

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

panorama

September Quarterly Issue 2019 #74

- Repair Cafe
- Epik Treo “it ain’t no movie, this is real life”
- Holding on to what really counts.
- Always give it 101%

**Record number of contributors
(30+) in this issue!!!**

More 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

flourish[®]
AUSTRALIA

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

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

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

Warren.Heggarty@flourishaustralia.org.au

OR 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: Troy Mahlberg tinkering in the Repair Cafe at New Outlook in Wollongong. PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON.
See the story on pages 24-25

6-7 School Leavers Employment Supports
8-9 Holding on to what really counts
10-11 Bands Appeer. Music at Newcastle
12-13 Epic Treo: It ain't no movie, this is real life.
14-15 Diego goes to Cobar
16-17 Flourishing after five years of hell
18 Hearing voices, sharing recovery
19 How to cope with disturbing voices
20 Finding better health, a better job and a better life
22 Peer work: sharing stories, strengths and strategies
23 Accomplishing a life long goal: The City2Surf
24 The Repair Cafe: It isn't old, it's vintage
26-27 Helping people to get home
28-29 Always give it at least 101%. No short cuts, no excuses
30-31 Charlie reconnects... one step at a time.
32 Susmita
33 Reconnecting with friends, family, study and wellbeing
34 'I wouldn't be alive today if it weren't for Him'
36 Reengaging with creativity after thirty years.
37 From customer to kitchenhand
38 What Flourish Australia is doing right now to prevent suicide
39 BACK ON TRACK HEALTH. My Legs: Do the Squat
40 BACK ON TRACK HEALTH. My Breathing
41 BACK ON TRACK HEALTH Diabetes
43 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT Peer Workers learn to share their story in a way that really helps others
44 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT Managing vicarious trauma
45 The Disability Royal Commission
46 MONEYPANORAMA Establishing your financial independence
47 TRAVEL. High Tech Travel /

Brisbane
48 CULTURAL DIVERSITY Dealing with forces of nature
49 Asking the big question: RUOK?
50 How my community connections support my recovery
51 Upskilling to better dinners
52 Vale Sacha Maller. A quiet pioneer departs
54 Continuity of Support. Old programs end but support continues at Flourish Australia
56 Commissioner Lourey visits the Hunter Street Wellbeing Centre.
58 Another door opens, 2019
60 Practicing and Teaching Art and winning Another Door Opens 2019
62 NAIDOC: Voice. Treaty Truth

CONTRIBUTORS

[Neil Felon](#) (Cover photo) is a professional photographer

[Clare Evans](#) is Flourish Australia Business Services marketing and capacity manager.

[Penny and Michael Strickland](#) access Flourish Australia's Bega, NSW, service

[Elice Crouch](#) is a Mental Health Worker at Flourish Australia's Bega, NSW, Service

[Beautifier and MC Buzzer](#) (are two members of Epik Treo. [Beautifier](#) aka Nina accesses Flourish Australia's Blacktown, NSW, Service (Embark Cottage).

[Diego Figueroa](#) is NDIS Coordinator at Flourish Australia's service in Chapel Road Bankstown, NSW.

[Megan Paull](#) formerly accessed Flourish Australia's Warana, Queensland service.

[Stephen](#) facilitates the HEARING VOICES group at Flourish Australia's Queanbeyan, NSW service.

[Tim Franklin](#) accesses Flourish Australia's Newcastle NSW service.

[Luke Nias](#) accesses Flourish Australia's Newcastle NSW service

[Anne Bell](#) Accesses Flourish Australia's Katoomba, NSW, service

[Rachel Hannon](#) is a mental health worker at Flourish Australia's Wollongong

service

Jessica Donnelly is Housing and Homelessness support coordinator at Flourish Australia's Tamworth, NSW, service

Nicole Pearce is a mental health workers at Flourish Australia's Tamworth Service

Murray Dean is a supported employee at Flourish Australia's Prestige Packaging Co, Harris Park, NSW.

Megan Millemaggi is a mental health worker at Flourish Australia's Leeton, NSW, Service

Charlie W. is the pen-name of a person who accesses Flourish Australia's Leeton, NSW, Service.

Sushmita Kunda is a supported employee at Flourish Australia's Prestige Packing Company, Harris Park NSW.

Owen accesses Flourish Australia's Queanbeyan service and helps facilitate several groups there.

Neil K is a reader of Panorama from Western Sydney who wished to share his lived experience story in order to reassure others that there is hope.

Helen Fenner accesses Flourish Australia's Newcastle NSW service.

