

People share their stories of mental health recovery in work and life

# panorama

June Quarterly Issue 2019

- Sailing for recovery
  - Peer Work: Using “lived experience”
- Hope and recovery
  - Rainbow on the Plains: Hay Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras

**Contributors wanted!**

**We especially like to read recovery stories from people with lived experience of mental health issues! Contact us at:**

**[panorama@FlourishAustralia.org.au](mailto:panorama@FlourishAustralia.org.au)**



Where mental wellbeing thrives

NDIS provider since 2013

# Mental Health Recovery is for everybody



# Sign up to have a FREE hard copy of Panorama sent to your home address

- Recovery at home
- Recovery at work
- Recovery in the community

Email 'subscribe' & your mailing address to  
[Panorama@FlourishAustralia.org.au](mailto:Panorama@FlourishAustralia.org.au)

For electronic copy only, just email 'subscribe.'





Where mental wellbeing thrives

#### About us

Flourish Australia is committed to walking beside people with a lived experience of mental health issues as they progress along their recovery journeys. We passionately believe in mental health recovery, and are committed to providing the best possible support and encouragement to people so they can achieve their recovery goals. We offer this help across all 64 of our services in NSW and Southern Queensland.

Chair: [Prof Elizabeth More AM](#)

CEO: [Mark Orr AM](#)

Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270

[www.flourishaustralia.org.au](http://www.flourishaustralia.org.au)

#### Panorama

Founded in 1996 in one of Flourish Australia's predecessor organisations (PRA), Panorama has grown to become a lifestyle magazine dedicated to informing and encouraging the recovery journey of readers. Panorama is written, designed and produced almost entirely by people with a lived experience of mental health issues.

Manager, Development projects: [Jasmin Moradides](#)

Publications Office: [Warren Heggarty](#),  
[Grant J Everett](#)

General Manager, Inclusion: [Fay Jackson](#)

#### Subscriptions FREE

Warren: (02) 9393 9021

Grant: (02) 9393 9022

Address: Publications Officer, 5 Figtree Drive,  
Sydney Olympic Park, NSW 2127

E-mail [panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au)

[Warren.Heggarty@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:Warren.Heggarty@flourishaustralia.org.au)

OR [Grant.Everett@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:Grant.Everett@flourishaustralia.org.au)

#### Disclaimer

Panorama's content is not intended as a substitute for the advice of any specialised or qualified professional. The views expressed herein are those of the authors, not necessarily of Flourish Australia, or any associated enterprises, their staff, management, employees, or service recipients.

# CONTENTS

COVER: **John O and his instructor set sail from Dobroyd near Five Dock, NSW.** PHOTO BY SIAN STANLEY See the full story on pages 10-11

- 6-7 Using my own lived experience to support people
- 8-9 To make way for the things you really want, you have to let some other things go
- 10-11 Sailing for Recovery
- 12-13 Helen Blum: the very beginning of Australian Peer Workers
- 14 Trevor is doing it for the love
- 15 From YPOP to help desk, Kirt has a solution
- 16-17 Glenda Paton's journey towards becoming a peer worker Part II
- 18 Walking through life together, riding into the future
- 19 SPORT-O-RAMA City to Surf dream becomes magical reality
- 20 SPORT-O-RAMA Engage and Re-engage, YCLSS Street Soccer in Newcastle
- 21 SPORT-O-RAMA Fun Commitment and Support: Getting active with the Mood Active exercise program
- 22 The Man from Lightning Ridge
- 23 Goings on in Griffith
- 24-25 Rainbow on the Plains: Hay Mardi Gras Parade
- 26 Recruiting Peer Workers
- 27 Reflections of a new Peer Worker
- 28 SELF ADVOCACY Part V. Mel's battle for mortgage protection

## Middle pull-out section THREE IN ONE ACTION

#### JUNE (BLUE SECTION)

- A. Keeping In Touch. The value of building connections
- B. Getting Myself Around. The advantages of two wheels
- C. READERS' SURVEY page 1
- D. READERS' SURVEY page 2

#### MAY (PURPLE SECTION)

- A. Intimate and close relationships. Let's agree to disagree
- B. Sexual and reproductive health. Are we winning against STIs?
- C. Caring for children and family. Preparing for parenthood
- D. Education and Work. What's holding

you back from study?

#### APRIL (GREEN SECTION)

- A. Safety of Others. Responsibility towards others
- B. Alcohol. the dangers of mixing alcohol with medications
- C. Drugs: Pill testing
- D. Friendship. The ABCs of hanging out

- 41 The man in the glass reflects on life and peer work
- 42 What is 'Ability Links'?
- 43 Using the four pillars to care for carers
- 44 The Gardening Gang Gets Going
- 45 Music Review. RUNNING FOLK by Jeff Tooth
- 46-48 Coming home to Embark
- 49 BACK ON TRACK HEALTH: My Skin
- 50 BACK ON TRACK HEALTH: Chest pain
- 51 BACK ON TRACK HEALTH: Going to the Toilet - Bowel cancer is treatable and beatable if detected early!
- 52 Hope won't forget
- 53 Staying on top of it
- 54 Three Great Challenges for us all
- 55 A Gold Service Provider
- 56 PRESTIGE PETS A curious clowder of calm at the charming cat cafe
- 57 TRAVEL with Edwina: my favourite things about Tokyo
- 58 Skills for dealing with shame
- 59 Exploring Veganism

#### EMPLOYMENT PANORAMA

- 60 Funeral Attendant.
- 61 Employers are crying out for empathy
- 62 Employers are crying out for: The power of teamwork
- 64-65 Work, fatigue and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.
- 67 More than token hiring

# CONTRIBUTORS

[Sian Stanley](#) (Photos) is a Mental Health Worker at Flourish Australia's Leichhardt service.

[Kylie Smith](#) is a Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Blacktown service.

[Anna](#) accesses Flourish Australia's Maitland, NSW, service

[Sue Matynia](#) is a Mental Health Worker at Flourish Australia's Maitland service.

[Janet Meagher AM](#) (Photo) is a long standing champion for the rights of people living with mental health issues.

**Trevor** accesses Flourish Australia's service at Wollongong.

**Glenda Paton** is a Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Orange service.

**Sam** accesses Flourish Australia's service at Hervey Bay, Queensland.

**Kirby Lunn** is the Manager of Flourish Australia's Newcastle service.

**Tania Curley** is general manager of the Mood Active program

**Jean-Claude** Accesses a number of different Flourish Australia services

**Leticia Franchi** is a mental health worker at Flourish Australia's Leeton service

**Mel the Bunny Mother** is a professional who is a long time reader of Panorama

**Tony** is a peer worker at Flourish Australia's Hervey Bay service

**Nerida Jackson** Works with Ability Links in Woolloomooloo NSW.

**Emma Burton** is carer advocate with the One Door organisation.

**Karen Delaney** formerly worked at the PEARL program, Warana QLD.

**Lachlan Smith** formerly accessed the PEARL program, Warana QLD.

**Charlene Del-Cet** Senior Mental Health Worker at Flourish Australia's Katoomba service.

**Peter L** accesses Flourish Australia's Penrith service

**Doris Kluge** is Flourish Australia's senior human resources advisor.

**Tina Irving** is a professional copywriter

**Neil Fenelon** (Photos) is the regular professional photographer for Flourish Australia

**Grant J Everett** staff writer/photos/design

**Warren Heggarty** staff writer/photos/design

**flourish**  
AUSTRALIA

Where mental wellbeing thrives

# NDIS

Flourish Australia can assist you to:

- Find out if you can access the NDIS
- Think about your current supports, goals and needs
- Meet with your NDIS planner and get a plan
- Decide which service providers you want support from
- Put your plan into action

If you or someone you know needs support, we are here to help.

**Contact us** ☎ 1300 356 874  
✉ [ndis@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:ndis@flourishaustralia.org.au)  
📍 [flourishaustralia.org.au](http://flourishaustralia.org.au)  
📱 /FlourishAus

**flourish** | NDIS  
AUSTRALIA  
Registered NDIS provider

## Contributors NEEDED!

We especially like to read recovery stories from people with lived experience of mental health issues!

Contact us at:  
[panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au)

A black and white photograph of a man in a white sailor's uniform, including a jacket with an anchor emblem and stripes on the sleeve. He is holding a detailed model of a boat. The boat has 'POLICE' written on its side and a sign on top that says 'CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS'.



# Using my own lived experience to support people

**ABOVE: Kylie Smith, Peer Worker at the Women and Children's Program**

PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

**What is does it mean to use your own lived experience of mental health issues to support other people? Kylie Smith, a Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Women & Children's Program at Blacktown explains.**

By Kylie Smith

My lived experience is what led me to this role. I started an online support group for women who live with a mental health issue, and I actually found out about this little cottage through the grapevine. I arranged to meet with Belinda Jenkins, the Senior Cluster Manager who ran things, and when she mentioned something about peer workers I was like, "Okay, I didn't even know that such a role even existed! So I could use my own experiences to support people?" I applied for a casual position, and I've been here ever since. This is my first role working in the mental health sector, and in October I've been doing it for five years.

The services we offer vary according to need. I started off working in the residential program, which is comprised of six villas located on site at Charmian Clift. This program provides around-the-clock supported accommodation. However, I'm now working with the transition and outreach program. This basically means working with families living out in the community. At the

moment we have nine families in transition, and three in outreach who I work with directly. Another couple of peer workers share the caseload with me here at Charmian Clift. No two days are the same, which is a good thing.

To be eligible for our program, a woman needs to either be homeless or at risk of homelessness. They need to have a child in their care, or seeking to have their child returned to them while they are here. They also have to be living with a mental health issue. A lot of the time there is some extensive trauma.

## How we help

When a mum first enters our program we basically sit down with them and ask what their goals are, then we figure out how to support them towards achieving those goals. We offer all kinds of practical support, and one of the standard ways I assist families in the transition and outreach program is to link them up with dedicated services in the community so all their needs are met.

When somebody first walks in the door there's usually a sense of hopelessness, and it can be hard for the mums to believe that there's a better life waiting for them than the one they arrived with. Considering where a lot of the mums have come from, it's incredible that they

can even get up of the morning and do half the things they do. They're all so inspiring.

Housing NSW will often play a big role in helping with the transition back into the community, as the women who seek our support often need housing assistance, whether in the private sector or in public housing. If they want to return to work then we can support them with writing a resume and by linking them in with job network members. Study is another major goal for many of the outreach mums, and we make sure they're receiving enough support to get the most out of their education. Linking up the ladies who have younger children with supported playgroups can ease the pressure of parenting and help with the bonding process.

I think we do a great job in working side by side with these families-in-need. We don't take over their lives: we work *with* the families.

By role modeling what good parenting is, what good living skills are, how to maintain wellness, and how they can work towards their goals. We've got lots of families who have had a lack of role models in their lives, so some mums can't even do basic things like put on a load of washing or cook a meal, so to see them build those skills is beautiful.

There are so many vital lifeskills that we don't learn about in school. I guess we take it for granted that parents are meant to be teaching their kids these things, but that's not always the case. This is why we do all we can to break that cycle right now, to teach all those essential skills that some of the mums may have missed out on.

I think in a nutshell we want to reach the point where they no longer need us, where peer workers and support workers become redundant. We always say that at the end of the day we want the women to "put us out of a job", so to speak. We want to set them up to live independently long-term.

To be able to see them get out and thrive and to - pardon the pun - flourish, is really good. It's nice to see things go full circle, to see the support you've given get implemented.

When the mums complete the program and leave here, I think they take with

## Recovery Story

them a better sense of self and the hope that they, too, can achieve anything.

## Centrelink

Centrelink plays a key role in assisting just about everyone we support. We have a lot of women in outreach who have never dealt with Centrelink before, and then all of a sudden they're divorced and need all kinds of support. Just navigating Centrelink can be a huge job in itself, sometimes.

There are a lot of situations where women feel powerless because their partner is the main income earner. If they aren't sure how they'd survive financially, then it will often feel as though staying in their current situation is the only option for them and their kids. However, it's very common that they'll be eligible for all kinds of Centrelink assistance that they aren't aware of. So many mums have never even *heard* of a lot of the different parenting payments on offer. We're lucky to have a Centrelink engagement officer visit the cottage once a month, and she runs a little workshop where the families can come and chat with her. We can also contact her at any time via email if it's urgent.

For women in need, knowing exactly what Centrelink assistance they're eligible for can greatly motivate them to get out of really bad situations faster. For instance, we just learned the other day that when you're accessing the Centrelink website and you go into a section concerning domestic violence (which a lot of our mums have encountered), you can hit an emergency exit button that takes you straight out of the Centrelink site, kicks you back to Google and wipes the search history. So if there was the chance of an abuser looking over her shoulder and asking "What are you doing?", this one button press can instantly cover the woman's tracks, making it safer to seek the information she needs. I just think that this idea is incredible and wonderful.

## A little help

Our funding comes from FACS (Family and Children's Services) and NSW Health. But we also receive other kinds of support from many organisations and businesses. So if we have a mum who's out in the community and she needs a new bed, we will liaise with an appropriate supplier to try and get a donation sent directly to the family in need. One of our biggest providers is Providential Homes, and they've

been fantastic in providing mattresses, beds, fridges, freezers, and all kinds of household products to our mums. And when the mums come to the end of their transition lease and they need another source of supported accommodation, we can support them link up with Wesley Mission or Mission Australia.

## Highlights

One recent highlight was meeting Michael Clarke the former Australian Cricketer. He visited Head Office to interview Mark Orr AM (the CEO of Flourish Australia) as a part of the "Choose Empathy" campaign. Taylah, who accesses our service, and I, were both approached to share our stories, too. I think they wanted to talk to someone who was working in a role of giving back to the community and also had a lived experience of mental health issues. So the two of us went out to Sydney Olympic Park to meet him, and I've never met a more incredible person to talk to. I felt like Michael was really listening to what Taylah and I had to say. He asked a lot of big, difficult questions, but it was nice to know that it's going to get a social platform, as you never know who your story will help.

## Final thoughts

It would be great if we could replicate

this program elsewhere because there is such an incredible need for services like ours. I think that with more women finding their voice and getting stronger to flee harmful situations - whether it's sexual abuse or abuse from their parents, drugs or alcohol issues or domestic violence - I think that one of the biggest barriers is feeling they have nowhere to go.

As a peer worker, it's kind of a humbling to be able to use my journey to give hope to the women I work with. I've had mums ask me, "How did you get through this? You're in this job after going through these things." I've actually got one of my transition mums at the moment asking me how to become a peer worker with Flourish Australia. She's at the end of her transition lease, and done a lot of public speaking recently for our women and children's program.

Working in this role supporting women in the program has helped me continue my own recovery journey.

Flourish Australia  
Charmian Clift Cottages  
WCP Blacktown  
(02) 9393 9333  
Open 24 hours

**BELOW (FROM LEFT): Ethan, Mum Taylah, Cricket Legend Michael Clarke, and Ethan's Dad Lachlan at Cathy Freeman Park** PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY





## “To make room for the things you really want, you have to let some other things go”

ABOVE: Anne relaxing on the porch of her new, clutter-free home PHOTO PROVIDED BY ANNE

by Anne from Maitland

I am a mother of three, and I also have many happy and healthy grandchildren. I raised my three children by myself – with some help from my mum when I got really sick - in the same house for 26 years. I tried hard to bring my children up so they wouldn't be scared of life. I got them involved in sports and dance activities and tried to be the best mum I could.

As a mother, we give so much to our children and often have so little left for ourselves. During their upbringing, I was sure to make time to express myself by writing poetry and doing other creative things. Some of my poetry has been published, and I won an Editor's Choice Award in 1992 or 1993. I have painted for a number of years, and I've got experience using oils, watercolours and acrylics.

During a traumatic period of unwellness in 1990 I was given a diagnosis of

paranoid schizophrenia. I had another period of unwellness in 1994 or 1995. At first I found it difficult to cope, but then I began taking a medication which makes me feel a lot better. While I already had difficulty maintaining my home before that point, I think that this traumatic period in my life was what led to me acquiring my hoarding problem.

**“I want to be able to enjoy my life, maintain my home, have friends and family over and be able to cook and entertain. That is why I work hard to take control of my hoarding problem.”**  
-Anne

One of the worst consequences of my hoarding was that it became difficult to have other people around for visits, whether they were friends or tradesmen, and this made my life very

isolated.

I've had assistance with my hoarding from numerous organisations and companies in the past, but as they didn't provide me with any ongoing follow-up support I just ended up going back to hoarding again.

### A major challenge

As my three children grew up and moved out of home to start their own families, our home became far too big for just me, so I requested to be transferred into a smaller one-bedroom unit. This meant I now had 26 years of clutter to sort out and clear up before I could move into my new home.

Flourish Australia supported me with this huge job. They assisted me in sorting my possessions for the big move by helping me separate everything into the following five categories: Keep, Op Shop, Maybe, Storage, or Throw out. Flourish Australia staff also supported



## Recovery Story

me in maintaining my house and keeping it clean and tidy during the sorting, and they were very good at supporting my mental health during this whole process. For instance, they would offer me suggestions as to how I could live in a more positive environment. Thankfully, unlike the other services who have offered me help over the years, Flourish Australia has continued to support me when I need it. I am very grateful for the guidance and support I've been provided.

### My new home

I am now living in a one-bedroom house, and I continue to sort and maintain my possessions to keep my home as uncluttered as possible. I have been looking after my new unit by using some of the skills that I learnt from the Flourish Australia staff. If I need to acquire something new, then I need to make room by letting other things go. I'm not isolated anymore, either: I receive regular visits from family members and friends, and some of my grandchildren have even had sleepovers at my new place.

### Becoming who I want to be

I've worked on myself in many ways. I attended an ongoing hoarding support group where I learnt to acknowledge my triggers, how to control my hoarding with steps and rules, and how to achieve my goals. When I first decided to take control of my hoarding problem I discovered that parting with things that I wasn't emotionally attached to was not as hard as I had assumed. I am also sure to regularly take some time out to just enjoy life. This could mean going out for coffee or lunch, attending yoga and Tai Chi classes, or exercising my creative side by drawing, painting and writing. I love to cook and I can really whip up a storm, but I haven't gotten back into it on a regular basis just yet.

### My hopes for the future

In the future I hope to keep my hoarding problem to a minimum. It's a big job, but I am slowly chipping away at living a

better life. I want to be able to maintain my home, have friends and family over, be able to cook and entertain, and just enjoy life. With support from Flourish Australia and a psychologist from the hoarding program, I am learning to be more assertive in taking control. I continue to see my psychologist at least once a month to help keep me on track.

I have a positive outlook now and I will continue to do all I can to achieve my goals, even if I stumble at times. I want to enjoy as much of my life as possible, join some groups, and continue my arts, crafts, writing and exercise.

### Advice to others who hoard

Seek help with your problems. Listen to the positive advice and feedback that you are offered. Try to learn from your experiences, and live a happier, more positive life. Never give up when things look tough, and keep your eye on the prize. Know that you can beat hoarding if you try, and be sure to ask for ongoing support if you need it. You have to believe in yourself and be respected for who you are. Life can be a challenge, but help is available. If someone suggests you try something that will help, try it.

Note that collecting and hoarding are two different behaviours. This article

from the Anxiety Recovery Centre Victoria illustrates the difference:

[www.arcvic.org.au/anxiety-disorders/229-hoarding](http://www.arcvic.org.au/anxiety-disorders/229-hoarding)

### Where to get help

[www.samaritans.org.au/news\\_article/samaritans-helps-hunter-hoarders/](http://www.samaritans.org.au/news_article/samaritans-helps-hunter-hoarders/)

[www.catholichealthcare.com.au/in-homecommunity/hoarding-and-squalor/](http://www.catholichealthcare.com.au/in-homecommunity/hoarding-and-squalor/)

[www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/live/report-local-issues/squalor-and-hoarding](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/live/report-local-issues/squalor-and-hoarding)

[lifelineh2h.org.au/get-help/groups/compulsive-hoarding-treatment-program/](http://lifelineh2h.org.au/get-help/groups/compulsive-hoarding-treatment-program/)

[www.hsru.com.au](http://www.hsru.com.au)

Further reading:

"Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving, and Hoarding" by Tolin, Frost and Steketee

**Flourish Australia**  
**7A, 500 High Street**  
**MAITLAND NSW 2320**  
**1300 779 270**

The next issue of Panorama will feature the story "Holding on to what really counts" about Michael and Penny and how they came to manage hoarding.





**ABOVE: John O (RIGHT) walks down the gangway towards the Harmony II two-person yacht for another great day on the water!** PHOTO BY SIAN STANLEY

# Sailing for Recovery

By Warren Heggarty

## How Sailability and Flourish Australia support John to pursue his interests

Getting out into the open air and doing something physical is good for us. It's good for our physical health and it's good for our mental health, too. What about sailing on the harbour? It's not just billionaires who do it. John O, who accesses Flourish Australia's service at Leichhardt, goes sailing every second week, thanks to an organisation called Sailability. John is keen to share his

experience with you and encourages you to give sailing a try, too!

Many people with mental health issues have their lives and interests interrupted and stop doing the things they enjoy. Flourish Australia aims to help people reconnect with those interests, or even find new ones!

Jason Balmer, who is a peer worker with the Leichhardt service, says it all started when John was talking about the things he used to like doing years ago but had stopped doing. He mentioned that he used to go rowing on one of the

many rivers that flow through Sydney's national parks. John also likes to go swimming and walking along the beach at places like Bronte, where he enjoys having a coffee. He finds it relaxing.

## Give it a try!

This led to the idea of linking John up with Sailability, a sailing school that gives people with disabilities the opportunity to learn how to run craft on the water. Soon, John went with support worker Sian Stanley down to the wharf at Dobroyd Point near Five Dock in Sydney's inner harbour Sian Stanley, to give it a try.

Jason recalled to John, "I remember when you came home from the first sailing session how you looked really, really happy!" John had to agree!

What exactly is involved? John said, "They showed me how to set up the boat. It's a two person boat with two sails. The instructor goes with me in the boat. I learned how to steer to the left and right and how to use the ropes. I learned how to tie the double knots."

We asked John where he sails to once he gets going. He said, "We sail out all around the harbour and spin around the buoys then come back. Then we have a break and do it again. There are about four other boats there as well."

What sort of gear do you need? "Before I go out I put sunscreen on, and a hat and some sunglasses. To stop the sunglasses falling off I tie a string around them. I also wear a life jacket and there is a circular lifebuoy as well."

John agreed when we suggested it might be good to try even bigger sail boats in the future!

Sailing isn't all John does. "I like basketball and I used to play soccer. I am a South Sydney (Rugby League) supporter."

John has been going to the library a bit more lately and read the book Rain Man. He has also recently received a DVD of the TV show Cosmos. He takes part in the sessions with music therapist Gina, which they hold in the private group home where he lives. He likes to play the guitar and the djembe drums. Then there are regular visits to the three

## Sport-o-rama

households where his mother and uncles and cousins live. His family are very supportive of him. "My sister lives overseas, in London. She comes home at Christmas."

Jason tells us that it's great that John can assist his mother with the shopping when he visits her on Fridays. Strong ties to family can be an important part of recovery. Every year, with the support of Flourish Australia, John will spend a few weeks with his Mum at home.

John is also a member at Flourish Australia's Buckingham House, where he takes part in regular outings and social activities.

### About Sailability

Sailability's mission is, "to facilitate participation in sailing and boat usage at social, recreational and competitive levels on inland, estuary and ocean water, for people with disabilities regardless of age and level

of disability."

NSW Sailability's patron is Paralympian Liesl Tesch AM. Along with crew partner Daniel Fitzgibbon she won gold in the SKUD18 class at the London Paralympics in 2012. Prior to that she had represented Australia many times in Wheelchair Basketball.

John accesses the Dobroyd branch, near where all these pictures were taken. There are a number of other branches under Sailability NSW. Here are some details...

[www.sailabilitynsw.org](http://www.sailabilitynsw.org)

Neil Anderson, Vice President  
Sailability NSW  
Email: [sns.w.vp2@sailability.org](mailto:sns.w.vp2@sailability.org)  
Russell McLaren, Executive Assistant  
Sailability NSW  
Email: [russellmclaren@lycos.com](mailto:russellmclaren@lycos.com)

**MAIN PHOTO: John and his instructor set sail from Dobroyd near Five Dock, NSW.** PHOTO BY SIAN STANLEY

**BELOW: John O (LEFT) in the backyard at home in Petersham, near Sydney NSW, talking to peer worker Jason Balmer, who is based at Flourish Australia's Leichhardt service**  
PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY



Flourish Australia  
Leichhardt  
152 Moore Street  
LEICHHARDT NSW 2040  
1300 779 270

## Historical Feature



# Helen Blum: The very beginning of Australian Peer Workers

**ABOVE (FROM LEFT): Desley Casey, Simon Champ and Helen Blum, all pioneers of the early recovery movement.** PHOTO COURTESY OF JANET MEAGHER AM

By Grant J Everett

Considering that Flourish Australia employs well over two hundred Peer Workers, it may surprise you that this role has only existed for a little over a quarter of a century. The very first paid Peer Worker in the country was **Helen Blum** in 1992, though back then this role was called something else: Consumer Worker.

Like all the Peer Workers who followed in her footsteps, Helen had a lived experience of a mental health issue that she would utilise to assist others who were going through similar circumstances. Peer Workers provide non-judgemental, empathetic, practical support, and are mentors and role models who can support people with a lived experience navigate the mental health system. Peer Workers often know firsthand what it's like to have treatment forced upon them, to be kept in seclusion, the distressing side effects some medication can have, and the stigma and discrimination people with mental health issues often encounter in the community. Peer workers can draw upon their own lived experience to provide a sense of hope to a person on their recovery journey.

