



# ELEMENTAL

International Centre for Principles and Values of Recovery and Thriving

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*"We firmly believe mental distress to be a human condition which has been medicalised by professionals who create within society a "sense of other" and disenfranchise often vulnerable, distressed people. This is our statement of resistance."*

Marion Aslan,  
2009

## WHAT IS ELEMENTAL?

EleMental promotes the acceptance within society of mental distress as a natural human reaction and addresses the issues of stigma and isolation experienced using the following elements:

We hold a fundamental belief in the individual's capacity to recover from life distress, rejecting any concept of illness. Rather we see the root of the distress being in an existential crisis which of necessity results in a philosophical view of the experience.

### Core values

- The individual owns their recovery journey.
- We reject of the reductionism of medical theories of distress.
- We reject the medicalisation of misery.
- We network like-minded individuals internationally for mutual support.
- We support information gathering and dissemination of information and research

about the concept, process and elements of recovery and thriving.

- Campaigning against medical labels that say little or nothing about actual traumatizing origins of distress.

EleMental is an organisation without frontiers introducing and developing the elements of Recovery and Thriving with national leads in countries throughout the world. In addition to defining these concepts, we will focus on the core values of humanity, human rights, equality, dignity and self worth. It is a nonprofit association where all surpluses are reinvested back into the communities and causes we serve, our accounts are public and we accept no donations or affiliations to any medical-drug or madness/ illness group. We campaign for the human rights and equality of people that societies have tried to deem mad or crazy and deny both the biological and medical origins of these experiences and campaign for the personal meaning and potentially positive nature of these experiences to be recognized. We firmly dispute the reductionist theories, medical language and the oppression of maintenance model services.

## MARION ASLAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*Marion is a director of crazydiamond training, and has worked internationally for the past fourteen years in mental health statutory and non-statutory organisations, developing recovery-focused services and also as a motivational conference speaker and trainer. She has authored a number of books on recovery and thriving, and is vocal in her assertion that people fare best in recovery when supported by the mental health system, family, and friends to "make sense" of their experiences of mental distress - an impossibility for most, within current psychiatric systems.*

"I qualified as a teacher in the 1970's and worked in the learning disabilities sector for many years, then went into the business arena until 1994 when I had some difficult life experiences for which I sought assistance. Being described as seriously mentally ill was not only a surprise but also quite

an unhelpful concept and one that I totally refuted. I recognised that I had problems and struggled to deal with them in my own way, but became very frustrated that no one else was talking my language!

This fuelled my passion to work with individuals and learn more about how people recover. I charted my own pathway to recovery and since that time have worked within mental health services as a recovery activist, training staff and clients in developing more helpful concepts and ways of supporting people. I have repeatedly seen how people diagnosed as mentally "ill" are unheard, dismissed and often have their human rights stripped away wrongfully and unlawfully. The general public is easily persuaded by psychiatric deception which convinces society at large that this "chemical imbalance" is to be contained, controlled and

managed. This is often in the format of drug regimes which are disabling, lethal and most often prevent recovery,

taking the person further away from reclaiming their lives. People may be viewed as crazy when it is their life events and the actions of other people who are in fact crazy. I find the resistance to accept that people have become distressed by life events an immoral act which I seek within EleMental to address. I firmly believe mental distress to be a human condition which has been medicalised by professionals who create within society a "sense of other" and disenfranchise often vulnerable, distressed people."



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# Key Differences Between Recovery and Thriving



Here's some evidence of a slippery slope! Think the pills are bad enough? I suggest you study history and pay attention!  
-voxfuror

*To summarise; Recovery - Is the beginning of a destination. Thriving - Is what lies beyond the destination.*



Greetings from EleMental Coventry!

