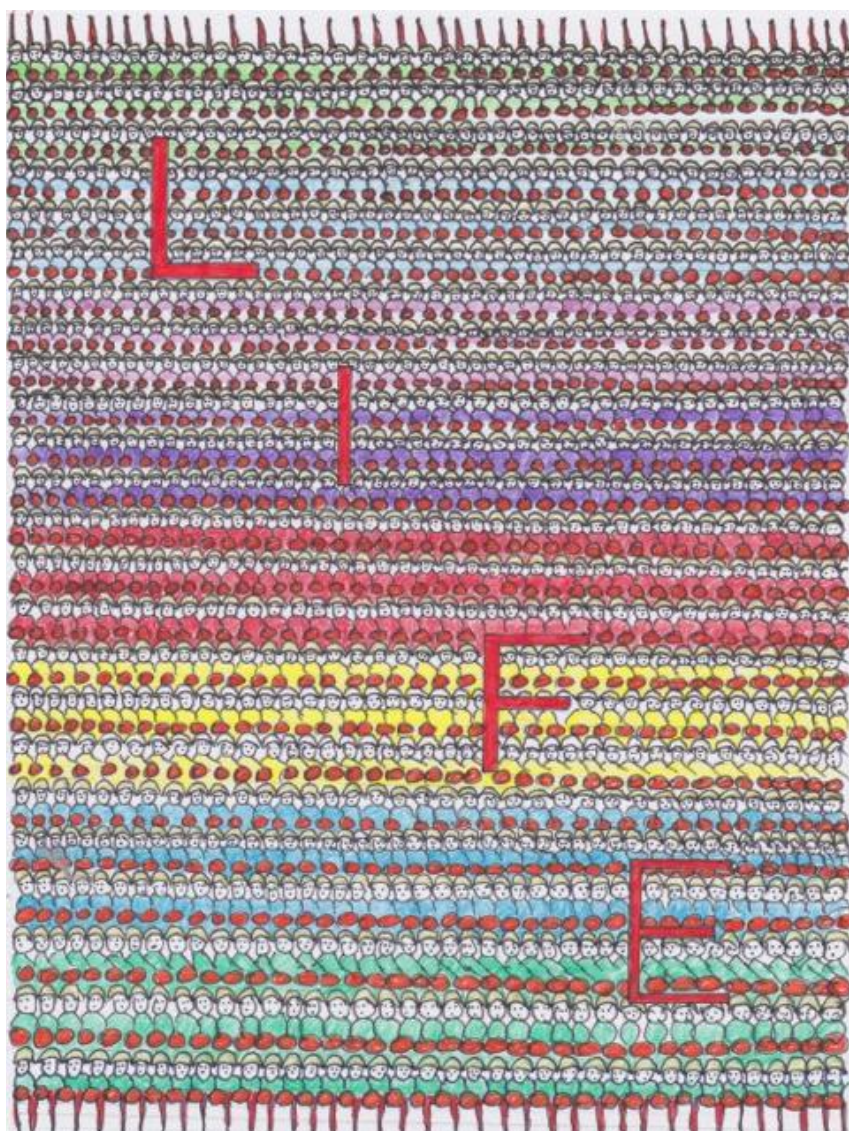
A few years on, I joined a drawing class and loved it. Today drawing is almost a daily activity, helping me to look at things and see how beautiful they are. Then, many years later, I started to learn the tin whistle. Each tune set off a sense of immense joy inside me. It was almost physical and crumbled away the barriers caused by my paranoia and label of pathological shyness.

I once asked a professor of French literature where poetry came from. He said there are two kinds, Dionysian and Apollonian. Dionysian poetry bubbles up spontaneously from the chaos of life within us. Apollonian poetry is shaped by us as we sculpt it from the outside.

Before I came to Grow I believe my soul was screaming for help, and this manifested in me in poetry and music. Now I have learned how to make this creative side of myself a central part of my life. In the words of Walt Whitman, Grow has enabled me to 'celebrate myself and invite my soul' while I face the ongoing challenges we all face, and which become acute as you get older.

The composer Schumann wrote his last piece of music while he was in a mental hospital. It came to him ready written in a dream. Paul McCartney wrote his beautiful anthem, 'Let It Be' in a similar way. I would encourage everyone to become involved in some creative activity and explore it at your own pace and make it part of you.

WORDS BY MIKE WATTS
IMAGE (THIS PAGE) AUTHOR'S OWN DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPH (PREVIOUS PAGE) BY
ALPHASPIRIT FROM GETTY IMAGES PRO



Letters are wonderful things!
They make up words
which in turn make up stories.
Stories help us live life.

A PROBLEM SHARED: CONQUERING SHYNESS



Our Grow support groups are where we share all kinds of life challenges in a safe, non-judgmental setting. The following fictitious scenario demonstrates how we work in our support groups when someone shares a concern or worry.

Sarah has always been shy. Lately it feels like her shyness is getting worse and stopping her from fully stepping into her life. She brings her worries about her crippling shyness to her Grow Mental Health support group.

Sarah's fellow Grow group members assure Sarah that she is not alone in her anxiousness and they share the strategies and tips for they have found helpful.

Keith looks inward to understand more

When shyness strikes, Keith takes a moment to reflect on when and where he feels most shy. Is it in big groups, around strangers, or in certain situations? Understanding this helps him work on things gradually.

Deborah takes it slow

Rome wasn't built in a day, and building confidence takes time too. Deborah thinks of confidence not as a feeling but an attitude. She has challenged herself with small steps - admiring someone's outfit or starting a conversation with a sales assistant. Small interactions help Deborah practice without feeling overwhelmed.

Judy's negative thoughts

Shyness often comes from worrying about what others think. Judy has learned to challenge those thoughts by reminding herself that most people are too focused on their own lives to judge her harshly.

Bob shifts his focus

By showing genuine interest in others, Bob shifts the focus away from himself. He asks open-ended questions and listens actively to take the pressure off him and build connections naturally.

CONT.

“
My shyness is
stopping me
from thriving.
- Sarah

A PROBLEM SHARED, CONT.