## JANET

Janet Meagher AM was a founding member of several mental health Consumer organisations and has worked tirelessly for the rights of people living with mental health issues. She has been appointed to many Ministerial and National Advisory bodies in Health, Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Disability. Janet knew Helen for decades.

**As well as being the first Peer Worker, Helen was also the longest employed Peer Worker.**

## A CATALYST

"Ms Jan Whelan was the General Manager of Rozelle Hospital in 1992 and she was often surrounded by a coterie of people with a lived experience. Jan was getting more and more disgusted with how dehumanising and ineffective institutional care was, so she took a step that was highly unusual back then: she gathered a group of people with mental health issues and asked them how they could help to start a cultural change

for everyone with a lived experience. Note that the recovery movement hadn't been invented yet and people with a lived experience didn't have the human rights they do now, so it was revolutionary to consult with consumers of mental health services like this.

## A NEW DIRECTION

"As the system could be frightening and even outright detrimental in the long term, Jan wanted people with a lived experience to start supporting each other. This initial group developed a framework for employing Peer Workers (Consumer Consultants at the time) called The Consumer Consultant Resource Group. We knew that these new workers needed to be the sort who would be willing to make a difference by taking part in meetings and face-to-face discussions with the people in charge. My role was to actively investigate wards and other places where we could slot in and have an impact.

"Our first official meeting was in October 1992, and Helen was employed as the very first Consumer Coordinator in December. CAG (Consumer Advisory Group) also formed around this time. Helen's office was located in Cottage 18 at Rozelle Hospital, and it served as a meeting place for the early consumer movement. Cottage 18 was often filled with lively debates, but Helen was usually out and about working with people in need.

"Helen worked 13 hours per week on the grounds of Rozelle, and in order to maximise our impact Helen employed another half a dozen Consumer Workers in February 1993. Helen and her team provided advocacy and support, ran groups, attended meetings, and spread the news about what the recovery movement had to offer. Their message was such a success that soon Victoria started employing Peer Workers, gradually followed by all the other states and territories. A lot of well-known names within the recovery movement got their start around this time: Merinda Epstein, Peter Schaecken, Leonie Manns, Simon Champ, and many more. "Helen was very innovative. For instance, her office garage was a clothing store for people who had been hospitalised with just the clothes on their back, but she only offered the best quality items. She would source donations from Op Shops

and charitable people. People were welcome to take whatever they needed. Helen also understood the importance of pets, and offered pet-minding services for people who had been admitted. And anyone who visited Cottage 18 was introduced to the donations tin! When NSW CAG itself became homeless, Helen generously provided them with 2 rooms of her Cottage. This served as CAG's home until 2006.

## MY FRIEND HELEN

"Helen was very refined and educated and smart, and was a beautiful, beautiful person. We actually wrote a paper on ethics together. She was strong as an ox for people's rights. She was often underestimated, but Helen was truly a revolutionary. Considering how hard her life was, she was like the Little Engine That Could: *I think I can, I think I can...*

"Helen was a woman of great compassion who spent her life helping the most vulnerable and marginalised of people. When she passed away on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2012, her colleagues and friends – fellow veterans of the Australian mental health consumer movement - presented twenty yellow roses to her family to acknowledge how it had been 20 years since she was appointed as Australia's first Peer Worker, and how she'd helped pour the foundation of modern mental health services. Although most people have never heard of her, Helen will be remembered as the ultimate advocate... and for her unbeaten Scrabble skills.

"Helen was courageous, generous, a critical thinker, and full of perseverance and humour. Helen's son Gunter spoke of the many qualities he'd learned from her, and his hope that he could pass these on to his own son with the same style and grace."

## MARGOT

Margot McKay works for Flourish Australia's Katoomba service, and is Helen Blum's niece. While she was aware of Helen's work, Margot was quite surprised to find out how much of a forerunner her Aunt really was.

"I must have been in my 20s when Helen was first employed as a Consumer Worker. She was allocated a cottage on the grounds as her office and employed 2 days a week. She would spend a lot of

## Historical Feature

that time making trips to the wards to talk to people and encourage them. She was kind of like an Official Visitor in that she'd discuss people's experiences, what their needs were, and how the system could better support these needs.

"Back in 1992 Helen's work was groundbreaking, as back then people with a diagnosis like Helen's simply didn't get jobs. She had a diagnosis of schizophrenia and was really unwell from time to time, but Helen's employer at Rozelle was always very understanding when she couldn't work. I remember she would have quite long periods off, but her job remained there waiting for her, and she would always return to it as soon as possible.

**"We were all so proud of what we were a part of that we stopped seeing ourselves purely as ex-patients and instead saw ourselves as people of worth and value who had something real to contribute to society."**

**-Janet Meagher AM**

"During my childhood and teenage years she was often in and out of Rozelle Hospital as a patient, sometimes voluntary, sometimes scheduled. She could usually tell when she needed to admit herself for a short stay. It must have been interesting to go from being an in-patient to a Peer Worker at the same place.

"From time to time Helen had public housing around Balmain and Leichhardt, and sometimes when I was a kid she would live at our place for short periods when she was quite unwell. Her son stayed with us, too. Occasionally, when Helen was in hospital, my cousin would remain with us. Helen would visit her parents at Kiama numerous times over the years, and maintained contact with them throughout her life. She lived in the same area her parents had once lived for a number of years, and saw this place as her home. We would still see her from time to time.

"Helen had quite a few colleagues who meant a lot to her, and over time a larger and larger network grew from these small beginnings. Later on, Helen got involved with the Consumer Advisory Group. We'd have long conversations about her work over a game of Scrabble.

"Helen's work was highly political, as she wanted to empower people within the mental health system to have an impact of the way things are run. This was the beginnings of the recovery era, where people with a lived experience not only started to have a voice but also began to be heard, and it's easy to forget how controversial the consumer recovery movement used to be.

"Gunter moved to Melbourne and had a child with his partner, and Helen was over the moon to be a grandma. They kept up contact, but I don't think they actually saw each other that often.

"Much of my career has been in the field of child protection, and a lot of the people I encountered had mental health issues and drug and alcohol problems, so it's a world I've had a lot of contact with. I've also studied psychology at Uni. And with all the contact I'd had with my Aunt, when the Flourish Australia job came up, it felt familiar. When I started working here I thought I should Google my Aunt, and that's when I found her obituary. I was aware she was a forerunner in the field, but I didn't know she was the very first Peer Worker!

## THE VALUE OF FAMILY SUPPORT

"My Aunt's struggles didn't carry a stigma within my family. I spent a reasonable amount of time around her, and her health was always something we could openly discuss. Indeed, I had spoken with Helen a lot about her health and her experiences and the mental health system."

Sources:

"What are Consumer Workers and what do we do?"

[www.slhd.nsw.gov.au/MentalHealth/pdf/What\\_are\\_Consumer\\_Workers.pdf](http://www.slhd.nsw.gov.au/MentalHealth/pdf/What_are_Consumer_Workers.pdf)

NSW Consumer Advisory Group newsletter, "Vale Helen Blum", page 14, July to December 2012 issue

[http://old.being.org.au/files/our\\_work/newsletter/info\\_link\\_issue\\_31\\_final.pdf](http://old.being.org.au/files/our_work/newsletter/info_link_issue_31_final.pdf)

# Trevor: Doing it for the love



**ABOVE: Trevor has been playing this bass for five years**  
PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

By Trevor from New Outlook

If you ask me how I am today, I'd say I'm very good. It's probably the best day of my life!

I really value being able to express myself creatively with my music, and two years ago I finally bit the bullet and started composing. Now I have almost two hundred followers on Facebook! It gives me a buzz to know that there are people out there who like my music. Some of my followers are personal friends, but many of them are from all around the world and I haven't actually met any of them. I probably wouldn't have been able to start composing and sharing my songs without the confidence I have gained with New Outlook's help.

I've been attending New Outlook the whole time it's been at Wollongong. I've become friends with a lot of the members over the years, though many of them have moved on to bigger and better things. It's always bittersweet to see them go. These friendships, the chance to socialise and the familiarity, are what keep me here.

Something I love about this place is that

I really feel like I'm a part of things. New Outlook values member input – the staff always listen to our suggestions and requests - and they do all they can to accommodate our ideas. If they know you have an interest in something, they'll go out of their way to help you get involved with it. They're always very open to new ideas. For instance, I asked them if they could promote the benefits of veganism, and this led to the Veganuary event they ran in January.

**"I probably wouldn't have been able to start composing and sharing my songs without the confidence I have gained with New Outlook's support."**

I also suggested a music appreciation group, and that quickly led to the formation of The New Outlook Band (they're still working on finding the perfect permanent name). I know for a fact that at least one of the musicians of New Outlook comes here specifically to play in the band.

Something I really enjoy is the cultural

celebration days we hold on the last Wednesday of each month, as this allows us to explore other cultures and try the kinds of food that they eat. The first one of these celebration days focused on Spanish culture, and I love everything Spanish! We had a Latino guitarist turn up as a guest, and he was amazing. He was actually a friend of one of the band members, and he was kind enough to accept an invitation to attend New Outlook on the day for free. It's really great that we have visits from celebrities like that.

Having goals has really helped me and New Outlook as supported me in those goals. I've achieved many things that I've set out to do, like losing weight. New Outlook made this easier with their physical exercise groups. Even though these classes weren't all that strenuous (mostly stretching and gentle stuff like that), they still had an impact. Another major goal was to build on my confidence, and that's going really well. I don't think I would have been able to get any more confident without New Outlook's support.

Another goal I have is to start swimming in the ocean (between the flags, of course). I haven't really been in the sea in 25 years because of a bad experience I had where I almost drowned, but I actually achieved a part of this goal just yesterday: I went to the beach and walked in the water. And not just the shallow bit on the beach, but deep enough for the water to come up to my knees. Until then, the closest I got to the salt water was the safety of the rock pools. Actually, I might ask if New Outlook can take the members to the beach. It isn't far, and if we do it as a group we can support each other...

Personally, even though I've been a long-term member of New Outlook and I love a lot that's on offer, the main thing keeping me here is the music, especially the weekly band practice. The New Outlook Band always plays at the cultural celebration days, so we have to prepare for that. Like many things in life, I don't compose and play just to get paid: I do it for the love.

**Flourish Australia's  
New Outlook  
3 Station Street  
Wollongong NSW 2500  
1300 779 270**



ABOVE: Kirt can see a pattern, and we're sure you can, too. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

## From YPOP to Help Desk, Kirt has a solution

By Grant J Everett and Warren Heggarty

**It would have seemed impossible had we not seen it with our own eyes...**

The Panorama staff were discussing ideas with a group of people who access our services when we were treated to an impromptu display of Rubik's Cube speed solving. Kirt, who formerly accessed Flourish Australia's Young People's Outreach Program (YPOP) at Kogarah, claimed (correctly) that he could solve the puzzle from any random setting in under ten seconds.

For those who don't know, a Rubik's Cube has six faces made up of numerous randomly coloured tiles. The idea is to rearrange the tiles so that all the colours match on each of the six faces. Ten seconds seemed a bit unrealistic, to say the least, as it would take the Panorama staff longer than that just to figure out which end was the top and which end was the bottom! Assuming Rubik's Cubes *have*

tops and bottoms, of course...

While we all gaped slack-jawed in amazement, Kirt showed us exactly how it's done, and well within ten seconds. Even with a slow motion replay, we found it a challenge to keep up.

Kirt assured us that there are patterns to look for, and if you learn to logically following those patterns, voila! You've solved a Rubik's Cube. From there it's simply a matter of practicing to improve your time.

"You should get paid for that!" we said.

"I actually compete," said Kirt, "so I do get something out of it."

Rubik's Cube solving is a serious business, and there's even a World Cube Association that runs competitions in speed solving.

"The last one I went to was a few weeks

ago, and I'll be heading to another one in about two weeks time at Turramurra High School. There's a large hall there that people use for competitive speed solving,, and there will be about 100 other competitors and their families, so it's quite a busy day!"

"Do you bring your own cube?" we asked. "Yes, you bring your own," said Kirt. "They don't provide it for you, but they have rules and regulations to make sure everything is fair."

"And what's your record time?"

"Six seconds," Kirt told us, matter-of-factly.

Kirt, who also likes to sing, has recently started an Information Technology job with Flourish Australia. Kirt handles the Help Desk, where he responds to requests from workers who are having problems with their computers and related paraphernalia.

"After finishing a Diploma in Software Development at TAFE, I had been applying for work. Around the same time I had also gotten involved with the YPOP Kogarah group. They offered to help in my search for employment.

"They organised a placement for me at the Flourish Australia IT help desk. After 2 weeks of placement, I was offered a part time position.

"I've been working as an IT Desktop Support Officer for 9 months now, and I'm very happy working with the Flourish Australia team."

The 6AM starts were a bit of a shock, leaving a little less time for honing his cube skills, but we have a feeling Kirk might be well suited to this new lifestyle.

It's probably expecting too much of Kurt to solve our-day-to day computer glitches in under ten seconds, but with practice...who knows?

**Flourish Australia  
Young Person's Outreach  
Program (YPOP),  
Level 1/15 Kensington  
Street, KOGARAH  
NSW 2217  
1300 779 270**



## My journey towards becoming a peer worker by Glenda Paton: Part Two

**ABOVE: Glenda's graduation (with support from a very proud husband, Dave)** PHOTO BY GLENDA PATON

Last issue, we introduced our readers to Glenda, sharing the journey she has taken through mental health issues on the way to gaining the life that she wants. At the end of part one we revealed that Glenda and her husband, Dave, found out they were pregnant with twins...now read on

By Glenda Paton

I had a healthy twin pregnancy and an uneventful labour. Apart from being induced, I was able to have both the babies naturally, which was unusual in Bathurst hospital as twins are often caesareans. We were fortunate that a midwife friend of ours was able to get us into contact with *another* midwife who was studying to be a doula (a woman who provides guidance and support to pregnant women and new mums). She really helped support us through the pregnancy and postnatal periods.

Unfortunately, after our babies were born I became unwell again. My husband had never seen me like this, so all of a sudden he was a brand new father of infant twins who had to also deal with a wife who has mental health issues. This was a really challenging time for both of us, and we only got through it with God's help (as well as family, friends and various organisations around town).

Due to my husband's brain injury he slept very heavily at night, so we needed outside assistance to look after our twins when I was in hospital.

Everything happened in fives. My twins were about five weeks old when I was finally taken seriously by the mental health team and admitted to hospital after repeated unsuccessful attempts to get help. I spent five days in Bloomfield Hospital in Orange and five weeks in Panorama Clinic in Bathurst. My husband and the babies were consistently visiting me during this time.

**"A large percentage of Flourish Australia's workforce is made up of people who have a lived experience of a mental health issue, and it is a key focus of the organisation to employ peer workers."**

I had a persistent delusion that my thoughts were being "broadcast" to car radios, and that people driving past me could hear what I was thinking. This meant that when I was walking down the street I would get distracted and be unable to follow conversations as my

mind was elsewhere. Unfortunately, when I got some day leave from the Panorama Clinic it was right in the middle of the Bathurst 1000 V8 races. Having all the hoons around town constantly revving up and down the street wasn't easy for me, so I was content with just having weekend leave at Panorama Clinic until I became well again.

I spent a further five weeks at St John of God in Burwood, Sydney. The hospital patient transport people had to borrow a car seat from a nurse at Panorama Clinic, as it was unusual for them to be transporting twins. My babies could stay with me at St John of God, and for a small fee my husband could also sleep over. He usually came down for three or four nights each week, and he particularly enjoyed the continental breakfasts! St John of God was expensive, though we were provided with four paid weeks by the DOCS Brighter Futures program, specifically so I could have an opportunity to bond with my children. We had to wait a month for our private health insurance to get bumped up to the level where they could pay for a mental health admission, so Westfund paid for the final week there.

Many of the other mums I met in the ward had post-natal depression or anxiety, and I was the only mum who had twins. Other mums would wonder how I managed with twins, yet luckily for us our twins were very settled and content, we just had two to deal with.

### A setback

When my kids were in preschool, I attempted to change my medication. My psychiatrist had suggested coming straight off Clozapine and switching onto a drug called Solian. I had gradually weaned off Clozapine with no dramas in the past, but doing it suddenly was another matter. After about ten days of very little sleep I was at the end of my tether, and I voluntarily admitted myself to Bloomfield Hospital. I was becoming manic again, so I wouldn't stop talking and couldn't sleep. It was Mother's Day, and I needed help.

I was in an acute ward for a few days before going to Amaroo Ward, and then onto Panorama Clinic. My husband took the twins to his parent's place and stayed there for a while for help with



## Families and Carers / Recovery Story

looking after our kids. Whilst I was at Amaroo I visited the O'Brien Centre and came to appreciate the down-to-earth volunteers, the welcoming environment, and being able to visit somewhere that was off the ward.

I spent most of my admission wandering around Bloomfield, buying magazines and reading them in the sun at the golf course and going to Parklands. I also raked up the leaves at Amaroo and at Parklands to keep myself busy, as going from being a mum of twins to sitting in a mental health ward doing nothing was not helping my mental state. To this day I find keeping busy is what keeps me well, though I also need to make sure I don't over-commit myself to too many things at once, as that can also push me over the edge into becoming unwell.



**ABOVE: Twins Laura and Joshua off to school** PHOTO BY GLENDA PATON

Several months into volunteering, our team was visited by representatives from the hospital who encouraged us to study a Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work that the Mental Health Coordinating Council was offering in Orange. I secured a scholarship, and as I was only volunteering in the mental health sector at this point, I felt lucky to be given this opportunity. I studied the Certificate IV alongside some of the other O'Brien Centre volunteers and other students from other backgrounds.

### Finding my calling

A few months into the Cert IV I heard from an O'Brien Centre volunteer that Mission Australia was looking for a peer worker for their Personal Helper and Mentors Program. I had a successful interview with them and ended up working at Mission Australia for almost three years helping people in the community who have mental health issues. I had my own caseload of up to seven clients, and I also ran arts and craft groups. I enjoyed the work, yet I often wondered what it would be like to become a peer worker in the hospital. At times, I found it challenging being the only peer worker. And while most of the caseworkers had a good attitude towards the other staff and clients, some of the caseworkers did not.

I am excited to say I have continued on my path as a mental health peer worker, though in a different setting: Bloomfield Hospital in Orange. I am employed by Flourish Australia under the Pathways to

Community Living Initiative, a program specifically created to assist patients who have been in hospital for longer than 365 days. We primarily help the people we work with to establish themselves in the community in whatever home setting suits them best. I am currently in the process of securing funding from PCLI for a ten week arts program, and I'm gradually getting to know the seventeen male patients who are currently on the ward. At the moment I'm building a rapport with them and learning how I can help with their recovery and eventual transition back into the community.

### Looping

I'm employed two days a week on the hospital ward at Bloomfield, and I volunteer an additional day at the O'Brien Centre. In addition to three days a week at a very people-oriented role I also do some transcriptionist work, typing at home alone with just my computer and headphones. This schedule allows me to be a mother and a wife on top of my work commitments, and gives me enough variety to keep life interesting. Basically, I've found the perfect balance.

My story has now come full circle. Who knows what the future holds? I hope that I can still continue to make a difference in the lives of people who have mental health issues, and show clinical staff, consumers and the wider community that it is possible for people to recover and live a fulfilling life.

### Stepping stones

After I was discharged from hospital, I decided that the O'Brien Centre had been so helpful to me when I was a patient that I would volunteer with them. I always hope that new patients will see how the O'Brien Centre can help them with their recovery like it helped with mine, and I'm sure to let them know that they can still access our support even when they are discharged. At this point my children were in preschool two days a week and I was working from home as a transcriptionist for Charles Sturt University, so I had enough time to volunteer regularly at the O'Brien Centre on top of everything else.

### BELOW: Dave and Glenda holding their twins

 PHOTO BY GLENDA PATON

# Walking through life together, riding into the future



**ABOVE: Decreasing the sense of isolation was a challenge for me before I was introduced to Flourish Australia** PHOTO PROVIDED BY SAM

By Sam from Hervey Bay

Not having to struggle through the whole mental health challenge on my own anymore feels like flourishing to me. At Flourish Australia, I have others around me who “get it” and walk with me through it. It took time to build a level of trust and connection where I felt safe to open up. What I needed came about quite organically while we were walking through life together.

After graduating university I lived in London for two years working as a paramedic, that I absolutely loved. I have also struggled with mental health issues since I was 16, which had caught up with me many times throughout my life. About a year ago my mental health issues caught up with me again and my UK employers weren't very understanding about it. This led to me having to return to Australia and in doing so I moved in with family here in Hervey Bay, Queensland. After moving to Hervey Bay I found my mental health worsening, I wasn't working and I felt quite isolated.

Creating new friendships and decreasing the sense of isolation was a challenge for me before I was introduced to Flourish Australia.

At first I was apprehensive about going to Flourish Australia. I wasn't sure what to expect, so it took me a while to take the step to try it. I initially only attended the movie group on Wednesday

afternoon, but this was good because I didn't feel pressured to start talking to people. Eventually I started feeling better about coming in and hanging out with people at Flourish Australia. Each time I turned up, I felt more comfortable.

**“...riding together had built a level of trust and connection where I felt safe to open up.”**

One of the peer workers, Tony, was one of the first people I met. He explained everything and showed me the ropes. Our relationship grew from there as we found we had common interests; like skateboarding and an experience of living in London.

It took time, but sharing our interests eventually got me to the point where I felt safe to open up, and share my thoughts and feelings with Tony. I spoke with him about how I had been frustrated about not having access to a car and having to ride my push bike everywhere.

After some time of cycling everywhere an opportunity arose for me to buy a motorbike, the only problem was that I didn't have my learners yet or anyone to supervise my riding. In Queensland a learner needs to have someone with a

motorbike licence follow them around while riding and I had no one to do that for me.

Tony and I were getting on so well that I was bragging about my new bike to him, it came up in conversation that I didn't have anyone to ride with me. We spoke about what it would mean for me to have the independence that would come from having a licence, and how we might be able to make my need for supervision an opportunity for peer support.

Together, Tony and I took our ideas to the Hervey Bay Flourish Australia manager as well as Queensland transport. Everyone was in agreement; riding with Tony would enable me to improve my skills and qualify for my licence, and after each ride we would sit down for half an hour to talk about how things were going with me. We did this together, every step of the way, and made it happen.

On one of our last rides, I was feeling pretty down. I wasn't ready to talk about it when we set off but when we pulled up I felt comfortable asking him if we could have a chat about how I was feeling. Tony listened to how I felt and we spoke about how we might manage things better. Sharing feelings like that isn't easy for me, but riding together had built a level of trust and connection where I felt safe to open up. It was pretty cool!

Now I've got my motorbike licence and I'm back at university studying nursing. It's such a relief to not have to cycle home along dark roads late at night or in the rain.

Having a safe place, such as Flourish Australia, where I can just hang out and not put on a show and no one's going to care if I'm having a bad day, means a lot to me. I'm getting better at sharing what's going on for me instead of bottling it up and that's bringing more stability to my life.

*As told to Tina Irving*

**Flourish Australia  
Hervey Bay  
Unit 6 & 7, 10 Liuzzi Street  
PIALBA QLD 4655  
(02) 9393 9560**



ABOVE: "We...were met with a crowd of approximately 90,000 people," says Justin who followed in the hallowed footsteps of Steve Moneghetti and Rob De Castella from Sydney to Bondi via Heartbreak Hill.

# The Sun-Herald Westpac City to Surf dream becomes Magical Reality!

*Justin was one of a team of three from Flourish Australia's Goulburn service who took part in the great race in 2018. He was happy to share his story with Panorama.*

By Justin from Goulburn

I want to tell you how taking advantage of an opportunity benefited me.

As a teenager I had always wanted to participate in the Sun Herald Westpac

Flourish Australia

City to Surf, a 14 kilometre hike.

So when I was asked at age 44 what I wanted to achieve, I thought of the City to Surf.

It was just a dream at the time, but now it has become a reality.

The first step was to build my endurance. I did this by using the gym twice per week and incorporating lots of walking and trying to maintain a good diet.

With nine weeks to go it was registration time and before I knew it, the big day was upon us!

It was an early start and we needed to dress to the conditions.

We rode the train from Campbelltown to Sydney station and were met with a crowd of approximately 90,000 people. We put on our entry bibs and waited for the starter's pistol.

People everywhere! My senses were alive with adrenaline! It was just so magical to see so many people doing the same thing and having fun.

We started at Mrs Macquarie's Chair,

just left of Centrepoint Tower, past the beautiful views of the Harbour, the pristine waters of Neutral Bay, the grandeur of Rose Bay, then HEARTBREAK HILL and out through and past the heads and to Bondi Beach, some three and three quarter hours later we finished around the 60,300th mark.

I was totally exhausted, almost crippled. Knowing I accomplished something I always wanted to do kept me going. This was my first time, so I didn't know what to expect, but having completed it, I'll be ready for it next time.

So thank you for reading my story, and thank you to the Sun Herald Westpac City to Surf!

*Thanks to Rebecca Smith*

**Flourish Australia**  
Shop 1,  
42-44 Clinton Street  
GOULBURN, NSW, 2580  
1300 779 270

# Engage and Re-Engage YCLSS Street Soccer in Newcastle

## ABOVE: Ball for fun and fun for all! Have you thought about the benefits of playing team sport?

By Kirby Lunn

Sport brings great benefits – not just because of the physical activity, but also because of its well-known positive effects on our social and emotional well-being.

