

SUMMER 2025 ISSUE 2

THRIVE

Sharing the wisdom of lived mental health experience



THE REAL VALUE OF INCLUSION

TIME IN NATURE IS A BALM
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

CONNECTION: BEING PART
OF SOMETHING BIGGER

A SPACE FOR
CREATIVITY



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Cover image by Yonas Merian

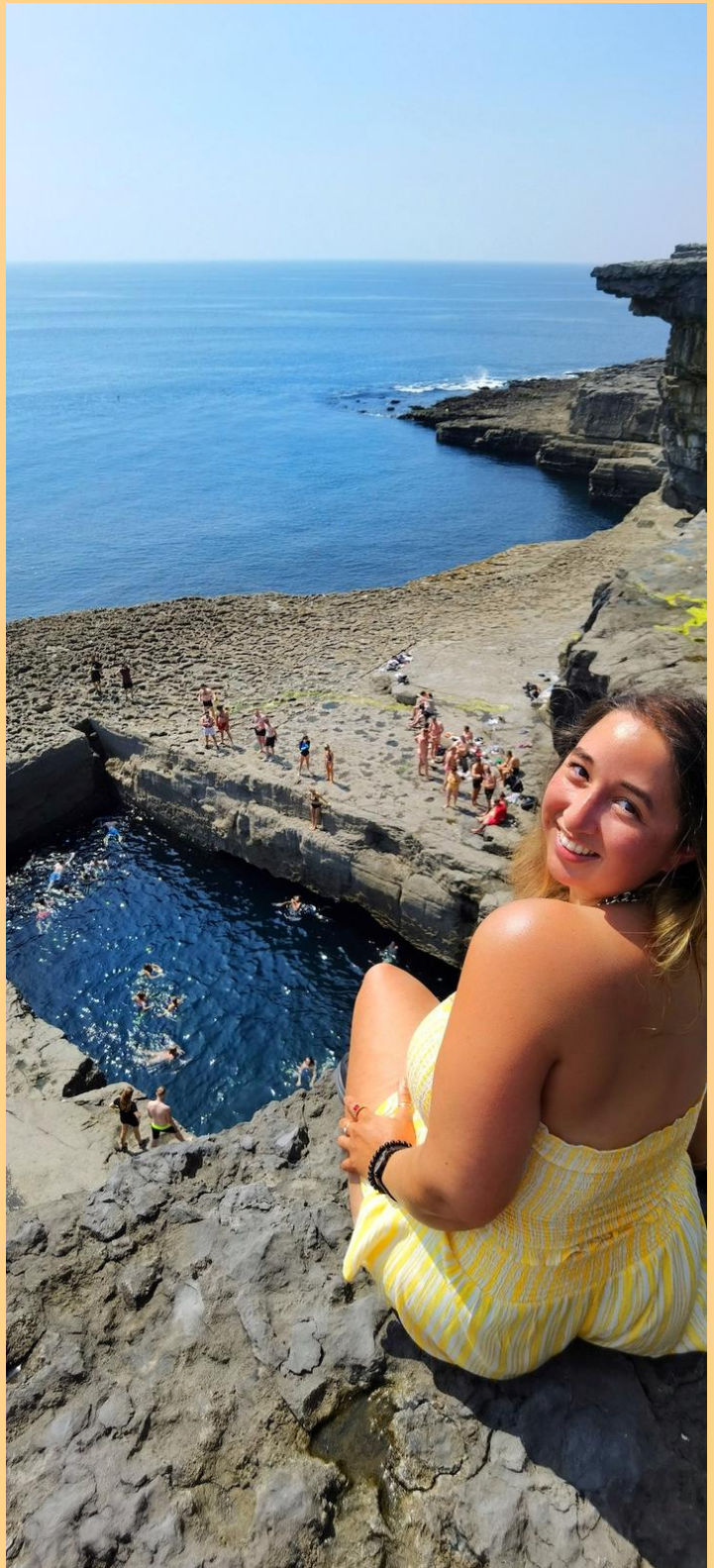


Photo: Nirina Plunkett, @NirinaXX, cookie-fm.com
A warm day on Inis Mór, Aran Islands
Reprinted with permission

ABOUT GROW MENTAL HEALTH

Grow Mental Health run 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.



WWW.GROW.IE

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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!



NOTES FROM THE CO-EDITOR

What is Grow Mental Health?

Grow Mental Health is a charity 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.

"Friendship is the special key to positive mental health. To have a friend, be a friend."*

Welcome to the second edition of THRIVE – a magazine rooted in real journeys and lived experiences.

This issue explores the themes of Inclusion and Connection, containing reflections that speak from the heart in terms of what it means to belong – to ourselves, to each other, and to the world around us. As summer brings longer, brighter, and (fingers crossed) warmer days, we hope this edition inspires you to step outside – into nature, into community, into conversation.

Within these pages, you'll find essays, poems, art, reflections, and voices that encourage curiosity, courage, and change. We have included practical tools, motivational prompts, and thoughtful questions –outlining what has helped us grow through life. Our hope is once again, that in sharing them we inspire you to grow. Nudging you to explore beyond your comfort zone and embrace each moment this summer with intention.

We invite you to seek joy, to discover meaning in the everyday, and to make space for deeper connections – with yourself, nature, and others. Above all, we hope THRIVE encourages you to grow, just as creating it has inspired us to keep growing.

