




Finding something positive to build your life around

For many of us, recovery hasn't just been about moving away from eating disorder behaviours, it's also been about moving towards other more positive things to build our life around and be well for. For example, new interests we want to try out, or old ones that we might have stopped doing because we have lost confidence or feel we can't do them anymore. Exploring things that give us a sense of meaning or enjoyment away from disordered eating has helped us in various ways, including:

- **Staying motivated**
 - **Connecting with others**
 - **Building our sense of self away from 'eating disorder recovery'**
 - **Providing a sense of focus, structure or purpose for life beyond eating disorder treatment**
 - **Finding a sense of community and belonging**
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"I still thought a lot about food and my body at the end of treatment, but it was more manageable than before. It meant I had a bit more headspace to find things that make me excited about life, and the more I did these things, the less I thought about food and my body. Now, life is so much more than disordered eating – I am connecting to who I really am."

Community groups

Some people have found it helpful to do things in a more structured way, using the time we used to spend in therapy on something else regular such as joining a group or class in the community. Particularly groups that aren't specifically focusing on mental health, but which have a positive impact on our general wellbeing. Eg. creative writing, art groups, gardening groups. Some of these groups are run by mental health organisations, so they can be good if you want a space where you are focusing on other things while still being around people who 'get it'. Libraries also run all kinds of groups and courses.

- [City and Hackney Wellbeing Network](#)
- [Centre for Better Health](#)
- [Well Newham Directory of Services](#)
- [Tower Hamlets Connecting Communities](#)
- [Cody Dock therapeutic gardening and volunteering](#)

- [Newham libraries - groups](#)
- [Hackney libraries - groups](#)
- [Tower Hamlets libraries - groups and courses](#)

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"I decided to join a writing group at my local library, even though writing had always scared me. It turned out to be **one of the best decisions I made during my recovery**. There's something almost meditative about sitting with other people, all quietly working on the same prompt and listening to whoever feels like sharing what they created. The mindfulness of it really appealed to me – being present with words and feelings without judgement.

The people I met were so lovely and supportive. **What surprised me most was how trying these new things made me less scared of putting myself out there. Wonderful feelings and connections can come from pushing through that initial fear.** It's become this beautiful part of my week that I never would have discovered if I hadn't taken that first step."

Finding events

Sites like [Eventbrite](#) and [Meetup](#) can also be good places to find events related to specific interests and other people to connect with. These are particularly useful if you want to find things that are outside of mental health spaces, or want to find one off events as well as regular groups. There are usually low cost or free things on there – people have also found activities on discount sites like [Groupon](#) or [Wowcher](#).

"I've found that having something regular in the diary helps so much for getting out the house when I'm struggling – even if I feel like I don't want to go, I can tell myself 'it's just 1 hour'"

"In the early stages of recovery it can feel like your whole life revolves around eating habits and mental health, so moving away from the structure and connections built in treatment might feel scary.

Some people I work with feel like they've lost sight of who they are outside of this, so I encourage them to be curious about where they can build connections outside of mental health circles that don't constantly remind them of the struggles they are experiencing"

~eating disorder therapist



Recovery Colleges

If you'd prefer to start exploring different interests in a more explicitly 'recovery focused' environment, Recovery Colleges could be a good option. These are run by NHS mental health trusts in every borough, and offer free courses and educational workshops to support wellbeing and help people grow within and beyond their mental health difficulties. The sessions are co-delivered by 'peer tutors' who have personal experience of mental health recovery, and the team can offer optional support for setting goals for what you'd like to get out of your time with them. You don't need to be under a mental health service to be eligible, so you can self-refer to your local college at any time using the links below.

- [Tower Hamlets Recovery College](#)
- [Newham Recovery College](#)
- [City and Hackney Recovery College](#)

"By attending classes at the recovery college I felt like I could have a few hours when I was around other people I didn't have to mask so heavily with. Over time this gave me greater confidence to be more authentic generally about the reality of my life."



Creativity

Finding ways to express ourselves creatively, whether with others or on our own, has helped some people to connect to themselves outside of therapy.

"Drawing became my route back to living, to finding my free will. I would do it every day just to have that space to play and not think. Embracing my creativity really helped me out of what would become 16 years of my life – it's changed the way that I see and feel about myself."

More ideas...

The [**5 ways to wellbeing**](#) offer some basic principles that can be helpful in finding other things to build your life around.

(NB. you may need to skip the 'get active' part if it doesn't fit with your recovery needs at this stage)

TIP: Some people have found it helpful to start looking into things before finishing treatment, to give themselves something to continue with when therapy ends.