Chad K accesses Flourish Australia's Newcastle NSW service.

Elizabeth Kempers is a blogger who formerly accessed Flourish Australia's Taree NSW service. She has recently published a children's story.

Edwina Keelan is a supported employee at Flourish Australia's Prestige Packing Co, Marrickville.

David Nguyen is a Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Bankstown, NSW, service

Jamie Hill, is Senior Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Wagga Wagga service

Matthew Cheyne accesses Flourish Australia's Leichhardt, NSW, service

Robert Keegan accesses Flourish Australia's Newcastle, NSW, service

Jim Booth is Flourish Australia's Cluster Manager based at Tamworth, NSW,

service

Michaeli Gwilliam is Manager at Flourish Australia's Newcastle, NSW, service

Simon Scott provided some of this issue's photos

Stephen Correy is a visual artist who won this year's Another Door Opens Award.

Deonny Zaroual is an employee at Flourish Australia's Figtree Conference Centre, Olympic Park, NSW

Jane Miller is Flourish Australia's community arts coordinator.

Jade Ryll is Flourish Australia's Program Manager, Back on Track Health

Tina Irving editorial assistance
Grant J Everett staff writer/photos/design

Warren Heggarty staff writer/photos/design. As always, mistakes are Warren's.

Contributors needed!

We especially like to read recovery stories from people with lived experience of mental health issues. Call us at: panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au

ACTION?

The ACTION supplement is currently under review and will not appear in September or December Quarterly issues in 2019. Thank you to all those people who have sent in their survey forms by the way!

Flourish Australia

Get Social with us



/FlourishAus



/FlourishAus



@FlourishAus



/FlourishAus



ABOVE: Getting a job can be stressful but in the long term having a job is GOOD for your mental health. Tina can help you get there. PHOTO BY CLARE EVANS

School Leavers Employment Supports

Find a positive mindset towards employment with
Flourish Australia's mental health-specialised

By Warren Heggarty

Flourish Australia's School Leaver's Employment Support plan operates in the South-Western region of Sydney. It assists young people to achieve their goals and aspirations, to gain life-skills and to establish a positive mindset towards employment. It is specialised to support young people with lived experience of mental health issues.

To be eligible for this service, the young person will need to have access to SLES within their NDIS plan; be an early school leaver or not academically coping at school; and have an established plan, referred by teachers.

We assist young people to make a successful transition from school to sustainable employment. The SLES

program will help young people through meaningful work experiences, mock interviews, industry visits, mentoring and exploring effective ways to communicate and problem solve.

SLES coordinator Tina Nguyen started her own working life in customer service including retail. More recently she has worked for eight years in Disability Employment Services, including as an NDIS support coordinator. In SLES she is able to combine her skills, working more with young people.

'Being able to support someone who is just starting out fresh and is learning to find their way into the real world is quite rewarding,' Tina says. 'My cultural background is a bonus. I'm bi-lingual and could assist with the CALD community wanting to access NDIS services.'

'We are really keen to get the word out about SLES. I've been contacting schools and promoting it. Flourish Australia is the only Mental Health Specialised Provider in the South Western Sydney Region. I also want people to know that SLES is more than just finding and keeping a job. Its gaining life skills, building confidence, managing mental health issues, dealing with workplace conflict, budgeting, time management, travel training, team building activities and community engagement *Phew!*... Just to name a few!'

'People can contact me directly by phone, email, or coming to the office,' says Tina. 'I'll set up a meeting and discuss the program and how we can tailor it to suit the individual participant and go from there.'

Tina finds that many young people encounter similar difficulties. The most obvious one is lack of experience. 'As they are leaving the school life and embarking on the job market, it is hard to gain a realistic idea of what the employment world entails. We can help young people build job searching skills like resume writing and interviewing.'

Depression and anxiety are very common and can sap a person's motivation and confidence. Building resilience and establishing goals are other areas where Tina can help young people.

'Regular mentoring and support is required to help the participant remain and do well in a job,' says Tina. 'This is just as important as gaining the job.'

'When you are new to the employment world, you will come across many unfamiliar issues. These might include working amid cultural diversity, dealing with bullying, managing your time, deciding on priorities and of course, travelling to work and even getting enough sleep!'