- *A phrase commonly used by our community. You will find these peppered throughout Thrive.*



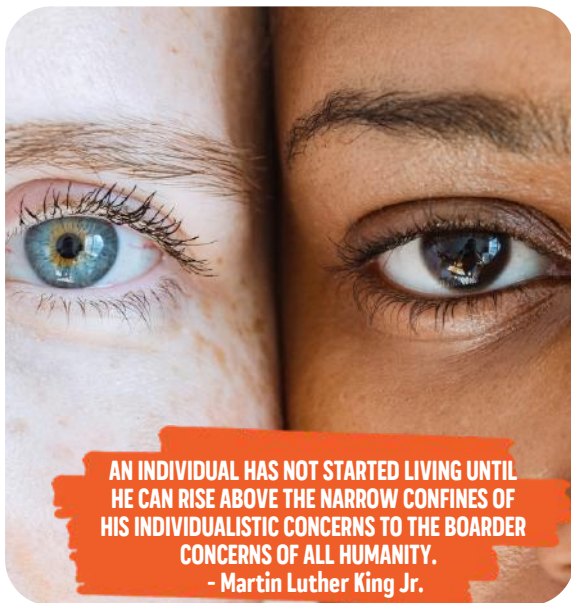
SILE AND FRIENDS GET READY TO DIP@DUSK, OUR ANNUAL FUNDRAISER. SEE GROW.IE FOR INFORMATION.

SINCERELY,

Sile Tracey

CO-EDITOR, THRIVE

TRUE INCLUSION



As the saying goes, “we can’t like everyone and not everyone will like us.” Some people are very different from us with different values. They may be from different social classes, backgrounds, countries, or be of a different sexual orientation. We may see something in them that we don’t like. Often, we may have this same character trait in ourselves, unrecognised! We may feel superior or inferior. If people struggle in an area of life which we find easy, we may judge. Or if we fear judgement, we might hold back on connecting.

Ultimately, we are not on this planet to be approved of and liked, but to be our authentic selves and live up to our potential. To return home to our true nature that was lost along the way. This is why we many people join a Grow support group, to heal and become whole again.

“—
ULTIMATELY,
WE ARE NOT
ON THIS
PLANET TO BE
APPROVED OF
AND LIKED BUT
TO BE OUR
AUTHENTIC
SELVES ...

However, in a Grow meeting there can be likes and dislikes – just like in any other area of community or life in general. We are encouraged to be tolerant of others. To treat everyone with respect. The Golden Rule is: treat others as you would like to be treated yourself. A simple wisdom that really works.

However, there is a wonderful thing that I have witnessed in my Grow group! The initial dislike or judgement of another group member melts away after the weeks and months. As the weeks go by and we all share our vulnerabilities, we get to know the real individual and understand their struggles with life. They are just like us! And to understand all is to accept. Can you truly love someone unless you understand them? Subsequently, if you seek to understand someone then a love will grow.

When someone risks being vulnerable, open and truthful, empathy and compassion flow through the group. The person you initially disliked begins to grow on you (no pun intended). You end up liking them, sometimes even liking them a lot.

No longer does our heart shut them out. That’s true inclusion.

WORDS BY JONATHAN MULLEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGELA ROMA FROM PEXELS

BALANCE

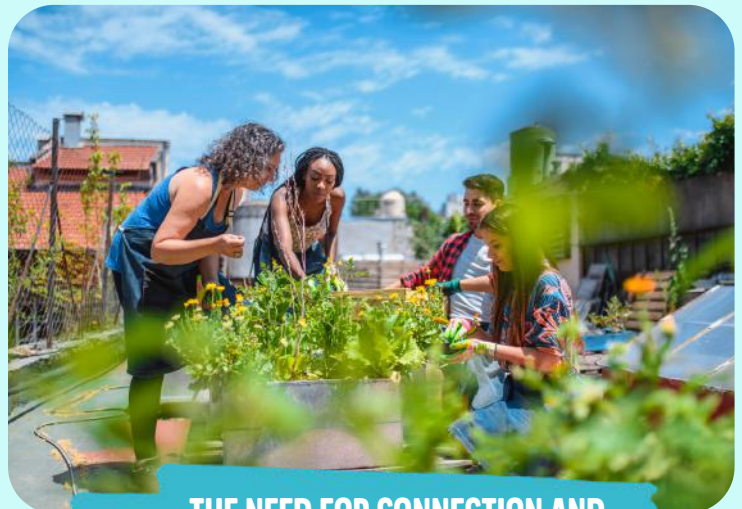
For each of us, life is a balance. Every day we walk a tightrope, between teetering on the edge to believing in our ability to steady ourselves. For each of us, that walk will be different, and so will our perceptions as we go. For those of us with mental health difficulties, we are not like the adrenaline lovers who volunteer to bungee jump or climb a mountain. There are enough challenges in our life to keep us from becoming bored. The ordinary is our excitement.

“ —

NO MATTER HOW BAD MY
PHYSICAL, MENTAL OR
SOCIAL CONDITION, I AM
CAPABLE OF LOVING AND
BEING LOVED.



