

SEEDS OF CHANGE FROM A WILD GARDEN

Letters & Stories of Mother-Women in Recovery



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Introduction

When we launched our earlier ‘report’, *Mothers in Addiction Recovery Rising: The Will and the Way*¹, we wrote letters that were read aloud on the day of the event. The experience of listening together was powerful and deeply moving. Out of that moment, the idea for this publication emerged: to gather those letters so they could be shared more widely and become a documented part of our living story.

The most important recommendation we wanted for that ‘report’ and as we have continued our journey is simple: grow more empathy and understanding. However, we recognise that these are not things that can be mandated or requested as beautifully illustrated in the words of Nora Bateson (2022)² when talking about respect and trust:

“One cannot, for instance, make a rule that people ‘must respect each other’ and expect that the respect will be any deeper than vocabulary. Respect is not some thing that can be mandated; it is produced in the specifics of context, in unique relationships and in the unmodel-able complexity of each person’s experience. A false respect may be put into visible practice as rules to abide by, but the mutual disdain may still infect the relationships in unspoken ways. For example, telling someone to stop being depressed, or to love another person, or to be trustful, is likely to produce odd configurations of the suggested changes. The unready change is a short-circuit of the necessary transcontextual mutual learning in ways that often lead to deeper insidious difficulties later on. The ‘goal’ of a linear strategy may be to generate ‘respect’ or ‘optimism’ or ‘trust’—but the culture of strategic productivity is ill equipped to meet the wildness of life. To produce the goal without the ready-ing undermines the depth at which ‘respect’, ‘trust’ and ‘optimism’ are the consequences of relational possibility, not mental states to adopt.” (Bateson, N., 2022: pg 2)

We hope that sharing these letters and stories may continue to grow spaces where empathy and understanding can be tended and where the ‘wildness of life’ is embraced.

The ‘Mother-Woman’

In our group we have talked about the importance of naming and describing the unique experience of being a ‘mother’ in recovery. This experience is not the same as being ‘just’ a woman in recovery. There are additional layers, responsibilities, expectations, judgements, and pressures that shape the experience in ways that often remain unseen. Together in our co-inquiry we explored this more deeply, and the idea of the **‘mother-woman’** came forward, a concept that helps illustrate how maternal identity carries its own specific challenges and complexities. This term ‘mother-woman’, drawn

¹ McCulloch, L. et al (2025), *Mothers in addiction recovery rising: the will and the way*, Dublin: Trinity College Dublin

² Bateson, N. (2022). An essay on ready-ing: Tending the prelude to change. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 39(5), 990–1004. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2896>

from the work of O'Reilly (2019)³, helped to articulate some of the nuances and challenges:

“The category of mother is distinct from the category of woman: many of the problems mothers face - social, economic, political, cultural, and psychological - are specific to their work and identity as mothers. Mothers, in other words, do not live simply as women but as mother women, just as Black women do not live simply as women but as racialized women. Moreover, mothers’ oppression and resistance under patriarchy are shaped by their maternal identity, just as Black women’s oppression and resistance are shaped by their racialized identity. Thus, mothers need a feminism of their own - one that positions the concerns of mothers at the starting point for a theory and politics of empowerment.” (O'Reilly, 2019: pg 20).

Naming the *mother-woman* is a step toward making visible what has too often been unseen and unheard; the letters and stories gathered here hope to carry that visibility forward in the mother-woman’s own words.

Letters of Strength, Stories of Insight

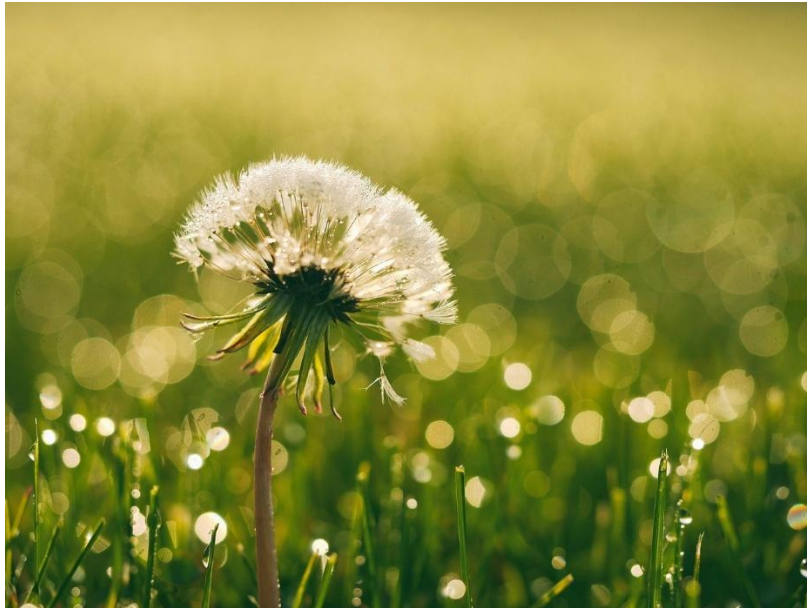
This booklet gathers letters and stories written by mother-women in recovery. Each piece is an invitation to pause, reflect, and speak to the person they have been and the person they are becoming. Some letters are rooted in struggle, others in hope, but all carry the courage and wisdom of lived experience. Alongside their words, each chose a flower - symbols of resilience, persistence, or renewal. Like the letters themselves, they carry meaning: small acts of naming what matters and what helps them grow. Between the stories, we have placed poems that resonated.