Practice makes perfect(ish) for Bruce

For situations, like speaking in meetings or social gatherings, Bruce prepares in advance by practicing what he might say with a friend. This has helped Bruce build that confident attitude over time. He's even joined his local Toastmasters group for more practice.

A 'Well done!' from the group

Martha reminds Sarah that she has already taken a big step in coming to, and speaking up in, her Grow group. Martha has found that sharing in her group and with a trusted friend, family member, or work colleague has been life-changing for her.

The group give Sarah a weekly task to make eye contact and smile at strangers. Maybe even to start a conversation or introduce herself to someone new. The next week she can feed back on the progress she made. Every interaction counts.

David accepts his shyness

David has accepted that it's okay to feel shy sometimes. Accepting himself as he is, is also a step towards growth. Remember, shyness doesn't define our worth. Don't be shy about being shy!

When shyness starts to feel overwhelming, the group members will be there to remind Sarah to go slow, use her tools, and find support wherever she can. She's not alone. The group will be there to celebrate all the small steps she takes along the way.



In Friendship,
The Grow Mental Health Meeting Community

WORDS BY SÍLE TRACEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATYASMAILEY (PREVIOUS PAGE)
AND IVAN S FROM PEXELS (THIS PAGE)

We welcome you
to share your
problem here.
Contact us
publication@grow.ie

BE NOT AFRAID, CREATE LIKE A LITTLE CHILD

Little children don't know! They don't know right or wrong, good or bad. They don't think about the judgement of others. And creativity is easy when you don't know, no preconceived ideas, no idea of good or bad art, where one just plays.

Can we get back to this beginner's mind? I believe we can. It's a letting go. And a letting go of fear. A trust, allowing what is inside to come and letting it flow. No need to hide, but be authentic and vulnerable. Letting what is in your heart out, and letting any spark from "above" catch fire.

Write, paint, make chocolate chip cookies. Make happy mistakes and have lots of "bad" ideas. That's fun! Lose yourself in abandonment. Play, make a mess, have no time constraint, anything goes, be silly!

Cast aside any fear of judgement.

Cast aside any fear of "What shall I do?"

Cast aside any ambition, any ego – it's not that important! It's play.

WORDS BY JONATHAN MULLEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANY_TKA FROM ANYTKA

Children act spontaneously. You can too. Just let go and do without doing! Without too much thinking, forcing or control. Dive in, forget yourself and you may get in the flow. And if you believe – the universe and your higher power moves effortlessly through you. It happens. It's magic.

Practise being present in the here and now. To see with new innocent eyes! That happens when thinking subsides. Then we see with wonder again and we simply enjoy creation. Then creativity gently awakens.

All creativity, whether a little poem or a decorated room is a gift to the world, so give us what you got! And no matter how "good" or "bad" (that's just a judgement of the human ego) it makes our soul grow.

So, paint and dance like no one is watching. If you feel blocked – that's ok. Make a simple mark, doodle, play, let go. Ideas come in their own time. You don't have to do a great finished piece. It can be a few splashes of colour or a couple of rhyming lines. It can be for your eyes only. No need for validation. It's the play that enriches the soul and delights the heart.

MAY WHAT I DO FLOW FROM ME LIKE A RIVER, NO FORCING AND NO HOLDING BACK, THE WAY IT IS WITH CHILDREN.
- Rainer Maria Rilke



CREATIVITY IN ACTION



If you want to see creativity happening in real time, there is no better place than at a Grow mental health support meeting. In my mind, I can almost imagine a sign on the door: “Creativity at Work.”

From the moment we arrive to the moment we say goodbye, something creative happens. Tired faces soften. A few smiles appear. People settle around an oval table with natural light filling the room. Everyone brings a unique perspective to the meeting –no matter how they feel when they arrive. Each person carries their own lived experience: what is happening in their life, what brought them to the meeting, and what they hope for.

Creativity shows up in the simplest acts:

- * Trying to put thoughts into words.
- * The group “walking in the shoes” of the person sharing.
- * Suggesting a task for the week, paired with encouraging or motivating piece of the wisdom.

There is no rush. Only encouragement. Time just seems to hover. We begin to understand and accept our human condition (p.82, Grow Program Book)

My First Grow Mental Health Support Meeting

When I first attended a support meeting, I did not fully understand what was happening. I was overcome by bullying at work. My joy in photography had descended into a dark, empty space; my creativity had vanished.

When I look back, I see now how the meeting flowed gently. I still appreciate the skill of the leader and the compassion shown by the group. It felt like magic. Leonard Cohen sang: “There is a crack in everything—that’s how the light gets in.” Grow shines that light into our darkness and awakens the creativity we thought we had lost.

The Structure That Makes Creativity Possible

For creativity to thrive, there must be commitment to having an open mind and motivation to Grow. The practice, routine, and rhythm all matter. Simple rules to keep us on track—the “4 Ps”—protect the shared space so creativity can flow safely, following

- o Progress report (one at a time)
- o Person speaking (one at a time)
- o Problem discussed (one at a time)
- o Part of the Program (given with a task)

They are like a roadmap. When you add the creativity of each person’s story, insights appear—sometimes small, sometimes life-changing.

FROM THE
MOMENT WE
GATHER TO THE
MOMENT WE
SAY GOODBYE,
SOMETHING
CREATIVE
HAPPENS.



CREATIVITY IN ACTION, CONT.

Re-Enchantment

I was struck by another member's use of the word "enchantment" in his book "Narratives of Recovery from Mental Illness" (2014). He believed peer support could lead to a re-enchantment with life—a rediscovery of meaning and possibility. Mike, had joined Grow in 1976. He had failed his A-levels three times due to anxiety, but through the group's encouragement and small "tasks," he eventually completed a psychology degree, finishing third in his class! He later completed a PhD at Trinity College Dublin. His research showed that our lived experience becomes a beacon of hope for others navigating their own turmoil.

Vital Needs: Fuel for Creativity

To keep creativity alive, we must nourish our Vital Needs. These are the "Pillars of Wellness" that support our wellness: "The group encourage one another to take care and control of our bodies."