Every human being has a story. Whatever that story is, whatever chapter we are on wanting it to be read or heard is common to us all. It is in the hearing that we receive healing. This is where Grow Mental Health and its peer support works its magic. Through it, we receive what each of us need; the gift of knowing our life matters. In a world where it is all too easy to feel insignificant, our Grow community helps us challenge these feelings. The Grow Program tells us, “No matter how bad my physical, mental or social condition, I am capable of loving and being loved. I am a connecting link, between persons. I am valuable. I have a purpose and a unique place in this world that no one else can fill.”



**THE NEED FOR CONNECTION AND
COMMUNITY IS PRIMAL, AS FUNDAMENTAL
AS THE NEED FOR AIR, WATER AND FOOD.
- Dean Ornish**

This piece encapsulates so much that makes our time walking across the tightrope less precarious; Connection. Purpose. A belief in our own value. When we endorse each other we celebrate their life, and in turn, they do the same for us.

WORDS BY MARIA MULLIGAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STYF22 AND
AZMANL FOR GETTY IMAGES

CONNECTING WITH NATURE: Just BE like nature IS

Nature IS – but we modern humans are busy complex beings. And each day our lives get faster and more complex, more emails and WhatsApp groups. We have split from nature and suffer immensely for it. With our mobile phones and laptops as our constant companions, we are bombarded with words and images. I heard it said we now receive more information in a day than we received in a year when we were hunter-gathers living more in tune with the natural world.

Not only are we physically busy but our minds are busy too. We rarely have a still moment in both our outer and inner world. As technology is taking up more and more of our day, we overuse our analytical and language oriented left brain. It's our left brain that separates us from the world around us. Its thinking, its words, judgements and concepts and sense of "I" splits us off from the world and each other. It's our silent and holistic right brain that gives us that sense of peaceful oneness with all.

How do we get back to that right brain? Meditation and mindfulness help. But not everyone is attracted to these practices. However, most of us enjoy time spent in nature. It's silent nature that brings balance and healing to our overtaxed, troubled and imbalanced psyche.

Our modern mind is always in a hurry, it is now time oriented. There's no time in nature, just seasons. Paradoxically we need to spend time in nature to forget time and the world, the human world that is. So, give yourself plenty of time when you go to nature. Any time spent by oceans, in a forest or on a mountain is golden. Parks and gardens are good too. Anywhere you can hear the birds and not traffic. Look at the trees and clouds, hear what can't be heard and not bother.

Slowly we move from our anxious doing mode to just being. No need to do anything, improve ourselves or fix our life. Just be like the rest of nature. We are nature. It's the left brain that forgets that. The left brain has built up our civilisation that, in turn, conquers nature. We forget we are nature. We need to come home. It's in the dabbled green of a forest glade, with a bird in the infinite blue and by lapping clear water that we find and restore our silent soul, our naturalness, our true nature. To just BE – as Nature IS.

WORDS BY JONATHAN MULLEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STUDIO LIGHT AND
SHADE FROM GETTY IMAGES



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: MIND GAMES

There has always been a lot of discussion around the impact of the usage of video games on people's mental health, and for good reason. Video games, like many things that feel good in this world, can be abused and become a detriment to one's mental health. While research has shown time and time again that excessive use of video games can contribute to problems with sleep and anxiety, and while we cannot stress enough the importance of exercising extreme caution with the use of all technology, there is also research backing some positive uses of video games as a tool to improve one's mental health. When used in a healthy and disciplined way, video games in the "edutainment" genre, have been shown to improve mental health on a scientific level.

In the past three decades, studies have suggested that certain genres of video games can improve – and detect – mental health conditions in people who use them, especially in certain demographics. Video games have often been touted for their benefits regarding cognitive ability – particularly in competitive spheres such as Donkey Kong and Super Mario 64 – but studies have indicated concrete proof of this.

Players of simple, repetitive and task-oriented games such as Tetris, Fruit Ninja, the Brain Training series and Candy Crush have demonstrated improved mental faculties as a result of consistent activity and repetition – a sort of "mental physio".

These types of games have been used to both indicate the onset of dementia and to stave off its effects. The classic video game Tetris, first released in 1984, was shown in a study conducted by the University of Kent to be able to "capture" indicators of the symptoms of dementia and Alzheimer's based on the patients' ability to play Tetris at a certain level of ability.¹



Dr. Kawashima rendering copyright Nintendo

In addition, a study conducted in Ohio by the mastermind behind the Brain Training series, Dr. Ryuta Kawashima, showed that basic learning exercises based on those utilised in the video games showed an ability in patients for their dementia symptoms to improve, even being able to re-access some of their memories. Through monitoring these patients' usage of these games, they were able to spot tell-tale signs of cognitive decline, and through the game, were able to mitigate them to a degree.² The usage of simple and repetitive games such as these have been indicated to improve the cognitive ability of children. A survey conducted in Scotland of 600 children documented increased scores in less time on school tests by the group who had been given the Brain Training game on the Nintendo DS than the control group.³

CONT.

1. University of Kent, Popular mobile games can be used to detect signs of cognitive decline, 12 September, 2019.
<https://www.kent.ac.uk/news/science/23266/popular-mobile-games-can-be-used-to-detect-signs-of-cognitive-decline>

2. McNeill, David, Ryuta Kawashima: The devil who cracked the dementia code, Independent, 28 May 2013.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/ryuta-kawashima-the-devil-who-cracked-the-dementia-code-8633489.html>

3. BBC, Computer game boosts maths scores, 25 September 2008.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/7635404.stm

MIND GAMES, CONT.