The title, *Seeds of Change from a Wild Garden*, reminds us why we turned to the wild as our metaphor. A wild garden is never neat or orderly. It holds both flowers and ‘weeds’, each with their own role in sustaining life. While flowers may speak to care, tenderness, and fragility, weeds remind us of strength, adaptability, and the persistence that can push through cracks in hard places. Both are necessary, and both belong.

In the lives of mother-women in recovery, change rarely follows a straight path. Like a wild garden, it grows in unexpected ways. The stories, flowers, and poems gathered here hope to honour that wildness – like seeds scattering into the world, carrying the possibility to take root, to grow, and to flourish. We share these seeds of change, holding space for the wildness of life, and inviting whatever may come in its own time and way while gently nurturing the possibility of empathy and understanding.

³ O'Reilly, A. (2019). Matricentric Feminism: A Feminism for Mothers. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, 10(1-2), 13-26

A story from Dandelion



Dandelion = survival, perseverance, transformation, from flower to seed to new life

I chose the dandelion because it mirrors the kind of growth I value - **quiet, steady, and full of grace in the face of challenge**. It reminds me that even the smallest, most overlooked things can be powerful symbols of transformation.

Strength: Despite being seen as a "weed," the dandelion is nearly impossible to destroy. Its roots go deep, and it keeps coming back stronger each time.

Courage: The dandelion doesn't need ideal conditions to bloom. It dares to show up and stand tall, even when the environment is harsh or unforgiving.

Perseverance: No matter how many times it's pulled up or stepped on, the dandelion persists. It reminds me that setbacks are part of growth.

Change: The transformation from a golden flower into a puffball of seeds ready to drift on the wind is a perfect symbol of life's changes and of letting go, trusting that something new will grow.

My Story: A Journey from Survival to Recovery

If I could go back and talk to my younger self, I would have so much to say. I would tell her that the escape she was looking for would only lead to a deeper trap. I would warn her about the nights spent chasing a high that never truly lasted, and the mornings filled with regret and shame. But most of all, I would tell her that there is another way: a way out, a way forward, and a life beyond addiction.

I am a single mother of two children. I had my first child at just 15 years old - I was still a child myself. I grew up in a household where alcohol was always present. We weren't a family that hugged or showed affection. What went on inside the house stayed inside the house. You learned to fend for yourself, to stay quiet, and to not feel.

I never really felt like I belonged. I craved the things every child should have - love, affection, attention, and safety. These were my most basic needs, but I didn't know how to ask for them. I found a way to fill that void through drugs. They became the thing that helped me block out the world and all the pain I was carrying. At the time, I didn't realise they were masking my feelings. I just knew they made everything stop for a little while.

As my life went on, I found myself in a violent and abusive relationship. It lasted for years, and I accepted it because that was what I had seen growing up. I thought that was normal. I lost who I was. I felt like a nobody. Drugs gave me comfort. They let me escape the reality I didn't know how to face. And I loved that feeling - until it stopped working. I wanted to stop. I wanted to ask for help. But when I did, I was laughed at. I shared with my doctor that I was thinking about going to prison just so I could get clean and their response: "I'll see you in maybe two weeks, we'll talk when you're back."

That moment broke me. I realised just how little support there really was.

I was in and out of prison from the age of 19. Before my last sentence in 2013, I made a decision. I decided I would go to prison because it was the only place I believed I could get clean. That's how broken the system was for me. I had been in and out of services for years, but no one told me where I could go. No one told me there was hope. No one told me I was worth fighting for.

Do people realise how hard it is just to get one hour clean - never mind meeting all the criteria to get into treatment? I couldn't do it on my own. I didn't know how. I knew no other way. But something changed in me. I was determined. In March 2014, I gave my first urine sample. Not a single substance in it. That was my turning point. I have never looked back.

My recovery began in prison. I was seven months clean when I left and went on to treatment in Coolmine. That was the next chapter of my journey. I graduated from the programme, went back into education, and eventually into work. I now work in the same service I once attended - one of the first clinics I ever went to for my methadone.

Standing there now, supporting others, is something I never thought would happen. I love my job because I've been where these people are. I understand. All we need is some understanding and some empathy.