- Body: Good sleep, healthy eating, movement (walking, yoga, tai chi), and medication as prescribed.
- Mind: Relaxation, meditation, mindfulness and learning something new (workshops or online resources).
- Heart & Spirit: laughter, connection with others and spirituality in whatever form is meaningful to you.

Keeping the Spark Alive

Covid forced many of us to be more creative, and we must keep that spark alive. Creativity is not only music or painting; it is problem-solving, connection, courage, and imagination.

The philosopher Nietzsche wrote: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."

Viktor Frankl, who survived the concentration camps, wrote in *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946) that "life holds potential meaning under any conditions."

So; ask yourself: "What am I like when I am well?" Then, write it down. Keep it close. Let it remind you that: "The best in life and love and happiness is ahead of you" (p. 51, *Grow Program Book*) and that "the complete picture of your life is designed to be beautiful and your ultimate story, if I so choose, will be a happy one." p. 86, *Grow Program Book*)

WORDS BY GEORGE TRACEY-LEIGH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SDI PRODUCTIONS FROM GETTY
IMAGES SIGNATURE (PREVIOUS PAGE) AND PELIN
FROM PEXELS (THIS PAGE)



MY ART PROCESS: FROM FOUR TO FORTY

Creativity is an innate part of being human. It is something we inherently seek out from a very young age. The instinct to create is closely linked with our desire to express ourselves and explore our worlds.

Having a relationship with a creative practice is so beneficial to our wellbeing. Especially during our greatest struggles. A relationship, that as long as it exists, is constantly evolving and responding to the ups and downs of our life journeys.

A year ago, my son began his own journey. Like myself, he was drawn to the visual arts. Art is accessible to us from very early on, as Rowan demonstrated at just 17 months of age. I provided the space, resources and encouragement to create art, just as my own mother had done for me.



He reminds me of myself, as a child. Fascinated by colour and form. The feeling of the crayon in his hand. I too took to art as if it was second nature to me. At home, there were always containers filled with colourful crayons and pencils.

My relationship with art began when I needed it most. I was four when my sister was born with Down's Syndrome and a congenital heart defect. Suddenly, my mother couldn't give me the time she once had. It was then, I began to immerse myself in making art, for hours at a time.

My sister died at aged 2 and a half. I was seven. My parents did not have the capacity to help me negotiate such tremendous loss. They were too consumed in it themselves. I remember drawing her as an angel, seeking to comfort my parents, and communicate my feelings. I needed to understand the process we were all going through. To be reassured we would survive. But my picture only highlighted the tension between them. In the aftermath of my sister's death, both turned towards unhealthy coping mechanisms, and retreated into themselves.

Art became an outlet for my grief. Crayons, pencils, paints, chalk and clay were my only confidants. The creative process helped me to navigate overwhelming concepts, like death and grief. I began to notice the correlation between making art and gaining approval from people. It happened at home, school, and at various competitions I entered. This was most significant for me when it came to my parents. They took notice of me, talking about how talented I was, and displaying my art for all to see. My artwork was a bridge that connected us.

It was connected with my sense of pride also. I began to expect praise whenever I finished a picture. Art had become "my thing", intrinsically tied to my value and identity. So much so, that I decided from very early on, that I would pursue art as a career.

In the aftermath of my sibling's death, I took on the role as family "healer". It was due to my sensitive and empathetic nature, that I saw it as my responsibility to make our family happy again. I knew whenever I drew or painted, this elicited positive reactions from my parents. Therefore, it stood to reason that if I made art, I could heal them.

CONT.

MY ART PROCESS: CONT.

Within a few months, my father moved away for work. We followed him, two years later. My parents had another child. This period was a tumultuous time for me. I struggled, feeling out of place in this new community and the changing family dynamic. I was no longer the cherished only-child, central to her parents' happiness. I turned to art, as a way of feeling valuable again.



As a teenager, my relationship with my parents broke down. The bullying at school only intensified my misery. I was depressed and withdrew into myself, labelled as a problem child at home and in school. Through these dark years, I clung to the dream of leaving home to become a successful artist. This became my lifeline. I felt good about myself whenever I created something of truth or beauty, when I manipulated my materials to be realistic or expressive. It was the ultimate escapism when the world felt heavy. A cathartic release when the page absorbed my emotions. A way of disentangling difficult situations; forming connections in my mind.

To make art, was to enter a calm, present state; an oasis outside of life's hard realities. Confusion or anxiety could not exist here. I could play, imagine, trust my intuition. Picking up a pencil or paint brush felt empowering. I felt authentic.

The day arrived, when I was accepted to art college. I did not find the kinship I had been seeking, nor did I find a tutor under which to flourish. This place was ruled by criticism, elitism and ego. I wilted under the hostile environment. By the time I graduated, I had become very disenchanted with the art world, and felt like an imposture artist.

During my college years, I met my husband-to-be. Suddenly, I had someone to confide in, connect with, who I could be myself around. It was during this time, that I began to question my relationship with art. I realised that I did not need it as I once had done.

After college, the effects of my experience there became evident. I could not pick up a pencil without feeling an overwhelming feeling of fear and self-consciousness. I tried in vain to recapture the freedom and instinct I had once had, the pleasure and comfort that art had brought me. For a long time afterwards, I felt without purpose. Art had been such a big part of who I was. A great passion that had shaped me, shaped my life.

Some years later, I found myself watching as my son picked up a crayon. I was confronted by that fear again. I could see that he didn't know how to draw or hold the crayon, how to apply pressure, how to move it across paper. I knew that I must push through my own trauma, so I could show him how it was done. It was in that moment, that I knew I wanted to share in his experience.

"What do you want me to draw?" I asked him. "Cars!" he demanded. "Cars! Cars! Cars!" He directed me to his choice of colours, the size of the car, who was in the car, etc. Then, it wasn't just crayons, but markers, chalk, pencils and paint. Soon, he started asking for paper. We have created art every day. This collaborative experience has been incredibly healing for me. Experiencing his joy, far outweighs my fear. Some days, I even find myself drawing, after Rowan has stopped altogether. I realise, that I'm not drawing for his sole benefit, anymore. It seems that I am ready to take up where I left off, and let my inner child lead the way.