The reason for these improvements? Simply put (as has been seen with activities like sudoku and crossword puzzles), simple task-oriented activities played on a consistent and constant basis are known to increase and improve brain capacity on a neuro-scientific level. Take Tetris, for example. A game that essentially works as a big, moving infinite jigsaw puzzle. To stay in the game, you need to continually ensure you've manoeuvred the pieces in the correct way, and as the game goes on this gets faster and more intense.

Playing games such as these requires brainpower:

- the ability to concentrate,
- reaction time
- hand-eye coordination
- the ability to keep momentum
- ability to recognise when a mistake has been made and adjust accordingly



Tetris image copyright RE Games

The applications of these brain skills then lead on a physical level to stimulate and make one's prefrontal cortex (the part of the brain responsible for decision making on small and large scales) thicker and more resilient, reduces the amount of un-needed grey matter in the brain, and increases the amount of neuroplasticity (the ability of the brain to form new neural pathways, create memories, and retain information) in people, particularly children and adults with mental challenges.

“SIMPLY PUT, SIMPLE TASK-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES PLAYED ON A CONSISTENT AND CONSTANT BASIS ARE KNOWN TO INCREASE AND IMPROVE BRAIN CAPACITY ON A NEURO-SCIENTIFIC LEVEL.

Another benefit of playing the game lies in the total dedication to the task at hand. There's no room for thoughts or distractions. You are totally preoccupied. Your brain has a task to do and has nothing in its path to stop it. This is why games have even been proven helpful in treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, because the concentration needed in playing the game lessens the intensity and frequency of traumatic flashbacks in patients. It grounds them.

As I said at the beginning, proceed with caution and ensure you remain disciplined. Always be aware of how much time you are spending alone, as isolation is never good. Video games have been a big part of my life, and the insights I have found in researching this article have made me feel a little better about playing them. That quick game of Tetris when I wake up, or a bit of Candy Crush on my lunch break which gets the synapses firing, I feel has helped my well-being. Playing these casual games and speed running video games help increase my hand-eye coordination. Kawashima's games were a form of edutainment during my childhood, and as I struggled with overwhelm and burnout during my undergraduate degree, Tetris helped regulate my brain and ground me. I now feel I am future proofing my brain for my older years. The brain is the most important weapon in our arsenal, and it's important to ensure the sword stays sharp.

WORDS BY AARON MCCANN

DURING TOUGH TIMES, TURN TOWARDS OTHERS

Isolation and loneliness are commonly experienced by people facing mental health challenges. Some of us tend to turn away from others, spending more time alone, even though doing so will ultimately leave us less able to cope.

The Grow Program, like many other programs of growth or self-discovery emphasises the value of human connection. It reinforces that inclusion through friendship is the key to our mental health and well-being.

"Recovery Through Community" is the simple, yet profound motto of the Grow Program. Inclusion and Connection are at the heart of everything we do. Belonging to community is crucial. People feel included and connected through the friendships they find when they come together in our weekly support groups.

**MENTAL HEALTH
CAN'T BE TAUGHT, IT
HAS TO BE LEARNED
TOGETHER.***



**ONLY THROUGH OUR CONNECTEDNESS TO OTHERS CAN
WE REALLY KNOW AND ENHANCE THE SELF. AND ONLY
THROUGH WORKING ON THE SELF CAN WE BEGIN TO
ENHANCE OUR CONNECTEDNESS TO OTHERS.
- Harriet Goldhor Lerner**

*"You feel less alone when you hear someone else's story." **

There is nothing as healing as experiencing friendship with others. Friendships allow us to receive and give love. There is no inclusion and connection for ourselves without others. The feeling of being included builds self-confidence and builds bridges of communication, trust and respect.

*"Connecting with people on a personal level is a basis for strong therapeutic relationships – it's the informal conversations where the relationships grow and endure, where the trust develops, and the space to set recovery orientated goals open."**

**WORDS BY JOHN O'DONNELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SKYNESHER
FOR GETTY IMAGES**

** A phrase commonly used by our community. You will find these peppered throughout Thrive.*

CONNECTION & INCLUSION

Connection and Inclusion are essential elements. They are important in fostering resilience, recovery, and well-being.

Connection

- **Social Support:** Building strong friendships fosters a support network that can provide emotional assistance during difficult times.
- **Community Engagement:** Being part of a community can enhance feelings of belonging and purpose, which are crucial for mental health.
- **Communication:** Open lines of communication help individuals express their feelings and experiences, reducing feelings of isolation.

“
INCLUSION
WORKS TO THE
ADVANTAGE OF
EVERYONE. WE
ALL HAVE THINGS
TO LEARN, AND
WE ALL HAVE
THINGS TO
TEACH.
- HELEN
HENDERSON

Inclusion

- **Diversity and Representation:** Inclusive settings guarantee that everyone has access to mental health resources and assistance, irrespective of background.
- **Reducing Stigma:** By encouraging people to seek group peer support without worrying about being judged, inclusion works to combat and lessen the stigma associated with mental health concerns.
- **Empowerment:** By enabling people to tell their stories and participate in conversations about mental health, our support networks grow.