Addiction doesn't just happen. Nobody wakes up and decides they want to become an addict. It creeps in - maybe through peer pressure, experimentation, or simply needing to escape pain. You might think you're in control at first, but addiction takes over your life faster than you realise. That's why compassion matters to simply understand how difficult it is. That's why we need to stop judging people who are struggling and start supporting them instead.

Recovery was never just about getting clean - it was about facing the world again. And the hardest part of addiction wasn't just the substance. It was how people treated me because of it. The judgement. The shame. The way authority figures made me feel like I was less than human. Over time, I began to believe what others thought of me. That I was worthless. That I didn't deserve help.

As a woman, that stigma was even heavier. Society expects us to be the strong ones, the carers, the mothers. When we struggle, we don't just get judged as addicts - we get judged as failed mothers, failed daughters, failed women. It's a shame that cuts deep. It kept me silent when I should have been screaming for support.

The fear of losing my children was the greatest fear of all. It kept me stuck, afraid to ask for help in case it was used against me. And even when I did ask, I faced barrier after barrier. I couldn't even get a GP - no one would take me on. I tried for two years. Eventually, after a cancer scare, our family doctor did take me on. I had to be at my most vulnerable just to access basic healthcare.

I was lucky to have my sister. She stepped in to look after my daughter so I could go to treatment and attend meetings. Many women don't have that kind of support. They're forced to choose between recovery and their children, and often, they end up losing both.

When I left treatment, I had nowhere to go. I was lucky to get into a transitional house, even if it was only supposed to be for six months. I ended up staying for 18 months. The staff believed in me. They saw my fight. They fought alongside me to make sure I had a place to stay until I got permanent housing.

Through all of that, I kept going. There were days when I wanted to give up. But something in me had shifted. I trusted the process. I kept putting one foot in front of the other.

Now, I have my life back. I have my daughter back full time. My son is in Australia, living his best life. I'm proud of how far I've come. I've grown, I've healed, and I've found purpose.

To anyone out there still struggling: You are not your addiction. You are not your past. You are more than the pain you've lived through. You are worth saving. You are worth fighting for. You deserve compassion, support, and a chance to rebuild your life.

Healing isn't about being perfect. It's about showing up, day after day, even when it's hard. Recovery isn't a straight line. There will be setbacks. But every step forward is a step toward freedom.

I found my way back. And I only hope that things continue to change for others - that more people are encouraged to get help. Not everyone wants it, I know that. But for the ones who do, they should know it's possible. You can recover. You can rebuild. You can live again.

Kindness

*by Naomi Shihab Nye*⁴

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.

What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.

How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.

You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.

You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

⁴ Nye, N. S. (1995). *Kindness*. In *Words under the words: Selected poems* (pp. 42–43). Portland, OR: Eighth Mountain Press.

A letter from Lotus Flower



I chose the Lotus flower to represent **a new beginning**

The lotus grows in muddy waters, yet it rises above the surface, opening its petals to the light. It reminds us that even in the harshest conditions, beauty and strength can emerge. The mud does not define the lotus - it nourishes it. In the same way, struggle and pain can become part of a story of resilience and renewal. The lotus is often a symbol of new beginnings, dignity, and inner strength. Its unfolding petals reflect the journey of recovery, step by step, layer by layer, revealing courage, growth, and the possibility of transformation.

From powerless to feeling empowered: my journey to a new lease of life

Sitting down and reflecting on what I would say to my younger self has brought up a multitude of different emotions for me- feelings of sadness, pride, frustrations, resilience and inner strength. As well as reliving some injustices that I have experienced from both my own and other people's actions. I would like to give you a look at how my life was journeying from active addiction into recovery as both a woman and a mother.

I am a single mother of four amazing children. Three of them have now grown into the most amazing young adults with minds of their own, and goals and dreams that they are reaching every day. And my nine-year-old daughter is just as strong minded and amazing. When I started taking drink and drugs, like most people, my goal was not to become an addict and to have my life fall apart, or to let my children down in ways that no mother wants to ever let their children down in. But sadly, my life and my addiction spiralled completely out of control. I lived to use and used to live. Meaning I got to the stage where I could not even take a shower or clean my home without a substance in my system.

When I was younger, I had many dreams, one of which was to be an amazing mother like the amazing mother I had. So to say the shame I felt was excruciating is an understatement. To feel and to know that my children had a drug addict for a mother was absolutely devastating and yet I could not stop using. This guilt and shame was compounded by the fact that I was a woman and a mother because although there was a stigma attached to a man who was addicted to drugs, the stigma attached to a mother in addiction was that much worse. This created so many barriers for me. There was the obvious one's of the guilt and shame and the 'what if' my children are taken from me by social services. Another barrier I faced was who will mind my children for me to get the help I need as I had destroyed most relationships in my life. I continued to break my families' hearts and yet I kept on using. I had become accustomed to the constant feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness that I somehow managed to normalise. I believed in my heart that I would die an active addict and more heartbreaking than that I was okay with this. I stayed in this space for years and the more I used the worse I felt so I used even more. Until I felt so small and insignificant. I believed that what I wanted, how I felt or even what I had to say just didn't matter anymore. I felt like even if I was to scream from the top of my lungs I still would not be heard.