Flourish Australia
Disability Employment Services:
SLES
Suite 5, Level 2, 224 George
Street Liverpool NSW 2170
1300 334 497
tina.nguyen@flourishaustralia.org.au

SCHOOL LEAVERS EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

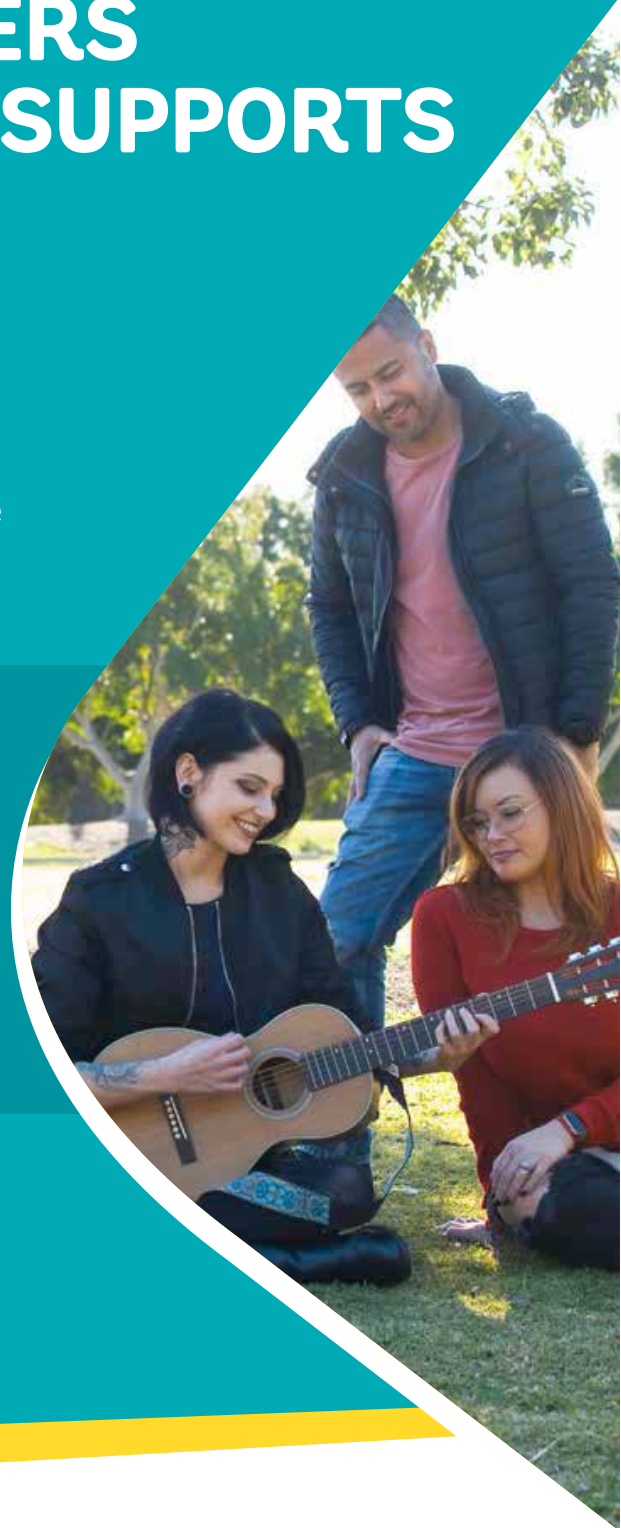
**Are you a recent school leaver
with SLES in your NDIS plan?**

Flourish Australia provides mental health specialised SLES for eligible school leavers.

**We can support you to prepare
for employment through:**

- Identifying your career goals
- Developing your confidence
- Work experience opportunities
- Resume building & Interview preparation
- One-on-One mentoring
- Group based activities
- Life skills development

To see if you qualify for Flourish Australia's SLES services, please contact us for a confidential conversation.





Holding on to what really counts

ABOVE and OPPOSITE PAGE BELOW: Michael and Penny on their wedding day. PHOTOS COURTESY OF MICHAEL AND PENNY STRICKLAND

By Penny and Michael Strickland (with Elice Crouch)

People who are caring for a loved one with a mental health issue may experience the same issue themselves. Penny and Michael Strickland explained their journey to Panorama from the backyard of their home in Eden...a home that they really had to fight to keep (with some encouragement from Flourish Australia).

MICHAEL Penny and I live in a Housing Department home in Eden, near the NSW/Victoria border with our children, Ben and Lesley. Penny's son Ben is 17, and he's going quite well in year 12, while our son Lesley is a typical 7-year-old.