Techniques for Strengthening Inclusion and Connection

- **Community Programs:** Activities that unite people can strengthen bonds and offer mutual assistance.
- **Mental Health Education:** Spreading knowledge about mental health concerns can help communities become more empathetic and understanding.
- **Accessible Resources:** Inclusivity can be enhanced by making sure that mental health services are available to a range of individuals.

We can establish supportive environments together that improve everyone's mental health by placing a high priority on connection and inclusion, as we do in the Grow community through peer support groups, social outings, promotional events, meet-ups and most of all, connecting and including ourselves within the community.



WORDS BY CELIA BRETT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DZMITRY
DZEMIDOVICH FROM GETTY IMAGES



CREATIVE CORNER

CURATED BY
HOLLY DARRAH-HICKEY
BARRY HURLEY

Written by
Francis Lawlor

When life turns sour and troubles appear
When skies get dark and things get rough
It's then you will find who is there for you
those who are kind will see you through,
Life is queer with its ups and downs
peaks and valleys will make you cry and frown
but your friends who are true will give you their hand
and walk with you till the grey skies turn to blue.

"ART
TRANSCENDS
CULTURAL
BOUNDARIES."
-THOMAS
KINKADE

Written by
Barry Hurley

Alien

Why do people sit alone
On bus, trams, when going to town?
In libraries and city trains
They shy away from ugly stains
On benches sit to East and West
For fear they haven't passed some test.
When given pennies in the hand
They wash themselves for fear they'll land
A strange and rare, cold-palm disease.
'If you sit down don't touch me please'.

Written by
Naomi Butt

The Shape of Change

A chrysalis stirs, a silent call,
Wings wrapped tight in nature's thrall.
From stillness bound, it breaks and flies,
In darkness formed, to touch the skies.

A tadpole dreams in the depths below,
Where tiny limbs begin to grow.
It leaves behind what it has known,
To leap and breathe, to live alone.

A seed is cradled in the earth,
In quiet soil, it seeks rebirth.
With roots that drink, it learns to stand,
A bloom unfurls by unseen hands.

A child grows up, a steady climb,
Each step, a mark upon the time.
From laughter pure to burdened grace,
New wisdom wears an older face.

For change, we know, is never kind,
It asks us all to leave behind.
The broken patterns, fears long-held,
And break the shells where they once dwelled.

Change needs no banners, no grand display,
Its greatest work is done this way.
Within the heart, where courage sows,
The seeds of love that gently grow.

To heal the world, we start inside,
The hidden scars, the tears we hide.
The love we seek, we must create,
And let that light illuminate.

For all things grow and all things fade,
In tender strength, the change is made.
A whisper, then, to soul and mind,
Begin with self, leave fear behind.

THE BOY, THE MOLE, THE FOX AND THE HORSE: A REVIEW

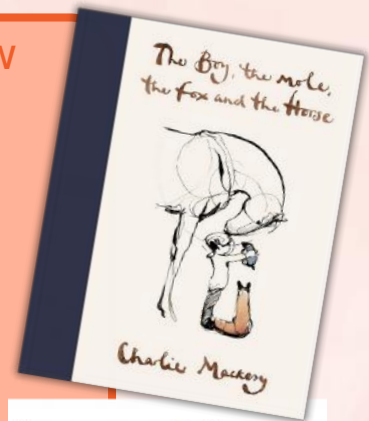
Author: Charlie Mackesy

This gorgeous little book with its wise words and stunning illustrations, charmed the socks off me. It was such a hopeful and heartfelt read, and it is one I will return to over and over.

A boy sets out on a journey with his new friend, the mole. As they progress, they are joined by two others. Through their conversations and experiences, we learn what it means to be human. For example, all four struggle to balance authenticity to themselves and to belong. The fox in particular, shows us how easy it is to lose ourselves when life has been unkind to us. However, connection can be a kind of salvation, helping us expand our worlds and re-learn trust and community.

This book implores us to be true to ourselves and kind to others. For life is too short, and we are all on the same journey.

Written by Holly Daragh-Hickey



Written by Amina
Pundeer [Always Right
Behind You, 2021],
reprinted with
permission

Silence

Silence
covered with noisy thoughts
And roaring waves
Is not quietness.
Is not dead
Or death

Is not nothingness
Nothingness maybe

Silence
Alive and Pulsating
Current
Underlying
All around
Everywhere

You can feel it In your cells
Hair follicles
Flowing out of you
Immersing you

Try tuning into it

Written by
Barry Hurley

Dream

Close your eyes, release your mind.
answers searched for there, you'll find.

Use the vision of your brain
to wipe away all thought of pain.

Think of dark and open space
Depart and leave the human race
where you can touch but you can't see
the mask of false reality.

Tense your muscles, hold them tight.
Breath in the stillness of the night;
contract, then rise above yourself,
beyond a continental shelf.

Sink into a realm of thought –
where symbols of the life you fought –
the battles of your burning past,
into all twirling time are cast.