I felt so overwhelmed that getting off drugs and being the mother that my children deserved was simply just unobtainable. I lived with the defeating thought of you can't do this and so I spiralled even more. By this time, I then had social workers in my life, and I knew if something didn't change, I would inevitably lose my children. And I also knew I would not survive that. So, I tried and failed and tried and failed, I still felt like I was not heard by the social workers and so I felt like I was just performing. That this was yet just another mask that I had to wear and it was all I could do not to completely fall apart.

I sought help from a local project and was given an amazing keyworker. For the first time in years, I felt not only listened to but heard. This was the first time I had experienced this since my life had completely spiralled into active addiction. As I went on in my journey, I started to believe that what I had to say did matter. As I referred to earlier, one of the injustices I had experienced was with doctors and social workers where I didn't feel heard. My keyworker didn't just treat me as a number or a statistic. She treated me like a human being with feelings. I then started another day program and was given another amazing keyworker who also heard me and valued what I had to say. I am under no illusions that I would not be standing here today without these two ladies. So, I started to grow and learn why I was the way I was and why I behaved the way I did. I gained new coping mechanisms to get through life. It was a tough journey but the most worthwhile journey I have or ever will take.

I eventually got drug free, but I had no childcare, so I had to do a community detox which I won't lie it was horrific. Trying to balance my recovery, rearing my children, moving house as my old house was a huge trigger, leaving my relationship for the sake of my children and my recovery, trying to build relationships back up that I had destroyed, run a home, pay my bills. And all without the use of a substance in my body. It was a struggle. But with recovery came new challenges around my children. I didn't know how to talk to my kids or how to be around them, and so, a new guilt set in saying it wasn't the drugs, you are just not a good mother. It was horrific and again the shame of admitting this was too much to bear. So for a long time I carried it on my own. I became overwhelmed of how I can get a meeting. I've no one to mind the kids. How can I get through another day? How can I quieten my mind? and how do I do all this while being a responsible, loving mother to my children? I also had the added overwhelming guilt of what I had put my mother, father, sister and brothers through and so, I fought harder than I have ever fought for anything in my life. I demonstrated extreme perseverance because my children needed me. But I still wasn't at a place where I thought I deserved happiness. This only came over time and by breaking down the walls I had put up and when I stopped wearing the masks I had become so accustomed to wearing all my life.

Eventually I found my rhythm in recovery and in life and I found somewhat of a balance.

I continued my journey and started to want things for not only my children but for myself too.

I went to college and did numerous different courses and started to build on the foundation I had grafted so hard to build in early recovery and I continue to build on it every day. I am now working helping other people who are on their journey of recovery in the same programme that I got drug free in and I absolutely love it. I know firsthand of the amazing work they do because they did it with me and I am honoured to be a part of that today.

I can say with conviction that I am a great mother to my children today. I have the most amazing supportive family. We are so close and today I can be the daughter, sister, auntie and granddaughter that I should have been. I have the best sponsor I could have asked for and the best friends, I am extremely lucky and grateful. Because of my experience I now approach everything in life a little differently. I make sure I hear people when they talk to me. I take a completely non-judgemental approach because I know what it feels like to be judged. And I spread awareness about recovery because for years this information wasn't known to me. I wasn't told by doctors there is another way to live or encouraged to find recovery. Instead, I was told you just need to go on more methadone or another tablet. I was never encouraged by the social workers instead I was dictated to, spoke down to and had my feelings shoved aside.

I was asked before "if you could change your past, would you?". For a long time, my answer to that was "yes", but asked that question today and my answer is "no" because I would not be who I am today without all the pain, struggles and turmoil. I don't think my children would be who they are either and they are amazing, and I wouldn't have found my path in life to do the job I do with the passion I have for it. So, I recover out loud in the light for those women and mothers who are still suffering in the dark.

I am nearly 11 years drug and alcohol free and will continue to spread awareness that recovery is possible.

I would like to finish off with a few things I would say to my younger self:

- You don't need drugs to deal with life. You need your family and friends.
- Always speak your truth even if no one else agrees (I'll be honest this one can be a struggle).
- Do not change yourself because of others' opinions of you. (Remember opinions are like arseholes and everyone has one).
- You are neither above or below anyone and never feel smaller than anyone because of their profession.
- The fear of doing something is always worse than doing it.
- When someone speaks to you, listen to hear.
- Nothing worth having comes easy, we grow through the tough challenges and emerge stronger for it.