Flourish Australia’s Newcastle (NSW) service has a small team of passionate mental health workers who make up the YCLSS (Youth Community Living Support Service) program. We are here to support 16-24 year old individuals to promote a smooth and supported transition into all aspects of community living.

YCLSS provides support with many avenues of community living, including linking young people with services related to housing, volunteering, mental health support, financial support and supporting individuals to engage in community and social inclusion where they may feel a sense of belonging, inclusiveness, commitment and more.

We have found one thing in common with many of the young people who we support, and that is how much they thoroughly enjoy a program called Street

Soccer.

Street Soccer is an initiative of The Big Issue that promotes social inclusion by giving the participants an opportunity to get together once a week in a safe, fun, judgement-free environment. This allows them to get fit, make friends and seek support and advice. Street Soccer coordinators work closely with the players, linking them to services that address issues such as homelessness, substance abuse, mental health issues and isolation.

Street Soccer is an all-inclusive initiative that welcomes and encourages people of all abilities, cultural backgrounds and ages. The YCLSS staff attend Street Soccer each week and participate in the games, encouraging and promoting great teamwork and inclusiveness throughout the duration of the afternoon.

Street Soccer is run at the PCYC (Police Citizens Youth Club) in Newcastle every Thursday from 3:30pm to 5:30pm.

We asked one of the young people from YCLSS whether they looked forward to Street Soccer and why:

“I look forward to catching up with others and getting exercise. Street soccer is a place for me to be me.”

How does participating in Street Soccer make you feel?

“Street Soccer has made me feel connected to others. Street Soccer provides social connections and it makes me happy to reengage in a loved sport.”

### Where can I play Street Soccer?

Street Soccer currently runs at...

Broadmeadow NSW

[newcastlesoccer@bigissue.org.au](mailto:newcastlesoccer@bigissue.org.au)

Sydney and Parramatta NSW

[nswsoccer@bigissue.org.au](mailto:nswsoccer@bigissue.org.au)

Brisbane QLD

[qldsoccer@bigissue.org.au](mailto:qldsoccer@bigissue.org.au)

And North Melbourne Vic

[melbournesoccer@bigissue.org.au](mailto:melbournesoccer@bigissue.org.au)

The Melbourne women’s group is at

[womensoccer@bigissue.org.au](mailto:womensoccer@bigissue.org.au)

You can find out more information about participating in Street Soccer on the website at:

[www.thebigissue.org.au/community-street-soccer/play-with-us/](http://www.thebigissue.org.au/community-street-soccer/play-with-us/)



**ABOVE: Tennis, music and company – stories from the Mood Active court**

PHOTO FROM MOOD ACTIVE SITE

along. There is a pre-check and post-check fitness assessment to make sure it's safe for you to engage in this level of exercise, though. These checks involve yoga, doing a circuit, some cardio tennis, and a game we call Pickle Ball. We do our best to accommodate everyone, and I would love to expand our services to be even more inclusive.

The Mood Active team provides a complete service. Our Program Manager is an exercise physiologist with an undergrad in psychology, so when participants decide what their goals are, she can figure out how to make them happen. And while the primary role of our qualified personal trainers is to focus on creating a positive and productive exercise environment, they also have a knowledge of mental health first aid. That means they can provide some extra support when someone is down. As people tend to isolate when they're not traveling well, we've found that it's often best to reach out to them a bit more in such cases.

When you complete one of our programs, we will encourage you to stay active by transitioning into services like Buckingham House and other free community programs. We want all our participants to learn how to stick to their exercise routines even when the going gets tough. To make this easier we started a social exercise group on Facebook where people can arrange to get together for physical events like bushwalks, cardio tennis and yoga. We've found including a social aspect to exercise can play a major role in encouraging people to stick with it.

For details, contact Mood Active at [info@moodactive.com.au](mailto:info@moodactive.com.au) or call our Program Manager on 0412 190 842

## Fun, commitment and support: getting physical with the Mood Active exercise program

*Tania Curley is the General Manager of the Mood Active Exercise Program. She visited Buckingham House to fill us in about what this service has to offer.*

Even though we all know we're meant to be exercising, many of us don't. Admittedly, it's not always easy to workout when we're feeling down or having a bad day, and it can be tough when we're already so busy. For example, when I visited my beauty therapist she said to me, "I know I need to exercise, but it's just another job!"

I think it feels like this for a lot of us.

It's no secret that exercise is necessary to keep healthy, and it provides many other physical benefits, too. But what if I told you that exercise can offer a lift for your *mental health*, too? Research has shown that regular physical activity can be an effective treatment option for mild to moderate depression, anxiety and stress. The Mood Active Exercise Program exists because we want to motivate people who have these struggles to get back on their feet and get physical.

Mood Active is a not-for-profit association that's existed since 2013, and our aim is to provide low-cost or free programs for people who are experiencing mild to moderate depression, anxiety or stress. Our groups are all about fun, commitment and support.

We provide exercise classes tailored to people's individual needs. Our supported eight week exercise program runs three days a week, and we keep the numbers small to ensure that the trainer can

provide everyone with the attention they need. Lots of people have told us that simply taking ownership of their health and wellbeing by doing something positive has provided a real mood lift. This class runs at Camperdown, Prince Alfred Park at Surry Hills and Kingsford. We're also starting a fourth one at Rockdale. The number of participants ranges from 8 to 12, but can go as high as 20.

**The founder of Mood Active has bipolar and has a lived experience of using exercise as an adjunct to medication.**

We've also launched a shorter four week wellbeing workout for those who cannot commit to eight weeks. This once-a-week group is a great way to start setting health goals and rebuilding your confidence. It goes for two and a half hours per session, with the first ninety minutes spent on theory work. We learn about what to do when the going gets tough, practice mindfulness, engage in exercise-related behavioural therapy, and discuss how to keep active long-term. This is followed by moderate exercise such as yoga, circuit, cardio or something else.

Thanks to funding from the City of Sydney Council, all our wellbeing workout classes are free. And unlike the usual rigmarole you get with the health system, Mood Active doesn't require a referral. The program is open to anyone between 18 and 65, and carers and support people are welcome to come

### BELOW: Tania Curley

PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT





# The man from Lightning Ridge

**“Flourish Australia is supporting me to manage my anxiety and depression with different activities.”**

**ABOVE: Jean Claude has a serious sensory disability, but this doesn't hold him back!** PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

By Jean Claude

I started attending the Buckingham House day centre in Surry Hills back in 2008. Janet Meagher AM (Flourish Australia's former General Manager Inclusion) connected me up with Buck House. This wasn't the first time Janet helped me, though. In fact, I wouldn't even be in this *country* if it wasn't for her!

I first met Janet in 2004 through the Advocacy France organisation. I was living in Northern Ireland at the time, and volunteering with the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health (NIAMH) and Beacon Centre for the Blind. I was also part of a group called Live Better. When I told Janet how serious I was about wanting to emigrate, she offered her help. She said, "it's difficult, but it's not impossible, so we can try." Even with Janet's considerable help, I don't think I could have moved to Australia without the assistance of my wife. I met her in Lightning Ridge during one of my crazy holidays in 2008, and by 2010 we were married. She has provided me with all the day-to-day support and practical care I need, and does all the caring and housekeeping. I really appreciate her.

We lived at Lightning Ridge for the next

eight years, and I quickly learned that it's one of the hottest places in Australia. In Summer you can get up to around 50 degrees, so if your house is a tin shack with no air conditioning (like ours was), you'd probably be on the next train out...except there *is* no train! Leaving Lightning Ridge means a really bumpy four-and-a-half-hour bus ride, followed by catching the XPT to Dubbo. The bus is really rough the whole way, and when I caught it after coming back from Europe I vomited every ten minutes for the whole trip.

The population of Lightning Ridge is a question mark in Summer because the locals know to escape from the heat, but in Winter you've got the tourists. While Lightning Ridge is a unique experience, once you've visited everything it becomes pretty boring. The most popular destinations are the bowling club, the pub, and the mines. You can prospect if you like, and if you find an opal there are local shops that can clean it and make it into a very nice souvenir. I actually made one for my friend in America. While some say that Coober Pedy has the best opals in the world, I'd say that Lightning Ridge opals, especially their amazing black opals, are the greatest.

My wife and I have travelled a fair bit over the years. We had a few cruises and went to Europe a couple of times. My wife has also taken me to some of the best places Australia has to offer, and I've developed warm feelings for this country. I like the food, the people, the culture...and I think Australians have their heads screwed on right. They have a good grasp on reality, and I need that.

In 2018 my anxiety and depression got worse, so my wife and I decided to move to Sydney. It took 7 months to get housing commission, which isn't too bad, and it wasn't long before I was involved with several Flourish Australia day centres: I regularly attended Buck House at Surry Hills, Flowerdale Cottage in Liverpool and New Outlook in Wollongong. Accessing Flourish Australia's day centres has allowed me to get into the world and be a part of things.

New Outlook has given me a chance to live life and really helped in my recovery. Not only did they help me recover from my mental health problems, but it's also a good train trip from Sydney to Wollongong. This gives me a break from the stress of The City. I like commuting, but it can be difficult if the train or bus gets delayed, or if it's too crowded.

One highlight that happened in January whilst attending New Outlook was when everyone went to the rainforest at Jamberoo. I was very nervous when I came in that day as I was due to have a medical procedure later on, but relaxing in the car in the air conditioning helped with my anxiety. It was so hot in the forest that we could really hear the cicadas, but I loved the sound of the cascade, and hearing it made me feel like plunging into the cool water. It was so refreshing.

I have a passion for radio, and I studied for 20 weeks at Community Media Training Organisation to earn an industry-recognised Certificate III in Media. Now I'm looking for a chance to get picked up by a community radio station as a presenter. I worked with a community radio station in the UK for 5 years, so I have experience.

*As told to Grant J Everett*

**Flourish Australia's New Outlook, 3 Station Street WOLLONGONG NSW 2500 1300 779 270**



# Goings on in Griffith

...and Leeton, Lake Cargelligo, Wagga Wagga, Narranderra...

ABOVE: Yes, it's all happening in the Riverina and Environs. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY LETICIA FRANCHI

By Leticia Franchi, Mental Health Worker

*We are sure our city readers sometimes wonder what sort of activities are available for people who access our services in "sleepy" country towns. So we asked Leticia, a Mental Health Worker for Flourish Australia in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area town of Griffith NSW, to give us a description.*

## On the Rampage

During February the Griffith and Leeton groups travelled to Lake Talbot in Narrandera, about 87kms from Griffith. There were three swimming pools, picnic areas and THE RAMPAGE! The Rampage is a big water slide which Autumn Pierpoint, one of the other Mental Health Workers at Griffith, was brave enough to try! We all had a great time swimming and our exercise guru, Gail Cummings, led a water aerobics class. Some of her moves had us all in stitches! After all the swimming we had some very hungry people. We organised a picnic lunch of bread rolls, BBQ chicken, salad and fruit, which everyone devoured.

## Shopping for Mardi Gras

A month later during March the Griffith group travelled 187km to Wagga Wagga, along with the Leeton group, for some much needed retail therapy. Everybody enjoyed shopping and having lunch at the plaza. We used this opportunity to visit many op shops and to find some fashion accessories so we could dress up for the Hay Mardi Gras. People walked away with some great bargains including books, DVDs, clothing and much more.

## Frisbee fun

Griffith and Leeton groups also met for a BBQ lunch at City Park in Griffith. Jeff, who accesses the Leeton site was joined by peer worker Michelle Van Ree

in cooking a beautiful lunch which we all enjoyed. Lunch included rissoles, kebabs, sausages, onion and salads. The bluetooth speaker got a good workout that afternoon, blaring amazing tunes throughout the day. A few of the men played a game of frisbee, too. Baker's Delight donated some bread for the day, which we were so grateful for!

We also had a great day of Bingo at the Griffith Office. Everyone absolutely loves Bingo, and it offers a chance to win some awesome prizes, too!

## We make our own paint!

During April the Griffith group had a great time making our own paint to create wonderful puffy paint art! First, we made the paint by combining flour, baking powder, water, salt and food colouring. We put this paint mixture in zip-lock bags and used the zip-lock bags as dispensers. Once we had finished our creations, they went into the microwave for 45 seconds and the paint magically popped up on the page, creating amazing 3D art!

## Bowling bunnies

Also during April the Griffith group went Ten Pin Bowling at Star Bowling in Griffith. Everyone involved wore cute rabbit ears, and we had some

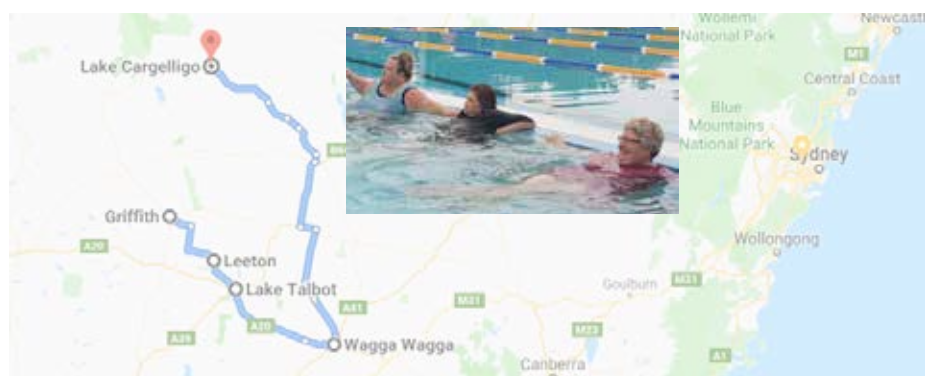
very talented bowling bunnies on the day! We all love to go bowling, but this occasion was egg-stra special as it came with Easter eggs!

The Griffith group traveled about 133kms away from Griffith to Lake Cargelligo to meet with mental health worker Verona Blue, who is establishing a new service in that area. We all loved eating some sugarfree Anzac biscuits while overlooking the lake. We also attended the Lake Cargelligo visitor's centre where we learned a little about the town and bought some souvenirs. Another highlight of this trip was listening to some great music on the way there and back. We have some amazing singers in our group and they absolutely loved belting out the tunes in the bus!

## Future travels

The people who access our Griffith service have traditionally taken a yearly holiday. Everyone gets involved in organising the trip and picking the destination. Last year it was Canberra. Everyone LOVES these trips away, as for some people it is the only time they get to leave Griffith, let alone go on a holiday! I have done a fair bit of travelling overseas and I know everyone loves hearing all my stories about it. I'm sure they would all absolutely love to go overseas one day.

BELOW: Location map. The distance covered is larger than some small countries.





# Rainbow on the Plains Hay Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras



Flourish Australia was excited to be a community sponsor of the **2019 Rainbow on the Plains** festival which included a Mardi Gras parade and Fair day held in the rural NSW town of Hay (a smidgen over 700 kilometres west of Sydney). In the lead up to the big day, many Flourish Australia sites showed their support by sending in group photo shots of them holding the same signs that were being used in the Hay Parade: from New South Wales there was Wollongong, Goulburn, Bateman's Bay, Nowra and Harris Park (pictured), as well as Penrith, Emu Heights, Inverell, Orange, Cranebrook and more. Queensland services included, Hervey Bay and Warana, to name a few! This support was felt all the way to the community of Hay.

Flourish Australia also had a booth at Hay Fair Day to connect with the locals and promote the amazing work our organisation is doing, particularly the services we're offering in the neighbouring Griffith and Leeton areas. These services went above and beyond with their fabulous parade floats, and we also handed out promotional materials. Be sure to check out all the photos on our Facebook page!

[www.facebook.com/FlourishAus/](http://www.facebook.com/FlourishAus/)



THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: In Wollongong, the Outlook from New Outlook was positive; John Maraz from Olympic Park waves his rainbow flag; Flourish Australia CEO Mark Orr AM, ACON CEO Nick Parkhill and Sally Davoren, sexual health nurse from Griffith; Flourish Australia's Bateman's Bay service; staff and people who access the Goulburn service showing their support; On the March in Hay, Sarah from Leeton.

RIGHT PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Yes, they had FLOATS at the Hay Mardi Gras! Look! Michelle is on television (sort of); The people from Flourish Australia's Nowra service get in the swing; Employees at Flourish Australia's Prestige Packing Co, Harris Park, show their support; Mark with Krista Schade, Chair, Hay Mardi Gras.



Community Partnership





**ABOVE: Flourish Australia's General Manager, Human Resources, Tim Fong (left) and Manager, Peer Workforce Peter Farrugia (right) look pleased with the book 'Peer Work in Australia: A New Future for Mental Health. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY**

# Recruiting Peer Workers

By Warren Heggarty

There is now an additional career pathway for people who are interested in becoming Peer Workers. Peer work is a formal job role that requires suitable qualifications and aptitude. Lived experience alone does not qualify you to be a Peer Worker. Flourish Australia has a reputation for being a leader in the field of peer work, and Tim Fong, Flourish Australia's General Manager of Human Resources, explained how to find the right people for Peer Worker roles.

"Like any other position, (Peer Workers) need to be able to do the job and meet the essential criteria for the position." Tim explained. "The commencing classification for a Peer Worker is SCHADS Level 3, because we expect the person to be able to demonstrate that they have suitable knowledge, qualifications and aptitude to perform well in their role."

## The new pathway

A Certificate IV qualification is a minimum requirement for Peer Workers and Mental Health Workers with Flourish Australia. Recognising that this might be a steep initial jump for some people, Tim says Flourish Australia has created new positions to enable people to gain the necessary knowledge, qualifications and work experience to progress to becoming Peer Workers and Mental Health Workers. With peer work, this includes support with obtaining a Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work qualification.

The main difference between a Peer Worker and a Mental Health Worker is that a Peer Worker is required to use their lived experience of a mental health issue for their job, and they have been trained in how to do so. Peer Workforce Manager Peter Farrugia has developed a one day in-house training program called Peer Work: Using lived experience in the peer space, which provides guidance to Peer Workers on how to use their lived experience appropriately in the workplace. Other than that, Peer Workers and Mental Health Workers are complementary roles.

"Both positions are treated the same," says Tim. "There is the same minimum qualification of a Certificate IV, and the new pathway provides the same learning and development opportunities for everyone."

### The book

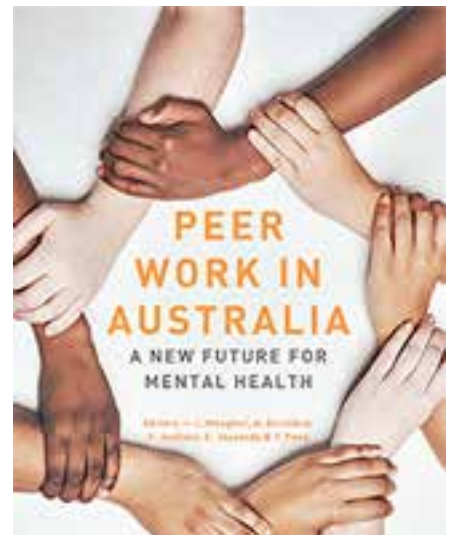
Last year, Tim was part of the editorial team that produced the book *Peer Work in Australia*. This book is about the journey of peer work in the Australian mental health sector, and the deeper understanding it shares makes this book arguably the first of its kind in the world. It is a pioneering book for a pioneering field.

"The book has been reprinted twice, with little more than word of mouth to publicise it," says Tim, "so that is a pretty good endorsement!"

This book's release was timely, as the mental health sector is currently engaged in major reform. The peer work field has matured to the point where it is intersecting with the broader disability sector, providing a new understanding of the value of good, quality peer work. Evidence has shown that peer work is a highly effective intervention tool that allows mental health services to better deliver what's needed, and so the peer workforce is becoming an increasingly vital component of the mental health sector. It's playing a key role in bringing about much-needed cultural change in services and workplaces, and paints a bright future for the mental health sector in Australia.

What better way to learn the whole story of the emergence of peer work than to purchase a copy of *Peer Work in Australia*? Available through Booktopia, .

[www.booktopia.com.au/peer-work-in-australia-tim-fong/prod9780648441700.html](http://www.booktopia.com.au/peer-work-in-australia-tim-fong/prod9780648441700.html)





ABOVE: Lauren Nolan with her daughter, Hunter.  
PHOTO COURTESY LAUREN NOLAN

## Reflections of a new Peer Worker

By Lauren Nolan

I started at Flourish Australia in February 2019, so I am very new to Peer Work, and support work in general. My background is in copywriting, content writing and marketing. About a year ago I started rethinking what I wanted to do as I was feeling incredibly unfulfilled at work.

At the time, I had a little side job as a Holistic Coach where I would support people who were stuck creatively, at work, or at home. I helped them develop tools to manage their lives better. It was great, however I felt limited with how far I could help them. It was then I decided to study counselling. I then stumbled across the Peer Worker role at Flourish Australia. It sounded too good to be true because it was so aligned with what I wanted to do. I had to apply!

Starting at Flourish Australia felt like a

breath of fresh air after the suffocating corporate environment. From day one, I felt welcomed and supported. Buddying with the HASI (Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative) team at Marrickville was so valuable in shaping my understanding of peer work. Very quickly, I felt that this is what I'm meant to do - and I've never felt that before.

It took me a while for my own lived experience to come up because, initially, I didn't really understand exactly how to use it in my work or what would be appropriate. How to do this is covered in Flourish Australia's training course, Peer Work: Using Lived Experience in the peer space, which Flourish Australia provides for new staff.

To give an example of how I use my lived experience, a woman I support was explaining how she tried going to the shops by herself recently but was so anxious she had to go home. I listened and told her that I understood, as I too used to experience high anxiety in similar situations, specifically food courts. I offered a suggestion where we could work towards a goal of her going to the shops by herself.

I told her of a strategy that I found helpful, which is having an anchor point at the shopping centre, somewhere a bit away from the busy energy, where she can feel okay and regroup when things get overwhelming. Then once she was calmer, she could attempt to continue. I explained she could go back to the anchor point as many times as she needs to.

This strategy helped me a lot, and she said she would really like to try it. What I would do differently would be to reassure her that I no longer get anxiety in food courts, because she asked worriedly if I would be okay to go to the food court for her to get lunch. Next time, I would be sure to clarify that it's no longer an issue and definitely not something for her to be concerned about!

Yesterday, I used my lived experience chatting to a person who said the main emotion he feels every day is anxiety, but that he would like to feel joy and contentment too. I let him know of a way that would help me move towards joy when I was really suffering.

**"I'm learning that using my lived experience doesn't only have to be about "strategies", but simply understanding, listening and being able to read people and situations in a way that I wouldn't have been able to if I hadn't experienced it myself."**

I told him that I discovered that you can't feel anxiety and gratitude at the same time. I explained that by simply shifting my perspective to feeling grateful for simple things, like the tea that I was making, to be in my home, about to have a warm and comforting beverage, I began to feel less anxious. I said that gratitude doesn't have to be huge but making it about small things - tea, clothes out of the dryer (which he said he likes), sunshine on your face - it can seriously shift how you feel. He really liked this way of looking things and he said he wanted to try it.

I'm learning that using my lived experience doesn't only have to be about "strategies", but simply understanding, listening and being able to read people and situations in a way that I wouldn't have been able to if I hadn't experienced it myself."



# Mel's battle for mortgage protection

**ABOVE: Mel's house. Insurance companies can decide not to sell insurance because of certain conditions, but the onus is on them to provide evidence to back their decision.** PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

By Mel

**In the March quarterly issue of Panorama we featured several stories about self advocacy. As promised we now return to Mel, who, fresh from her battle with the 'Government Body' had to take on 'The Insurance Company' that refused to sell her mortgage protection insurance.**

In 2017 I bought a house. It is not always easy to be in a position to buy a house. Especially in the expensive Sydney market. Especially if you are like me and live with mental health issues and a sensory disability that makes regular employment a challenge (see previous story in March 2019 Panorama). Still, I managed to do it!

Unless you pay cash, the process of buying a house means that you need to pay a 10% deposit, then demonstrate that you have the capacity to keep making repayments at a certain rate during the life of the mortgage.

I decided that if I had a mortgage I would also need mortgage protection insurance to go with it. It turned out that buying the house was in some ways easier than buying the insurance!

This insurance was not compulsory, nor was it part of any covenant with the bank. So why exactly did I decide to

purchase it?

I just like to be sensible with my money. I knew that I wouldn't have been covered for my pre-existing mental health condition, but I also had been in a casual work role at the time and also I'd been on temporary contracts. My positions hadn't been permanent ones, so if I were to get hit by a bus or to get some hideous illness I would be off work for a period of time and wouldn't receive pay and the mortgage protection insurance would then kick in and cover my mortgage repayments.

The other thing it would cover is that if I died for some reason unconnected to my pre-existing condition, the mortgage protection insurance would pay the remainder of my mortgage and my family wouldn't have the burden of recovering my repayments.

Despite taking this cautious and responsible decision, the Insurance Company (a large multinational one which advertises extensively) declined my application for mortgage protection insurance!

I was really angry. I felt furious. It was really unjust and unfair and I felt stuck for a long period of time like there was nothing I could do. I kept trying to contact them and discuss it with them but it was like a block, like I couldn't get

anywhere with them about it.

That's why I decided I had to take issue with it and do something about it because it was so unfair.

There were times when I was a little bit tempted to give up the fight, to tell you the truth.

I know that when I first called the Financial Ombudsman Service about this, they were not completely encouraging. They just said that I could go ahead and lodge my dispute online. Once I explained my situation, they said that they couldn't tell me whether or not it was a case of discrimination! They said insurance companies are well known for their denial of people with certain mental health conditions, but to lodge the dispute anyway.

The onus is on insurance companies to provide evidence to back up their decision not to sell insurance policies to people with certain conditions and disabilities.