ART & CREATIVITY WITH NIAMH

Artist Interview

1.) What does creativity mean to you and how has that meaning changed over time?

Creativity is a profound expression of intellectual freedom for me. It represents the ability to play, to create, to design, to decide, to experiment. To celebrate colour, shape, concept and aesthetics in a way that indulges my soul's desire. To express myself as valid, professional, and seen. To create is to love myself and to love my paintings and sharing my work.

So much of creativity as a painter is to make my paintings a visual statement to be seen by family, friends, and the public for impact and critique. A form of social language for communication, personal strength, and intrigue. When you love your work, it brings a long lasting love of creativity.

The foundational joy of a painting is the meditative quality of actually working on it. Of designing the concept and drawing the painting in terms of shape, scale and colour scheme. Then filling in the colour and layering it to create depth, aesthetic impact and realism. All while trying to infuse it with a spark of joy for me and those who see it.

Creativity is a hobby for me - a much loved practice that I do every week to feel professional, intellectual, and stimulated. Art is working, designing, deciding, comparing, analysing, creating, and learning. Art is a practice of love and skill.

Art was like this for me as a teenager and I adored my art as a hobby. Art college brought a competitiveness to my art that meant my simple love of art became more ego driven and more about impressing others. I had very high standards for myself and for other artists and I lost some of the love and joy of creating.

Since having many years of mental health issues I fell out of making art. Only in the last two years did I start back with Arches free online Art Therapy 'Recovery in Colour' art class, and rediscovered the love of art, colour, and design. It was a very gentle and uplifting way to get back into painting.

Creativity means empowerment and over time I have learned that the simple compassion and gentility of painting. It is the greatest way to express fun, design, self love of my art choices, and colours. Creativity improves self-identity.

2.) What does it feel like when you are creating?

Creating is like project work. Its an application of focus with intention. Envisioning the visual result through mapping out what the painting design will be. It requires painting resources, space, atmosphere, and a clear mind to focus on what the end result will be.

The emotional process of painting is so fun. The freedom of creating exactly what I'm interested in visually and conceptually. An indulgence of myself articulated on the white page through pencil and paint. Painting, once I know what I am doing, is a meditative zone of quiet tranquility and amusement as I work on my piece. I experience the process as a glow of joy.

CONT.

ART & CREATIVITY WITH NIAMH, CONT.

Occasionally when working on a painting, in the indecision of a piece, there can be some stress and self questioning. I analyse and compare all the ways I can proceed. The fear of making a mistake is an awful one, but I usually chose the direction of the most joy and visual appeal, which can take some time. But once I get through this design step and I know what the painting plan is, I really enjoy the process. It gives me joy, pleasure, stimulation, and pride to work on a painting.

3.) How does your creative process intersect with your mental health and overall wellness?

I usually need to be in a good place to work on my paintings as there is so much focus, planning and work put into them. That said, if I am a little upset I can draw and paint in a more casual way to help detox unhelpful emotions and clear my mind. To find balance and tranquility. Much like the process of journaling when upset.

Thus I have two types of painting styles. One including serious planning and mapping a clear-minded design with focused intention. And the second style of painting or drawing is an emotionally detoxing therapy style art that helps relieve symptoms of upset and worry. This type is more abstract, casual and less focused on end result, but more on joy and working through difficult emotions while doing.

Painting for me helps boost my happy hormones naturally, complimenting my mental health medication to keep me well and happy. Art and creativity has an ability to profoundly focus the mind and give purpose to my life, despite not working because of my mental health challenges. Life is better with art. I have so many ideas and look forward working on my art for the rest of my life. It is as essential as exercise is for me, for my mind and soul and gives life meaning and pride.

4.) Is there anything else you want to say about creativity and mental health?

Art is for all people. Everyone can draw their feelings however simple and casual. Everyone can apply colour and practice their skills slowly to improve in their own estimation. Art is personal. Art is also social. There is so much to admire and share through your art. Art is a language of expression. Art is therapeutic, entertaining, enjoyable and sometimes challenging.

Art makes complex feelings seem more tolerable, painted in unique and poetic ways. Art is a language that transcends cultural boundaries, so all can identify some common value - positive or negative - in the art you create. Art allows the artist to see more in themselves by exploring a topic through paint. Art is pure Joy, there is no wrong move. It is your painting so enjoy it.

WORDS BY NIAMH BE
GROW ONLINE GROUP MEMBER IN DUBLIN



THE BEAUTY WITHIN by Niamh Be
*As featured in THRIVE Issue 3 -
Autumn 2025*

BEHIND THE FUN: BRIAN WILSON'S STRUGGLES

The late Brian Wilson was a paradox. He spent his life with significant mental health challenges and spoke publicly about how he heard voices. He explained that one of these voices was the abusive voice of his father. Brian was the talented songwriter and producer who created the Beach Boys' most famous songs and passed away recently.

Brian and his brothers, Dennis and Carl, spent their formative years in a home that created wounds that followed them throughout their lives. Wilson once wrote that his father beat him so often that a glance from him used to make Brian retreat in fear.



RECOVERY IS LIVING A LIFE OF ONE'S CHOOSING, HAVING DREAMS AND AMBITIONS WITH OR WITHOUT THE PRESENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES, AND REGARDLESS OF THE SEVERITY OF THOSE CHALLENGES.

-Excerpt from the Grow Program Book

Wilson was prone to introverted moods and confidence-sapping attacks of fear. Since he was the eldest son, his father pushed him the hardest towards unattainable ideals which were unreachable. While the Wilson home resembled a war zone, the one thing with which Brian could pacify his dad was music.

The Beach Boys reached creative heights with the Pet Sounds album and Good Vibrations single in 1966. Brian Wilson's growing studio mastery and an increasing confidence in his arranging skills were at their zenith.

With the dawning of 1967, a chasm began to grow between Brian Wilson and the rest of the band. Brian wanted to make more experimental music, while others in the band saw it as too risky. Arguments began in the studio to such an extent that Brian chose to withdraw from his role as the Beach Boys' producer. While Brian Wilson did not go into hibernation directly after the debacle of 1967, mental health difficulties began to play a greater part with his life.