Touched by an Angel

by Maya Angelou⁵

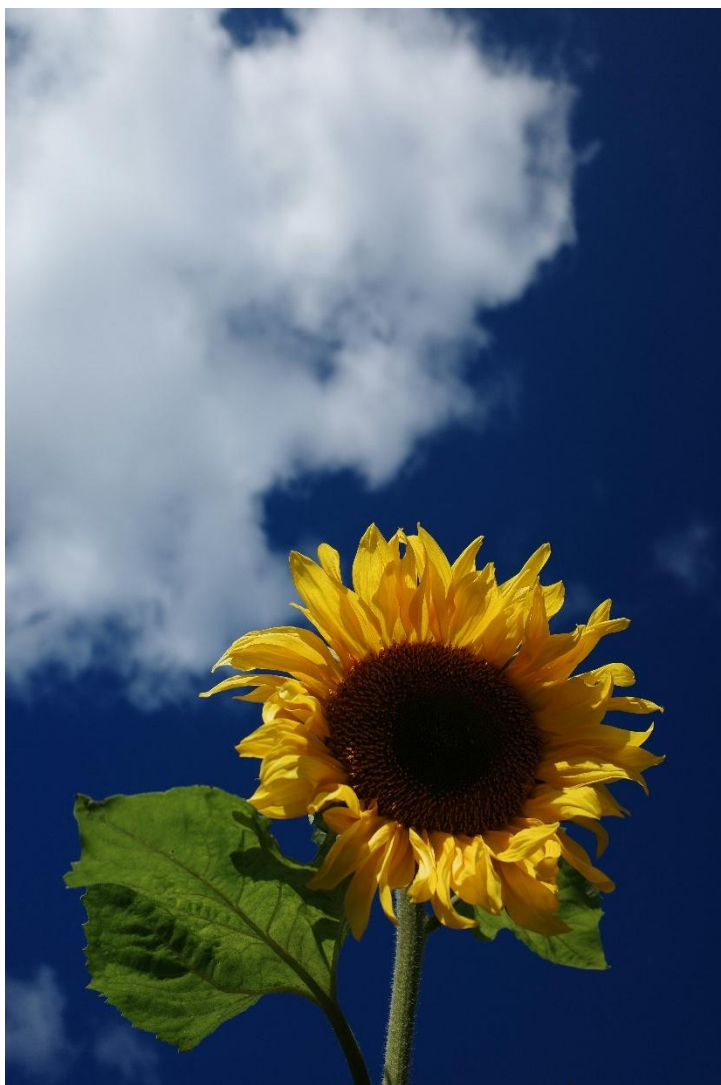
We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

⁵ Angelou, M. (1995). *Touched by an angel*. In *Phenomenal woman: Four poems celebrating women* (pp. 13–14). New York, NY: Random House.

A letter from Sunflower



I chose sunflower because **even on my darkest of days I still grow.**

A sunflower will grow in any weather and still stands tall.

The sunflower is a lesson in turning toward what sustains us. With its bright face always seeking the sun, it embodies hope, joy, and the power of orientation, choosing light even when shadows remain. Sunflowers grow tall, with strong stems and wide leaves, reminding us of resilience rooted in community: they stand together, not alone. For mothers in recovery, the sunflower could symbolise the daily practice of seeking what nourishes, lifting our faces toward healing, and remembering that even in difficult soil, we can grow toward the light.

For over two decades

For over two decades, I was part of a system that never saw me as a person just another statistic. But I'm here to tell you recovery is not only possible it's a right.

I spent 25 years on a methadone program that was originally meant to last six weeks. Six weeks. That's what they told me at the beginning. But no one ever showed me another way out. No doctor ever sat me down and said, you can recover, I was handed a script, given a dose, and told to carry on. I wasn't guided. I wasn't supported. I was managed. I became a case file, a number, a daily routine in a system that never really expected me to heal.

During those years, I was a single mother with no support system. Just me and my two children who were my entire world. I didn't reach out for help, not because I didn't want it, but because I was terrified of what might happen if I did. I feared judgement. I feared stigma. And most of all, I feared losing my kids.

The system doesn't make it easy for mothers to ask for help. Especially when you're alone. Especially when your only support is the very thing you're afraid of losing. The shame was suffocating. But so was pretending I was okay.

Through it all, I tried to keep going for them. I showed up the best I could, even when I felt like I was falling apart inside. There were birthdays I barely remember and moments I wish I could rewrite. But I held on. Because love kept me alive even when hope felt out of reach.

And then my grandson was born. That little boy changed everything. Even while still tethered to the program, still stuck in the same cycle, his life ignited something in me. I saw in him a future that I didn't want to miss. I didn't want to be a shadow in his life. I wanted to be whole. Present. Sober

I finally got clean just a week after my 43rd birthday. Not because someone fixed me, but because I found the strength to demand more for myself, for my children, and for my grandson. I walked away from a system that had kept me sedated and forgotten. And I began to reclaim my life.

Recovery wasn't handed to me. I fought for it.

I learned that recovery isn't one size fits all. It's not a pill or a program. It's connection, compassion, and choice. It's being seen and heard and told, "You are not broken. You are healing."