Written by
Matthew
The Forest

Dappled light sparkles
Through shadowed tress
Illuminating the dew
Glistening on the leaves

Dripping swiftly along
Branch and twig
Down bark and root
To the eluvium below

Life springs anew
On such gilded days
Seeds awaken and
Surge forth

And the forest grows
Stronger and thicker
Ever flowing out
Becoming great once more



Photo: A Perfect Day at the Beach by DANIEL O'DONNELL



**WHEN ONE TUGS AT A
SINGLE THING IN
NATURE, HE FINDS IT
ATTACHED TO THE
REST OF THE WORLD.**
- John Muir



Photo by FRANCIS LAWLOR
"One of the most peaceful and beautiful spots in Dublin"

Hope Needs Virtue By Niamh Be

Hope needs the virtue of care,
A care for more – for Better.
A care for wealth and abundance.

Hope needs the virtue of love,
To desire life and care for it.
For hope is love of a future, of
Improvement, of better blissfulness.

Hope needs the virtue of creativity –
Of an imagination fuelled by vision,
Of wonder and visualisation –
To see what you hope for,
To believe its true eventually.

Hope needs the virtue of Belief,
To truly have faith that all will
Work out and be better and be secure,
To get what you desire and want.
A belief that needs perseverance.

Hope needs the virtue of resilience,
Of persevering through difficult times,
And times of hopelessness and grief and pain,
And struggle to again have the virtue
Of hope as a core fuel of life.

Hope is a virtue that needs evidence
– In order to believe in it.
Hope needs truth to make hope real.



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

WORD SEARCH



Find the following words in the puzzle. Words are hidden



BALANCE
CONNECTION
DIFFERENCES
ENERGY
FRIENDSHIP
GROW
INCLUSION

LEARNING
LIGHT
NATURE
RAIN
RESPECT
REST
SEED

SOLSTICE
SPARK
SPROUT
SUNSHINE
SUPPORT
TOLERANCE
WARMTH
WATER



Did you know?

A study from Boston University found that short bursts of exercise lasting for 10 minutes can have the same health benefits as hitting the gym. While the National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland advise that adults between 18 and 64 take at least 30 minutes of moderate activity five days per week.

If you find yourself unable to get in 30 on any given day, a 10-minute burst of moderate exercise could be enough to keep you feeling good. This would include a brisk walk, digging in the garden, swimming, cycling or dancing.

– Amy Wall, Women's Way Magazine

WHAT WOULD I SAY TO MY 17-YEAR-OLD SELF?

I see her walking the causeway. Me—twenty-two years ago. In pink and black; thick eyeliner, fishnets on her arms and a small midriff-grazing top. My seventeen-year-old-self still dresses like a poor punk kid, I think.

Seeing her brings conflicting feelings. I feel protective of her, knowing where she is in life. Knowing things, like the fact she can't bring herself to work a part-time job to afford that proper punk look she craves. She doesn't have the confidence.

"Hi," I say, pulling my car over. "You called for me..." I pause. That permanent scowl meets me. "You're going to the beach, aren't you? I say. "I'll give you a lift."

She is hoping I won't see the fear in her eyes. That she is sick with self-hatred. She has honed her frown to appear many things she is not. A frown is a good defence. It can hide vulnerability, naiveté, desperation, fear.

She looks wary and confused. Then she remembers. "It's you... future me," she says. "I mean; me from the future...?" She fumbles over her words, as if weighing them. I smile and nod. We drive.



“—
SHE IS HOPING I WON'T
SEE THE FEAR IN HER EYES.
THAT SHE IS SICK WITH
SELF-HATRED.

This desperation for love and acceptance is apparent in how she speaks. The way she scans for approval afterwards. I know what she is thinking. Her mind is claustrophobic with self-doubt and uncertainty. She will be thinking about whether she said the right thing just now. She always believes the "right" words will gain her respect and social safety. She wishes she knew what to say...

I look into her angry blue eyes. She struggles to hold my gaze. "I know how I used to agonise over everything I did and said," I say. "Our mother used to tell me: "Just be confident." It made me feel furious, confused, dismissed—more broken. I believed our own mother didn't even value me back then." She thinks for a moment, then nods. She has already reached these realisations herself.

My stomach is hollow and sad, the feeling of the world closing in all around. I remember how lost she feels right now. The weight of carrying that deep shame. It's so exhausting, it makes her want to give in; to disappear. She thinks it would be easier.

My heart throbs. I just want to hold this girl and tell her it will get better. But I don't...because I know she will ask when—and she won't like the answer. Instead, I pull in off the road and turn the engine off.

We just gaze over the mudflats and distant water for a few moments. The window is down and briny sea is on the wind. We both sigh out slowly.

She is more relaxed now, so I lay my hand on her shoulder. "I know how hard it is," I say. "I'm so sorry for all the trauma you have suffered; that you are still experiencing." Sunlight scintillates and she looks away.

CONT.

WHAT WOULD I SAY TO MY 17-YEAR-OLD SELF?, CONT.

I know she wasn't expecting this. She isn't used to empathy, so it sucker-punches her. I know you cannot separate yourself from all that's happened to you," I say. "It's all you see because you are carrying far too much."

She hides her face and visibly shrinks in on herself. "But it is not all there is to you," I continue. "Nor will it be the only way you experience life—or yourself. There will come a day when you are ready to put down your burdens. Then you will get to be the person you were born to be. You will take the world in your own two hands."

I tell her these things not only because it is the truth. She needs to hear this, as a child with no one in her corner. I have lived more than double she has, and I am a mother now. Someone who understands and responds to her child's needs. She needs to hear this from the mother she will become.