A distant acquaintance recently suggested that Brian Wilson was a creep. His comment was untrue and baseless. The truth is, the late Brian Wilson was a humble and gentle person who experienced profound mental health challenges. Despite these challenges, Brian created music that is as beautiful as it is timeless.

The experience of the Wilson brothers resonates with me. It goes beyond language into the realm of the soul. I have an appreciation that is beyond the stereotype of the surf sound. The story resonates with me and moves me deeply.

**WORDS BY STEPHEN MAHON
PHOTOGRAPHY FROM BEACH BOYS
OFFICIAL INSTAGRAM**

JOURNEY THROUGH ESTRANGEMENT

I am estranged from my family for many years.
I know in my heart that I may never see them again.
So many years have passed now, where there has been no contact or
communication.
I have felt the feelings of shame, guilt, hurt, loss and grief.
Knowing that their presence is no longer in my life.
I cannot just pick up the phone and say hello.
Now silence fills that space where once was filled with the engagement of
my loved ones.

Life shared no longer happens between us.
I am sad that we have found this place in life.

I understand now how this has happened.
I acknowledge all the mistakes that I have made and the hurt and harm that
I have caused.

Time passes and the cycle of life continues.

Over the years through counsellors, reading, support groups, and practice of
life tools, my awareness, knowledge and experience have enabled me to try
to be a better person than before.

To change within and value each person that I may meet in my life today.

To live in this present moment with an attitude of trust, love and compassion
for each person I may meet and to value myself along the way.

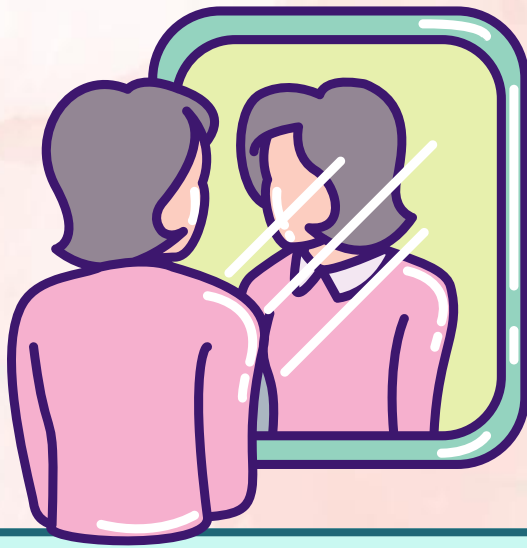
My estranged loved ones will be in my heart always.

I wish them all the goodness that this world can give and may they heal from
any wounds which they may carry within.

**WORDS BY GERRY, GROW GROUP MEMBER IN KERRY
PHOTOGRAPHY FROM SUZY HAZELWOOD FROM PEXELS**



CREATIVE CORNER



Perceptions

What do you see when you're looking at me?
Am I busy, engaging, do I seem to be free?
When I laugh, does it sound like it comes from within?
Do you envy how I read the room that I'm in?
But here is a secret, just between you and I
It's all a façade, I've just learned how to hide,
The scars in my mind, the tears I have shed,
The times my pain kept me laid up in my bed.
These are the things, when you're looking at me,
I will keep hidden, make sure you won't see.
Some days I'm a child, homesick for home,
Not wanting to bear all my struggles alone.
I want to retreat, away from the gloom,
Return to the comfort of my mother's womb.
There are times when my fears turn my days upside down,
When I want to scream HELP, but my pride won't allow,
This exposure of someone I don't want you to see,
The vulnerable, faltering version of me.

Maria Mulligan

**"ART IS A WOUND
TURNED INTO LIGHT." -
GEORGES BRAQUE**

Snail of Silence (meditation)

what does a snail do?
stuff all

it just does it's thing
they just exist
they have no thoughts
they just are
it has no objective, no responsibilities

just slithers along,
with no heed to the past or future
be a snail .

Aaron McCann

Out of Sorts

Out of sorts,
Feelings of incapability,
Mind not tuned into reasoning.
No to do list today.

Tiredness taking over the day,
Reality slipping further away,
Positive thinking shrinking
From 10 to minus zero.

The answer is easy, ACTIVITY.
Even if it's not the occupation I wish to do.
Anything to limit this frame of mind,
From spiralling into decline.

Feelings are not facts
I can compel my muscles and limbs
To act rightly in spite of my feelings.
Emphasise what is rather than what isn't.

God grant me the serenity to accept the
Things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Timothy Percy

MUSICIAN LUKE CLERKIN DISCUSSES HIS LATEST RELEASE, ORPHEUS. Photograph by @gisela_ph and album cover art by Invisiblist

Orpheus

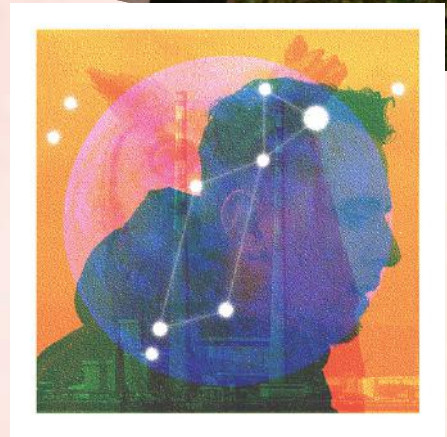
I released my debut album 'Orpheus' just over a year ago. It's an exploration of love, life, loss and grief, with a bit of hope scattered over everything. It's an album of two halves, the first six songs are fan favourites with some mental health focused songs and some 'bangers' thrown into the mix. The second half is an honest reflection of falling in love, then experiencing heartbreak after heartbreak until you find love again.

'Orpheus', the title track, is about the importance of communication in a relationship and how if that's not nurtured it can ruin everything in the long run. Unfortunately this was a lesson that I truly learned well after recording the song.

Making and releasing the album was a true journey of resilience, and a testament to how having something to focus on can help you through the darkest of times. I was in the midst of depression and burnout when I was getting ready to release it, and I was a regular member at Grow support groups throughout the process, which really helped me maintain some balance. It was one of the darkest periods of my life but having an outlet for that really helped me move forward.

My connection with mental health and creativity.