Today, I speak out because too many people are still being kept in cycles that were never built to help them thrive. Too many mothers are afraid to ask for help because the price feels too high. Too many lives are being reduced to dosages and policy decisions, instead of stories and hope.

I am more than a number.

I am a mother. A grandmother. A woman in long-term recovery.

And my story doesn't end in silence it begins there.

We talk about recovery, but we don't talk enough about stigma and how it keeps people sick. There's the public stigma the judgmental looks, the whispers, the headlines that paint every person who uses drugs as dangerous or unfit. Then there's institutional stigma systems that overprescribe but under-support, that offer punishment instead of pathways, and that expect silence from people who are already suffering.

But the worst, in many ways, is internalized stigma. That voice in your own head saying, You're a bad mother. You're beyond help. You'll never be enough. No one will ever understand. That voice almost broke me more than the addiction ever did. It kept me isolated and silent.

For years, I carried all three. I was afraid to ask for help because I thought needing help made me weak. I believed that if people knew the truth, they'd take my kids. I believed that being on methadone meant I had failed. I believed I was nothing more than an addict and would die an active addict. But stigma lies. And recovery tells the truth.

I speak out not just for myself but for every mother who's still trapped in silence. Every mother who's scared to reach out. Every mother on a program they were never meant to stay on. Every family member who wants to help but doesn't know how.

We don't need more judgment. We need understanding.

We don't need more barriers. We need bridges.

We don't need more shame. We need to be seen.

Love after Love

by Derek Walcott⁶

The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door,
in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.

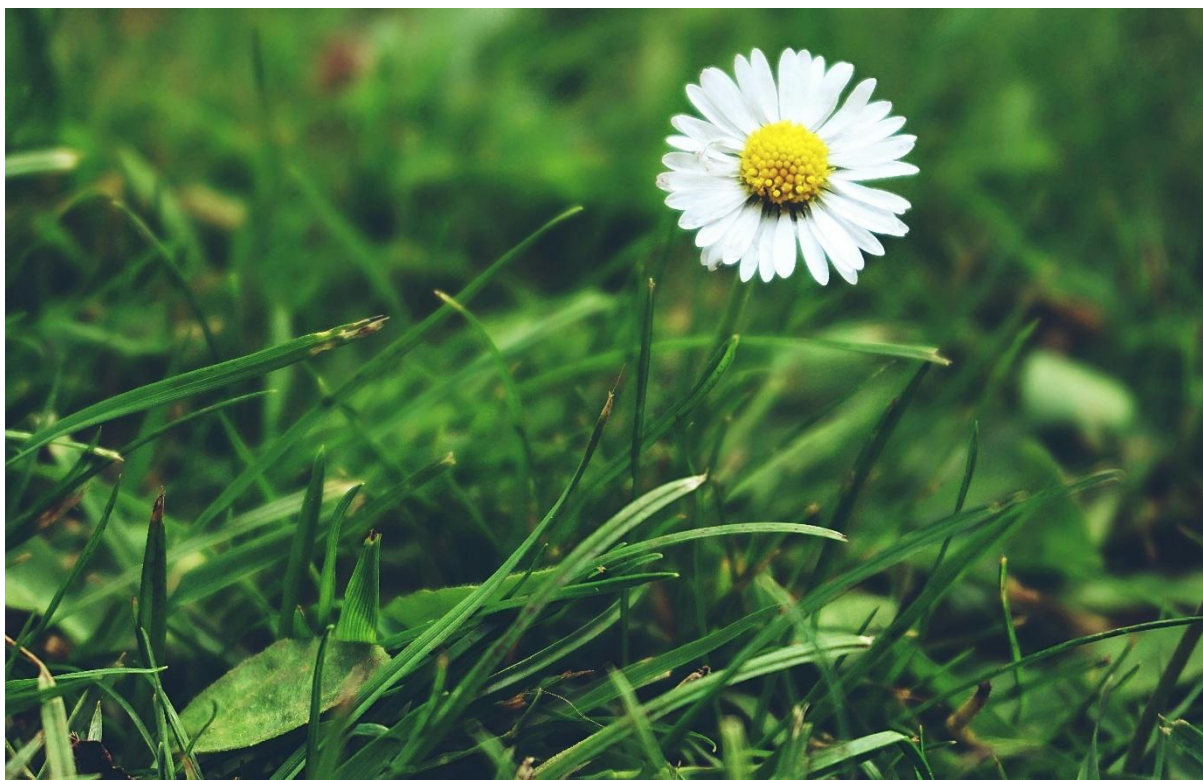
Give wine. Give bread, Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

⁶ Walcott, D. (1986). *Love after love*. In *Collected poems, 1948–1984* (p. 328). New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

A story by Daisy



I chose daisy because it is a delicate symbol of **purity, innocence, and new beginnings**. A bloom that carries the essence of cheerfulness, love, loyalty, and the quiet strength of motherhood.