So I didn't have a lot of hope but I wanted to push it because everyone in my treatment team was telling me it was wrong and I felt it was wrong and I wanted to fight it.

There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing with both sides having to make statements and responses to the statements. It took six or seven months, but when it came through in my favour I was very pleased. The Financial Ombudsman Service found that the Insurance Company had discriminated against me and ordered that it offer to sell me insurance. Not only that, the company had to pay me a sum of money in compensation!

I hope that my action makes it easier for other people to buy insurance. After all, regardless of our conditions or disabilities, it demonstrates that we take our financial risks and responsibilities seriously.

*Mel spoke to Warren Heggarty*

References

Everett, G. (2018, March ). More than being medicated: The Hierarchy of Need. Panorama, 28.

Maslow . (n.d.). Retrieved from Simply psychology: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

Seseidos, P. (2017, November 8). Responsibility: Being a responsible person makes you feel good. Retrieved from Cognifit: <https://blog.cognifit.com/responsibility/>

# ACTION: Adapting CANSAS to Individuals' Own Needs

## Recovery Conversation Theme #19: Keeping in Touch



**ABOVE: Meeting up over a sherbet or two can be very therapeutic. Especially if you cycled there...**PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

## Keeping in Touch: The Value of Building Connections

By Warren Heggarty

In some environments, such as rural and remote areas, people can find themselves doubly isolated: both from the human connections that keep us all well, and from services that can support us in our recovery. Fortunately, Flourish Australia has over sixty services including throughout rural NSW and South East Queensland.

### Rebuilding connections

When people are unwell, they often withdraw from family and friends, and from activities they once enjoyed. But it works the other way round as well. Establishing or re-establishing connections will help us on our recovery journeys.

Megan Millemaggi from Flourish Australia's Leeton service in the NSW Riverina, has recently worked with \*Charlie who benefited from re-establishing connections with people. Charlie's mental health issues led to him leaving the military and pursuing a

career in IT, "a career in which he was very skilled," Megan tells us. "He worked for a large Agricultural firm. However, as often happens in IT, his role became quite isolating. Over time, Charlie's marriage broke down and the isolation of his job took a severe toll on his health so that he began to retreat into himself, spending days and nights at a time playing computer games and closing himself off from society."

**"Exercise and companionship are a wonderful antidote..."**

**Tony Abbott, describing non-medical methods of soothing mental health issues.**

"Fortunately, he sought help and after working with his Psychologist and counsellor, he referred himself to Flourish Australia to try to reconnect socially. He connected with the local men's shed, the gym, and TAFE. He

even put in place some self-imposed restrictions on his computer and internet usage."

"Since coming to Flourish Australia, Charlie knows he has someone to connect to at any time he is feeling unwell. We have watched him blossom socially so that he has become quite a role model for other people accessing the Leeton service, not to mention staff!"

### Comrades for Men's Health Week

During Men's Health Week this year, former Prime Minister and Soldier On Patron, Tony Abbott spoke on the Alan Jones breakfast show about his 20 year role in the annual Pollie Pedal. This year, the event will raise money for Soldier On, an organisation that helps veterans with mental health issues. Speaking of the high rate of suicide among veterans and rural men, Mr Abbott told listeners that the solutions are not just medical. "Exercise and companionship are a wonderful antidote to the kinds of problems you've been talking about today...having a sense of meaning of life... comradeship." (Abbott, 2019)

Asking for help is something that can make some men feel uneasy. "Are you bogged mate?" is an organisation started by Mary O'Brien in rural Queensland to support men on the land to deal with mental health issues. Sometimes when your tractor gets really bogged, you will need help from others getting it out of the mud. The same with your mental health. (Mary O'Brien Rural Enterprises, 2019)

It is good to know that progress is being made towards improving men's mental health in rural areas of Australia.

#### References

Abbott, T. (2019, June 12). Men's Health Week, Suicide among rural and remote men and returned servicemen. The Alan Jones Breakfast Show. (A. Jones, Interviewer) Alan Jones. 2GB, Sydney. Mary O'Brien Rural Enterprises. (2019). Are you bogged mate: <https://www.areyouboggedmate.com.au/about/> Pollie Pedal. (2019, July). Pollie Pedal Bike Ride . Retrieved from <http://www.polliepedal.org.au/>

# ACTION: Adapting CANSAS to Individuals' Own Needs

## Recovery Conversation Theme #20: Getting myself around



**ABOVE: Milin and his Kawasaki.**

PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

Tired of public transport? Perhaps a two-wheeled option might be for you. Peter Farrugia, Flourish Australia's Peer Work Manger, and Milin Thaker, Accounts Payable Officer, discussed the pros and cons of motorbikes and scooters.

Peter: Living in the CBD, parking is at a premium, so I invested in a scooter. They're also easy to maintain and cheap to run. I don't ride too far nowadays, mostly just local errands, so I didn't feel the complexity of a motorcycle was necessary. A scooter meets the brief.

Milin: I have a Kawasaki motorbike, though I only really use it to get to and from work. Riding a bike is convenient and timesaving. Plus, when I go out riding, I often see a lot of empty motorbike-only parking spaces. That's really convenient.

Peter: I've used my scooter to get to work, though not so much these days. I do a lot of walking and public transport is fairly good in the City, so the scooter is an enjoyable way of covering distances that are too far to cross on foot.

### The drawbacks of two wheels

Milin: Carrying things is a big drawback. If I'm going shopping or I need to transport anything, I'll use my car.

Peter: There are also real safety issues to consider. People on scooters and motorbikes will often become invisible to other road users, easily disappearing from mirrors and vision. I'm always actively aware of everyone on the road, and you need to be able to anticipate issues that may arise right in front of you at 80 or 100 kilometres an hour. There are defensive driving courses for young drivers that can teach you all this. The tests you have to sit to get your license are also a really good introduction to riding on public streets without the protection of a car. They're an opportunity to develop confidence and awareness.

“Confidence is just as important as skill, because if you aren't confident, you can't be as defensive and proactive as you need to be”  
– Peter Farrugia

Milin: You have to be able to keep track of cars changing lanes, because if they don't check their blind spot you could be risking an accident. It's an even bigger issue with trucks, and you need to keep your distance from them and be very, very careful if you overtake them.

### Rules and regulations

Peter: For scooters and motorbikes you need a Rider's License, and you need to display your Ls or Ps like you would on a car. To get them, you need to do a couple of half-day instructor courses. These are conducted in dedicated lots, off public roads, and as a group with an instructor-rider directing everyone: “We're going three blocks, turning left at Red Rooster, then when we come to the park, I want you to pull up on the left, then a new leader will take charge.” If you see 6 or 8 riders in fluoro vests, that's probably what they're doing.

Milin: You can only ride on your Ls for around 3 months before you need to get your P-Plates, then you go from Red Ps to Green Ps and on to your Full License. One advantage to riding a bike is you don't need somebody with a full license to be with you during your Ls. If you've held a license overseas, you may be eligible to automatically get it here

without the whole learner's process. Peter: By law, you must wear a helmet on a scooter, but it's common sense to wear full riding gear: a padded leather jacket, leather riding pants, fully enclosed footwear, and gloves. You must prepare for the worst-case scenario of being thrown at speed and sliding along a gravel road, perhaps even crashing into oncoming traffic.

Milin: What you are wearing will have a very big impact on how serious an accident or a crash will be. It can save your life. So it's best to be all covered. The only drawback is you'll be hot in Summer, but you'll be warm in Winter.

Peter: Remember that the weather is more of a factor on two wheels, as having rain pelting against your visor can severely affect your visibility.

Milin: Another big issue is strong wind, as it can upset your balance.

Peter: Some drivers don't like bikes and scooters filtering through traffic, and may actively block you from doing that. I also think scooters get less respect than bikes. I've been riding on the street, observing the road rules, and drivers get angry with me because I'm not getting out of their way quickly enough, so that can create dangerous situations. I've had some close calls, and if I wasn't so attentive they could have been very dangerous.”

### Running costs

Peter: Before you buy a certain kind of transport, ask yourself some questions: where do I want it to take me? What do I want to do? Will I be able to transport things? How much will it cost to maintain?

Milin: Compared to a car, maintaining a motorbike is a lot cheaper. With my car, a service will cost around \$450, with the bike it's around \$250. Registration and CDP for a car comes to about \$1,000 a year, but for a bike it's about \$400. When I was driving my car to and from work my weekly petrol bill was \$50 or \$60, but now I can fuel my bike for a month for the same amount. Even compared to riding the train, I find riding a motorbike cheaper.

Peter: You need to get compulsory third party insurance for any damage or injuries, and you can opt for comprehensive vehicle insurance for more protection.

# ACTION: Adapting CANSAS to Individuals' Own Needs

## Recovery Conversation Theme #15: Intimate and close relationships



**ABOVE: Mandarin Ducks are a symbol of success and longevity in intimate relationships. What is their secret?** PHOTO FRANCIS C. FRANKLIN WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

By Warren Heggarty

Measure the health of an intimate relationship not so much by how you always agree with one another, but by how you deal with your disagreements.

At the beginning of relationships, (especially a romantic one!) people tend to go out of their way to please one another, so conflict may not arise. However, over time, disagreement and conflict will become inevitable.

In healthy and respectful relationships, people accept one another's differences and try to understand the other's point of view, even if it means 'agreeing to disagree.' It can be unhealthy if a person always tries to prove the other person wrong or change their beliefs or opinions. (Braun, 2018)

### Accepting our differences

Accepting differences can be difficult for some people, but it is necessary in intimate relationships. And intimate relationships are necessary for flourishing in life.

According to Degges-White (2017), the philosopher Aristotle 'emphasized was

that to be truly happy in life, we must have healthy intimate relationships; we are only able to flourish if there are others in our lives for whom we care. It is not enough simply to know the faces or the names of your neighbors, baristas, or colleagues. We must endeavor to connect and bond with others. Intimate relationships are the glue that often keeps us – or our worlds – from falling apart." (Degges-White, 2017)

### Signs of healthy intimacy Questions to consider

We tend to think of intimate relationships as romantic ones, but you could also include close family and friendships. The 6 essential traits of healthy intimate relationships according to Degges-White are

1. Meaning
2. Growing as a person, growing as a couple/ as family/ as friends. An intimate relationship is one that brings out the best in both people.
3. Shared Goals
4. Mutual give and take
5. Being able to express our true natures
6. Engaging deeply in life and the world around us

To gauge whether a relationship could be classed as both intimate and healthy, Degges-White suggests thinking about the following questions:

1. Does this relationship encourage me to think beyond the immediate?
2. Am I better person than I was before the relationship began?
3. Do I recognize the "us" when I think of my partner, or do I focus on what "I" want or "she" wants?
4. Am I willing to give what I want to get from this relationship?
5. Do I feel safe letting myself be vulnerable with this person?
6. Do I feel more alive when I am with this person? (Degges-White, 2017)

### Uncertainty

Because healthy intimate relationships are necessary for human flourishing, a lack or even fear of intimacy can be a major problem for some people. Lisa Fritscher suggests that we need to be willing to accept a degree of uncertainty in our lives.

'Those who fear intimacy' she says 'ultimately fear the consequences of a relationship that turns sour. It's important to embrace the fact that there are no guarantees in life or in human relationships. Every connection with another person is ultimately a gamble.'

This may seem ironic, given that 'social relationships are a basic driving goal of human existence.' (Fritscher, 2019) Yet a good sign that something is amiss in a relationship is the use of 'controlling behaviour,' a sign of a lack of trust... or perhaps a fear of the uncertainty that is inevitably part of an intimate relationship.

#### References

- Braun, K. (2018, May). Healthy Relationships. Retrieved from Women's Health Queensland: <https://womhealth.org.au/healthy-lifestyle/healthy-relationships>
- Degges-White, S. (2017, February 8). 6 Essential Traits of Healthy Intimate Relationships. Healthy relationships lead to a healthy life but they take work. Retrieved from Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/lifetime-connections/201702/6-essential-traits-healthy-intimate-relationships>
- Fritscher, L. (2019, March 20). Understanding a fear of intimacy: signs, causes, coping. Retrieved from VeryWellMind: <https://www.verywellmind.com/fear-of-intimacy-2671818>

# Are we winning against STIs?

by Grant J Everett

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which means our country has agreed that sexual and reproductive health and their associated rights are central to achieving health and gender equity by 2030. According to Associate Professor Deborah Bateson, Medical Director of Family Planning NSW, this promise is composed of many parts. For instance, Australia is using a multi-pronged approach to combating STIs, and the numbers show that our tactics are having an effect. Since the introduction of the HPV vaccine in 2007, Australia has seen a significant decline in the spread of genital warts. Since 2007 there has been an enormous 92% drop in its contraction rate among females and males below the age of 21, putting us on course to be a global leader in the elimination of HPV-related diseases (Bateson, 2019).

## Falling through the cracks

Not everyone is experiencing the benefits of new vaccines and other treatments. Women from very remote regions and from the lowest socio-economic groups are far less likely to be screened for STIs, and the mortality rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is subsequently four times that of non-Indigenous women. STI-related diseases among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people demands urgent attention. According to Professor Bateson: "Enhancing the availability of reliable, cost-effective, point-of-care STI tests is particularly relevant for regional and remote Australia. The significant burden of STI-related disease among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people... demands urgent attention...new (HIV) diagnoses in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population increased by 41% compared with a decline of 12% in

the non-Indigenous population between 2013 and 2016."

These vulnerable groups are also much less likely to have access to effective birth control, such as long acting reversible contraception like implants and intrauterine devices. While the use of long acting reversible contraception has sharply increased in Australia, we are still lagging behind other high income countries.

**By the end of 2017  
36.9 million  
people were living with HIV  
worldwide  
21.7 million  
were receiving antiretroviral  
treatment worldwide**

## Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

In the field of HIV infection, enhanced diagnosis methods and effective antiretroviral treatments have made a dent in new cases of the disease over the years. According to Professor Rebecca Guy, head of the Kirby Institute's Surveillance, Evaluation and Research Program, there were 963 new cases of HIV in Australia in 2017, compared to 2,412 in 1987 (the peak of the epidemic), and there's been a 7 per cent decline in HIV acquisition rates over the past 5 years. This is still a very high figure given the enormous investment of work and money that has gone into preventive education, and there is yet to be a "magic bullet" for HIV.

The recent listing of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) in April 2018 is projected to have a significant impact on the HIV epidemic. PrEP involves the regular use of HIV medications by HIV-negative people to prevent HIV acquisition. People at high risk of HIV

are now eligible for PrEP under the PBS in Australia, including sexually active gay and bisexual men, the transgender community, heterosexual people with a HIV positive partner, as well as other high risk population groups. Research shows PrEP medication is highly effective at preventing HIV transmission, making it an important new tactic in HIV prevention, and alongside existing treatments and preventions PrEP will support Australia in ending HIV transmission for good.

PrEP is thought to have already reduced new infections over the last few years, particularly in men who have sex with men. However, there has been a decrease in consistent condom use among gay and bisexual men since the introduction of PrEP: "The decrease in consistent condom use...since the introduction of PrEP has (also) led to an increase in the burden of bacterial sexually transmissible infections." (Bateson)

Chlamydia remains the most common STI, with three-quarters of cases occurring in young people aged 15–29. Most infections have no symptoms, but if left untreated can result in serious complications, including pelvic diseases and infertility. The rate of antibiotic-resistant gonorrhoea infections is also increasing.

**Take home message: if you are sexually active or planning on becoming sexually active, stopping the spread of STIs is your concern. Speak to your GP to learn how you can help.**

Sources and further reading:

"Sexual, reproductive health and rights: how are we doing?" Cate Swannell, Med J Aust, 24th of March 2019

"The Guttmacher–Lancet Commission on sexual and reproductive health and rights: how does Australia measure up?" Deborah J Bateson, Kirsten I Black and Shailendra Sawleshwarkar, Med J Aust, 1st of April 2019

[www.mja.com.au/journal/2019/210/6/guttmacher-lancet-commission-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-how-does-australia-measure-up](http://www.mja.com.au/journal/2019/210/6/guttmacher-lancet-commission-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-how-does-australia-measure-up)  
<https://www.afao.org.au/our-work/policy-and-submissions/prep/>  
[www.mja.com.au/journal/2019/sexual-reproductive-health-and-rights-how-are-we-doing](http://www.mja.com.au/journal/2019/sexual-reproductive-health-and-rights-how-are-we-doing)





**ABOVE: In a hospital environment, it is sometimes hard to remember the Golden Rule** PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

By Warren Heggarty

Sometimes we are so preoccupied with our own difficulties that we forget the needs of the very people who care for us.

One day I paid my usual visit to my father who was in the aged care psychiatry unit of a public hospital. Like many old people with kidney failure, constant infections and an attack of sepsis had caused dementia that made him somewhat unpleasant company! It could not be helped. On my way out, another patient called me over. 'Your father can't talk to you like that!' he insisted.

The other patient could only see what was before him, but I had been on the other side of the fence, too. When mentally unwell there had been many times I had been verbally abusive to people. My parents had had to put up with my tantrums, drunkenness and unpredictable behaviour for years. I think we all need to realise that the way we behave when unwell affects the people around us- especially those in a carer's role. This realisation becomes a part of recovery. If we are able to do something about it, then I think we

should take that responsibility and try while we can.

### Our need for safety and security

In March 2018 Panorama we discussed Maslow's pyramid which is a way of putting human needs into priority order. (More than being medicated: The Hierarchy of Need, #67 page 28). According to Maslow, feeling safe is one of the basic necessities of life. Safety, along with our physical needs, provides the foundation upon which we can build a sense of belonging, our self esteem, and being the best we can be. (Maslow ) "This goes beyond clothing and shelter to include financial security, health and mental well-being, protection from abuse and harm and having our rights respected." (Everett, 2018)

### Why is responsibility valued

One of the things that gives us this sense of safety is the people around us. Having reliable, responsible people around us gives us a sense of confidence and security. This is one of the reasons why in our society, responsibility is so positively and highly valued. It gives

us the stability we need to achieve our higher goals. (Seseidos, 2017) If you were often in contact with a person who was very unpredictable or who was prone to temper flare-ups or even violence, you would be living on edge and that would make it difficult for you to achieve the important things higher up on Maslow's pyramid. If we live by the maxim to "do unto others as we would have others do unto us", then we all have a basic responsibility to do what we can to ensure that we do not reduce the sense of safety of our carers, family and people around us.

This can be challenging when we are dealing with mental health issues, and if we are depressed there is the danger we might use it as another excuse to think poorly of ourselves. Taking the challenge of seeing past our immediate feelings, will make it easier for us to think well of ourselves.

#### References

Everett, G. (2018, March ). More than being medicated: The Hierarchy of Need. Panorama, 28.

Maslow . (n.d.). Retrieved from Simply psychology: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

Seseidos, P. (2017, November 8). Responsibility: Being a responsible person makes you feel good. Retrieved from Cognifit: <https://blog.cognifit.com/responsibility/>

# ACTION: Adapting CANSAS to Individuals' Own Needs

## Recovery Conversation Theme #12: Alcohol

### The Dangers of Mixing Alcohol With Medications



By Grant J Everett

Are you 18 or over? If so, there's not much standing in the way of getting a six pack of your favourite tippie from the bottle shop and having a couple of drinks after work. Alcohol consumption has been a part of Australian society for centuries, though the more you imbibe the less socially acceptable it tends to become. Excess alcohol consumption can make you feel sick and carries a high chance of some variety of embarrassment, and overdoing it means running the risk of inflicting some substantial (and lasting) physical damage.

According to [www.Alcohol.org](http://www.Alcohol.org), taking any kind of prescription drug with alcohol can spike your chances of harm, reduce the efficacy of the prescription medication, or change its effects in unpredictable ways. Even if you only take your medication as prescribed, drinking to the point of intoxication on top of that can be a volatile mix. Common side effects include stomach upsets, nausea or vomiting, drowsiness, fatigue, dizziness or fainting, headaches, blood pressure changes, heart concerns, changes in behaviour, emotions or mental state, as well as a loss of coordination that can lead to accidents. It can also cause chronic health problems including heart damage or heart attack, stroke, liver damage, liver failure or liver cancer, internal bleeding, brain damage, depression and anxiety and more.

Painkillers and benzodiazepines are

some of the most widely abused drugs, and are highly addictive. Taking them before you drink alcohol will greatly increase their effects, as well as your risks of harm. Drowsiness, dizziness, impaired motor control, unusual behaviour, blackouts, liver damage, and breathing problems are all common side effects of painkiller and benzos, and you don't need to use a large amount to run the risk of these ills.

**Remember that "overdose" is another way of saying "stopped breathing due to substance abuse." If someone is experiencing a drug overdose or alcohol poisoning, it's vital to call 000 immediately. Their life could depend on it.**

A study in the Journal of the American Society of Anesthesiologists in 2017 found that combining a typical prescription dose of oxycodone with just 1 to 3 alcoholic drinks can lead to dangerously depressed breathing (Professor Albert Dahan, Head of the Anesthesia and Pain Research Unit at Leiden University Medical Center in the Netherlands).

Taking pills used to manage mental health issues before drinking a large quantity of alcohol can be a bad mix. For instance, taking **antidepressants**

before drinking a lot can affect cognitive processes like memory and comprehension, make you feel sleepy, sedated, dizzy or drowsy, cause blood pressure spikes, impair your motor control, cause an overdose, give you liver damage or increase your risks of blood clots and heart attacks. Alcohol can also lower the efficacy of antidepressants, potentially leading to an increase in sadness, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation.

Taking **antipsychotics** before drinking a lot of alcohol can make this kind of medication less effective, increasing the chances of a symptom flare-up. Just taking antipsychotics on their own can cause sedation, sleepiness or excessive fatigue by depressing the central nervous system, so alcohol will only amplify this. Mixing antipsychotics and lots of alcohol can lead to respiratory depression, poor decision making, cognitive impairment, low blood pressure, and put you at risk of accidents by affecting your motor skills.

### Moral of the story

Taking prescription medication in any non-prescribed way, such as by combining it with heavy drinking, always has the potential to cause real harm, and can even be lethal. Always take prescription drugs according to your doctor's instructions, and be sure to ask if there are any specific substance interactions you need to avoid. Mixing a prescription medicine with alcohol has the potential to be dangerous, but deliberately abusing prescription drugs is just asking for trouble.

If in doubt, or for more information tailored to your needs, ask your doctor.

Sources:

[www.alcohol.org/mixing-with/prescription-drugs/](http://www.alcohol.org/mixing-with/prescription-drugs/)  
[www.drugs.com/article/antipsychotic-medications-alcohol.html](http://www.drugs.com/article/antipsychotic-medications-alcohol.html)

"Antipsychotic Medications and Alcohol Interactions", L. Anderson, PharmD, Nov 7, 2017

[www.drugs.com/article/antipsychotic-medications-alcohol.html](http://www.drugs.com/article/antipsychotic-medications-alcohol.html)

"Mixing opioids and alcohol may increase likelihood of dangerous respiratory complication", February 7th 2017, American Society of Anesthesiologists  
[www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/02/170207105306.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/02/170207105306.htm)

# ACTION: Adapting CANSAS to Individuals' Own Needs

## Recovery Conversation Theme #13: Drugs

And ne'er the twain shall meet...

### Pill Testing

By Warren Heggarty

We know that drugs (including legal drugs, and sometimes even prescription drugs) can cause mental health issues. Even with good quality control there is an element of risk. How much greater, then, is the risk of harm from illicit drugs, such as party pills?

Because so many young people have died or become seriously ill from party drugs at dance parties, some people are calling for pill testing at events so as to minimise the potential harm. But should we allow pill testing at the risk of legitimising drug taking? According to "The pros and cons of pill testing" by Matthew Thomas, expert views on pill testing seem to depend on whether you are into "harm minimization" or "zero tolerance." (Thomas, 2018)

In public debate on the subject, you will notice a division straight down the centre with no overlapping areas of agreement. The two sides are polarised and there seems little hope that they will ever see eye to eye. Worse, if one side gets its way, the other side will not stay quiet about it. It's always like this with emotive issues.

Thomas explains the harm minimisation sides: "From a harm minimisation perspective, completely eliminating a drug or drugs from society is an unrealistic aim that typically causes more harm than good. As a result, we would do better to restrict the damage caused by them, even if this means an overall increase in the use of drugs."

An example of this approach is shown in an article published on the website of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales by Professor Alison Ritter. Ritter says that under a drug checking regime, the quality of drugs on the market comes closer to matching user expectations. She also said that particularly dangerous drugs tended to "leave the market." She cited Austrian research that said drug testing changed



young people's views about drugs. In cases of negative results, young people said they would warn their friends. Ritter also says that pill testing - or drug checking as it's known in Europe - provides feedback to users on the content of illegal drugs, allowing them to make informed choices.

"Australia is internationally applauded for our harm-minimisation approach to drugs, but we have failed to introduce pill testing, even though it is an intuitively appealing strategy," says Ritter.

Intuitively appealing to her, perhaps, but not to NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian or Health Minister Brad Hazzard, who exemplify the "zero tolerance" approach.