My wife and I had a real problem with hoarding to the point where it was threatening our tenancy. Deep down, I knew we would end up on the street if something didn't change. There was a hell of a lot of stuff all over the floor in the lounge room and everywhere

else, and the kitchen wasn't exactly in A1 order, either. There was a massive mess. There was a lot of sentimental stuff that had piled up, as well as stuff that I'd buy and never use, and I just didn't understand how to start getting rid of it. You become attached to things because you get afraid that if you throw something out, you will miss it or need it. At one stage, my brother offered us some new cupboards. But I had to say no thanks, we've got no room!

The Flourish Australia staff in Bega - first Lauren and later Elice - taught us how to start managing the piles. We began to see the benefit of sacrificing stuff we didn't really want or need. I accepted that if I don't use something, what's the point of having it? This was hard for both of us at first, but we realised we had to do it.

Lauren started us off, then Elice took over. She was quite strict, which was good for us. She got us off our backsides and into the middle of it. It was the best thing that could have happened. Overcoming these hoarding issues was

complex when we started, but when people like Lauren and Elice showed us how to go about it, it got easier. Eventually, it was just "Bye bye!" and into the bin.

At first, I thought that it was only Penny who had a problem with hoarding. But as we went through it all I sort of twigged, and I eventually realised that I had a hoarding problem, too.

PENNY I was a bit upset about getting rid of some of the kid's old toys. I'd look away as I was throwing them out and cry, but afterwards I always felt better. I have never ended up regretting throwing anything away. I still have the memories with me, so I don't need to hang onto the actual objects. And as we went on, we'd pick something up and say, "Who's is this? Oh, that's Michael's. And this? Oh, that's Michael's, too."

MICHAEL The hoarding caused all kinds of problems, but now we are able to manage them. I chose to tell the people we were renting the house off that I was a hoarder, but I assured them that

Recovery Story

I was going to do something about it. The hoarding also greatly restricted our social life, but now we can confidently invite people to come around. Going through all this and having a routine in place has brought Penny and I closer together. It has made us a lot happier. We're getting back to reality again.

A helping hand

Elice Crouch is a Peer Worker with the Flourish Australia's Bega service who came to help out Michael and Penny with their efforts.

ELICE Michael and Penny are very family oriented people. I would ask them about some of the stuff cluttering the place: What's this? Do you use this? And then Penny or Michael would come up with stories and memories about the family. Michael told me one possible trigger for the hoarding was the regret he felt after having to sell the family home. It's a huge thing to do, and once you part with the family home you can't get it back. You can imagine how that might affect you. I definitely watched their relationship flourish. I recall when Michael returned from seeing a psychologist for the first time, and he told me, "All I want to do right now is take my wife out for a coffee or something," which I thought was quite romantic. And then Michael put it to Penny and she said, "But I've already had a cup!" And he said good-naturedly, "Well, you're going to have another one with me!"

MICHAEL I still ask Penny out on dates for coffee or to have something to eat. We call it "time with you and I." And of course we also spend lots of time with Lesley and Ben. When Elice came round to work with us, Ben and Lesley would chip in and help. They took it all on board.

PENNY Lesley had a bag full of old toys he didn't play with anymore, and on his own initiative he took it up to the Op Shop.

ELICE I was bossy. I ruled the roost. But it was Penny and Michael who actually did all the work. I remember how amazed I was to see their sparkling clean kitchen. I learned a lot from them, as well.

PENNY Elice gave us a kick in the right direction, and it all paid off.

MICHAEL The whole syndicate has opened up our hearts. They bent over backwards to keep us in this house.

ELICE And going through all their family history, I found out something interesting about myself, because I grew up in this area. I used to go to buy lollies at STRICKEY's lolly shop in Eden when I was young. That turned out to be owned by Michael's uncle.

PENNY AND MICHAEL The message we both want to say is if you are in trouble with an issue, DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP. And when you ask for help from Flourish Australia, they will fight for you.

MICHAEL I'm so happy with the support we've gotten from Flourish Australia. Deep down inside in my heart I know that we would have been out on the streets without their support. And we also owe a lot to Bega NSW Housing, Bega Mission Australia, and Bega Family Referral Services. We are really grateful to all of the people and organisations who helped us.

Getting more out of life now

PENNY I've started a crocheting and knitting group every Wednesday from 1 o'clock to 2 o'clock at the Eden Library. So far we have five or six people who attend. Next week we are expecting a few more. We get together and have a

good old chat about our projects and life in general. It's nice to meet new people this way. A lot of younger people don't know how to crochet or knit. I even taught Michael how to crochet and knit.

