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PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE NETWORK CONFERENCE

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THE PRINCIPLES OF THE MENTAL HEALTH ACT

Hello my name is Graham Morgan. I have had the privilege of being one of the judges of this competition. It is an honour to have been able to judge such good and powerful examples of good practise.

I work with the Highland users group which is well known across Scotland and even in Europe, and further afield. I love the work I do and the common desire that we all have to create a better world for all of us.

I was a member of the Millan committee in what seems some distant time and which developed the principles of the mental health act. I was involved with some of the work that turned the Millan report into an act of legislation and involved with its implementation in our own region. For the last year or so I have been a part of the mental health act review group which has been, as the title shows, carrying out a review of the act.

In our recent work it has become clear that the principles of the act are a bedrock of good practise that have helped establish this Scottish legislation as an example of excellence across the world. It is wonderful to have principles of

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the voice of users and carers

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conduct and approach and value that underlie something which, while it applies to anyone with a mental illness, especially applies to those desperate times when that minority of us lose the ability to live in safety.

To detain someone when they have usually done nothing wrong, and nothing approaching the criminal is at first glance such a shocking thing to do .

That it needs to be done is deeply dispiriting and should disturb the conscience of any fair minded person, but the fact that that process is underlined with principles of equality and benefit and the very minimum restriction that can be done, this gives me hope and makes me believe that, whatever the ills of our society, whatever the indignities we visit on those who do not have carefree lives, who do not have lives that celebrate the every day, who do not greet the morning with joy or have huge bubbling circles of friends and helpers but instead see the glimmer of hope as an insult to the reality of the everyday. At least we have a humane response to deal with these sad times.

When you go through this and lose your way and can no longer make sense of life and everything spirals out of control, so much so that that bedrock, that only certainty life, stops making sense and becomes something that can be glibly discarded and, in these states, where there is no certainty and confusion and distortion builds and we lose control and cannot, however much we wish, live the life that normal ordinary people lead and those normal people see our despair and intervene and say we cannot allow you to lose everything, we need you to keep together and keep safe and come back to our safer realer world but in order to do this, we are going to force you and control you and take away your freedom and autonomy and independence. In order to preserve you we will remove confidence, faith and joy and we know you have done nothing wrong but we have the right enshrined in society to do these greivous things in the hope and sometimes the certainty that one day you will thank us for this.

In this atmosphere where we may feel we have lost everything, it is heartening, it is wonderful that we have a society which asserts its humanity, its hope and faith in recovery from the most awful of situations with a set a principles that illuminate the right we all have to rights, the right we all have to respect and fairness and equality and to have a voice and to have the voice of those that we love respected too.

But principles are words; they remain meaningless unless we live in a culture and environment that makes them real they are a gloss that demean humanity if we don't believe in them and carry them out; they are an insult, if we live with indignity and are given further indignity by promises that beckon with their own falseness.

Let me illustrate the importance of all this; less than three months ago, as I write this, I was under a section. For weeks on end I had a nurse at the door to my

room, if I left it they followed within arms length of me , if I wanted to leave the ward this was forbidden, I couldn't even approach the doors without people becoming alarmed and gathering around me. My only desire was to get away and periodically I would manage and I would run and run and the alarms would blare and these people would be rushing after me and gathering around me and holding me and stopping me going anywhere, telling me that they would physically carry me back to the ward and summoning the people from the locked ward to get me back to what seemed to me to be my inhumane, unjust, horrible prison where no one believed me, no one would let me do what to me seemed the only way I could rescue those that I love from my evilness.

And I despaired and I was alone and I was scared and at the same time I knew that it was my fault and that all I could do was to conform to keep faith with everyone around me. And it was horrible.

And the point? Some weeks in, a recently qualified nurse on her first proper job came into my room to do her shift of obs and I forget her exact words but it was something like:

“Graham I have had an exhausting shift if you say once more that you want to die I will be so angry and will be so cross that I will scream. Do not talk to me anymore about it”

And in our 'right on' society there may be some of you who say that was disgraceful and insensitive and just plain old bad, and I have to say that before I repeated anyway all over again, all the reasons why I thought I should be put down, I had a twinge of alarm and conscience and nearly said nothing but I said my spiel again anyway and then I burst out laughing, my smile burst out of me and I felt such connection and, before I started this talk, I was going to talk about all the people who treated me and the different way they conformed to the principles of the act. To me she conformed in every way possible way and why? how did she conform? she never for one moment stopped treating me as an equal living loving human being , she never dismissed me, she never patronised me, she never lied to me or disguised her frustration, she never pretended anything other than the fact that whatever happened she was dedicated to preserving my life and my hope in the world and through her belief, through her wish for my preservation without a diminutiation of my essential me-ness, through her determination to speak to me as a person and to be forthright and not let me get away from my life and not to be coy about the things she thought I was doing wrong with my life she embodied Millan in that crude vigorous loving way that gives hope when it is distant. I don't even know if she liked me but I remember the first night that went on and on because as the early hours passed I sat at the dining tables unable to sleep frightened and alone and she came and sat with me and she was unconventional, fed up with night shift because there was no one to talk to, fed up with the nurses because they were internet shopping and fed up with me because

I wanted to die and her childhood had been spent with a person who wanted to die and she full well knew the effect it would have on my son just the wanting not even the doing. And that, that belief in me, that joy in the world, that confiding, that determination to be real is what underlines the Millan principles it is that fundamental respect we have for any human whatever their circumstances, that is what Millan is about, maybe not in the actual words, but what underlies the meaning of the words; seeing beyond the despair, being real, being there for us, giving of your self, giving the respect that any relationship however contrived or professional always deserves.

On the same ward I met a few professionals who were truly professional; they could recite the Millan principles backwards and forwards, they could tell me about my right to participate, my right to respect for my beliefs and culture, all the rights, all the issues written off pat and in the blankness of their words, in the arrogance of their superiority, in their career minded distant mediocrity you knew that they had grasped nothing of the principles.

Then in contrast you meet so many in hospital and the community that are there because they care and believe in us and sooth, with this compassion our pain. I remember a nurse who was so keen on the philosophy of care and illness and tenderness that you got bewildered because its one in the morning and he has just taken the can that you have wripped apart to slash your wrists with and really really wants you to understand and agree with why he's done it. Or you meet a different professional who gives so much that she worries for the safety of her job and you laugh at the incongruity of saving lives that don't want to be saved but will be anyway. Or you sit in the safety of your front room talking with a wonderful c.p.n who values everyone she works with and the horrors of what you have been through begin slowly to drift out of your memory and you begin to forgive that which should have been forgiven in the beginning of all this.

That is what the principles make me think about – its about believing in us when everything says give up, it's about believing in us as people when we have long since stopped believing we have any right to be people and everything that is being done to us seems to confirm this.

That is why they are vital

Thank you.