Thomas explains: "From a zero tolerance standpoint, illicit drug use should be prohibited under any circumstances. Harm reduction measures—such as pill testing—it is argued, can encourage and enable drug use, keep people stuck in a pattern of addiction, and serve as a Trojan Horse for drug law reform and the legalisation of drugs." (Thomas, 2018)

After 25 people were admitted to



hospital for drug-related illnesses over the 2019 Australia Day long weekend, the Premier doubled down on the government's position on pill testing: Ms Berejiklian said that she didn't want pill testing to give people a "green light to take these drugs." (Truu, 2019) "Do not take ecstasy. It can injure you for life or it can kill you," she said. (Truu, 2019) Health Minister Brad Hazzard described talk about pill testing as a "side show." (Truu, 2019)

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians criticised the Premier's views in an open letter. The letter begins: "There is sufficient evidence to support pill testing trials at festivals," said the RACP's Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. "Ideally, we would all like young people and the wider public not to use drugs illicitly, however, the reality is that they do in large numbers and the moral message to abstain from taking drugs is not getting through." Their message was that "Pill testing saves lives." (NewsCorp, 2019)

What about the provision of paramedic services? What kind of message does it send when we increase the level of paramedic care available at dance parties? Speaking of the Australia Day incidents, Dr Sarah Coombes of NSW Ambulance Service said "hard decisions" would have to be made about what level of medical support is provided within festivals in the future. This is because, "A number of patients who were treated likely would not have survived this event if the increased medical support had not been on site." (Truu, 2019)

#### References

- NewsCorp. (2019, January 18). Royal Australasian College of Physicians smack down premier Gladys Berejiklian. Retrieved from [www.news.com.au/lifestyle](http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle): [www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/news-life/royal-australasian-college-of-physicians-smack-down-premier-gladys-berejiklian/news-story/4c69a2fd4cb9121f56427d7141e152a9](http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/news-life/royal-australasian-college-of-physicians-smack-down-premier-gladys-berejiklian/news-story/4c69a2fd4cb9121f56427d7141e152a9)
- Ritter, A. (n.d.). Six reasons Australia should pilot 'pill testing' party drugs. Retrieved March 19, 2019, from NDARC National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales: <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/node/301000974>
- Thomas, M. (2018, May 2). The pros and cons of pill testing. Retrieved from Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library: [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2018/May/The\\_pros\\_and\\_cons\\_of\\_pill\\_testing](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2018/May/The_pros_and_cons_of_pill_testing)
- Truu, M. (2019, January 28). NSW Premier doubles down on pill testing stance following horror drug weekend. Retrieved from SBS News: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/nsw-premier-doubles-down-on-pill-testing-stance-following-horror-drug-weekend>

# ACTION: Adapting CANSAS to Individuals' Own Needs

## Recovery Conversation Theme #14 'Company': Friendships



### The ABCs of hanging out

PHOTO PROVIDED BY PIXABAY

By Grant J Everett

The onset of mental health issues can interrupt milestones that most people take for granted. For lots of us, our social development was interrupted. We might not have learned the basic social niceties that are expected of adults, or they've become blunted. Whatever the case, there are a lot of non-negotiable social expectations we need to fulfil whenever we go out with a bunch of with people. Thankfully, with a little practise they're not that complicated.

First off: ALWAYS turn up when you say you will. Ditching people is insulting. Punctuality is even more important with time-sensitive events, like going to the theatre or if you have reservations. If you cannot make it to something you've committed to, call and explain beforehand, preferably with notice.

Getting too familiar with people you just met might not be a good idea. Hugs and kisses may be unappreciated by virtual strangers. Bad language and off-colour jokes can also be a real turn off for a lot of people, so err on the side of caution.

Try and include the whole group in the conversation. If anyone's fading into the background, try to bring them in.

Unless you're after an argument, it's best to avoid controversial topics. Politics and religion aren't always off the table, but shoehorning them into the conversation may annoy people. If the topic comes up naturally and is relevant to what you're

discussing, sure, go for it. If you're tired of hearing about Trump, you can always redirect the conversation. Just change the topic.

Basic hygiene is important. Every adult needs to shower, brush their teeth, apply deodorant and wear clean clothes every day.

**Flexibility is important. If you're arranging a get-together, keep in mind that certain days and times will work better depending on their schedule. And give people notice: coffee is the sort of thing that can be arranged a day or two in advance, but movie nights and dinner parties require a week or two.**

Overly personal questions might make people uncomfortable. Asking if they're pregnant, how much money they earn or why they are still single are all best avoided. However, when you meet a new person at a gathering, there are a lot of good questions to ask. Exchanging names, what they do for a living and how you know your mutual friend is a good start.

Gossip can be a violation of privacy, and makes people appear untrustworthy. Ask yourself: if this rumour was about me, would I want people secretly discussing it? Outing somebody's sexuality, legal issues and recent breakups and listing

things you don't like about them will put you on shaky ground.

It's best not to be stingy over small amounts of money, as this sends the message that you value a bit of spare change over your friends. You don't have to be extraordinarily generous or anything, but be willing to pay your way. Consider covering the coffee occasionally.

It's unrealistic to always expect to call the shots. If you're going out to the movies, for example, try and reach a consensus about what to see and where to eat. It's best not to steamroll your friends every time you go out, or they'll feel ignored and not come.

Afterwards, check that people made it home safely, especially if your friends are catching public transport at night. It's good manners, and it shows you care.

Having a mutual experience of mental health issues can serve as a good foundation to a friendship. Making friends during a recovery journey has many benefits. For instance, you'll know what to watch for leading up to an episode, and can empathise with them.

Do you always rely on someone else to arrange a night out? Pick up that phone and do it yourself! If you are arranging things, make sure to fill everyone in on what they need to know. When the movie starts, how much it costs, where to meet, and so on.

With a group outing, try and make sure everyone is acquainted at the start. If they haven't met, do some quick introductions with their names and how you know them.

Only share what you are comfortable sharing. It's totally okay to hold parts of yourself back if you aren't comfortable sharing certain things.

### Further reading

9 Tips for Being a Great Friend  
by Dawson McAllister

[www.thehopeline.com/63-how-to-be-a-great-friend/](http://www.thehopeline.com/63-how-to-be-a-great-friend/)

# ACTION: Adapting CANSAS to Individuals' Own Needs

## Recovery Conversation Theme #17: Caring for children and family



ABOVE: Are we there yet? Before you even start, it is best to have a plan. PHOTO FROM PIXABAY

## Preparing for Parenthood

By Warren Heggarty

**“It’s a bittersweet reality: The major part of our job as parents is to eventually become dispensable. So, above all, we need to encourage our children to do things for themselves. We need to teach them to think independently, solve their own problems, and believe deeply in their own abilities.” Jane Nelsen (Nelsen, et al., 2001)**

Having children changes everything, so no wonder people (who usually like a bit of stability and certainty) get a little stressed when junior comes along. Is there any way to prepare yourself for parenthood so that it doesn’t come as such a rude shock?

First, what are the qualities that you need to develop to become a great parent. Aside from budgeting money, the editors of Parents Magazine assembled this set of attributes which will make it easier to become a great parent.

A great parent knows when to let go  
A great parent has a strong marriage  
A great parent finds time for fun

A great parent knows how to say no  
A great parent is a great role model  
A great parent shows a child endless love (Nelsen, et al., 2001)

In real life, of course, one or two of these attributes are often missing, but people seem to manage. One thing that will help you manage is planning.

**Calculate the cost:** By that, we mean the whole cost from conception until at least tertiary education. This will give you some idea of the size of the commitment you are going to make. Importantly, it may encourage you to START SAVING before you have a child so that you are not in so much financial stress later. (beliefnet)

**Realise it is no longer ‘all about me:’** Because when you have a baby, you won’t be number one any more. Not for another couple of decades at least!

**Discuss becoming a parent:** This is how you learn things. In the old days when several generations lived in the same household, it was difficult NOT to learn a thing or two about child rearing. Nowadays you have to make an effort to learn as much as possible, from other parents and your extended family.

**Accept that you won’t be able to control your environment as completely:** With a child you will

no longer be able to arrange your household and your routine exactly as you want it. If you have a spouse, you will already have realised that, in the immortal words of Petula Clarke, ‘it’s all compromise.’ Speaking of spouses, with children.

**You will really need to work as a team.** It is a big help if you are consistent in the way you relate to your children. You also need to keep one another in the loop. And remember, you are modeling parenthood before your children. Don’t stress!

So what about **preparing your children for the world of work?** According to J.T. O’Donnell of ‘Work it Daily’ the best thing you can do is ‘training them to solve problems.’ This, she says is because employers have trouble finding young workers who are resourceful enough to do this. Why? Because we have the answers to things at our fingertips. One just Googles it. But when you get to work, you discover that not ALL the answers are on Google, you have to work most things out yourself. (O’Donnell)

There will come a time, of course, when you will have to release your children into their own lives. Hopefully you won’t have to wait too many decades for this, but some parents find the adjustment a little painful. The sooner you prepare for all these things, the easier it will be.

If you need a laugh after all that, read this article by Bunmi Laditan which tells you what you REALLY need to do when preparing for parenthood. (Laditan, 2017)

### REFERENCES

beliefnet. (n.d.). *7 Ways to mentally prepare yourself for children*. Retrieved May 2, 2019, from Beliefnet: <https://www.beliefnet.com/love-family/parenting/galleries/7-ways-to-mentally-prepare-yourself-for-children.aspx>

Laditan, B. (2017, December 6). *How to Prepare for Parenthood in 11 Easy Steps*. Retrieved from huffington post: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-to-prepare-for-parenthood-in-11-easy-steps\\_b\\_5411134](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-to-prepare-for-parenthood-in-11-easy-steps_b_5411134)

Nelsen, J., Gottman, J., Cohen, L., Taffel, R., Berger, E., & Doherty, W. (2001, May). *What Makes a Great Parent?* Retrieved from Parents Magazine: <https://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/style/what-makes-a-great-parent/>

O’Donnell, J. (n.d.). *The Best Thing You Can Do To Prepare Your Kids for the Future of Work*. *The Playbook*. Inc.Video. Retrieved May 2, 2019, from <https://www.inc.com/video/jt-odonnell/how-to-raise-kids-who-will-succeed-in-the-workplace.html>

# ACTION: Adapting CANSAS to Individuals' Own Needs

## Recovery Conversation Theme #18: Education and Work



## What's holding you back from study?

By Grant J Everett

We all have dreams, but it can be easy for fear to stop us from moving towards them. Wanting to access tertiary education is a common goal, and it can provide many benefits: a TAFE course or two can open up your job prospects, assist with your self-development, and even get you into University, if that's what you desire.

Those of us with mental health issues are at risk of automatically writing ourselves off, to believe that we have no chance of going any further in life due to our diagnosis. The trick with overcoming fear is to challenge it rather than assuming it's insurmountable.

### TAFE Counsellors

TAFE NSW wants all students to get the most out of their learning experience, but they understand that personal matters can interfere with their academic performance. This is why they provide free counselling and support services all the way from enrollment to graduation, and their counselors will listen and help you come up with effective strategies to complete your

education. Counselling is available to all current and future TAFE students, and accessing it is as easy as making an appointment or dropping in and asking to talk to somebody. If a one-to-one face-to-face session isn't possible, then telephone or video conferencing can be provided. If necessary, they can arrange for you to speak with a counsellor in your own language.

Counsellors can help you to deal with any personal matters that are affecting your studies. Whether it's mental health issues, physical illness, problems at home, poor study skills, financial issues or anything else, they can lend a hand. For those of us with mental health concerns, TAFE counsellors can refer you to a Disability Consultant to arrange educational assistance, or connect you up with community mental health services. TAFE counsellors maintain a large network with community and government agencies in areas including education, health, welfare, law and disability, and can use these networks to provide specialist assistance.

[www.tafensw.edu.au/counselling-career-development-services/personal-counselling-wellbeing](http://www.tafensw.edu.au/counselling-career-development-services/personal-counselling-wellbeing)

### Potential barriers to studying

No matter what might be holding you

back, there's a good chance that there exists some kind of support that will allow you to be the best student you can be. For instance...

Were you bullied in high school? The world is getting less and less tolerant of bullying, and TAFE has a zero tolerance policy towards it. TAFE students are treated as adults, and are expected to act like adults.

Do you think an old dog can't learn new tricks? Not only are you never too old to pick up new skills, but mature age students can actually be better pupils: adults are more mature, take their studies more seriously, and have a better idea of what they want in life.

Concerned that you won't be able to keep up with the coursework? TAFE classes are kept at a manageable size so the teachers can offer extra assistance to anyone who's feeling a bit lost or overwhelmed. Many courses are available either part time or full time, so bigger certificates can potentially be spread out over several years. Some courses can also be attended during the day or in the evening. Allowances can be made if you are falling behind.

Worried studying will cost too much? Not only do students on the Disability Support Pension get one free TAFE course a year through Centrelink, they are also eligible for a regular support supplement to help with study expenses.

Don't know where you want to go in life? TAFE campuses provide course information sessions and other group programs to assist students with plotting their career path.

TAFE NSW has 130 locations around the state and is also offered online. Their courses are specifically designed to help you to get the most from your training, and provide you with the knowledge and skills you need to succeed.

[www.tafensw.edu.au](http://www.tafensw.edu.au)

Not sure where to start looking into Universities in NSW? Try this list:

[universityreviews.com.au/list-of-universities/nsw/](http://universityreviews.com.au/list-of-universities/nsw/)



Where mental wellbeing thrives

# Seven Quick Questions About Panorama

If you regularly attend a Flourish Australia Service, please name it in the box at right:  
Eg, Moree, Harris Park, Buck House...

## Could you tell us a little about yourself?

Q.1 Are you... PLEASE TICK BOX, AS APPROPRIATE

Male

Female

Trans\* person

Don't want to say

OR WRITE IN  
YOUR ANSWER  
HERE

Q.6 Are you.. PLEASE TICK BOX AS APPROPRIATE

A person who accesses Flourish Australia services?

A person who works for Flourish Australia?

A carer

Don't want to say

OR WRITE IN YOUR ANSWER HERE

Q.2 to which of the following age groups do you belong? PLEASE TICK BOX, AS APPROPRIATE

Under 18 years

46-55 years

18-25 years

56-65 years

26-35 years

over 65 years

36-45 years

Don't want to say

We would like to ask you a few questions so that we can improve the quality of Panorama

Q. 3 Firstly, how often would you say you read Panorama? PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY, AS APPROPRIATE

Always

Occasionally

Never

Most of the time

Rarely

If you ticked 'Never', PLEASE GO STRAIGHT TO THE NEXT PAGE

Q.4 When you are reading Panorama, do you usually... PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY, AS APPROPRIATE.

... read all of it, cover to cover

read some of it

read most of it

Just skip through it/ look at the pictures etc.

Panorama has a detachable ACTION recovery conversations section. We would like to improve the way we present the information in ACTION so that it works better in supporting your recovery journey. If you are a carer/staff member, we want to present information that is most useful to your support role.

**WHICH TOPICS ARE IMPORTANT TO MY RECOVERY**

Q5. Which of the 22 CANSAS topics covered by ACTION recovery conversations are most important to you? Please tick the box next to the ones that you would like to read about.

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Accommodation            | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Information about condition. | <input type="checkbox"/> 17. Child Care      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Food                     | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Safety to self              | <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Basic Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Looking after the home   | <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Safety of others            | <input type="checkbox"/> 19. Telephone       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Self care                | <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Alcohol                     | <input type="checkbox"/> 20. Transport       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Activities               | <input type="checkbox"/> 13. Drugs                       | <input type="checkbox"/> 21. Money           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Physical health          | <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Company                     | <input type="checkbox"/> 22. Benefits        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. 'Psychotic Symptoms'     | <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Intimate relationships      |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8. 'Psychological distress' | <input type="checkbox"/> 16. Sexual expression           |  |

**WHICH TOPICS ARE NOT SO IMPORTANT TO ME**

Q6. Do you regard any of the topics as unimportant to your personal recovery journey? If you do not have lived experience of a mental health issue, do any of the 22 topics seem less appropriate, important or useful than the others. Please tick the box next to the ones that you would probably NOT like to read about.

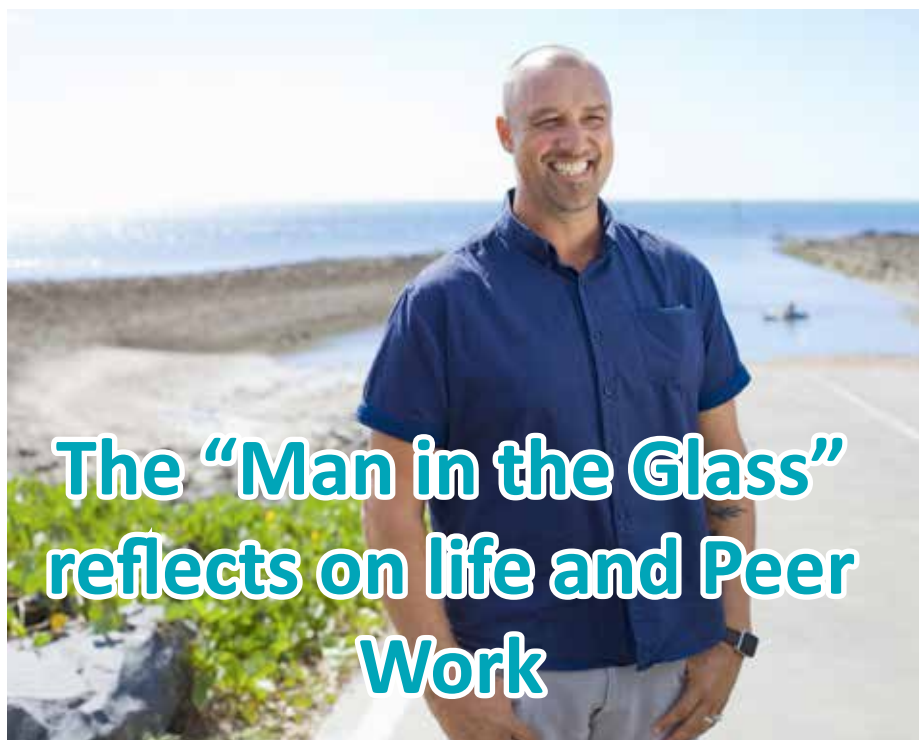
- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Accommodation            | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Information about condition. | <input type="checkbox"/> 17. Child Care      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Food                     | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Safety to self              | <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Basic Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Looking after the home   | <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Safety of others            | <input type="checkbox"/> 19. Telephone       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Self care                | <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Alcohol                     | <input type="checkbox"/> 20. Transport       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Activities               | <input type="checkbox"/> 13. Drugs                       | <input type="checkbox"/> 21. Money           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Physical health          | <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Company                     | <input type="checkbox"/> 22. Benefits        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. 'Psychotic Symptoms'     | <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Intimate relationships      |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8. 'Psychological distress' | <input type="checkbox"/> 16. Sexual expression           |  |

Q7. If you have any comments or suggestions, please write them in the space below.

**THANK YOU FOR ANSWERING SEVEN QUICK QUESTIONS ABOUT PANORAMA!**

Subscribers, please use the Business Reply Envelope to return this to Flourish Australia 5 Figtree Drive Sydney Olympic Park NSW 2127. Or you can hand it in to your local service manager or group facilitator.





**ABOVE (TONY):** ‘...my dad told me what matters is how we deal with the cards we’re dealt...it got me thinking...’ PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

By Tony of Hervey Bay, QLD

For me, Flourish Australia means no more regrets! I get to be myself, free from any anxiety about fitting in; and I own every challenge I’ve come through, because those are the experiences that shaped me into the self-assured person I see smiling back at me from the mirror today.

I lived with regrets about past choices until Flourish Australia taught me to see my experiences from a strengths-based perspective.

My best memories of growing up in Albury Wodonga were of being outdoors, camping and fishing. Around people, I felt anxious about fitting in.

From the age of 10 I took to skateboarding because I felt that gave me an edge. At 18, I got into DJ-ing, and had the time of my life for about 12 years...until the pressure to perform lead to dabbling in drugs to boost my confidence, which brought everything unstuck.

Stepping away from music was really tough. I tried to find meaning in life by doing good, like mentoring at youth camps, but it’s only since becoming involved with Flourish Australia that I’ve found a real sense of purpose and feel that my life has come together.

Twelve years ago I was hiding myself away, working in a factory so I didn’t have to relate to people. I realised I’d taken things too far the day I spoke no more than 4 words.

My girlfriend at the time gave me a poem called “The Man in the Glass” that I keep on my desk to this day. It’s about looking into your own soul to ask yourself what you want in life and whether the person you see in the mirror fits with that vision. I could barely look my own reflection in the eye and that set me on a new path to getting back among people.

Breaking free of my dependence on drugs wasn’t easy, but Flourish Australia showed me the confidence that I craved was already inside of me. I learned how to connect with that part of myself instead of disconnecting with drugs.

Another milestone moment came three years ago. I began feeling dissatisfied with my life all over again, and I looked to my counsellor to fix things for me. I woke up to the fact that no one else was going to make my life happen for me. I knew I wanted to help people, so I signed up with Lifeline’s Suicide Crisis Support Line, but that didn’t allow me to explore communicating with other people the way I wanted to.

The connection I was looking for came

with a casual role at Flourish Australia’s Warm Line in Queensland. I was able to use my story as something callers could identify with, to open a dialogue about their own struggles.

What’s so rewarding about the Flourish Australia approach is that I’m not hiding behind a mask or a job role. I share my vulnerability by talking openly about the things that have been tough. The stigma around my mental health has caused me to fight with myself a lot and avoid anything like medication or other treatment, as that might mean admitting that I had a problem. Flourish Australia doesn’t use labels: they look at who you are and what you want in life.

Working collaboratively appeals to me now. I see myself moving into a role providing suicide prevention support in hospitals and becoming a peer leader so I can have more of a hand in guiding my team to become the best support we can possibly be.

I’d love to travel with my wife. We put travel on hold a few years ago when my dad was diagnosed with cancer. That experience taught me how to be a man when my dad told me in one simple sentence what matters: it’s about how we deal with the cards we’re dealt and how we choose to move through that space.

It got me thinking: if I died tomorrow, how would I be remembered? I didn’t feel there was a lot of good to be said, so I started investing more of myself into others and becoming someone I could feel proud to be.

I coach my son’s soccer team now, which is something I had always wanted, but never imagined I would do. I have discussions with the kids about bullying and ways they can use strengths-based self-talk to come out on top in situations where they might find someone trying to get into their head to affect them.

That’s what fulfils me now – just being with someone in that moment when they most need support, so they can share what’s going on for them instead of masking it by self medicating in harmful ways.

*As told to Tina Irving*



## What is Ability Links?

**NERIDA JACKSON attended Harmony Day at Buckingham House day-2-day living centre at Surry Hills. She told us all about the program she works for.**

By Nerida Jackson

I work for a program called Ability Links. The staff like to call ourselves Linkers for short. It's a government-funded program that's NSW wide, though in the City it's mainly funded by St Vincent de Paul. I work at their office at Wollomooloo, but I cover pretty much all of Sydney.

### Who can access Ability Links?

Ability Links works with people with disability so we can connect them up with services that will help them achieve their goals. It really is as broad as that. We don't have set forms you have to fill out with lots of invasive questions: we just ask if you identify as having some form of disability. You don't have to tell us any more than you want to. We can also support families and carers. We will work with anyone aged from 7 to 64, so that's a huge range.

### What can Ability Links do?

The next part of the process is having a chat. We need to find out what you want from life so we know what help we can provide. All Linkers know what services are available locally, so we can use that knowledge to connect you up. You might want a mainstream service, or something really specific. One person

who accesses our services told us, "I want to meet up with people to play chess," so we found a time and a place that suited their needs. You might want to have a conversation with somebody in Chinese, or assistance with your housework, or learn to budget. You'd be surprised how much help is out there. If you need advocacy, we can link you up to an advocacy service. There's quite a few services of this kind out there. One of the main ones is located at Redfern. Something else I come across a lot is public housing issues, where tenants are having problems with trying to get a transfer and not being listened to, or their homes aren't receiving important maintenance. Again, we can connect people up with a lot of services who know how to deal with this sort of thing. Another service we work with are community legal centres. A lady I'm working with at the moment has been involved in a huge legal issue, and she was totally distraught, so we connected her up with Kingsford Legal Centre nearby and they helped her to figure everything out.

We think creatively, and there's not many things we can't help with. Sometimes we need to talk with different community organisations and pursue different things with them, and it may not always be clear cut, but we are persistent!

### What Nerida likes

The beauty of Ability Links is it's tailored by what YOU want to do. Taking a TAFE course is a popular goal, and there are

a lot of people looking for jobs. Even though we're not a job search agency, we can offer support in other ways: we could link you up with a job provider, or with someone to who can show you how to prepare a good cover letter and resume. We can also offer tips on how to conduct yourself, the clothes you should wear, and those other little details.

We'll connect you up with a Linker who "gets" you. You might like to work with someone who's closer to your age, or you may prefer to work with a lady. We can usually match people up with a worker who meets their preferences. We also try and make the whole process as easy as possible, and that includes meeting where you'd like: at our office, at a café in the community, or even your home. Wherever you feel comfortable is fine by us.

What I love about Ability Links is that we build confidence and capacity in people by working alongside them. When we sit on the computer and search online for different options, they'll be learning how to do these things by themselves.

### Highlights

I remember one lady, Kerry: when I first met her she was extremely shy. She had numerous disabilities and had been through all the services, but was still feeling very isolated and had such a lack of confidence. The first time I met her it was hard just to get her to speak to me, so we met a number of times over coffee until she got to know me a bit better. She finally started opening up after about six meetings (it's a good thing I like coffee!). Eventually we started talking in depth, and I asked her "What do you like to do?" And she said, "Well, I've always wanted to know how to knit." After connecting her up with an appropriate service we also linked her up with some language classes. Now she's attending a gym class. She's really come out of her shell so much.

### Summing up

All of our services are free. You can call and leave your details, and a Linker will get back to you within a few days. We can chat over the phone, and agree on a place to meet so we can figure out where to go from here.