MICHAEL I'm actually still in the process of knitting a scarf, I'm getting better all the time with practice and my mother told me that my father used to knit. This was special to know, as I learned how to be a mechanic from my father. We had a service station at Bombala where he worked on trucks and cars and everything, and he taught me how to pull a motor down and rebuild it. The only thing I can't take apart and put together is a manual gear box. We used to go gold mining, too, as my great grandfather had a 99 year lease at Yambala. We used to go there on holidays when I was just a kid and work with ten foot drills and jack hammers. Today, I do part time work on the weekend and maintenance on trucks, doing grease and oil changes.

As told to Warren Heggarty

**Flourish Australia
Kemp Building
1/176 Carp Street
BEGA NSW 2550
1300 779 270**





Bands Appear Music at Newcastle

ABOVE, L-R: “Peer Reviewed” band members Chad, Broughton, Ben, and Jarrod Hayes are READY TO ROCK over at Newcastle. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

By Grant J Everett

“Flourish Australia’s Newcastle site on Hunter street (A.K.A The Centre) has been running peer music groups twice a week as part of their daily program for some time. It’s always been one of the most popular events on The Centre’s timetable,” said Mental Health Worker Jarrod Hayes.

“In order to showcase the talents of the many, many musically-inclined people who access our service, we decided to hold a music night starring these singers and musicians. Getting the word out and organising the performances required a collaboration between our peer workers

and the people who access the peer music group and one-to-one music support. Lots of people pitched in to set up and decorate the place.

“The performers played and sang in front of a crowd of approximately 40 people who all clapped and danced throughout the night.” Jarrod said. “For many of the performers, playing music in front of an audience has been a long-term goal of theirs, the culmination of hours and hours of practice and determination. Despite the nerves of a few performers, they were all able to push through and put on a great show that was enjoyed by all.

“Repetition was a key factor in preparing for the music night and overcoming nerves. One performer who found the prospect of playing in front of other people significantly distressing was able to employ relaxation strategies and successfully performed with the band. The shared nerves of the performers

were ironically a comforting factor, as it enabled the members to recognise they were not alone in feeling this way and helped them *band* together to get through the night.”

From all accounts, it was successful.

“On the big night, there was a mixture of solo performances and peer bands, with some playing original songs while others did covers of classic pop.”

Overall, The Centre has a lot to offer for the musically inclined.

“At The Centre, one-on-one music support is available for people who have funding under the NDIS as long as it will support them to reach one of the goals in their NDIS recovery plan. For example, there’s a person I work with who has specified music in their individual recovery plan, and though these practise sessions initially centred around learning guitar, they’ve developed into

**Flourish Australia
627 Hunter Street
Newcastle, NSW, 2300
(02) 9393 9700**

Panor-ARTS-ma

general music support where I often help people to write and record music and vocals using the Garage Band program. Currently I have some people exclusively learning guitar whilst others focus on song writing and general music production."

The house band's current in-progress name is "Peer Reviewed", but that isn't set in stone. When Panorama visited Newcastle recently, the house band was jamming in an improvised style, but they also performed all kinds of rock and roll songs. Some of them were quite complex and done very professionally. These songs included...

- *When You Come Around* and *Hitching A Ride* by Greenday
- *Come As You Are* by Nirvana
- *Morning Glory* and *Wonder Wall* by Oasis.

As you can see in the main photo, their band consists of a drum kit, a keyboard, a bass guitar and an electric guitar. Besides Jarrod on the electric guitar, the band is made up of people who access services at The Centre. At the time we took the picture, they were "between singers." Recently, there has been a rumour that they might even be performing at a major corporate event for Flourish Australia... but we have to keep that secret for now (shhh).

Jarrod told Panorama about some of the people involved in the music group and

RIGHT: Christine. FAR RIGHT: Lyndon. BELOW: Dylan and Jarrod Hayes PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CENTRE

the one-on-one sessions.

"Dylan is a younger member of The Centre who attends musical one-on-one support. Dylan writes rap songs about his struggles with mental health and his subsequent growth from these experiences. Two of Dylan's songs are aptly titled 'The Real Struggle' and 'Time to Heal'."

(For fans of rap, check out our story on Epik Treo in July's Panorama - Ed).

"Christine also accesses one-on-one music support, and writes songs to express feelings of love, loss, and her day-to-day experiences. Christine's songs may range from jazz to country and even rock ballads depending on the way she

wishes to use to express herself. Her songs are composed during one-on-one support."

"Chad (see his story in July's Panorama) and Marcello P are both talented musicians who attend the music groups, both are experienced in performing, and they've written numerous original pieces. Typically their music falls within the classic rock/blues genre."