## Recovery

The fundamental issue is that it is seen as recovery from a medical condition or a social problem of the individual's life consequences. The politics are often denied or trivialised by workers and carers. The Recoverer themselves at this stage often has little or no knowledge of the politics of madness or the historical perspective of psychiatry

## Thriving

**Thriving is a political act.** The person who is thriving has often begun to develop knowledge around the politics of madness, and psychiatric history, and a desire for the political act of thriving to be recognised. The person's experiences and the process of recovery and thriving are seen and understood in a socially political context.

## Recovery

Service User, Service Avoider – the person may still prefer to use the terminology of the professionals and often aligns with their thinking. Often they are popular with workers and other service users as not too challenging. They are frequently invited to “speak out” on behalf of other service users and it is may be the beginning of a journey of self discovery, building self confidence and feeling “of worth”, but some service users may feel threatened by the concept of thriving due to the need for personal responsibility: there may be fear around coping alone when dependency has been encouraged; they may not believe they have the personal resources necessary.

## Thriving

The person has moved beyond “service user or service avoider” and now recognises that they are an expert by experience, they start to become emancipated, may regard themselves as a psycho-warrior – in short, they refuse to play the game of the professionals. Often, Thrivers are unpopular with workers and service users, as they are seen to be radicals and too challenging to the system. “Service users” either feel threatened by their knowledge or recognise that there is “a step beyond” Recovery.

## Recovery

A desire for justice is perceived and is a motivating energy. Trying to get justice is seen as the way forward in one's own healing and wellness.

## Thriving

There is recognition of injustice for self and a consequent determination to help others in order to live well with these injustices. Living life well is often seen as the way forward. It is not powerless acceptance or fatalism, it is more a “Sod it, I'm getting on with my life” mentality.

## Recovery

Many people still have links, even if tenuous ones to mental health services – counselling, therapy, medication, support groups, etc.

## Thriving

Thriving necessitates emancipation from the whole of the mental health system. It states, “a belief that the self possesses all the tools now required for wellness and well-being – support from natural links, work, friendships, hobbies, interests outside of mental health services.” Any contact with services is to change them, to work within them, and if so doing, not to participate in them in a way that validates a corrupt model. Thrivers often create cells of resistance and insurgency.

## Recovery

There is still, at some level, often an acceptance of the medical model, labelling and “illness entity” Many people will accept a label, e.g. “Bipolar” as a valid *raison d'être* for their feelings and emotional responses.

## Thriving

Total rejection of the reductionism of any singular reductionist model, coupled with a fundamental belief that “I was never ill or mad”, it was what happened to me that was mad! The disorders are abstract concepts! “They do not define me, my past experiences or my present state”.

## Recovery

There is a shift of emphasis from pathology deficits and illness to strengths and wellness. The assumption that biochemistry *may have* played a part is one aspect of recognition of the problem. At this stage, people are usually complicit with a variety of theories, and indeed may be beginning to forge their own interpretation of events.

## Thriving

There is an underlying belief and commitment that pathology and illness play no part in recovery, indeed never was the problem”; the problem was multifactorial, and others were as involved in the equation as self. Therefore the “distress” was a consequence of life, not a pathological symptom.

**Recovery**

To thrive means rejecting the need for long term medication as a crutch and involves making changes elsewhere to accommodate difficulties that arise as a natural rhythm of life's ups and downs. There is usually recognition of the hard work involved in developing one's own personal qualities and a reluctance to accredit recovery to a singular medical approach. "The long, dark night of the soul" is a prominent belief.

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**Recovery**

Although individuals are starting to take responsibility for self and illness others are often in control or responsibility is shared- for instance parents or partners. The person in recovery may or may not be willing to take sole responsibility for their descent into madness and their journey out; this is an area they currently explore.

**Thriving**

The Thriver recognises the importance of ownership and that full responsibility lies with the individual. They assert their autonomy from families and others in decision making. Often they are fully aware of their limitations, but also glimpse the potential in challenging self and others.

**Recovery**

The individual, for a variety of reasons may prefer to remain on incapacity benefits, disability living allowance or other subsidies. They may choose voluntary work or part time work with a view to returning to full time employment in the long term.