The daisy carries a quiet strength in its simplicity. Often found in open fields, it thrives without fuss, reminding us that beauty doesn't have to be rare or elaborate to matter. With its white petals radiating around a golden centre, the daisy speaks to innocence, renewal, and beginnings that emerge from the everyday. The daisy can symbolise gentleness in the face of struggle, the courage to begin again, and the reminder that healing is not always grand - it can be tender, small, and quietly persistent.

Remember Where You Came From

There's a phrase that sticks with me: Remember where you came from. It's more than just a reminder of the past, it's a core part of who I am. One of the most defining moments in my life was when I sat in a small room in a treatment centre with my key worker and my mother. That day, I faced years of pain, confusion, and silence. And I found something I never thought I would get, acknowledgement.

Growing up wasn't easy. I carried scars, both seen and unseen. For years, I questioned my reality, unsure if the things I remembered had really happened or if they were just nightmares I couldn't wake up from. One memory haunted me more than any other a scar on the back of my head from when I was a child where it had split my head open. But the incident was never mentioned again. She moved on as though nothing had happened. And I grew up wondering did I make it all up? Was it just my imagination?

That question followed me through life, like a shadow. I never felt good enough. I felt unloved, unwanted, and constantly trapped in a storm of emotional doubt. Eventually, I reached a point where I couldn't move forward without going back. I needed to speak my truth. Not to shame or blame but to be heard. To be seen. To be acknowledged.

So we sat down, the three of us. Me, my mother, and my key worker. I told her everything about the physical abuse, the emotional pain, the deep-rooted feelings of never being enough. And I asked her the question that had lived in my heart for so long: Did it really happen?

Her response changed everything. She didn't deny it. She didn't make excuses. She said, "I'm not going to make this about me. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything I put you through." And then she said something that hit me deeply "How can I give you something that I didn't have?"

In that moment, something inside me shifted. The weight I'd been carrying for so long the guilt, the confusion, the doubt it lifted. I finally had what I needed truth. Not justice. Not repair. Just the simple, powerful truth. I wasn't imagining things. I wasn't crazy. My pain was real. And it was finally acknowledged.

The next day, I felt emotionally drained. Deflated, even. But I also felt lighter. Free. All I wanted was to call my mam and tell her how much I loved her. So I did. I rang her and said, "I love you so, so much." And she replied, "I wish I could turn back time."

That day will stay with me forever. It reminded me of the importance of facing the past not to stay trapped in it, but to be released from its hold. It taught me that healing sometimes begins with a single, honest conversation. And above all, it taught me to remember where I came from, not with shame, but with strength.

Daisy Journey

by Daisy

I wandered lost through shadowed days,
Uncertain steps through twisted ways.

Fear and guilt were by my side,
A heavy load I could not hide.

Yet slowly came a quiet sight,
Acknowledging my inner fight.
Through tears that fell and nights so long,
I found my strength to carry on.

My children, like daisies bright,
Bring me hope and morning light.
Their laughter lifts me, their hands guide me near,
Planting new strength, dissolving fear.

The storm now softens, the dark gives way,
I rise renewed with each new day.
Lost behind me, the future in sight,
In fields of gold, I claim my light.

A letter from Forget-Me-Not



The forget-me-not is a lesson in remembering what matters most. With its small, vivid blue petals, it embodies loyalty, enduring love, and the quiet power of memory. Forget-me-nots grow close to the ground, often in clusters, reminding us that connection and care thrive together, even in overlooked spaces. For mothers in recovery, the forget-me-not could symbolise the persistence of love, the courage to be present despite hardship, and the hope that even after loss or struggle, bonds and memories endure.

Hopelessness to Hopefulness

Being a mother means giving everything you have – your love, your time, your body and your soul for the sake of your children. But so does addiction, you give your soul for the sake of a bag, a pill, a line, a rock, a drink. The love you have for your child is deep, fierce and real – but when you're in the grip of addiction, even that love can feel powerless. People say: "Just think of your son, isn't that enough to stop?" And you wish it were. You wish the image of their face, their laughter, their need for you could break the chains. But addiction doesn't respond to love – it drowns it.

You love your child that never changes, but addiction dulls your light, clouds your mind and steals your voice. You find yourself making choices you never thought possible. You lie, you hide, you break the promises you built your identity around. Guilt becomes a second skin. You see the hurt in your child's eyes, and it shatters you. But by then, you are already drowning, and no amount of love can pull you out until you are ready to swim.

The pull of the substance comes first. It hijacks your brain, your body, and your will. It whispers lies louder than any truth: Just one more. It convinces you that you'll be better for your child after the next fix, after the next escape, after the pain dulls just a little more. And time and time again, it wins. Not because you don't care, but because addiction is a disease that overpowers care, logic, and even the deepest love.

Loosing yourself in addiction as a mother is a special kind of pain because the damage doesn't end with you. It reaches into the innocent eyes that look up to you for safety, comfort and guidance. And when you're deep in addiction you feel the split, the part of you that wants so desperately to be present and the part that's drowning, numb, unreachable.