"Lyndon is a regular and can be found singing and strumming away on his guitar. Lyndon often writes country-esque sounds, including a powerful ballad about his late Mother titled "I Miss You, Mum'."





ABOVE: Buzzer (left) and Beautifier (right). Together with Liquifyer (at work!) they are Epik Treo. All the crew have a lived experience of mental health issues and a desire to give back something positive. Check out their new album “Shattered Dreams” on SoundCloud! PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

Epik Treo: “It ain’t no movie, this is real life”

– from “Haters” by Epik Treo

BEAUTIFIER and BUZZER, two thirds of the Australian rap group Epik Treo, shared their pursuit of musical dreams with Panorama.

BEAUTIFIER Our crew is called Epik Treo. I sing and play keyboards, and there are two rappers, Buzzer and Liquifyer. They remembered me from headspace and asked me to join their group. At first we all rapped, but I’m a better singer than a rapper. I get all tongue tied when I rap.

BUZZER Beautifier liked singing better. Liquifyer and I started rapping when we

saw a rapper from Canada and that just cemented our will. We both decided that was what we wanted to do. I entered a competition where the prize was to rap at the League Grand Final, and I got through to Stage Three. Liquifyer and I have also entered talent quests. There was one competition where the winner who came first got to go to LA! We came second in that one. In another talent quest we won an African artwork. I’ve gotten into the paper about ten times for my rapping. I used to rap with some people in the park who would bring their guitars. They’ve all moved on, but I’m still going!

BEAUTIFIER I won the Karaoke competition at the Flourish Australia Picnic Day in 2014 doing an Evanescence song. My elder sister is a singer and a musician, too. She got a scholarship to study psychology at UWS. My brother won the Dean’s award for computer studies at UWS. We come from a very large family. So does Buzzer. All three of us in the crew all have mental health issues, so that’s another thing we have in common.

BUZZER I remember the exact date we came together as a group. It was September 11, 2014. I’m the one with the good memory, so that’s why I’m also the manager!

Who are the Epik Treo?

**Beautifier (Nina Kay),
vocals and keyboards
Liquifyer (Gary),
Rapper
Buzzer (Keirron Smith),
rapper, producer**

BEAUTIFIER So we had our first gig in the Art Gallery at Parramatta. Our dream is to be a “proper” band. The problem is that Gary has to give priority to his paid job! Sometimes we’ve been paid for our performances. One time we performed at a McHappy Day, at McDonalds!

BUZZER We did a gig once a week at the

Casula powerhouse. Our biggest ever gig so far was at the Blacktown show. There were heaps of people there.

BEAUTIFIER We practice our songs. We don't just improvise them on the spot. Usually what happens is that I come up with something on the piano, then we add a beat, the guys rap over the top and I sing the chorus. I put the songs together using Logic Pro. I did a Certificate III in music. There are some songs which I think are too poppy for rap, but we can get the producer to put a certain beat to it that makes it more rappy and the guys can rap over that. We did record one of those kind of poppy songs on our album called "Never Know" We've done a song about mental health issues called "Demon Within" because sometimes that's what it feels like. We don't do the sex and drugs and violence routine that other groups do. We do stuff that matters. For example, we focus on mental health and anti-bullying. We've done a wedding song and another one called "The Grass is Greener." our song about bullying is called "Kicked Around" We sing about real things. I like Eminem, but our own material isn't like his, of course. We have recorded songs at I.C.E. (Information + Cultural Exchange) at Parramatta with a producer.

BUZZER Music is really good for me. It helps me manage paranoid feelings and anxiety. If it wasn't for music, I'd be in hospital. I'm glad to be alive. Every day is a blessing!

BEAUTIFIER I guess you could say music saved our lives. I play the piano every day. The last time I was hospitalised was about six months ago, at Paringa. Luckily they had a piano, and I found playing it very therapeutic. The medication I take makes me put on weight, but under the NDIS I have a female support worker who helps me with working out. I've had support from PIR and also the disability coordinator at TAFE. I think I'm on the other side of it now and I'd like to be able to help others in the future.

"I'm the kid you kicked around"
– from "Kicked Around" by Epik Treo

BUZZER I once wanted to be an actor or a singer when I was younger. Now I'm a rapper. I have done hospitality, painting and decorating work. I've also worked at Maccas, and i spent time working in the

Sony factory making CD covers. One job I had involved sandblasting and etching with acid. I wouldn't want to do that again. I'd like to work with youth one day.