**Thriving**

Thriving essentially accepts a work ethos, requires the fulfilment of contributing to the community through work, rejects subsidies and seizes opportunities for work. They will actively seek work opportunities and if volunteering it is usually as a means of personal growth or enhancing opportunities for the future

**Recovery**

Those in Recovery start to explore new challenges but often will set limitations "I can do this, but not that..."

**Thriving**

Those who are Thriving are willing to meet new challenges, however difficult or painful or frightening with vigour, and know each new challenge is a risk worth taking. Additionally, they are willing to have a life separate from their illness or disorder. For example, they join clubs where those without disorder exist and co-exist and thrive in these settings.

**Recovery**

The person starts to make sense of the past. There may be a sense of loss or regret concerning past difficulties and distress, a feeling that one has recovered but that life has been unkind

**Thriving**

To Thrive means to embrace life because of what has been accomplished and gained through that accomplishment personally because of past difficulties, happy that the experience has made them the person who they now are, and recognizes the importance of continually instilling growth

**Recovery**

The person is learning to recognize early warning signs and triggers, and how to manage and self-manage episodes of distress. They often count on those in their support system to help identify their "symptoms".

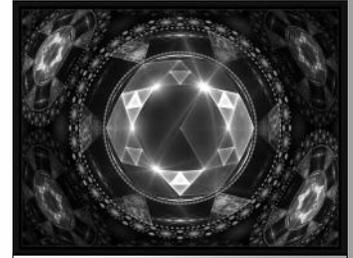
**Thriving**

The person who is thriving recognizes and self-manages break-through symptoms with little if any effort or disruption to work, school, relationships, etc. Management and self-management skills are second-nature, part of life as usual.

**Therefore, we say:**

**Recovery equals** medication compliance, awareness of illness or disorder, education about illness, acceptance of illness or disorder (i.e., moving through the stages of grief to reach acceptance), personal advocacy, etc.

**Thriving equals** advocacy for others, self determination, willingness to work or further one's education/ retraining to be at peace with one's accomplishments and self since the disorder sat down beside them, existing in the world as a whole person with acknowledgement of illness or disputing clinical titles/ diagnoses' to move beyond the illness/disorder to find happiness.



See us online at:  
[www.elemental.org.uk](http://www.elemental.org.uk)  
 and our allies at  
[www.crazydiamond.org.uk](http://www.crazydiamond.org.uk)

**KAREN'S THOUGHTS**

"Thriving is much more than maintaining and emulating the status quo, it is not aspiring to be 'normal' or mediocre. It is complete self acceptance and the integration of all aspects of self, especially the bits that are quirky, original and unique. It is pushing boundaries and the daily reinvention of self; it is this flexibility which leads to the constant self improvement and personal expansion which is Thriving.

I believe that service users may feel threatened by the concept of thriving due to the need for personal responsibility: there may be fear around coping alone when dependency has been encouraged; they may not believe they have the personal resources necessary."

EleMental Coventry



### EleMental Kenya

Hi voxfuror! It is my pleasure once more to ride on Marion's introduction; this is a rebirth; it embodies a new thinking on how to help mankind. I have attached a photo for Kawere widows as they tend to a farm during a dry spell. They represent a new thinking in the sense that despite their ill-health, they don't live in denial, but accept their condition and do not wish to hide anything, as would other people, and to me this acceptance is a positive step that in itself is symbolic of a healthy mind and which then makes the process of healing possible. We shall, hopefully, meet one day, maybe in Africa. Regards, Julius

### EleMental Coventry, England

*Some thoughts of the benefits that the group has given its members so far;*

Mutual and non-judgemental support.

A safe place to express yourself.

An opportunity to talk openly about feelings without fear of being labelled, criticised or rejected.