[www.abilitylinksnsw.org.au](http://www.abilitylinksnsw.org.au)



## Using the Four Pillars to care for carers

**ABOVE: Emma Burton, Carer Advocate** from the One Door Mental Health Carer's Service. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

By Emma Burton

My job as a Carer Advocate is to support people who are caring for a loved one with a mental health issue. Essentially, Carer Advocates care for carers. This includes providing practical support, teaching coping skills, helping them build a network of support people, and providing assistance in navigating the mental health system and NDIS. Carer Advocates can also point you in the direction of supports and services you didn't even know exist. Whether it's one-on-one face-to-face support, a group meeting, or just chatting on the phone when you need someone to listen, our Carer Advocates can help.

All our services are supported by what we call The Four Pillars. They are...

### Pillar One: Information

While our Carer's Service has a "no wrong door policy", it isn't possible to provide a one-size-fits-all support option. Every recovery journey is unique, so we clearly spell out everything in layman's terms: our services, their eligibility criteria, our referral process, how to navigate between different services, and so on.

### Pillar Two: Emotional Support

We encourage carers to request all

### Families and Carers

the emotional support they need to perform their roles as carers. I often meet with carers one-on-one in a café or some other gentle environment so they can share how they're traveling. Carer Advocates spend a lot of time providing emotional support to carers. Knowing they are free to talk with someone who is willing to listen and will validate them with a non-judgemental approach can bring a lot of relief. Being a neutral, listening ear is a key part of my role, and while I also need to figure out what support they need in order to continue looking after their loved ones, it's imperative that I help them to stay on top of their own self-care, too. Carers need to remember to look after themselves!

Our support groups are the most important component of our work. I facilitate one in Balmain and one in Glebe. We get together, have something to eat and share our experiences of caring for a loved one. We'll see if anyone is facing hardships, acknowledge that being a carer is challenging at times, and work out what strategies can overcome our obstacles. Anyone who can share their experiences is brave and vital.

### Pillar Three: Education

One Door offers educational modules created in consultation with health professionals and consumers. Our class teaches how to deal with anxiety and depression, self-care and how to boost our communication skills, to name a few. We also explain what a "carer" actually is, as we've found a lot of people are under the impression there's a specific criteria that classifies someone as a carer, whereas it's actually anyone who supports somebody with their mental health issues. While many carers are looking after a loved one with a specific mental health issue, they might not understand *other* mental health issues, so we aim to improve their understanding by debunking common myths. We want to do away with the kinds of unhelpful, untrue stigma that leads to mistreatment. An honest conversation goes a long way to sharing understanding.

### Pillar Four: Advocacy

I can facilitate meetings for carers, link them up with relevant service providers (such as social workers or psychologists),

and serve as a voice for carers who feel their needs (or the needs of their loved ones) aren't being met. This might mean making contact with their treating team, for instance. We don't provide legal advocacy, but we can use our voice to support carers in any other way.

[www.onedoor.org.au/services/carers-services/nsw-family-carer-mental-health-program](http://www.onedoor.org.au/services/carers-services/nsw-family-carer-mental-health-program)

**Flourish Australia** is also committed to helping carers who support loved ones with a lived experience of mental health issues. Our inclusive, holistic approach enhances the relationship between individuals and their families and other support people, and we do all we can to make their day-to-day challenges easier to manage. Receiving help from a carer will often play a key role in keeping someone with a mental health issues well, and help them to feel like they're a part of their local community. So when somebody asks us for support, we discuss what they already have or how they can reconnect with their family, friends and other support people. We like to involve carers in the planning process to ensure everyone's feedback and views are considered, and carers are most welcome to attend planning meetings. Their ideas and views will be acknowledged and listened to. We also partner with numerous specialist organisations in order to provide all kinds of assistance and education.

Our family and carer practise is based on *A Practical Guide For Working With Carers Of People With A Mental Illness*, a resource developed by a range of mental health organisations who specialise in providing support to carers.

To find out more about what we can do for carers and your loved ones, please contact us.

Call 1300 779 270

[info@FlourishAustralia.org.au](mailto:info@FlourishAustralia.org.au)

[www.FlourishAustralia.org.au](http://www.FlourishAustralia.org.au)

[www.FlourishAustralia.org.au/family-and-carers](http://www.FlourishAustralia.org.au/family-and-carers)



**ABOVE: Finished product; Lachlan and Amanda who access the Warana service are seen picking some of the delicious Butterbeans, Parsley and Shallots that are growing amongst those huge Cabbage.** PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAREN DELANEY

# The Gardening Gang Gets Going (with help from Bunnings and Taubmans)

By Karen Delaney and Lachlan Smith

**What exactly does it mean when we talk building partnerships that support people to live and work in the community. This story from Flourish Australia's Warana service puts you in the picture!**

The Warana PEARL (Peer Engaged Assisted Recovery Lifestyle) Program located in Kawana, Queensland has been steadily growing in size over 2018/2019. As our numbers grow the, rooms where we hold private conversations with the people who access the service have been in high demand. Space inside the building is being used daily by the peers.\* To help accommodate for the

\*NOTE. Warana is proudly a peer operated service. In this story you can read 'peer' as meaning 'both staff and the people who access the service.'

growing groups, the peers decided to renew the back yard area.

The concept was to create feature gardens and private sitting areas to make better use of backyard space...as a more congenial peer to peer conversation back drop than inside the building. Over time, it's hoped that bright feature plants, fragrant flowers and a culinary patch would bring functionality and inspiration to the are.

Our backyard consisted of a narrow patch with an aged outdoor table, wooden chairs, a cantilever umbrella, two semi-retired garden plots and a few Cordylines, which are a popular garden feature plant. There's also a lovely mural painted on the shed wall by past peers and staff, and a nice high timber fence.

Not deterred by a small budget and minimal equipment, a Garden Gang was formed, and the peers laid out their ideas for the backyard. Lachlan possessed hidden talents and presented us with a master plan fit to scale, and although the end result wasn't quite the same (we have no water feature, sadly) it is wonderful to have such a talented and enthusiastic peer.

## You never know till you have a go

In the next stage of the project, our gang explored possibilities of where we could get outdoor furniture, garden soil, plants, screens for some privacy and fence paint to renew our back yard. With a belief that 'you never know till you have a go' and 'if you don't ask you don't get,' peer worker Karen sent an email to Amanda, the Activities

## Community Partnership

Organiser at Bunnings; and, well... the response had us doing little cartwheels all over the place.

Not only did Mandy from Bunnings come out to visit us, discuss our needs, and let us know that they would help us with items and labour, but they also brought in Taubman's Paints. The local area manager Fiona donated and even offered to paint the fence as soon as we chose the colour.

**"...how powerful a thing it is to reach out to others and be rewarded with such kindness."**

Well, the paint lottery was on, and with the many shades on offer, Vanilla Brandy was the winner. The date was set and peers got busy cleaning out the yard, tidying the fence line and relocating a raised garden plot. March 11th Arrived and along with it came Mandy, Fiona, Jack and a ute filled with supplies including an unexpected wish listed item:

### A lovely new Barbecue!

It was hot and hard work but with lots of laughter and peer-made pizzas for lunch, the fence was painted. The screens

were set up, tables and umbrellas put together, and boxes of plants and garden mix stored in the shade for a later day. The day closed with a 'Certificate Presentation' and promises to keep in touch, and we were reminded of how powerful a thing it is to reach out to others and be rewarded with such kindness.

The garden gang continues with planting of vegetables and herbs from Bunnings, cuttings from our own home gardens, and planning where to put the pallet gardens. Discussions also continue on how to include these freshly grown goodies in to our cooking groups. A broken bench seat has been painted and re-purposed on the fence as a table, and pavers from a garage sale will come together for a mandala in the seating area.

We now have a new opportunity to continue to express our creativity in the garden, and are grateful for the contributions of others in helping us make our peer operated service just as comfortable as our own homes.

**Flourish Australia**  
289 Nicklin Way  
KAWANA Qld 4575  
1300 779 270



**ABOVE: From L-R, Christian Ravello and Nancy Mattos from A Sound Life with Jeff Tooth performing at Buckingham House recently. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT**

Review by Warren Heggarty

As a person with lived experience of mental health issues and a long time supporter of Flourish Australia's Buckingham House, Jeff recently emerged from his spiritual home of Campbelltown to perform some new songs at his old stamping ground.

Last year, 2018 was a tough one for multi-instrumentalist Jeff. 'Happy to say I'm far better these days,' he now tells us. He has even recorded another new CD: RUNNING FOLK. It was only a matter of time before Jeff combined two of his favourite things, music and running.

Panorama readers may recall Jeff's ultra-marathon exploits which we have reported over the years. Well, now they can sing along with them! And there is even a song about Jeff's hero Pat Farmer, the distance runner and former member of Federal Parliament!

'Five Marathons in Five Days' tells of Jeff's gruelling progress through 'the wall' towards the great achievement of 'five in five.' The *Sri Chinmoy 24 Hour Race* tells what it is really like to 'run all day and run all night.' For those who like their races a little less gruelling (?) the good old City To Surf gets a song too!

Readers who are interested in purchasing this or any other Jeff Tooth opus can contact Panorama!



**Below is a photo collage put together by the Flourish Australia Warana service. LEFT: Mandy, Jack and Fiona. RIGHT: Paul, Vicki, Fiona, Mandy, Karen, Jack and Toni. PHOTOS BY RYAN SCHMIDT AND KAREN DELANEY**



# Coming home to Embark

What is it like to participate in one of Flourish Australia's many and varied day services?

By Warren Heggarty

When Panorama visited Embark Cottage in Blacktown one day, the most noticeable thing was how WELCOMING the place is. We were only there a few minutes before being invited to join in a game of Bocce and their regular Tuesday barbecue!

## Teaching and Learning

Peter from TAFE is at the house taking a class of Community Services students who come to Embark Cottage every week as part of their studies. The students gain valuable experience by actually having their class room in effect moved into the field in this way!

## Cooking and Eating

Food is important. Today, Lloyd has donned the apron for a barbecue lunch outside. Readers who follow Flourish Australia's social media might have seen an item about an interesting chicken and rice recipe from Nigeria which TAFE student Anna introduced to everybody at Embark.

## Working and Volunteering

Narelle Passlow and Melanie Dragusanu are the two Flourish Australia staff members on duty today and it is marvellous how they manage to keep up with everything going on around them! This would not be possible without assistance from the members and volunteers who chip in with the running of the Cottage.

## Cleaning and Nightscaping

For example, Victor Verheul and Ian Bailey are the cleaning team...or should I say "The Clean Team", who take great pride in their roles at Embark cottage. Victor took the opportunity to show us his favourite art pieces hanging on the walls of what was once a suburban lounge room. Four of the members were working on "Nightscape" drawings on pieces of black paper at the time.

---

**LEFT: Katie and Billy the Delta Dog in the back yard at Embark.** PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

## People and Services



**ABOVE: Renovations at Embark mean that the offices have been moved upstairs making it easier for people to access groups which are mostly conducted downstairs. Here we find four ladies working away at their “Nightscapes” in progress in the Arts room at Embark Cottage. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY INSET: A collage by Embark members after Yayoy Kusama PHOTO NARELLE PASSLOW**

### Indoors and outdoors

There IS an actual lounge room as well, with plenty of lounge chairs. This is the venue for general meetings each month, but there is a lot of emphasis on the great outdoors as well. The back yard has a number of garden plots and a rock pool with quite a few colourful Koi Carp.

### Lots and Lots of Dots

Narelle told us about a recent creative morning doing Art with community arts coordinator Jane Miller.

“The drawings and collage are a group artwork created that morning by the artists at Embark Cottage. It was all inspired by the Japanese artist Yayoi

**BELOW: Narelle Passlow and Terry Clendon discussing the benefits of sunshine in the back yard. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY**



Kusama. Kusama is a prolific artist who is 90 years old and still creating art. As a child Kusama had hallucinations, often with bright dots. She moved to New York and was at the forefront of Pop Art in the 50s and 60s. Becoming unwell again, she returned to Japan where she found herself a hospital that was interested in art therapy. With this support, she continues to create art each day.”

### Singing and Dancing

Terry Clendon has been a member for many years and he is also a regular visitor to other Flourish Australia services. Several years ago, he did a major feature article for Panorama in which he spoke about the use of technology in interstellar space travel. Recently, Terry has been concentrating on things a little more down to Earth, though. He prepared a video presentation for the TAFE students which looked at how mental health issues are presented in popular songs.

“For example, the Bee Gees song / *STARTED A JOKE*,” says Terry. “You could say it is about how depression develops and grows. But there is another song / *CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW THE RAIN HAS GONE* which describes a depression lifting.”

Narelle says, “A lack of sunshine is known to make some people unwell, so of course sunshine can be good for depression.”

## CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

**BELOW: Ian and Victor. The Clean Team at Embark. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY**



## People and Services

Terry has also done this presentation for local senior citizens.

"I have heard that with postnatal depression, they did a trial with mothers and their babies in a circle singing and found that it works better than the medication."

Narelle says, "Singing and dancing is good for everyone."

"Yes, music is very powerful and can help with mental illness," agreed Terry.

### Tae Kwon Do & Bocce

And so is Tae Kwon Do, according to Lloyd. Lloyd is a volunteer at Embark these days, though he used to be a peer worker. Today he is the chef for the barbecue. "We got the Tae Kwon Do idea from (Flourish Australia's) Buck House. We love it." If martial arts don't bowl you over, Embark has a Bocce group too!

### Delta Dog

Also at Embark today is Carol and Billy from Delta Dogs. Billy is a trained

therapy dog who works in places such as nursing homes and hospitals. Billy has a reassuring facial expression that can calm even people who are a bit nervous around animals. And for people who love animals, Billy is the epitome of loveliness. We also suspect that Billy enjoys being the centre of attention! We really need to clone Billy so that EVERYONE can have their own Billy. We managed to get a cute snap of Billy being held by Embark member Katie (main photo on page 46).

### Rapping and Rolling

Katie's sister Nina Kay is also a member at Embark. Panorama readers have met Nina before: she appeared in Panorama in 2014 after winning the Karaoke competition at Flourish Australia's Picnic Day. She absolutely blew everyone away with her rendition of an Evanescence song, then came back and did it all again the next year.

Nina has a very powerful voice. But Karaoke isn't all she does! Nina (under her stage name Beautifyer) is in a group called EPIK TREO. We will have an

exclusive interview with Epik Treo in your next issue. In the meantime, why not go to SoundCloud and search for EPIK TREO (careful of the spelling) to listen for free? They have a number of songs available that we strongly recommend.

Nina is also hoping to start a Certificate IV in Peer Work. Listening in, one of the TAFE students being hosted at Embark, RL, encouraged Nina to go for it.

"Music is very therapeutic," says Nina. "I think Embark should start its own group..." But we will have to leave that for another story.

### TLC Garden Day

One great thing about Embark is that it has a big back yard, as demonstrated below during its recent TLC Garden Day. It's a great place for barbecues, or just hanging out.

All this leads to the obvious question: is there anything they DON'T do at Embark Cottage? Further investigation will be needed...

**BELOW: Blacktown is famous for its big back yards, which require a certain amount of maintenance. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY**



Flourish Australia's  
Embark Cottage  
38 Peter Street  
BLACKTOWN NSW 2148  
1300 779 270



# Back On Track Health Your Physical Health and Wellbeing

<https://both.flourishaustralia.org.au/>



## My Skin

### Tan Lines

By Warren Heggarty

Since the 1970s when sunbaking seemed almost to be compulsory for Australians, health authorities have pushed the message that tanning can lead to dangerous forms of cancer. Tanning clinics have been banned for good reason.

Tanning and sunburn are a reaction to the sun (actually ultra violet rays) damaging your skin. Part of the damage may be triggering off uncontrolled cell growth: skin cancer. The older you get, the more likely you are to develop skin cancers. The majority of skin cancers are non-lethal if treated. Melanoma, however can be fatal- and it does not spare young people.

There was a lot of social pressure on people to get a tan in the seventies. "Sun Worshipping" was supposed to be a good thing. If you didn't, some people thought you were a bit strange. Even without this kind of social pressure, the sunny climate we have in most parts of Australia leads us to have the highest skin cancer rates in the world.

This statistic remained true even in the 1980s when it briefly seemed to be cool to be as pale as possible. People began shaming you if you were too tanned. You can't win with fashion...

There is an old article from Cosmopolitan by Angela Ledgerwood which shows the torment of a Sun Worshipper torn between being fashionable and being sensible...or even alive. Is there a happy medium? Medical science says NO...but fashion...? (Ledgerwood, 2014)

### Warnings

Despite the decades of warnings against skin cancer, many teenagers today, especially girls, still believe a tan (ie, skin damage) is a good thing. The Cancer Council's National Sun Protection Survey (Cancer Council, 2018) found that overall, 38% of teens say they like to get a tan, though girls proved to have a greater desire to tan with 43% saying they prefer to be sun-bronzed. 67% of girls also believe their friends think a tan is a good thing. Overall, 62 per cent of teens (both boys and girls) believe their friends think having a tan is a good thing.

Each year sees 14,000 new cases of Melanoma leaving 1,900 people dead, many of them young.

Using sun screen reduces the chance of developing cancer although most people seem to underestimate how much they need to use. The Cancer Council has its own brand of sunscreen which you can get from a chemist. Follow the instructions carefully and use more than you think you need.

It is not just Summer that can increase your risk of skin cancer. According to Robyn Lucas of the Australian National University, If you spend long hours in the sun, you can get sun damage on most days of the year. Including in winter. (Parnell, 2018)

Being outdoors is healthy in itself and we actually need to get sunlight to function

at our best and to manufacture Vitamin D. You can read what the Cancer Council says about ultraviolet rays and Vitamin D here: [www.cancer.org.au/preventing-cancer/sun-protection/vitamin-d/](http://www.cancer.org.au/preventing-cancer/sun-protection/vitamin-d/)

So even if you are careful not to get sunburned, you can't hide from the sun all the time. You still need to check any suspicious looking marks when you go to the doctor. If you want to know what to look for, the Cancer Council has posters and fact sheets which you can find here:

[www.cancer.org.au/content/pdf/Fact-sheets](http://www.cancer.org.au/content/pdf/Fact-sheets)

### References

Cancer Council. (2018, November 18). National Skin Cancer Action Week. Retrieved from Cancer Council : <https://www.cancer.org.au/preventing-cancer/sun-protection/campaigns-and-events/national-skin-cancer-action-week.html>  
Ledgerwood, A. (2014, July 19). Is getting a tan really that dangerous. Retrieved from Cosmopolitan: <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/health-fitness/a28855/anti-sun-shaming-feature/>  
Parnell, S. (2018, November 23). Teenagers tan today pay tomorrow. The Australian .

## My skin

- Do I get sores or boils?
- Does my skin take a long time to heal?
- Do I have itching or scratching that is hard to stop?
- Have I ever had any skin cancers removed?
- Do I use sunscreen?
- Do I use medications that make it easier for my skin to burn in the sun?
- Am I due for a skin check?

If you are Flourish Australia staff or access Flourish Australia services, you are able to access the Physical Health site here:

[both.FlourishAustralia.org.au/](https://both.FlourishAustralia.org.au/)

Your Physical Health and Wellbeing



## Chest Pain



## When it's not a heart attack

by Warren Heggarty

In December and March Quarterly Panorama (which you can read online at [panoramaonlinemagazine.com](http://panoramaonlinemagazine.com)), we featured stories about Heart Attack, signs to look for and action to take. In this BOTH article we briefly look at OTHER types of chest pain. Some of these can be mistaken for a heart attack, but don't let that put you off getting help. It is better to be safe than sorry. If you need detailed information always consult a Doctor, who can take your individual needs into account.

Chest pain has a number of causes, some of which may be minor, such as indigestion. Other more serious causes can include pulmonary embolism (blood clot on the lung). (WA Health) There are many different sources of chest pain, the heart being just one of them.

Commonly, the digestive system is to blame. Indigestion and gastric reflux caused by stomach acid coming back up from the stomach into the throat can produce a nasty burning sensation in the chest. The solution here is usually to be careful not only WHAT you eat but HOW you eat. Chewing food thoroughly will help. This is difficult if you have problems with your teeth but a dentist can help out here. Eating too much too close to bedtime can bring on reflux, too.

Chest pain may also be the result of muscles, bones and related tissue. Sprains and strains or even fractures in the ribs can be responsible for pain.

Shingles is quite painful and often affects the chest and abdomen. It is caused by the same virus as Chicken Pox, usually affecting older people after having lain dormant for years. It usually affects a particular "dermatome" or zone of the skin fed by a major nerve coming from the spine. This is often accompanied by a rash in the effected area. See your doctor.

A pulmonary embolism, or a blood clot in the lung, often causes sudden, sharp and severe pain that might become worse when breathing in. Another common sign of blood clots is severe weakness and getting puffed out by very little. Either way, it needs urgent medical attention.

Chest infections such as pneumonia can cause pain when breathing. Sometimes a continuous cough over several days can become painful, not to mention exhausting, even while we seem to be recovering. Parts of your chest may become sore to the touch when you have a chest infection or you may feel pain when coughing or sneezing. It is best to get symptoms like this checked out by a doctor to rule out something serious.

### Panic Attack

A tricky one is the panic attack.

This is caused by overbreathing (hyperventilation) and sometimes, but not always, severe chest pain results. People sometimes report to Hospital Emergency Departments with suspected heart attacks which fortunately turn out to be panic attacks. Not that panic attacks are pleasant, but they won't kill you like a panic attack will.

A medical examination can quickly rule out heart attack if it is actually a panic attack. People who have panic attacks often have an anxiety disorder, or may have experienced an extremely stressful life event.

So the causes of chest pains are many and varied, some are not very dangerous, others (like a blood clot) are very dangerous indeed.

So it won't hurt to repeat the information about suspected heart attacks:

**If any of the following develop, dial triple zero (000) to call an ambulance:**

- chest pain that feels like crushing/choking or like a heavy pressure
- pain radiating to the neck/jaw/shoulder/arm
- nausea/vomiting accompanied by pain
- sweating or clammy to touch
- shortness of breath (WA Health)

Works Cited  
WA Health. (n.d.). Chest Pain. Retrieved from Healthy WA Health information for West Australians: [https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A\\_E/Chest-pain](https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Chest-pain)



## Going to the toilet

# Bowel cancer is treatable and beatable if detected early!

Grant J Everett

Bowel cancer is Australia’s second deadliest cancer. Sadly, it claims the lives of around 103 Australians every week (around 5,375 people a year), but if discovered early it’s one of the most treatable cancers, making early screening essential. A staggering 1 in 13 Australians will be diagnosed with bowel cancer in their lifetime, with around 15,604 diagnosed this year alone. And while the risk of bowel cancer increases significantly with age, it doesn’t discriminate: it affects both men and women, young and old.

## Prevention

Australia has one of the highest rates of bowel cancer in the world, but there is a lot we can do to reduce our risks of developing it and increasing our chances of beating it if it does make an appearance. Certain lifestyle factors are vital in reducing your risks of developing bowel cancer, such as...

- Eating a healthy high-fibre diet that’s low in saturated fats
- Engaging in regular physical activity for at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week
- Reducing your consumption of red and processed meat
- Not smoking
- Maintain a healthy body weight (obesity is linked to bowel cancer, especially in men)
- Drink alcohol only in moderation

## Back On Track Health

Other factors that increase your risk of bowel cancer include inflammatory bowel disease and anal polyps. You should also know your family history, as heredity plays a big role.

## Things to watch for

If you experience one or more of the following symptoms, you may want to consult your GP. They can tell you whether these are the hallmarks of anything more serious, or just too many beans in your taco.

- A change in toilet habits, such as diarrhoea, constipation, or feeling “unfinished” after going
- Blood in your stool
- Abdominal pain, bloating or cramping
- Bottom pain
- A lump inside or on your anus
- Weight loss
- Fatigue
- Unexplained anaemia

## Screening

Getting screened every year or two can reduce your risks of dying from bowel cancer by up to 33%. If detected early, up to 90% of bowel cancer cases can be successfully treated. This is why eligible Australians aged between 50-74 are sent a free bowel cancer screening kit every couple of years. This involves a simple, non-invasive test that can be done at home.

## Colonoscopy

Bowel cancer develops on the inner lining of the bowel, and is usually preceded by growths called polyps. These growths can become cancerous if left unchecked, which is why the best test for bowel cancer is a colonoscopy. This physically examines the bowel with a flexible tube. In addition to being equipped with a light, a camera, and a water jet, the tube also has tools for snipping polyps for further examination.

## Treating bowel cancer

If you have been diagnosed with bowel cancer, the core takeaway message is that it is treatable and beatable if detected early. Treatment is highly dependent on the type and stage of the cancer, your age, your general health, and other factors. Radiotherapy, chemotherapy and surgery are all common options, though your treating Doctor is best equipped to discuss your treatment details. You will also receive help from a team of special-

ist staff who will help you to manage all the areas of your life that a cancer diagnosis will affect, medical or otherwise.

For further information call 1800 118 868 or visit [cancerscreening.gov.au](http://cancerscreening.gov.au)

Source

[www.bowelcanceraustralia.org/bowel-cancer-awareness-month](http://www.bowelcanceraustralia.org/bowel-cancer-awareness-month)

Understanding Bowel Cancer, Cancer Council Australia © 2019. Last medical review of this booklet: February 2019.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. ACIM (Australian Cancer Incidence and Mortality) Books. Canberra: AIHW.