BEAUTIFIER I have worked with Endeavour supported employment and also a company that made environmentally friendly cleaning products. I don't think factory work would make a fulfilling career for me, though. That's why I plan to do a Certificate IV in Mental Health at Mt Druitt TAFE, so that I can support other people. I am pretty far along in my own recovery journey now, so I feel like I'm at a stage where I can do this .

as told to Warren Heggarty

Where to find the Epik Treo

Their album is available to stream on SoundCloud. Just go to...

<https://soundcloud.com/discover>

And type Epik Treo into the Search box (careful of the spelling, folks!)

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

BELOW: Flashback to the 2014 Flourish Australia picnic day. Nina belts out a song by Evanescence to win the prize. PHOTO BY NARELLE ROBERTSON INSET: And she did it all again in 2015. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY RIGHT: The whole Treo PHOTO BY SOUND CLOUD



Diego Goes to Cobar

The advertisement promised a great career development opportunity in an outback country town for three months. Diego Figueroa, from Flourish Australia's Bankstown service, took the plunge. He was stoked!

BACKGROUND: Countryside between Cobar and Bourke. PHOTO BY DAVID FIGUEROA **ABOVE: Diego Figueroa as NDIS coordinator in Bankstown.** 'I was amazed at how giving and resilient people are.' PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

By Diego Figueroa

I had never been in the bush before, unless you count Foster. My background is working with St Vincent De Paul in Western Sydney. I had been involved in things like transitional crisis accommodation and men's refuges, not to mention organising removalists.

For five years I was a case worker in Juvenile Justice Community Programs, supervising young people on community service orders. So for three months, I was seconded from Bankstown in the South-Western Suburbs of Sydney to Cobar, NSW a copper and gold mining town which is 690 Km by road to the North West!

I didn't have family around in Cobar so the staff were my support network and they were very patient with me. I remember on my first day, when I arrived at Dubbo and Manager Lisa Harrison picked me up. I remarked on the red soil. 'You ain't seen nothing yet' she said. She was right. There was so much more to see and experience.

Like Mount Grenfell. That was a great place, one of the most deeply moving places I have been to. It contains aboriginal rock art of the Ngiyampaa people who would take shelter under the rocky overhangs there. There are richly coloured paintings of humans, animals figures, and things in the natural environment, plus hand stencils. These are all of ceremonial significance to traditional owners. (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service)

Flourish Australia has a good name and level of respect in Cobar because of the hard work that our staff have been doing, people like Lisa, Margo and Katrina.

There is a real need for specialised mental health services here, but there is room for a bit of fun, too. Like Diving Ducks. People who access our service get a lot out of Diving Ducks -the aquatic program. It was so much fun in the pool. People were laughing because I kept falling over!

The specific goal I had in Cobar





involved the finishing up of the PHaMs (Personal Helpers and Mentors) program in June. Like other directly funded Commonwealth programs, the types of services provided by PHaMs is to be replaced by the NDIS which directs funding to the service user instead.

My focus was on getting as many people as possible to transfer to the NDIS, checking their eligibility, getting their access requests done, helping with doctors' appointments and sending through the paper work. There were some other people, generally elderly, who had been on PHaMs who also needed to be supported.

We didn't want to leave these people in the lurch, so at the very least we provided them with consistent support. Sometimes, because of isolation in Cobar, it takes a long time to get things done. There is a mental health nurse once or twice a fortnight. Seeing a doctor can take up to two weeks. There was an Iranian doctor there who was really good. Even getting an access request form can

take weeks... if it gets lost in the mail. We all had to just work around the delays.

Sometimes you have to transport people to the next big town which is Dubbo, several hours away. And then there were the trips to the Eye Hospital in Bourke. That's an all day job.

I'll give you some advice, don't make the trip at night because the kangaroos jump out at you.

I made a trip to Brewarrina where I was able to see the Brewarrina Fish Traps, which some people say is one of the oldest artificial structures on earth

Another role I had, for people who were already on the NDIS, was as a support worker. I was so fortunate getting to know these people. I supported a young man who uses a wheelchair for a couple of hours a day. We set up a worm farm, did gardening and would chat about footy or watch TV. I enjoy supporting people and seeing the progress as

they begin to open up.

I would encourage anyone to take an opportunity like this to work in a remote town. It is a great way to develop skills. I have been working in Sydney and overseas for twenty years but I am so glad I had that experience of working in Cobar. It humbled me and enriched my learning. I enjoyed building relationships but my time was so short there, 3.5 months.

I was constantly amazed and humbled at how giving and resilient people are out there. The people in Cobar opened up their arms and welcomed me into their community which has left a lasting impact on my life.