Inspiration to think outside the box you find yourself in. Empowerment and opportunity to take responsibility for your own problems and find creative solutions to those problems and issues.

Friendship and being on the end of the phone for each other.

Reassurance when talking about experiences and normalising those experiences.

Education and learning from each other's life experiences – crossing generations and up-bringing.

Challenge to change the pattern of thinking about and reacting to what happens to us on a day to day basis.

### EleMental Underground, USA

My pseudonym is voxfuror. I live in the USA, but I can't say where, as I work as an insurgent within the system. About 38 years ago, I was diagnosed with "serious and persistent mental illness". I was told I had a life-long disease, and that it would continue to worsen until I died, most likely at an early age. I stepped in & out of the system for decades. I hated the meds, and was quite non-compliant. I finally became firmly wedded to the psycho-industrial machine when my son got caught up in it through the schools. I, as his sole family member, had to participate as well, and while I was never court-ordered, I was EXPECTED to be fully compliant, if I wanted to regain custody of my child.

The longer I was in 'treatment', the more diagnosis I received, all with accompanying pharmaceuticals & incarcerations. I eventually became employed in the system, after not working most my adult life, and became the consumer leader in my state. It took me eight years to realize I never spoke at the multitude of state-level meetings I attended, representing my brothers and sisters, without a page of bullet points in my hand- that 'they' had given me. The very day I began to speak and act for myself and my community, I was squashed like a loathsome insect. In August 2009, I attended five days of crazydiamond trainings and learned of EleMental. ([www.crazydiamond.org.uk](http://www.crazydiamond.org.uk))

EleMental matches my own personal believe system perfectly, and after all these years of being told I was to keep my personal opinions to myself- as it would be dangerous to let on that a person might be OK without meds!- at last, I am free to seek like-minded people, and talk about the joys and the difficulties of living med-free. Able, once again, to experience my emotions and get on with my path. And help EleMental in any way I can in the USA. I wish I could say my name; it would mean a lot to a lot of people, but "all good things in time".

-voxfuror



sshhh! Big Secret!

### My Block Revealed by Barbara

I was young then; My family wasn't what it seemed.

A ten year old needed to know.

But no-one would tell. The secrecy was hurtful, The silence caused pain. A secret, unrecognised, unrecognisable pain.

The child wondered if anyone could be trusted.

Doubt was planted. Doubt of being valued or honoured or accepted.

Yes, of being accepted just as me.

My lack of openness led to Lost relationships

Lost love

Lost value

Lost wholeness

But now I'm FREE. No more doubt, I think!

Please remember, EleMental is not for everyone! We wish to keep our values, principles and policies pure. There are many, many support groups and networks for people who accept the bio-medical model, and this next step is sorely needed- throughout the world!

We will never attempt to change your mind or convince you to join us. We believe in diversity and meeting people where they are at.

### EleMental - International Centre for Recovery and Thriving

**JUST founded in March 2009!**

*The more we dream about personal and social change, The more we need people around us to sustain the dream, And support us during times of struggle and disappointment. The more people around us, The greater the dream and our sense of hope. The greater our sense of hope- The more we can change the world!*

The following are established EleMental Support Networks we have achieved so far without any funding.

- April 2009 Elementar Coventry, England
- May 2009 Elementar Nairobi & Kenya
- July 2009 Elementar Stockport, England
- July 2009 Elementar Oldham, England
- July 2009 Underground Group, USA
- October 2009 EleMental launch in the U.S.A. at Alternatives 2009, Omaha, Nebraska, USA



**Groups currently forming around the world:**

- EleMental Lille, France
- EleMental Cork, Ireland
- EleMental Athens, Greece
- EleMental Copenhagen, Denmark
- EleMental Hertfordshire, England
- EleMental Exeter, England
- EleMental Liverpool, England
- EleMental London, England
- EleMental Leicester, England

*EleMental is also committed to helping develop mental health support and information for the Zimbabwean communities both globally and in their homeland.*