For me, creativity and mental health go hand in hand, always. I think having a creative outlet, whether that's music, painting, writing poetry, acting or whatever, is so important for your mental health as it's another way of expressing how you're feeling or what you're going through. Songwriting for me is like journaling, it's my way of understanding what's going on in my mind as well as the world around me, and then I get to express that and share it with others. Then without ever meaning for it to happen, it can become someone else's way of understanding themselves. It's a magical healing thing, creativity, and I love it!



Open Plan Submarine

The tension wore a top hat
Off to the laundromat
The room it wore a silk shirt
Outside all the hurt
Some had only been at lunch
Rolled out the one of stomach munch
That little would be said
There was no doubt
For little it is said
When little mouths they shout
Open plan submarine
Filled with people and their dream
Open plan submarine
Open plan submarine

Stephen Mahon

Sail Away

When all is lost at sea I'll sail away
To shores unknown, unseen, assured what may
The sun shines brightest at the break of day
And veils from blinded eyes are swept away.
When shadows cast by wasted grief and time
Wear down and out my open heart and mind
I'll set a course for calmer waters still
Like I have done before and always will
When life and all its creaking timbers break
I'll build again, I'll bend, I'll mend, I'll make
New forms, new visions, frames and shrines
To everything that served to me as signs
Then, when dampened embers flicker in my soul
I'll know at once I've reached my waited goal.

Barry Hurley

SPRING CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY TASKS

I have experienced how a hobby (my photography) can feel "lost" during dark times. Below is a choice of tasks - gentle ways to use a camera or a phone to reconnect with the world. In the spirit of a Grow support meeting task, here are some suggested creative things to try at home or out and about with the increasing daylight.

The "Glimmer"Light

Find one thing today that catches the light—a reflection in a puddle, a shadow on a wall, or a glint on a window. Take a photo of it to remind yourself that light is always seeking a way in.

The View Shift

Take a photo of a common object (like a coffee cup or a chair) from an unusual angle—from low down or looking straight down from above. This mirrors the Grow Program encouragement to see an old problem in a completely new way.

The Symbol of Strength

Find something in nature that is growing despite the odds—a weed through a crack in the pavement or a bud on a branch. Capture it as a visual progress report of your own resilience.

A "What I'm Like When I'm Well" Photo

Take a photo that stands for your "well" self. It does not have to be a person; it could be a pair of walking shoes, a book, or a bright sky like my photo here. Keep it on your phone as a digital beacon.

I hope you enjoy trying these little photography exercises. And remember, this is just for you. There are no mistakes.



**Author's photograph: "I was reminded of the Leonard Cohen quote "There is a crack in everything—that's how the light gets in." when I took this photo. It is the moment we stop looking at the "cracks" in our lives as flaws and start seeing them as the places where hope and light finally break through.*

The photo also captures that sense of re-enchantment - moving from a dark space back into the light.

The sunlight pierces through the cracks in the blue sky. The Grow program and meetings shine that light into my darkness and awaken the creativity I thought I had lost.

A Limerick from Limerick

There was this guy who went to Grow,
He was a bit depressed you know,
But there he found hope,
He learned how to cope,
He's now filled with a friendly glow.

To grow is sometimes quite hard,
Even more so when we're scarred,
If habits we change,
And things rearrange,
Our worries we can discard.

Rob Stephen

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY GEORGE TRACEY-LEIGH



CREATE!

WORD SEARCH

E S P O C H L I G H T R Q Z C H U E
T H U R Q R P P Y C S J J Y A S N N
H G X N H O E H H C H F I C L P L G
P A I P L J K A O O O I P P R R E A
O R N A K I E F T B T E L Y O I A G
E D S I D H G C F I B O X D Z N R E
T E I N H O B H O U V I G P H G N A
R N G T N P E B T L I I E R A O P N
Y B H I V E K O U W O V T S A N O E
Q T T N G L F V B A J U V Y G P D D
S L Q G D E S I G N R D R E A M H G
G K A R T S E L F O Q C G R O W U M

Find the following words in the puzzle. Words are hidden

ART
CHILDHOOD
COLOUR
CREATIVITY
DESIGN
DREAM
ENGAGE

EXPAND
GARDEN
GROW
HOBBIES
HOPE
INSIGHT
LIGHT

PAINTING
PHOTOGRAPH
POETRY
SELF
SPRING
SUNLIGHT
UNLEARN



Did you know?

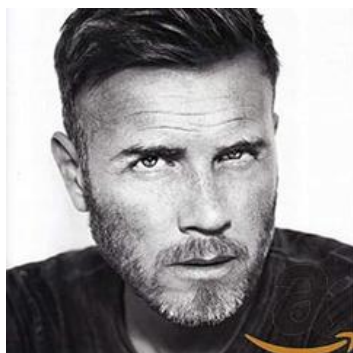
Zen doodles are repetitive patterns that help with relaxation, focus, creativity, and feelings of gratitude. To get started, draw a shape on a sheet of paper, divide it up into smaller, equal shapes, Then draw repetitive patterns in each shape. They can be colourful, monochromatic, or a mix of both. We would love to see how you get on. Check out charvi ashtekar on YouTube for some ideas and tips. Happy doodling!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: MOOD MUSIC

What is that one tune that immediately sets your toes to tapping? Or the one that evokes a memory so vividly that you can almost smell it? Or the one that brings a tear no matter where you are or what you're doing? Music is a powerful art form that resonates in all of us. We intermingle song lyrics written by a stranger with our own experiences so that it becomes something truly unique and personal. To me, music has been a constant companion through all of my ups and downs. When a song moves me, I am inspired to learn more. To understand the writer and the experiences that forged each line. I find music even more powerful when I can relate to its creators. Here are a few that have imprinted on me over the years. I hope you find, like I do, that they will lift and comfort you.