She removes her hands from her face and eyeliner comes away on them. "You're only saying this to make me feel better," she says. "I'm useless and stupid. I'm such a weirdo! And it's all my fault that nobody...likes me. I've ruined up my own life." Her voice trembles.

She steps out of the car, walking fast already. I know I need to get through to her before my time is up here. I hold my breath and walk after her. "Holly," I say. "I know you blame yourself for not being enough, for being too soft or afraid; for being too weak for this world. But—this belief you hold isn't your own."

She is slowing down, listening now. I continue. "It did not come from your own mind; it came from the people around you. You absorbed these messages through what they said, how they interacted with you. Then it became your reality because you believed it to be." She leans over the sea wall, sea spray settling into her hair.

"I know you may not fully understand what I'm saying or believe me either. But hold onto these words: Your reality can change. But it has to come from you." I see her attention visibly intensify on the last part.

Her eyes return to mine, clearer, almost resolute. Something potent has awoken in them that wasn't there before. Her hair whips around her, snarls forming in the wind. She looks elemental, I think. Her presence is less insubstantial, more concrete, now.

A thought occurs to me then. "Holly—can I see her hands please?" I notice the ink marks on them and then the paint stains on her elbows. "You are writing and doing art?" She nods. "You know they are powerful tools, then. Your allies and teachers that will support and help you understand yourself. You can always depend on them."

She looks at me then—properly. My hair is no longer bleached, my skin is free from makeup. But, I walk like someone who knows exactly who she is; who believes in her own personal value. I hold out my hand, and she takes it. Then she begins to see who I am.

I have been marked by my past, but—the lessons I have learnt along the way have made me the person I am today. "Thank you," she says. "Now I know I can be you someday, and that brings me hope." "You made me, ME!" I tell her. "Don't forget that. It was you who fought for us. On some level, you always knew you deserved better; to be at peace with your past, and especially with yourself."



“—
SHE ISN'T USED TO
EMPATHY, SO IT
SUCKER-PUNCHES HER.

WORDS BY HOLLY DARRAGH-HICKEY
PHOTOS AUTHOR'S OWN (P16) AND
SKYLAR KANG FROM PEXELS (P17)

A PROBLEM SHARED: WHEN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS BREAK DOWN



Our Grow support groups are where we share all kinds of life challenges in a safe, non-judgmental setting. The following fictitious scenario gives an idea of how we work in our groups when a problem is shared.

Fia's relationship with a family member has broken down and it seems unfixable. This is having a terrible effect on her mental health. What can she do?

After empathising with her, William, Alfie, Clara, and Laura share some of the strategies they found helpful when faced with similar situations.

William encourages Fia to acknowledge her emotions

It's okay to feel hurt, angry, or even confused about the estrangement. Suppressing these feelings only makes them stronger. Allowing ourselves to sit with our emotions, journal about them, or share them with someone you trust can be the first step toward healing.

Alfie asked Fia to clarify what is hurting her the most

Is it the absence of this person? The way the estrangement happened? Or feelings of guilt or resentment? Pinpointing the source of our pain can help us figure out what we need to move forward, whether it's closure, reconciliation, or self-acceptance.

Ciara likes to set realistic expectations

Ask yourself what you truly want from the relationship and whether it's possible. Rebuilding a relationship takes effort from both sides, and you can only control your part. Be prepared in case the other person isn't ready or willing to engage. It's not a reflection of your worth.

Laura wonders if Fia should reach out

Do you feel ready to consider reaching out to the family member in a non-confrontational way? In a similar situation, Laura found that a simple letter, email, or message expressing her desire to understand and rebuild the connection opened the door. If Fia isn't ready, she can take time to decide what she might want to say and how to say it.

“——
Can we ever
get back to
being family?
– Fia

CONT.

A PROBLEM SHARED, CONT.

As always, William reminds us all to seek support

You never need to face life's struggles alone. Talking to a therapist can provide tools to cope with the emotional burden of estrangement. Support groups like Grow Mental Health or trusted friends can also offer understanding and advice from their own experiences.

Alfie has learned the importance of prioritising his well-being

While challenges like family estrangement may feel all-consuming, it's essential to focus on our own lives and happiness. Engage in activities that bring us joy, surround ourselves with supportive people, and work on building our sense of self-worth outside of the relationship.

Ciara practices forgiveness to heal

Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting or excusing the hurt. It's about releasing the hold that resentment has on you. Forgive for your own peace of mind, even if reconciliation isn't possible.

William learns to accept what he can't change

Sometimes, no matter how much we want to mend a relationship, it may remain strained or distant. Learning to accept this reality can free you from feeling trapped by it. Acceptance is a journey, but it's also a gateway to healing.

Laura focussed on building other connections

She strengthened her relationships with people who bring positivity into her life. This can help fill the void and remind us that love and connection exist in many forms.

Everyone encouraged Fia to give herself grace

Family relationships can cut deep, and when there's unresolved pain or distance, it can affect every part of your life. Be patient and kind with yourself as you navigate this. Healing takes time. You are not defined by this estrangement. It's a part of your story, but it doesn't have to dictate your future. Keep moving forward, and know that you're not alone in this.