[www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/types-of-cancer/bowel-cancer/](http://www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/types-of-cancer/bowel-cancer/)

<https://www.letsbeatbowelcancer.com.au/bowel-cancer/prevention/>



### BACK ON TRACK HEALTH Recommended health screening tests - talk to your GP

- Self-checking (skin, teeth, breasts)
- Skin exams
- Dental checkups
- Testicle checks
- There are new, less inconvenient procedures to test for cervical cancer now. Ask your doctor!
- Pregnancy
- Blood pressure
- Blood tests
- Obesity tests
- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Diabetes
- Breast cancer
- Prostate cancer
- Bowel cancer
- Eye health
- Bone density
- Sexually Transmitted Infections



**ABOVE:** In the back garden at Flourish Australia's service at Penrith NSW. Do butterflies remember that they were once caterpillars? Who knows? For people, an important part of recovery is the hope that we won't be forgotten and that someone will follow up when we are unwell. PHOTO WARREN HEGGARTY

# Hope won't forget

Peter L shares how far he's come

*At Flourish Australia, we focus on people's strengths, even though at first the people who access our services may find it difficult to see those strengths themselves - Charlene Del-Cet, Senior Mental Health Worker*

When I first came to Penrith, I was very unwell and although I agreed to participate, I didn't have high hopes. I had lost faith in mental health services, due to my past experiences and feeling like I had been let down by them. I felt like I would be "forgotten about" as I had been in the past.

So to bring a bit of hope into the picture, the staff had to do things differently.

Because I was particularly unwell and even thinking of ending my life, one of

his support facilitators supported me to admit myself to a local hospital. I stayed there for the next four weeks.

**"When we first met, I was at my worst, ready to give up the ghost; but, with your help I've today enrolled in a Certificate IV in Community Service! I am so grateful to Flourish Australia, but mostly to you mate. For the first time in a long time, I'm excited." Peter L to a support facilitator at Flourish Australia's Penrith Partners in Recovery service**

While I was in the mental health unit, Charlene Del-Cet continued to support me by checking in on me and feeding my fish which I love dearly. I became hopeful that I would not be forgotten about and I knew that somebody would be there to "follow up" with me.

One of the challenges I faced was my isolation from other people.

Contributing to this was the fact that I was severely depressed and would also become highly anxious when having to leave my home. I would regularly experience anger outbursts when in the community. In fact, it was because of this that some other service providers did not want to engage or work with me.

I am now able to identify signs that my frustration, anxiety and anger are rising. I am now able to follow strategies to allow me to deal with my emotions in a way that does not jeopardise my relations with other people. This is allowing me to reconnect with the community, to go places I want to go and to get things done.

I was struggling financially and disclosed that I found it difficult to know when to take my medications. So the staff supported me to access free medication and to have it dispensed in a Webster pack. I am now able to keep on top of my medication and I'm feeling very positive about my mental health.

Among other achievements, I have:

- Re-engaged with a GP & various other health professionals to address my physical health concerns.

- Re-connected with some of my family members with whom I had been estranged for many years.
- Expressed an interest in becoming a peer worker and enrolled in TAFE to do a Cert IV in Community Services.
- Improved my physical health, losing 11kgs and maintaining a healthy BSL from 20's to 6/7.

Like most recovery journeys, there have been some set backs. During this time of recovery, my mother passed away from a serious illness. This is a stressful time for anybody. I went off my medication and became unwell again. However I continued to engage with Flourish Australia throughout this time and managed to get through it all and I am now back on track. The staff tell me they are proud of what I have achieved.

(Thanks to Charlene Del-Cet for helping Peter L to share his story)

**Flourish Australia's  
Penrith Partners in  
Recovery  
232 Derby Street  
PENRITH NSW 2750  
1300 779 270**

# Learning to stay on top of it

By Peter L

## On keeping a job

I used to be a bus driver. I've never had any trouble getting a job. The problem was keeping a job once I'd gotten it. I've been battling this for twenty years. It's almost like self destruction. You lose your job, then you end up selling your belongings. It's a perpetual circle. Flourish Australia has helped me stop that vicious circle.

## On goals

The important thing is staying on top of your mental health. It doesn't matter much what actual goals you set. Whatever makes you happy and stable in yourself. Then the other things will fall into place

## On support

If you've got people around you helping you and you're trying not to slip, that's what you need. That's what Flourish Australia did. I knew that if I hit a wall, then I was just a phone call away from help.

## On crisis

When Mum was sick a number of other things all happened at once. My best friend took off. The TAFE course got a lot harder. And when Mum got really sick I let it all go. But Flourish Australia came to the rescue. When she passed away recently, they helped me with preparing for the funeral, even with getting proper clothes and shoes for it.

## On "dealing with it"

I don't think my mental health issues are ever going to completely go away, but the important thing for me is that I've got to learn to deal with it. I can now accept who I am and where I'm at.

## On giving back

When I told my Mum I had enrolled in the Certificate IV in peer work at TAFE she was really impressed! Now I am going back to complete it. I'd like to do the same for someone else that was done for me. I've experienced agencies that promise things but don't deliver. I'd like to be one of the blokes who helps people. In the past, I've hit Flourish Australia up for some support. Maybe in the future I'll hit them up for a job!

*As told to Warren Heggarty*

**BELOW: Flourish Australia's Penrith Service is located in this large but inconspicuous house in Derby Street, near the PCYC, the bowling club, the aquatic centre and the paceway, site of the regular Penrith Market day. PHOTO WARREN HEGGARTY**





ABOVE: In the news. Physical health, the benefits of belonging and suicide prevention are there big priorities.

# Three great challenges for us all

By Warren Heggarty

The NDIS makes it more important than ever before for Flourish Australia to be responsive to individual and community needs. At the beginning of his second year in office, Flourish Australia Chief Executive Mark nominated three priorities: suicide prevention, social citizenship and physical health.

## 1. Physical health

Regular Panorama readers would be aware that people living with serious mental health issues can have a lower life expectancy than the general population- lower by as much as 20 years or more. This can be seen as a measure of how our quality of life is reduced by mental health issues.

'We can't do mental health without doing physical health,' says Mark. 'If people's physical health problems are because of things we can prevent then we should do something. That is why we have been encouraging conversations

about physical health with the people who access our services. Ultimately the aim is letting people self manage their physical health. That includes things like cooking better food and being more active.'

'It's also an issue for health systems. When people have a mental health diagnosis, that often overshadows their physical health needs. We are working to help health services be more responsive to people with mental health issues.'

**"Flourish Australia is making suicide prevention training available for everybody. So far, 325 people have undergone the training, a credit to everybody involved."**  
- Mark Orr AM

How will we know if we are making headway with physical health? Mark says 'If we could ensure that everyone connects with a GP regularly, then our job is done. It would ensure that serious health issues are picked up earlier.'

## 2. Social citizenship

Flourish Australia has paid much attention to individual rights and responsibilities in its Recovery Action

Framework. However that is not the end of the story. Society as a whole needs to change to enable people successfully to make their recovery journeys and enjoy full citizenship.

'We need to build a society in which people CAN recover,' says Mark. 'We need to build the capacity and confidence of both individuals and organisations in the community. That means helping organisations to be safe, responsive and welcoming places for people with mental health issues.'

'We want to counter the narrowing effect caused by the very idea of disability that excludes people because they are different. Disability is a way of viewing the world where you have an 'in' group and an 'out' group. Yet if every person's experience is valuable, there is no benefit in having an 'out' group.'

'We want to show to people that despite having a mental health issue, even if things seem to be going to pieces at the present, we say *you are still a citizen and you still have inalienable rights.*'

Flourish Australia's Social Citizenship project team, led by Fay Jackson, General Manager, Inclusion, will consult fully with all stakeholders. Once there is a clear definition of social citizenship and all that goes with it, we will then need to engage with local communities. There will need to be relationship building by management.

## 3. Suicide prevention

'The fact that we (Australia) had a slight rise in the number of people completing suicide last year made us stop and think,' Mark reflects. 'In 2017, 3,125 Australians completed suicide. That number is in the order of double the road toll. What do we need to do differently?'

'So as always, we need to support people in distress to get them through that period, to dig deep into the well of hope, but there is more.'

'We're also developing resources. For example, a flow chart to guide new staff in what needs to be said or done, pocket resources, quick tips and other things to keep suicide prevention much more front-of-mind.'

'Postvention is critical especially during the first three months following an attempt. This means actively following up a person's progress to make sure they are continuing to do well.'

## Mark Orr, Chief Executive of Flourish Australia, named AM, Member of the Order of Australia

by Warren Heggarty

Mark received the Order of Australia at the 2019 Australia Day Honours List in recognition of his significant services to community health over the years, and not only in the field of mental health.

Serving as the former President of the AIDS Council of NSW (ACON) from 2008 to 2015, Mark is an active volunteer and long-standing champion for the health and wellbeing of people living with HIV and people who identify as LGBTI. He's a leader of leaders, too, as current ACON president Dr Justin Koonan pointed out: "Mark has mentored many others as they take on leadership roles within our communities." (ACON, 2019)

In May, Mark went to Government House in Sydney for his investiture by the new Governor of NSW, Her Excellency the honourable Margaret Beasley AO QC.

Mark has been the CEO of Flourish Australia since January 2018.



ABOVE: Mark receiving his "gong" from Governor Beasley. PHOTO COURTESY OF GOVERNMENT HOUSE NSW

Flourish Australia awarded 2019

## Flourish Australia - A Gold Service Provider

By Peter Farrugia

Flourish Australia is proud to announce its recent recognition as Gold Service Provider in the 2019 Australian Health and Wellbeing Equality Index; as a result of our dedication to LGBTI inclusion. At Flourish Australia, we embrace diversity and are proud of our inclusive ethos and practices.

The AIDS Council of NSW (ACON) sets benchmarks which offer Australian businesses a yardstick to measure their practice of inclusion and equality for

LGBTI people.

The Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) measures workplace inclusion and diversity. It involves evaluating an organisation's inclusive practice for its LGBTI staff. These measures enable Flourish Australia to attract a suitably qualified, lived-experience workforce to work with and support diverse peoples.

The Health and Wellbeing Equality Index (HWEI) measures inclusive service provisions an organisation offers its customers.

For Flourish Australia, this refers to service provisions for the people who access our supports and services.

Each benchmark contains a range of categories and stringent measures, each demanding evidence of practice. To participate, an organisation must

demonstrate its continuous practice of diversity, equality and inclusion. It is a year-long process that requires absolute commitment and dedication from everyone. This ensures diversity, equality and inclusion are embedded into the core structures of the organisation and prevents 'face-value' attempts to claim participation.

Receiving the 2019 Gold Service Provider award is an important achievement and we thank our staff for their commitment to excellence.





# A Curious Clowder of Calm at the Charming Cat Cafe

“If there’s one thing we know from experience (and that studies actually prove), it’s that just being around a cat in a calm space is one of the most therapeutic things you can find, with amazing health benefits (relieving stress and reducing depression, among others).” – Catmosphere Cat Café website

ABOVE: Catmosphere offers a 50% discount to all Companion Card holders. Be sure to let them know when booking your cat experience. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

By Grant J Everett

We’ve covered how pets can be highly therapeutic if you are injured or unwell. But not all of us can own one. Our housing situation might not allow it, or the ongoing costs of food, pet care products and vet bills might be too much. Or you might (understandably) be hesitant about making a decade-plus commitment lightly. So what can you do if you want some pet therapy?

Catmosphere Cat Café is located at Surry Hills, and it allows you to hang out with felines over a hot or cold drink (the drink is for you, not the cats). They offer four different experiences: you can choose the Kitten Playroom or the Cat Lounge, watch a movie at Catflix Cinema, or do some Cat Yoga (yes, really).

The kittens range from eight weeks to one year old, and are all playful, cuddly, and mischievous. There are two clowders of kittens on rotation to ensure they all have adequate naps. On the other paw, adult cats are generally calmer and more peaceful than their kitten counterparts, and provide a more relaxing experience.

The Catflix Cat Cinema experience allows you to spend quality time with some cats while enjoying a recent film on a ten-foot screen. Check out their movie schedule, book a time, and kick back on a plush floor lounge recliner with a cat.

A Cat Yoga session provides all the benefits of yoga - improving your

balance and breathing, fighting off depression, easing chronic pain, and so on – with all the calming, mood-boosting effects of being around 10 cats. You’ll get a cat instructor to guide you through the class.

Entry into the Kitten Playroom is \$24, the Cat Lounge is \$22, Catflix Cinema is \$38.50, and Cat Yoga is \$30. A hot or cold drink is included in the price.

## About the Catmosphere crew

Catmosphere is owned and run by two guys who are passionate about the welfare, rescue and rehoming of all cats. The café partners with the World League for Protection of Animals and Kitten University. The League finds homes for displaced cats, while KU specialises in nursing and rehoming young, orphaned kittens.

## About the feline residents

Most of the cats were either surrendered, found on the streets, or orphaned at a young age. They are all vet-checked and vet-approved and are good with strangers. Catmosphere fosters these displaced cats and provides for all their needs. Some of the cats are even available to adopt if you have room in your home (and your heart) for them.

Everything you need to know is explained when you make a booking. For the health and wellbeing of the cats, visitors should stay low to the floor and be calm and gentle. Cats appreciate

a soft, quiet approach, and will often respond in kind. If a cat is feeling social, they’ll come and sit with you. They might even climb all over you and give you soft little headbutts. They’re always open to a gentle pat. There’s a wide variety of personalities, and each cat has different motivators when it comes to affection and play.

Catmosphere Cat Cafe  
66 Foveaux Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2560  
Australia  
(02) 8098 0741

Opening hours  
Monday 10am – 6pm  
Wednesday to Sunday: 10am – 8.30pm  
Closed every day between 3pm – 4pm  
and closed on Tuesdays

[www.catmospherecafe.com.au/](http://www.catmospherecafe.com.au/)

**BELOW: Actual footage of Linda from Figtree Conference Centre officially becoming a cat person**

PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT







# My Favourite Things About Tokyo

## Panorama Travel

Story and photos by  
Edwina Keelan

**I went on holiday to Tokyo, Japan in the first week of April. Here are my favourite things about Tokyo that you HAVE to check out...**



The cherry blossoms are in full bloom in the first week of April. These pretty trees are found everywhere, especially in Ueno Park (pictured above). Ueno Park is a colourful place, containing an art gallery, Tokyo National Museum, and is home to a community of homeless persons. The Museum displays vintage kimonos and traditional Japanese dresses, and they were all absolutely beautiful (see some of the exhibitions in the rightmost column).

Japanese vending machines are very different to what I'm used to. Not only do they dispense a very wide variety of hot and cold drinks and food, but some of what they sell is quite strange: bananas, eggs, hamburgers, ramen, socks, puppies...PUPPIES?!

On the subject of eating, some of the ultimate foods in Japan are sushi balls (onagiri) and novelty chocolate bars. The national alcoholic drink is Sake (rice wine). Sake is served warm in small porcelain cups, often alongside some hot tempura.

You can get a card called a Suica or Passmo that lets you travel on public transport, sort of like an Opal, but you can also buy food with it. Really thick crowds are common on the subway, but

Flourish Australia

## Travel

the carriages are quiet and there's no talking or headphones.

When it comes to places to see, Shinjuku is always a hit with tourists. It has a large market selling everything from souvenirs to soba noodles, and is decorated with huge billboards of all the popular manga characters.

Tokyo has many fashionistas and iconic styles, from the platform shoes and miniskirts of Shinjuku to the old lady in Ginza who was wearing a turban. Most Japanese men wear suits and ties, and are well-dressed even on a Sunday.

People in Tokyo often wear surgical masks to protect against germs when they're walking or catching public transport. Tokyo's locals are very neighbourly, and they keep the city clean. There's no littering, no messy people. Tokyo has the best toilets, which heat up when you sit on them and play music.

The worst thing in Tokyo is going through Haneda Airport. They have very strict searches when you arrive and depart. The staff at the airport are allowed to search and pat you down, including in between the legs and breasts (while clothed, though). It pays to have a doctor's letter to explain why you are carrying medication in your bag, and your medications should be placed in the carry-on luggage you take with you on the aircraft. Also, as I hold a Special Category Visa as a New Zealand citizen living in Australia, the airline staff temporarily detained me at the airport when I was departing from Japan. I had to explain the conditions of my visa to them when it was time to board my flight back to Australia.

It always pays to arrive at the airport really early to save unnecessary drama and to ensure you don't miss your flight. Remember that the gate usually closes 15 minutes before the plane departs.

This trip was more affordable than I'd expected. The plane ticket was only \$700, and 5 nights accommodation in the Taito prefecture set me back under \$500. The hotel even provided slippers, toiletries, a brush, sponges, shavers and very tiny, very deep bath that runs hot water at 40 degrees. Going online to prebook everything as a package certainly saved me a lot of money.

Don't forget the Rugby World Cup is coming up from Tokyo soon!





# Skills for dealing with shame

by Warren Heggarty

**ABOVE: Adam and Eve expelled from Paradise by a sword-bearing Angel.**  
LITHOGRAPH BY CONSONI AFTER RAPHAEL. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Researcher Dr Brené Brown describes shame as “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging.” The last thing we’d be inclined to do is talk about it. Yet, ironically, according to Brown in her book *Daring Greatly* (Brown, 2012), “The less we talk about shame, the more power it has over our lives... If we cultivate enough awareness about shame to name it and speak to it, we’ve basically cut it off at the knees.” (Sack, 2015)

**Note that there is an important distinction between guilt and shame. Guilt means “I did something bad.” Shame means “I am bad.”**

If you did something bad, you can do something else to correct the error, or make up for what you have done wrong. Someone who DOES bad can choose to do good, but if you believe you ARE bad, you see yourself as being incapable of changing.

Humiliation and embarrassment are

sometimes confused with shame. However, like guilt, these two painful emotions are usually attached to particular events, not to your whole being like shame is.

What is shame actually FOR? We all feel it at some time, so one would expect that it to serve some positive purpose. According to psychotherapist Joseph Burgo, shame is an emotion that protects us from social devaluation. It deters us from doing things which could lead to isolation, which is dangerous for humans. Shame can potentially be a great teacher, but not if it leads to “catastrophic and ruminative thinking” that prevents us from making necessary changes to our lives. (Mahonen, 2018)

Overcoming shame, according to Sack, involves “unhitching what you DO from what you ARE.” All people make mistakes, but all people are capable of change, too.

## Vulnerability

Shame attacks us where we are most vulnerable. Research suggests that women who feel shame report it most commonly in connection with their physical appearance, while men report it in connection with “weakness.” Everyone is different, so recognising what particular things trigger your

feelings of shame will help you become conscious of what is happening.

Jessica Van Vliet says shame is ultimately a fear of disconnection for being judged “not good enough.” So does counteracting shame involve making connections with other people?

“People start to realize that it’s not just them. Other people do things that are as bad or even worse sometimes so they’re not the worst person on the planet. They start to say to themselves, ‘This is human; I am human; others are human.’” (Sack, 2015)

## Self respect must be earned

According to Burgo’s book *SHAME* (Burgo, 2018), shame is a family of emotions with four members: exclusion, unwanted exposure, disappointed expectation, and unrequited love.

Burgo eschews the “unconditional self love and positive affirmation” approach that used to be fashionable. He says that moving from shame to justifiable pride is a slow process that is a constant part of living. “Self respect must be earned... it is an achievement rather than an entitlement.” (Mahonen, 2018)

According to Burgo, the main skills for dealing with shame are gaining self-awareness (about how our thoughts create our feelings), accepting what causes those feelings, preventing the constant focus on our self-image, acknowledging responsibility for the consequences of our actions, and being kinder to ourselves. (Mahonen, 2018)

Brene Brown has recorded a number of TED talks on you tube about shame which you might find useful.

References and Further Reading  
Brown, B. (2012). *Daring Greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent and lead*. New York USA: Penguin.  
Burgo, J. (2018). *Shame: Free yourself, find joy, and build true self-esteem*. Pan Macmillan.  
Mahonen, S. (2018, November 23). *Break the shame*. The Australian .  
Sack, D. (2015, January 13). *5 Ways to silence shame* . Retrieved from Psychology Today : <https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/where-science-meets-the-steps/201501/5-ways-silence-shame>

**“The less we talk about shame, the more power it has over our lives.”  
-Brene Brown**

# Exploring Veganism

By Grant J Everett

A while back New Outlook celebrated the advantages of eating a plant-based diet, and dietician Candace ran a healthy eating group to teach us the health benefits of veganism. Candace informed us that the average vegan has a lower cholesterol level, Body Mass Index, a lower risk of cancer, and a lower risk of Type-2 diabetes than the average person who consumes animal products. With such appealing bonuses on offer, we thought it was worthwhile to have a look at what a vegan diet has to offer.

Sadia, a Dietician from the *Pick Up Limes* vegan website, said that while becoming a vegan requires some knowledge and planning, it doesn't have to be complicated. In order to be sure you're getting all the nutrients your body needs, one of Sadia's tips is to choose "fortified" vegan foods. Fortified foods are supercharged with essential nutrients like Vitamin B12 and Vitamin D, fibre, calcium, protein and Omega-3 fats. Vegans also need to consume twice as much iron, as plant-based sources of iron aren't absorbed by the body as easily as the iron from meat. Pulses (like beans and lentils) are a vital source of protein and carbs, though Sadia advises newcomers to start off slowly, as pulses tend to cause indigestion and flatulence if you aren't used to them. Her video "Beginner's Guide to Veganism – How to go Vegan" is one of dozens on the *Pick Up Limes* website, and can tell a newbie everything they need to know.

## Stocking your fridge and pantry

What kind of things do you need for a vegan pantry? For starters, Sadia says that fresh produce, wholegrains, nuts, seeds, lentils and tofu are pretty much essential. But don't forget the herbs and spices, because knowing how to season food is the key to creating amazing meals. The right combination of flavourings like salt, pepper, curry powder, rosemary, thyme, oregano, dill, chives, chili powder, smoked paprika, garlic, cinnamon, nutmeg, and

parsley are all great, depending on your personal tastes.

Love eating meat, but are ethically bothered by it? Mock-meat (textured vegetable protein) is available as faux chicken, mince, meatballs, burgers, hotdogs and more. These meat substitutes can ease the transition to a vegan diet. Note that meat, dairy and eggs are all very calorie rich, whereas plant-based foods aren't. So a cup of mince will be more filling than a cup of carrot.

## Having plenty of choice

Do you think "plant-based diet" means "missing out" on tasty things? There are actually lots of vegan-friendly options in supermarkets now, and plant-based chocolate, lollies, bags of chips and ice creams are getting more commonplace. Some takeaway chains (like Soul Burger and Lord of the Fries) specialise in vegetarian and vegan options, but most fast food places have at least a few vegan options: McDonalds, Dominoes, Oportos, Guzman Y Gomez, Subway... the list goes on. You can even get vegan frozen yoghurt from Yogurtland.

loaded with cooking videos of every vegan dish imaginable. Remember that "vegan" doesn't mean you have to be gluten free, sugar free, fat free, or anything else: it just means no animal products.

Switching to milk substitutes like soy, almond, rice or coconut milk means you can still have your morning cappuccino. Like cow's milk, these plant-based drinks provide calcium, protein and other goodies.

## Hidden in plain view

Many foods and products contain unexpected animal content. For instance, gelatin is derived from the boiled-down skin and bones of animals, meaning that many lollies and jellies contain cow or pig. Also, the "carmine" colour used in many red foods is made from a type of crushed up beetle, and some medications contain things like lactose, fish oil, blood, shellfish, lanolin (from sheep's wool), cartilage, intestines, and even pregnant mare's urine. Your GP or pharmacist can tell you more.

Sadia encourages new vegans not to pressure themselves. Take the transition at your own pace. You could even step down to a vegetarian diet first, then see how you go. Like any lifestyle change, a vegan diet gets easier and more natural with time.

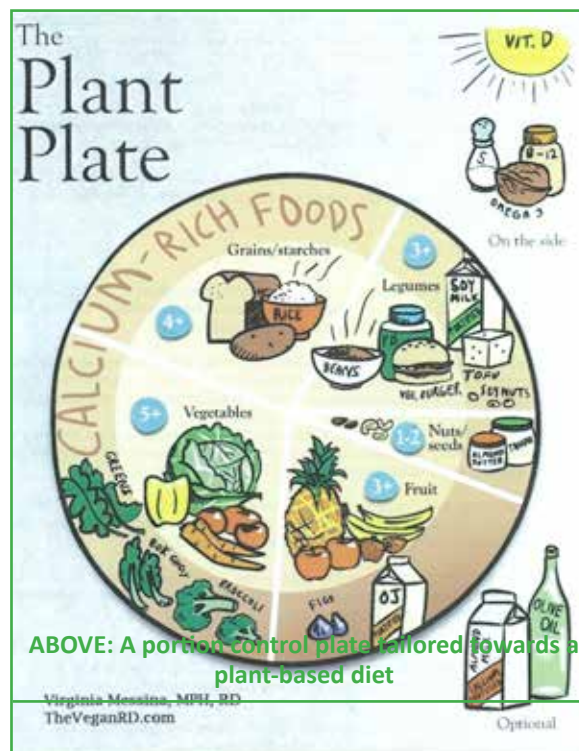
To maximise your chances of success, ask yourself: Why do I want to do this? Is it for health reasons, environmental reasons, or for the sake of animal welfare? This can help strengthen your resolve.

Always consult your health specialist before making any changes to your diet, lifestyle or exercise routine.

Further reading

"Becoming Vegan: Comprehensive Edition", by Brenda Davis RD and Vesanto Melina

"Beginner's Guide to Veganism – How to go Vegan", by Sadia



ABOVE: A portion control plate tailored towards a plant-based diet

Eat all these in moderation, of course! Just because something is vegan doesn't automatically make it healthy.