As a mother you are supposed to be the heart of your family, yet addiction leaves you drifting through a haze, your mind fractured by drug-induced psychosis. Reality blurs; voices whisper from the shadows, paranoia claws at every thought. Your child's laughter, once your greatest joy, echoes like a memory you can barely grasp. In a moment of despair, convinced the world would be better without you, you may even attempt to take your own life.

Surviving brings no relief - only a deeper agony. You carry an unbearable weight of guilt: for what you have done, for what you haven't done, for the harm your child has witnessed. Shame saturates your soul, a constant, crushing presence. You hide behind a fragile smile, haunted by who you used to be, and tormented by who you have become. But somewhere, beneath the debris of your suffering, a flicker of hope still flickers - quiet, but alive.

Doctors, Tusla, professionals they say they are there to help and maybe some mean it. But when you sit in front of them, stripped bare of your past, your mistakes on full display, it's hard not to feel like a case file instead of a person. Their eyes scan, their words are clinical, controlled. You can feel the judgement between the lines, even if they never say it out. And yet, what they think of you doesn't even come close to the judgement you carry inside. You've already sentenced yourself a thousand times over. They may look at you with doubt, but you look at yourself with disgust.

The judgement from society is just as harsh - sideways glances, whispered gossip, the cold indifference of systems meant to help. But none of it comes close to the torment you inflict on yourself. Every mistake, every missed school event, every night spent chasing a high instead of tucking your child into bed played on a relentless loop in your mind.

Being a single parent is already a heavy burden but carrying it while battling addiction makes you feel like you are failing at the one role you were supposed to get right. You berate yourself with cruel words no stranger could match, convinced you are broken beyond repair. The shame was not just in what others saw - it was in every silent moment when you faced yourself and found only disappointment. Society's stigma hurt, but your own self-condemnation is a deeper, more unrelenting wound.

Addiction to recovery is not a straight path - it's a brutal, raw, uphill climb. The hardest part isn't just the withdrawal or the triggers or even rebuilding a life from the rubble - it's facing yourself. The inner critic becomes the loudest voice in the room, echoing every failure, every relapse, every time you let someone down. It tells you you're worthless, that you'll never change, that you're too far gone. And believing it is easy, because in addiction, you've already lost your sense of who you are.

Recovery means standing up to that voice every single day. It means learning to sit with guilt without letting it drown you. It's about picking up the broken pieces of yourself and realizing you're not who you were in your darkest moments. You're still in there, beneath the shame, the pain, the chaos.

Recovery from addiction is only the beginning, walking away from drugs was the easy part. What comes after is harder. You're not just trying to stay clean, you're trying to win back your child's trust, mend broken relationships, find housing, find a job, meet conditions, smile when you're exhausted and stay calm when every part of you wants to scream. Recovery isn't just one battle, it's a 1000 and most people only see the surface. And the hardest part is trying to find yourself again.

And while recovery is messy and painful it's also freeing, you begin to remember what it feels like to smile without needing a substance to get through the day. Recovery is not just about staying clean - it's about coming home to the person you were always meant to be.

Wild Geese

by Mary Oliver⁷

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

⁷ Oliver, M. (1986). *Wild geese*. In *Dream work* (pg14). Boston, MA: Atlantic Monthly Press.

An invitation to join our living story

A living story is a weaving of beginnings, unfolding conversations and mixture of voices, hopes, struggles and possibilities. A story that is alive invites you to be more than a 'reader' but a receiver and a partaker, to be with and witness what is unfolding within and among us. To notice that these stories, letters, and poems are part of a larger, ongoing story - one that grows and evolves as it meets the experiences of those who read, witness, and hold it tenderly.

The letters, poems, and stories gathered here could be imagined to be like flowers and weeds in a garden - each carrying its own resilience, beauty, and wisdom and which like seeds can drift and take root in unexpected places. Together, perhaps they are tending a space where a garden of empathy and understanding could grow, a shared space where the "wildness of life" could be embraced, and where relational capacities like empathy and understanding could gently emerge. As we note in the opening reflections, these can be tended and nurtured (not mandated), creating conditions where growth may be possible.

By engaging with this living story, you become part of "it". You are invited to notice, reflect, and respond. To sense the courage, resilience, and hope embedded in these letters and poems. To sit with what is tender, what is raw, and what challenges you. And to carry these moments into your own life, as gestures of empathy, understanding, and care.

This is not an ending but an opening, perhaps a gap or space. It is also a continuation, threading and weaving of the journey we began with *Mothers in Addiction Recovery Rising: The Will and the Way*. Each story and reflection builds on what has come before and opens space for what may yet unfold. In reading, reflecting, and responding, you are part of this - co-creating a living story that grows as we engage with it, together.

To explore more of our living story, our earlier publication can be found here