In Friendship,
The Grow Mental Health Meeting Community



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

WORDS BY SÍLE TRACEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LIZA SUMMER FROM PEXELS
(P18) AND JACK F. BY GETTY IMAGES (P19)

May 22nd, Bewley's Cafe, Dublin

GROW MENTAL HEALTH LAUNCHES TWO NEW PUBLICATIONS

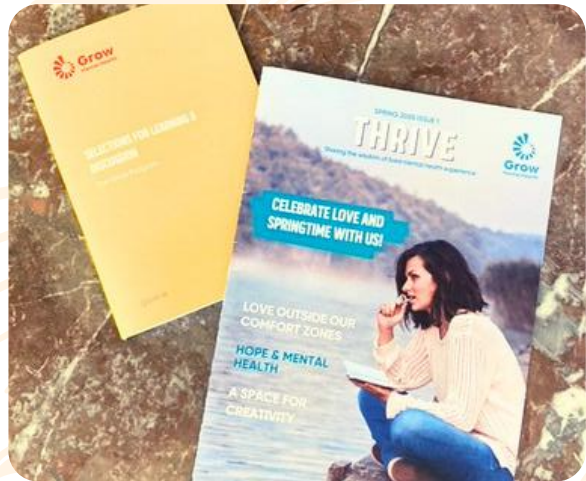
We gathered at the iconic Bewley's Cafe on Grafton Street in Dublin's city centre for a very special event. Together we launched two new Grow Mental Health publications - THRIVE Magazine (yes, this one!) and Selections for Learning & Discussion. It was a joy-filled event made all the better by the presence of many of our incredible writers and content creators.

Thank you to Dr. Jim Lucey for sharing his experience of the mental health sector in Ireland, and how connection and community are imperative in his view of recovery. Thank you to all of our readers; your pieces come from the heart and now that they are out in the wild through these two publications will surely inspire so many people. Thank you to the incredibly talented Luke Clerkin for sharing his songs and talent with us. Thank you to Bewley's of Grafton Street for sponsoring the event.

What a night!



Musician and Grow group member Luke Clerkin wowed us all with his performance.



Dr. Jim Lucey, Author and Inspector of Mental Health Services @ The Mental Health Commission



KATE'S STORY: SOME HABITS ARE HARD TO BREAK!

What would happen if you didn't do that?

I was asked this question when I shared the following statement with my support group at our weekly meeting;

Every morning, I get up, feeling a mix of disappointment about how yesterday went, but also with the tiniest spark of hope that today might be better. I sit down to have my coffee and toast and then for some reason my thoughts seem to take me down that familiar rabbit hole into the deep darkness of my past.

Most days I sit there for hours lost and when I finally do get up my head is like a whirlpool. The spark of hopefulness about today being better has well and truly faded, and it is sometimes followed by feelings of guilt or even shame that today, just like all the days before it is wasted. I once again feel I am just not able to do better.



When I was asked this question, "What would happen if you didn't do that Kate? If you didn't stay sitting down when you finish your coffee? If you set an alarm for 15 or 20 mins and found the discipline to get up and out for a walk the minute the coffee and toast were finished?"

I was thrown, because that simple question made me think and ultimately face the fact that I had become stuck in a destructive habit. A habit which only served to keep me in the mode of victimhood, but habits are hard to break as they very quickly become part of our routine.

With this question, I felt this week could be different! This question had made me accept what was holding me back. Made me realise it was the fear of making changes, the fear that I wouldn't be able to cope, which ultimately made my anxiety worse and kept me repeating the cycle.

Somehow this question and now the task given to me by the group that week along with a piece of the Program to support me, "Feel the fear and do it" made me feel facing this small change and seeing what happened just might be worth it. I also knew my group could be at the end of the phone to help me cope if I needed them.

KATE'S STORY, CONT.

The question represented a line in the sand for me; this week was to be different. I knew I was willing to see what would happen if I didn't sit for longer than it took to eat breakfast. Some days I was successful, some I wasn't. On the days I wasn't, I made a pact with myself not to beat myself up but to try again tomorrow.

On the good days I'd go for a walk, well more a stroll by the river, and on the days that wasn't possible I did little jobs around the house, or I would go to the library. So in effect I gave myself daily tasks which made me feel productive followed by a small reward.

I will say it took me months not weeks to feel better. Some days I would say to myself out loud "Kate, we're not doing this today."

I tell this story because this small change to my day had a huge result and more importantly I knew I was capable of starting and building good habits.

I still have my coffee and toast in the morning but now without even thinking I just get on with my day.

'Just as seeds need sunlight to grow, we need encouragement and motivation to THRIVE'.

“ —
...THIS SMALL
CHANGE TO
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BUILDING
GOOD HABITS

WORDS BY KATE SLATER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHISUKA AND ADITYA MARA
FROM PEXELS (P21) AND KATE SLATER (P22))



Connecting with the natural world around us can help drag us from the past into the present moment.

**WE DON'T ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING IN THIS WORLD ALONE,
AND WHATEVER HAPPENS IS THE RESULT OF THE WHOLE TAPESTRY OF ONE'S LIFE AND ALL THE
WEAVING OF INDIVIDUAL THREADS FROM ONE TO ANOTHER THAT CREATES SOMETHING.
- Sandra Day O'Connor**



LET'S TALK!



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