

(This is from Roisin Barker, about her experience in group)

The new year is upon us, and while others are celebrating and making resolutions, I'm just staring at the calendar, bewildered. Honestly, 2016 is a year I never thought I'd see. Every day that goes by is one more day I'm not expecting; sometimes it's a pleasant surprise, others a painful reminder of days past. Last January feels like just a blink away; not because the last twelve months were easy, but because they were so incredibly difficult. Between January and September of 2015, I bounced in and out of the hospital so many times I lost count. Each hospitalization simply reinforced my belief that I was this "other," this separate entity not found in nature, this thing with no connection, no hope of connection, to the people around me. Every time my sense of being disconnected began to creep in, however, Thursday came right on time, and with it, group therapy. Though the faces came and went, the facts remained: I was not, nor would I ever be, alone.

Learning to interact with the other members of my therapy group, to follow the hop-skip-and-jump of their minds, to unscramble the mixed metaphors, was like solving for "x." There was always at least one part of the equation missing, and though it took some time, I learned to fill in the blanks. It wasn't a chore, but a privilege; getting even the slightest glimpse of the world through their eyes taught me more than anything I could possibly see on my own. Following others' train of thought comes easily now, and yet they're always surprising me. My nefarious mother shall henceforth be referred to in group as "Voldemort" at their suggestion, and thanks to one creative soul, the last four minutes of group are generally reserved for a passionate rant, followed by light applause.

The people I have met in group are as near and dear to me as my family, if not more so. When I think about reasons to stick around, I think of the fantastic group of people with whom I have had the pleasure of sharing my Thursday evenings with for some time now. They're an inspiration. I don't know where I would be without them--and I don't know where any of us would be without our therapist.

As I'm growing older, people around me are plunging themselves into unfathomable debt in order to further their educations. Repaying that debt, more and more often, is simply not feasible for those entering many professions. Social workers, teachers, and, increasingly, therapists, find themselves at a crossroads. By no means is their intention simply to line their own pockets; these are people who have devoted themselves to the service of others. They want only to improve lives, and it is time that we made that a viable option. Financial pressures should not be the decider of one's path in life. In allowing proper reimbursement for services, we pave the way for budding group therapists to bring together the people of this world who for so long have thought they were alone.

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