Since I Saw You Last – Gary Barlow



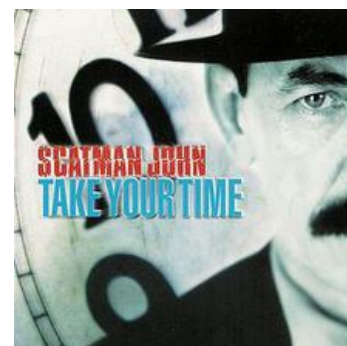
In his recent memoir, Gary Barlow discusses his rise from a period of severe depression. This song tells of the humiliation he faced at the hands of the media and his showbiz peers, and he also sings about the joy he feels now that he's recovered, that his sense of self is back, and that he's self-assured in his own innate goodness. That he has peace regarding who he is. The song ends with a strong message to the people who deserted him as he deteriorated, and he reclaims his own narrative from the zeitgeist that forced him into agoraphobia and unemployment. The song should resonate with anyone who has resurfaced from darkness, and also be a reminder that recovery is possible.



“Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness.” – Maya Angelou

Take Your Time – Scatman John (extended version)

Known primarily as the moustachioed icon behind 1995's techno classic Scatman, Scatman John (born John Larkin) was in actual fact a jazz cult icon and inspirational and much-loved figure in mental health recovery circles. His story is one of hell and redemption; he was bullied relentlessly as a child as a result of his severe stutter, and the trauma he endured led him to severe alcohol and drug addictions. He became sober and began to use his stutter as a tool through scat-singing, and became a superstar at age 53. He used techno music to impart principles learned in therapy and AA to inspire youth, to great acclaim. However, it wasn't to last. This 1999 song is effectively a parting message from the Scatman as he was dying from advanced lung cancer. 'Take Your Time' is about turning away from the need for external validation, loving oneself, and the importance of making your present moment meaningful by not dwelling in the past. A hidden gem in the discography of a much-overlooked legend.



CONT.

MOOD MUSIC, CONT.

Kendrick Lamar - Mirror

In my opinion, Kendrick Lamar is one of the greatest artists of all time. Before his meteoric rise to fame in 2024, he released the unofficial soundtrack to the Black Lives Matter movement with 2015's 'To Pimp A Butterfly' – and became the voice of a generation. Then this voice of a generation went to therapy. And in 2022, he released an album about it, called 'Mr. Morale and the Big Steppers'.

I'll reserve my fanning out for another time (please, listen to the whole album though), and focus on the album's closing track, 'Mirror', It is about establishing boundaries in one's life. The song's refrain "I choose me, I'm sorry" is a rebuttal to everyone who looked to Lamar to be a mouthpiece for the political unrest of 2020, instead electing to work on himself and his personal struggles. The song's message is simple – "I'm done being a people-pleaser. Don't look to me to fix your problems, I'm having enough trouble dealing with my own." I doubt you'll find a better rallying call for personal autonomy and boundary-setting.



Mary J Blige – You Ain't the Only One

Mary J Blige is another musical legend, with a thirty-year (and counting!) career to her name. One of the undisputed queens of R&B, Blige came from immeasurable hardship – abuse as a child, addiction in adulthood and toxic relationships throughout her life. 'You Ain't The Only One', from her most recent album 'Gratitude', is both a celebration of the happiness she now feels after years of intensive therapy work and creative fulfilment, and a reassuring hug to listeners who're going through pain in their lives. Blige has long been a role model for resilience through hard times. "I'm so proud of me", sings Blige. As she should.

“Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything.” –Plato

Kate Bush & Peter Gabriel - Don't Give Up

A song that, to me, perfectly encapsulates the ethos of Grow Mental Health and recovery. The song could very well be dialogue from a Grow peer support meeting. Gabriel singing about his depression, and Bush representing all of the people he has in his life to lean on, offering words of encouragement. 'Don't Give Up' is about seeing the bright side and the light of the people around you who will guide you through the dark times. The late Matthew Perry attributed his sobriety from opiates to this song, (as did Elton John), writing it on autographs of his addiction-centric memoir and having it played at his funeral. "Don't give up, you still have us".



WORDS BY AARON MCCANN

ALL PHOTOS OF ALBUM COVERS MENTIONED IN THIS ARTICLE

MEETING MY YOUNGER SELF

I'm nervous, how will my younger self judge me? "That's not important", I tell myself. But it is everything!

I'm visiting my 26-year-old self in St Patrick's Hospital. It's one of the worst times in my young life. Me, or he, has made a serious suicide attempt. He's just out of the lockup ward and is now in a private room. He is still suicidal and nobody can give him hope, no-one. They have all tried in vain. Now my future self just wants to give a life raft or north star or something. A huge task. But my compassion is huge and maybe that's enough. That, and that I'm still alive.



Why do I fear the judgement of my younger self? Well, I never married or had a family or had a paying career. It doesn't bother me now. I accept I had chronic schizophrenia and bi-polar to boot. So, it was not on the cards or in the stars. However, I do work. But to my younger self this is huge. True, my younger self is experiencing psychoses and depressions, one after the other. But it's the feeling of failure, of being too weak for this world that's eating him up. He has a young man's ego after all. And his now black pride attacks him mercilessly.

“ —
HE HAS NO IDEA
WHAT TO SAY TO
ME. HE IS LOST. AND
IN SHOCK.

I knock on the door.

"Come in." It's a voice with a veneer of strength.

As I enter, I say, "Hi, it's me. Your future self!" Well, what do you say!?

He's shocked. He just stares. Then scans me and recognises himself, me. I now see I look very old to him. I'm 56 and look older. It must be a huge shock to see yourself with grey hair and wrinkles. He's does his best to hide the shock. That's so me. That's my problem. I hide; I mask everything. Nobody, not even my younger self can see his true self. NOW, older, I know that was the core of my illness, why I was lost. I know to say nothing about that – he'll figure it out. He deserves that.

He looks at me with awe. Like I, or he, has resurrected. I motion with my hand to the bed. He understands and hooshes up to make room for me to sit next to him. Rain is splattering against the window. The natural sound helps the silence.

I can feel huge vibes off him. The shame. He does not want to be judged. He squirms a little. He has no idea what to say to me. He is lost. And in shock. Trying to process seeing his future self. I do not want to give him a pep talk. He has had to endure a dozen of these in the last fortnight. I know there are more, worse times to come. That he will be crucified. This is his fifth hospitalisation. There will be 12 more to come.

