At the suggestion that someone with an experience of mental illness would be less productive due to needing the occasional timeout or a little flexibility from their employers, Richard Johnson laughs. “We could say that about any of the staff and they don’t all have a diagnosis of mental illness,” he says.

Richard (pictured left) is the Catering & Events National Manager at Hiremaster in Wellington. It’s a large company with a history spanning 40 years, and has staged some of New Zealand’s largest corporate, sporting and government events.

Terry Shore (pictured right) is one of Hiremaster’s employees, and Richard is his manager. Terry has been diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome and has also experienced heightened stress and anxiety. He works for three days a week at Hiremaster doing cleaning and sorting cutlery.

He secured this role through the Emerge Supported Employment Trust, a not for profit organisation which assists people with physical disabilities or experience of mental illness into mainstream employment opportunities. Such services help, with the support of willing employers, to ensure the inclusion of people with physical disabilities or mental illness in the mainstream workforce.

Hiremaster is one such employer, and Richard says he is more than happy to have Terry as an employee. “There is no issue. Terry is more than capable of doing his job,” he says. “He has been here a long time, about three or four years, and [supporting him] hasn’t taken up much time. He gets on with his job.”

“I think working with Terry has created more awareness among the rest of my staff that there are a lot of people out there who do have some kind of mental illness. I have got a young team and it’s good to make them conscious of that,” he adds.

Terry, who is also a musician, says that he is grateful to be working and be able to earn money. “It’s really good support, casual hours and it gives me the chance to work on my music,” he explains.

Skills and traits of people with experience of mental illness and recovery can include creativity, empathy, inner strength,
Kiwis pride themselves on a sense of fair play. Yet a recent Like Minds survey on discrimination showed that over 80% respondents had faced some form of discrimination as a result of disclosing their experience of a mental illness. This is a worrying reflection of the level of unfair treatment still faced by people with experience of a mental illness today.

- For people with experience of a mental illness, fairness is as important as therapies and treatment.
- Attitudes within the wider public have improved but unfair treatment still exists.
- Fair treatment allows every person to be the best they can be.
- Every individual, family, employer and organisation can contribute to a fairer society that better includes and values people with experience of a mental illness.

“Live so that when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you.”

H. Jackson Brown, Jr. (author)