Worried you'll have to give up baking? You can still make everything from banana bread to blueberry muffins to mudcake without any animal products. Vegan versions of your favourite recipes are only a few clicks away on Google! Pinterest and Youtube, for instance, are

[www.pickuplimes.com](http://www.pickuplimes.com)

[www.jessicagracewhalen.com/vegan-fast-food-options-australia/](http://www.jessicagracewhalen.com/vegan-fast-food-options-australia/)

[NutritionFacts.org](http://NutritionFacts.org)

[www.veganaustralia.org.au/getting\\_started](http://www.veganaustralia.org.au/getting_started)

[www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/how-go-vegan](http://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/how-go-vegan)

<https://fpnotebook.com/mobile/Pharm/Adverse/AnmlDrvdPhrmctcls.htm>



# Employment Panorama



ABOVE: Funeral director/attendant work is surprisingly broad, requiring high level people skills as well as catering and cleaning skills. PHOTO PIXABAY

place of death and assist with preparing the body and placing it in the coffin. In smaller, more isolated funeral businesses, you often need to be an all-rounder and some firms want someone who can handle car detailing, grounds and building maintenance, grave plaque placements, coffin preparation, catering to functions, and cleaning.

## Essential requirements that employers are looking for.

- Able to give excellent customer service
- Demonstrate care, dignity and respect.
- Demonstrate compassion, empathy and sensitivity to the needs of grieving people
- Able to work as part of a team
- Demonstrate enthusiasm and reliability
- Know basic administrative work (eg Microsoft Office, filing)
- Display attention to detail
- Be flexibility and adaptable
- Be well presented and honest
- Be fit and healthy (coffin bearing will be required)
- Have a drivers' licence

## Some other desirable qualities include

- Have your own vehicle
- Speak a particular community language
- Be a Justice of the Peace or eligible to become one

## Specialist jobs in the funeral industry

Embalmers prepare and preserve the deceased person from the time of death until they can be buried or cremated. This requires qualifications.

Civil Funeral Celebrant is the 'master of ceremonies' who conducts the funeral ceremony.

## More information:

Australian Funeral Directors Association  
1300 888 188  
info@afda.org.au  
www.afda.org.au/careers

## Funeral Attendant

By Warren Heggarty

We scanned job advertisements for the funeral industry to find out what employers are looking for:

If ever there was a job that required emotional maturity, Funeral worker is it. It can be demanding and stressful, but also rewarding work. You need to be good with people, but you are also required to work with the bodies of the deceased. There are no formal qualifications, though there are Australian Apprenticeship traineeship packages available. On the other hand, there is a very low turnover of staff, so people who enter this line of work tend to stick with it.

Many positions in this industry advertise 'no experience necessary/training provided.' Some advertisements say something like 'you will learn all aspects of the funeral industry, including arranging funerals with families,

conducting and attending services... no funeral experience necessary.' One advertisement for a funeral arranger/admin person listed only one essential requirement- a drivers' licence, though it pointed out that being able to speak Greek would help.

Another firm insisted that applicants' covering letters be handwritten. It would seem that this is a way of gauging how careful the person is about details (like dotting i-s and crossing t-s) about neatness and about overall presentation.

Funeral duties include mortuary preparation, attending and conducting funerals, escorting mourners to and from chapels, and transferring the deceased.

This latter duty can involve on-call after hours work. Because of this requirement, a lot of firms prefer people who live within a certain distance of the office. It means that you help collect the body from the morgue, hospital or the



## Employers are crying out for **EMPATHY**

By Warren Heggarty

Think about these statements:

- Before criticizing someone, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place
- It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully
- When Maria told me she and Angelo were going to be married, I think I was just as excited about it than she was!!! (Greater Good Science, 2019)

Strongly agreeing with statements like these suggests a person is strongly empathic. Empathy is definitely a skill which is required in many jobs involving personal contact. It is also necessary for people who's work might involve negotiation or compromise, such as sales.

Having empathy, they say, is an essential part of

- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Understanding customers
- Knowing the right questions to ask
- ... And even helping you get a loan! (Stillman, 2014)

According to a 2018 'State of Workplace Empathy Study' by Businessolver, the vast majority of bosses and human resources people 'agreed that an empathetic workplace has a positive impact on business performance, motivating workers and increasing productivity.' (Lucas, 2019) So where do you get empathy?

According to Roman Krznaric, an academic working in the UK who specialises in empathy, 'empathy doesn't stop developing in childhood. We can nurture its growth throughout our lives- and we can use it as a radical force for social transformation.' He suggests developing several habits which include going outside your comfort zone, listening and allowing yourself to be vulnerable.

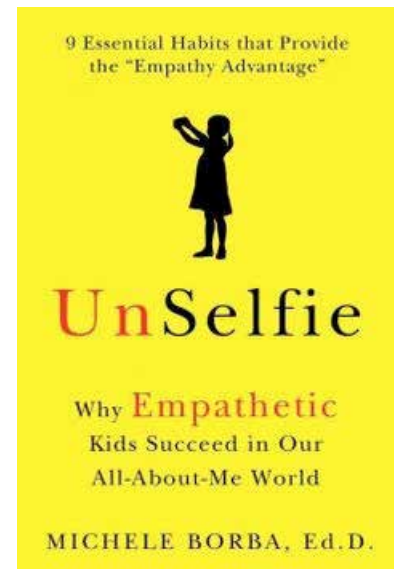
'Highly empathic people have an insatiable curiosity about strangers.' Their curiosity leads them to ask questions of people outside their normal social circle. Through listening, they come to understand diverse points of view. (Stillman, 2014)

That includes the points of view of people with whom we disagree- a talent that seems to be lost in the age of internet trolling. For example, if you are very keen on stopping global warming, trying to understand what motivates coal mining executives will be helpful. Some call this Cognitive empathy, or 'perspective-taking' perhaps because it is less focused on feelings. It is a useful workplace skill, particularly in negotiations for example, or for managers.

In addition, listening in the sense intended by Krznaric goes further than just staying quiet and nodding your head. To best understand another person's feelings, we need to be open about our own. (Stillman, 2014)

Listening is not just hearing, it is seeking to understand. Watching for body language is also a part of listening that often tells you more about what a person thinks and feels than words can. (Lucas, 2019)

Now think about these statements.



**ABOVE: Empathy is in high demand. There is even a book about how to help your children develop it! Might be an idea to start on ourselves, first...**

- If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments
- It is difficult for me to understand what makes my friends happy
- I often find it difficult to see things from the other person's point of view (Greater Good Science, 2019)

Strongly agreeing with these statements might suggest that a person would benefit from building their empathy skills, especially if they are interested in taking on employment that requires a lot of it.

Remember though, that your own level of empathy can change from day to day. If we are unwell, we tend to become more focused on ourselves which reduces our capacity for listening to and understanding others. While another person is unwell, we can't expect them to be as excited as we are about things. We recognise in these cases that people are 'not themselves' and tend to give them leeway... or at least we do if we are empathetic!

#### References

- Greater Good Science. (2019). Empathy Quiz. Retrieved from Greater Good Magazine. Science based insights for a meaningful life: [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take\\_quiz/empathy](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take_quiz/empathy)
- Lucas, S. (2019, April 4). How to use empathy to improve your workplace. Retrieved from The balance careers: <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/using-empathy-to-improve-your-workplace-4157504>
- Stillman, J. (2014, August 22). 3 Habits that will increase your empathy. Retrieved from Inc.com: <https://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/3-habits-that-will-increase-your-empathy.html>



ABOVE, FROM LEFT: Bobbi, Jelena and Rochelle are part of the Human Resources team at Flourish Australia. PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

# The Power of Teamwork

by Doris Kluge

I am the Senior HR Advisor of Flourish Australia. Not only do I work as part of the HR team, but I would say that I've worked with teams for all of my professional life. In essence, that's what organisations and businesses are: a number of teams all working together towards a shared goal.

Everyone needs to know how to work as part of a team. Even professions who may traditionally work independently, such as doctors, will still need to interact with colleagues such as nurses, pharmacists, secretaries and others to some degree. Any job role you can name will place you in contact with other people for some purpose. And teams aren't just found in workplaces: you could be a part of a family, a part of a neighbourhood, a part of a sporting team, or a part of a classroom.

Flourish Australia has many teams. We have teams here at Head Office, teams in the Community Businesses, teams in our NDIS and HASI services, the list goes

on. If you work for Flourish Australia, you'll be in a team of some kind. I love being a part of the HR team, as well as a part of the bigger Head Office team and the wider Flourish Australia team beyond that. I think, in comparison with other organisations I've worked for, it's such a good culture, and there's nothing toxic about it.

### Vital, but attainable, skills

The good news is that the skills you need to be a good team member can be learned. You don't have to be born with them, and you don't have to be really gregarious and talkative to be an effective member of a team, either. It's about asking lots of questions, being enthusiastic, and soaking up understanding and knowledge like a sponge. The most important skill you will need is to be able to listen and communicate clearly, and you also need to understand the purpose of all the other members. Another vital trait for working as a part of a team is being able to take feedback onboard.

### The role of HR (and my role)

The HR team helps wider Flourish Australia staff, including our frontline workers and managers, to be able to do

their job as well as they possibly can. While HR doesn't deal directly with the people who access our services, we actively assist the staff members of our 60-plus sites to feel supported.

**"The best teams are composed of a really diverse set of people who all bring complementary but different skills, because that's how we learn from each other and enjoy working with others."**

**-Doris**

This includes keeping track of things like recruitment and variations in locations and pay levels. Like other Flourish Australia teams, we deal in a high-volume workload, so we always need to be very organised, listen carefully, be patient, and maintain confidentiality. We work in a really fast-paced environment, and the NDIS has been such a fabulous change, but it's a MASSIVE change, and it's impacting all parts of the organisation. You'd be surprised how many of these changes affect my team at HR! We have a "no wrong door" approach like the rest of

## Employment Panorama

the organisation, so if we can't help with a request, we'll try to put you in contact with somebody who can.

As a senior member of the HR team, I think the best thing I can do is helping other team members to shine and do great things, as well as operating independently. It's not about being a boss, but about being unified. I also think it's good for team members to be able to feel safe enough to say "sorry, I don't understand" or "I don't know how that works" without the fear of being penalised. Good teams have a strong customer focus, rather than purely focusing on the wellbeing of their own organisation to the exclusion of everyone else.

If you want to be trusted by your team to work independently, it's important to continue earning that trust. Thankfully, I think we have trust in spades around here. I definitely trust everyone in the HR team to work to the best of their ability and do the best they possibly can for the stakeholders.

### Genuine inclusion

I've been doing a lot of reading about diversity and inclusion, and there can often be a feeling of tokenistic lip-service where an organisation will hire a new team member from a minority group just for the sake of ticking boxes, like hiring one person from a CALD background or adding a woman to an all-male-dominated team. But if an employee feels they're being included in a non-genuine way, they won't feel safe to share their thoughts and knowledge, and that defeats the whole point. The point of being diverse and inclusive is to seek out different opinions from people who think in different ways so that everyone can learn and improve how things are done. Ticking boxes means nothing if it isn't genuine.

### Planning pays off

A good way to build a team is to be clear about their purpose from the beginning. This ensures that not only do you recruit based on specific skills and experience and qualifications, but also on the ability to work cohesively. Sometimes these are called "soft skills" or emotional intelligence, as opposed to certificates you hang up on the wall. Soft skills are really important, because if you only hire

people with the exact same study and work backgrounds, you might be missing out on other sets of skills and talents that could make a huge difference to your team's output.

### A team of introverts?

Some people might find it easier to work in a less team-oriented environment, but that's often a personal makeup thing. However, some people might feel as though they aren't capable of working as part of a team. Perhaps they identify as an introvert, or get really anxious in crowds. But even if you have anxiety issues, you can still be a part of a small team, or be part of a team that doesn't come together very often. You can also use Yammer and Skype and other tools to assist with this, so there are technological options.

### You need to invest for it to payoff

If an objective is set for a team, it's vital that the team receives sufficient resources and influence to meet their objective. You need a supportive structure for a team to be successful, but then you'll always have these case studies where teams have managed against the odds to Flourish Australia. So it's about resourcing, it's about communicating effectively, and that's where Yammer and other types of online communication tools can be really great.

*As told to Grant J Everett*

**"Despite how busy you all might be, it's important for teams to put aside time to meet. You need to share what you've learned, what's stumped you, and to make sure everyone is on the same page. I believe if you have a diverse group who comes together with a common goal and you all have the respect to listen to differing opinions, that can gel into something really special."**

**-Doris**

## Wisdom from Wall Street

David Mattson, the CEO and President of Sandler Training, bestselling author of numerous books about Wall Street, business and how to become a great salesperson, had a lot to share about the benefits of working as a team. Here are a few excerpts from his **6 Benefits of Teamwork in the Workplace...**

Creativity can really thrive when people work as a team. Brainstorming ideas from several unique perspectives can create some really effective solutions.

Teams rely on the individual talents of the members in order to create something even greater than the sum of their parts. Combining your gifts will make you a stronger team. Working together lets employees build on their collective talents.

Teamwork maximises the whole team's knowledge, and will help you learn new skills for the rest of your career.

Collaborating on a project can spur new enthusiasm for a stale task, and sharing your own discoveries of the project can stimulate both individual and team knowledge.

Teamwork establishes trust between co-workers, and this feeling of safety helps employees to open up and encourage each other even once the team project has run its course. Open communication is key for group projects.

When conflict arises within a team, employees need to be able to resolve these issues internally. Conflict resolution is a skill that comes in handy.

Employees who connect with their workplace and feel as though they are contributing to the bigger picture are more likely to stay.

Sharing success as a team is a bonding experience that will assist with future brainstorming sessions.

Source:  
[www.sandler.com/blog/6-benefits-of-teamwork-in-the-workplace](http://www.sandler.com/blog/6-benefits-of-teamwork-in-the-workplace)

Employment Panorama

## Work, Fatigue and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome



**ABOVE: Dog tired? There are many things you can do to avoid fatigue in the workplace when it is caused by known factors over which you have some control. However, Doctors tell Jessica B that her Chronic Fatigue Syndrome has no known treatment.** PHOTO FROM PIXABAY

By Warren Heggarty

Fatigue, the feeling of exhaustion and being worn out, is quite common among our readers. There are many reasons for this. Sometimes it is medication, sometimes it is lack of sleep (insomnia), and it can even be *too* much sleep. Sometimes fatigue is caused by overworking or not having sufficient breaks. Sometimes the cause is mysterious, as it is for Jessica, who has been diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Whatever the cause, we need to be aware of strategies we can use to deal with fatigue so that we can have a healthy working (and playing!) life.

Whether fatigue is caused by factors outside of work or factors at work, it is important for managers as well as workers to tackle it. According to WorkSafe Australia, fatigue in the workplace can impact on the health and safety of the people around you. It leads to a lack of alertness, slower reaction times, and can affect your ability to make good decisions. Fatigue can increase the risk of incidents and injuries in workplaces. This is especially true in intricate work where safety is vital, such as taking part in surgical procedures.

More about that in a moment!

Managers should always keep an eye on work procedures and processes, on workloads and on schedules as a part of measuring and reducing the impact of fatigue.

### How much is too much?

One type of work which is notorious for pushing people beyond their limits is medicine. It is ironic that a doctor would probably never advise a patient to work longer hours, yet junior doctors often have a crushing schedule. Over the past couple of years we have seen many reports in newspapers about young doctors developing mental health issues, and even taking their own lives, because they feel they cannot live up to expectations.

Recently, there was a news article about a trainee surgeon who was reportedly expected to work up to 70 hours per week while being on call for “seven days straight” at a Sydney hospital. When she complained, it was allegedly put down to her being an “emotional female.”

(Aubusson, 2019)

Around the same time, the Sydney Morning Herald and the Australian reported that the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons told a Parliamentary Enquiry in South Australia that a 55-65 hour working week is appropriate for trainees and that restricting trainees to 38 hours per week would undermine their development. (Parnell, 2019). Some of these trainees, of course, will end up becoming psychiatrists!

The point is, the Sydney trainee ended up spending six weeks in hospital herself and felt she had to quit, saying, “I was physically alive but spiritually broken.”

The College says that there are strategies that trainees can use in order to deal with the stress of long hours and being on call. But if there wasn't a problem, why would you need strategies? (Parnell, 2019)

While stretching yourself by always going a little bit beyond your comfort zone is a good thing, routinely pushing yourself far beyond your limits will do you no good, and probably a whole lot of bad, too.

### Fatigue and Emergencies

Sometimes during an emergency people have no choice but to push themselves to work long hours. But this should never become routine. Emergencies like bushfires, floods, storms and so on are not day-in-day-out affairs, and the people who work (and volunteer) during these events are able to get some down time to recuperate in between crises.

At the NSW State Emergency Services (SES) there are two main divisions, field work and operations. Operations involves working on computers and phones, setting teams up and assigning jobs. Jessica B, 24, who formerly accessed Flourish Australia's YCLSS at Penrith, volunteers in the operations centre at Penrith SES in Claremont Meadows.

Jessica has worked a couple of shifts where there have been bad storms and “you almost have to triage the jobs” there are so many calls all at once. One of the most remarkable jobs undertaken



## Empoyment Panorama

by Penrith SES (though not during Jessica's shift) was the frantic search for the severed arm of a waterskier in the Hawkesbury-Nepean River. They had to find the limb within a short timeframe so that they would still have a change of reattaching it. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful. Such is the unpredictability of work for the SES.

## Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Jessica happens to live with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (also known as myalgic encephalomyelitis, or CFS). This is characterised by "profound fatigue, sleep abnormalities, pain and other symptoms that are made worse by exertion."

"There is a problem," Jessica says, "with people not understanding the severity of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. It isn't just tiredness, but extreme exhaustion. For much of the day I am limited in what I can do. Because there is no treatment, even if an employer asked me 'how can we accommodate this', there is no straightforward answer."

Health Direct says that with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome "you are likely to feel very tired, very often even if you have not been active." They suggest that if you have a diagnosis of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome it can be helpful to relax as much as possible, to have a regular sleep pattern, to limit your activity, and to keep your activity levels even (that includes good days). You should also avoid drugs that could affect your sleep. Some doctors suggest gentle, graded exercise, too.

"In my case," Jessica told Panorama, "it is called post viral chronic fatigue syndrome because it seemed to start ten years ago after I had swine flu. They don't know why. I'm a lot better now than I was. I've adjusted myself to what is best for my body."

A few adjustments have helped Jessica to live her life.

"The advantage with volunteering for the SES is that they have roles for people who start their shifts really late. Although training days and first aid classes tend to happen during normal business hours. For me, those days can

be very taxing."

"Ideally, I'd love to be a vet nurse or a paramedic, but with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, if I overdo things, I will crash. Doctors tell me there is no known cause and no treatment."

The fact that Jessica is able to volunteer with the SES shows that Chronic Fatigue Syndrome may not be entirely incompatible with work commitments if there is flexibility and understanding.

**"There is a problem with people not understanding the severity of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. It is not just tiredness, but extreme exhaustion. For much of the day I am limited in what I can do."  
-Jessica B.**

### References

- Aubusson, K. (2019, February 6). Exhausted surgeon dismissed as "emotional female". Sydney Morning Herald  
Parnell, S. (2019, February 6). Working 65 hours a week good for young doctors, college says. The Australian



**ABOVE: Jessica B volunteers in operations at the State Emergency Services at Claremont Meadows, near Penrith NSW. PHOTO WARREN HEGGARTY.**

Flourish Australia

**Get  
Social  
with us**



[/FlourishAus](#)



[/FlourishAus](#)



[@FlourishAus](#)



[/FlourishAus](#)



Community  
Businesses



We  
support  
the NDIS

# PROFESSIONAL MAINTENANCE SERVICES

Flourish Australia's community businesses provide quality maintenance services with a smile. Including:



Grounds  
Maintenance



Cleaning  
Services



Prestige  
Packing



Business  
Services

*Flourish Australia is a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider. We can provide NDIS recipients with lawn mowing, garden maintenance and domestic cleaning services.*



## SERVICES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Flourish Australia supports people living with a mental health issue to access employment. We provide comprehensive workplace training to all community business employees, along with the option of completing work-related TAFE qualifications onsite. This means highly professional services at a very competitive price!

Contact us for a FREE quote: Phone: 1300 939 300 Email: [darren.field@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:darren.field@flourishaustralia.org.au)

[f /CommunityBusinesses](#) [flourishaustralia.org.au](https://flourishaustralia.org.au)

# More than token hiring

The many benefits of nurturing good health in the workplace...and the consequences of ignoring it.

By Grant J Everett

According to Marketing Manager Heather Hammond from CHES Connect employment services (1), there is a common misconception that employees with disability require more attention and resources from their employer than the average worker, take more sick days, and don't last as long in their job roles.

Heather contradicted all of this, stating that workers with disability generally take less sick leave, have a higher job retention rate, and even once you take reasonable workplace adjustments into account, their employment costs tend to be lower than other employees. These misconceptions are not only incorrect, but fuelling the stigma that people with disability are a liability rather than an asset. Heather said that in the right role, people with disability are just as productive and competent as any other employee. Hundreds of thousands of Australians with disability are working on many rungs of the ladder in a variety of industries, and with a little assistance, they are making a valid contribution.

**Mental health issues are the third biggest health problem in Australia after heart disease and cancer, with depression being our leading cause of non-fatal disability.**

Heather identified many pluses to employing somebody with disability: they don't seek worker's compensation as often, it will enhance an organisation's image, and tapping into the skills, abilities, creativity and innovation of a diverse employee pool can help get the job done. After all, a tradie wouldn't be very effective if he only had hammers in his toolbox, would he?

### Good reasons for developing mental health strategies for the workplace

Many disabilities aren't visible. According to *Workers with Mental Illness: a Practical Guide for Managers* (2) by the Australian Human Rights Commis-



**ABOVE: Nancy, Sandra, Liza, Mark, Deyonne and the other Figtree Conference Centre staff all hold themselves to a premium standard** PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

sion (AHRC), 45% of Australians aged between 16 and 85 will experience a mental health issue at some point in their lives. Statistically, we will either go through one ourselves, or be close to someone who does. This means most businesses are already employing workers with mental health issues...whether they're aware of it or not. If somebody can manage a mental health issue without it impacting their work, does this make their diagnosis irrelevant to their employer?

It's definitely worth investing in a healthy workplace environment for the sake of your workers' mental health (and for the bottom line). According to the same AHRC source (2), a healthy workplace reduces employee absences, lowers turnover, fosters staff loyalty, improves productivity, provides a higher return on training investments, improves morale, and minimises legal repercussions like fines and litigation. Better yet, for every dollar that's spent on supporting the mental health of workers, employers experience close to a 500% return in improved productivity through increased work output and reduced sick leave.

Disability discrimination legislation requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of disabled workers, and Commonwealth industrial law prevents workplaces from taking adverse action against workers due to medical conditions. According

to Work Health & Safety Guidelines, employers are obligated to identify and eliminate risks in the workplace. In turn, employees are obliged to take care of their health, safety and wellbeing and that of their co-workers, and must cooperate with reasonable WHS instructions.

If the cost of ignoring the problem is far greater than the cost of developing and implementing a safe and healthy workplace, doesn't this make good business sense?

Sources:

(1) Marketing Manager Heather Hammond from CHES Connect

[www.chessconnect.org.au/the-benefits-of-employing-someone-with-a-disability-or-mental-illness/](http://www.chessconnect.org.au/the-benefits-of-employing-someone-with-a-disability-or-mental-illness/)

(2) *Workers with Mental Illness: a Practical Guide for Managers*

[www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/2010-workers-mental-illness-practical-guide-managers/1-mental-health-workplace](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/2010-workers-mental-illness-practical-guide-managers/1-mental-health-workplace)

(3) Graffam, J, Shinkfield, A, Smith, K, and Polzin, U 2002, "Employer benefits and costs of employing a person with a disability", *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, vol. 17, pp. 251-263.

[www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/benefits-employing-people-with-disability](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/benefits-employing-people-with-disability)

**flourish**  
AUSTRALIA

Community  
Businesses



**We  
support  
the NDIS**

# EMPLOYMENT & YOU...

**Are you living with a mental health issue?**



**Would you like to get back to work  
but feel unsure about where to start?**

Flourish Australia Community Businesses support people living with a mental health issue to take part in meaningful employment.

Whilst providing employment support in areas of lawn maintenance, packing & business services we meet strict service standards to ensure real employment outcomes.

Employees of the community businesses have access to one-on-one support from our peer workers and the option to attend our onsite recovery groups that cover a range of vocational and life skills topics.

We also offer tertiary qualifications onsite, including:  
Cert. 3 in Warehouse Operations and Cert. 3 in Horticulture.

When you feel you are ready to enter the open workforce, we are here to support you with the transition.

***Flourish Australia is a registered  
National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider.***

## OUR CURRENT JOBS AVAILABLE

### **Prestige Packing Harris Park:**

Supported jobs in packing and light assembly.

### **Marrickville Business:**

Supported jobs in packing and light assembly and scanning and document management services.

### **Flourish Maintenance St Marys:**

Supported jobs in lawn mowing, grounds maintenance and professional cleaning services.

### **Flourish Maintenance Warwick Farm:**

Supported jobs in lawn mowing, grounds maintenance and professional cleaning services.

To find out more or to APPLY: Phone: 02 9393 9000 Email: [clare.evans@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:clare.evans@flourishaustralia.org.au)

[f /CommunityBusinesses](#) [flourishaustralia.org.au](#)