All I can do is put my arm around his shoulder. As I hoped, he breaks down. There is a tear and his chest heaves, up and down. At least he is real now. Maybe I can get through. I'm kind of proud of him. Weak as he is, he does get through hell.

CONT.

MEETING MY YOUNGER SELF, CONT.

At last, I say, "You do become an adult." We both know he feels, and is, so immature. He is ashamed.

"You will love." I know he has felt no love in his heart for years. And is so ashamed of it too. His chest heaves again.

"You will find yourself and find life." He looks really confused. I do not explain. I will let him figure that one out. He's too reserved and masked to question me further about that. But I can see he has heard me and has stored that away.

I decide not to mention about not being married or not having a paying career. He does not ask. I know it will take a long time to accept that. But I know he will.

"It sounds tacky, but you will become a spiritual seeker, it becomes your journey." He looks doubtful. I feel I've said enough. Maybe too much. I say no more for what feels like a long time. "Are there any nice nurses on the ward?" He smiles a weak smile and says, "Yes, there's one cute one alright." I laugh.

I ask him about his art. He looks at the floor. "I haven't done any in a while." I nod.

Casually I say, "You get a bit into writing too."

He glances up at me.

I stand up to go. I shake his hand. Then draw him into a long manly hug with many beats on his back. As I open the door, I look back. He smiles weakly. I, like a father, show a little pride in my eyes as I look at him. After I close the door, I pause and think. I know he will go through hell, but he'll make it.



WORDS BY JONATHAN MULLEN
PHOTOGRAPH (PREVIOUS PAGE) OF
JONATHAN BY STEPHEN GEARY
PAINTING (THIS PAGE) AUTHOR'S OWN

No Fear or Mask to Block Their Radiant Spirits by
Jonathan Mullen

*Without fear, persona, ego or masks the life and spirit
of little children shines through them. When we forget
ourselves we too can shine.*

TIMOTHY'S STORY: UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION

My name is Timmy. I joined a Grow Mental Health support group in late 2012/early 2013. To give you some background on myself, I was born in the early 60s outside of wedlock. In the small town I come from, the street we lived on was considered to be on the wrong side of the tracks.

It's an understatement to say growing up was tough. The one light in my life in my early years was my grandmother. She was a small, gentle woman who just got on with things. I lost her when I was seven years old – a void of many that can never be filled. School was more trial than tribulations. I left it at 15 and got a job with a building contractor.

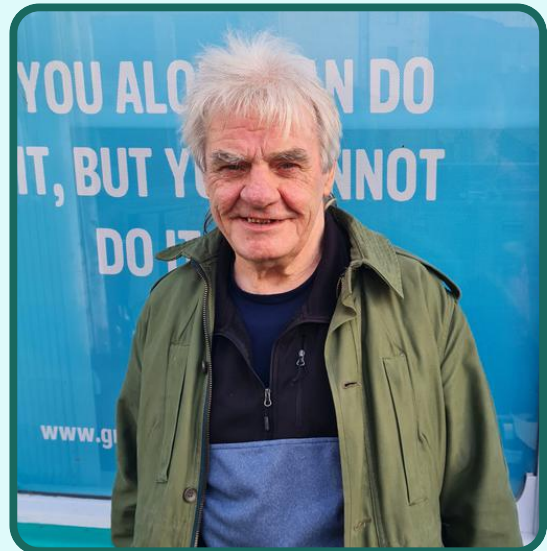
In the early eighties, the decade of recessions, a friend and I tossed a coin to either join the Army or go to England. The Army won. My friend did three years; I did six. Those six years were my first step into the University of Life. After that I went fishing, starting in a canoe lobster fishing, to 15 years on a trawler. I went back to construction after that. After about six years my body began to revolt against me. I had a lot of hardship under my belt by now.

All through those years, at times I knew I had a certain mental block. I did not know what it was and was not willing to discuss it. In late 2012 a friend asked me to go to a Grow Mental Health promotional event in our local town. I really didn't want to go but if the shoe was on the other foot she would have, so I did go. As I listened to one of the speakers describe symptoms of depression, I was ticking off all the boxes in my head. This depression he spoke of was the same as my mental block. In my ignorance I thought you had to be sad to be depressed. That night the penny dropped. I needed help, so I started attending the new Grow support group in Templemore.

The Grow Program has taught me how to fight this demon, depression. I often turn to page 24 of the Grow Program Book, Essentials for the Journey No. 2: "I can compel my muscles and limbs to act rightly in spite of my feelings." Also, the Grow wisdoms 42 and 73: "Emphasise what is rather than what isn't," and the Serenity Prayer used by Alcoholics Anonymous: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Last, by no means least, from the old Grow Program Book, mystery wisdom No. 2: "You are valuable, me too." These are the tools I use to fight depression. All I say is, I win more than I lose.

Just as essentially, my Grow group helped me be more open about myself and my feelings. As I said, I didn't have a favourable childhood. I learnt early in life that showing feelings led from ridicule to the back of the hand. For years my girlfriend told me I had a brick wall built up all around me when it came to talking about feelings. I knew what she meant. The fear of opening up about feelings was another Everest to me. It was only seeing and hearing other members of our Grow group speak at the reports on progress part of the meeting that slowly helped me discuss feelings. If it were for this alone, I will always be grateful to Grow and the Grow group I attended.



WORDS BY TIMOTHY PERCY , GROW SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER IN TIPPERARY



**"GROW GAVE
ME A VOICE"**

Talking to someone is the first step to improving your mental health. If you need help, we're here for you.

Call today on 0818 474 474 or visit www.grow.ie

ABOUT GROW MENTAL HEALTH

Grow Mental Health run 98 free weekly mental health support groups in communities all over Ireland and online.

Friendship, self-development, and community are at the core of everything we do.

Our groups are welcoming, inclusive, and supportive. They are not counselling or therapy. Each group is run by the participants.

People report life changing effects often within months of joining a group. Many describe a newfound confidence, a new and growing trust in other people, and a more hopeful outlook on both their future and overall wellbeing.

Our support groups are free to attend for anyone over 18.

VISIT US ONLINE TO FIND A MEETING NEAR YOU.



grow.ie