References

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. (n.d.). Mount Grenfell Historic Site. Retrieved from National Parks and Wildlife Service: <https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/visit-a-park/parks/mount-grenfell-historic-site>

PHOTOS: ABOVE LEFT Gundabookar. ABOVE RIGHT The mine pit at Cobar. PHOTOS BY DIEGO FIGUEROA



ABOVE: Megan Paull learning hands-on skills as part of her Bachelors Degree in Nursing Science PHOTO BY ONE OF HER FELLOW NURSING STUDENTS

Flourishing after five years of Hell

By Megan Paull

My name is Megan, and I have accessed Flourish Australia’s Warana service on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast for seven and a half years. It’s great connecting with people who have mental health issues like I do, as I feel most comfortable around those who’ve had similar experiences to my own. I don’t need to hide, and I can just be myself. I like the Peer Workers for the same reason. Unlike a lot of people who work in mental health, Peer Workers can support you and relate to you without needing to bring illness or diagnosis or medication into it.

Life is great at the moment: I’m happily married, I’m in the latter stages of

studying to become a Nurse, I’ve been well for quite some time, and I’m feeling fulfilled in all the ways that count. But things haven’t always been this good.

Back to the start

Nursing wasn’t the first field I studied, but I’ve certainly gone furthest with this degree. When I first left high school I started a Bachelors of Communications because I wanted to be a journalist, but I’m sad to say that this didn’t turn out to be my thing. I switched to a Bachelors of Computer Art and Design, and only got about halfway through that one, too. Again, I wasn’t confident that I was cut out for it, so I left.

While leaving Uni twice was stressful enough, I had a lot of other personal issues going on in my life, most notably my brother passing away and my husband cheating on me. I decided that I needed to bail from the Sunshine Coast for a fresh start, and I chose Alice Springs because I had some family living there to make the transition easier.

However, moving out to Alice Springs upset my mental health. I had several hospital presentations over a short period, but I was able to get back on track and I successfully maintained a full-time job at Kmart for about 10 months. This job was stressful, and at one point I was doing the work of literally 3 people. To make matters worse, despite moving across Australia, I found that my problems had travelled with me. All of these stressors snowballed into mild self-harming where I was scratching at myself.

This was the beginning of My Five Years Of Hell.

My Five Years Of Hell

While the scratching was already a really bad coping strategy, my self-harm got steadily worse until I was cutting and overdosing. I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, but when I saw clinical staff for help I felt that I was being stigmatised and that they weren’t listening. They relied on a purely medical approach to deal with my BPD and didn’t seem too interested in what I had to say. I had numerous hospital admissions over that span of time, and I found the clinical model of recovery got very tiresome sometimes.

“I realised that I could keep going down this path to self-destruction and let it ruin my relationships and eventually take my life, or I could turn things around.”

A while back I was actually shown one of my old mental health care plans from this part of my life, and I found out that my treating team were expecting me to commit suicide at any time. Obviously they did everything they could to prevent it, but they were ultimately convinced that this was going to be my fate.

By May in 2008 it was suggested I should try Dialectical Behavioural Therapy to help me cease my self-harm, but it wasn’t available in Alice Springs. My family flew me back to Brisbane specifically so I could do the DBT course.

Recovery Story

However, before I had a chance to start therapy I was self-harming again, and my family decided, "We just can't handle this." Even though I wasn't harming myself at the house, it was too stressful for them to cope with.

Soon I was hospitalised and I essentially became homeless. Thankfully the hospital had programs for people who were homeless, and they wouldn't discharge you unless you had somewhere to go. They usually organised temporary housing until something permanent could be found, but I was fortunate to get somewhere at Fortitude Valley straight away. It was a halfway house, and while the property itself was nice, I didn't like the environment. I didn't want to be in Brisbane anymore: I wanted to go back up the coast to where my Dad was.

I got kicked out of the DBT program after going on leave for a lot longer than I was supposed to, and I was spiralling out of control with self-harm and overdosing. It got pretty dire on a few occasions. On Christmas Eve I went to see some friends of the family, as I didn't want to spend this time alone, and I managed to speak with my Dad on the phone. He knew that if I stayed in Brisbane it would only be a matter of time until I was dead. Dad offered to let me move back in, and on New Year's Eve I was back to the coast with him. I was okay for a few months, but it wasn't long before I went back to self-harming and overdosing. I was losing control again, and I was in and out of hospital. At one point my Dad had to confiscate the keys to my car.

My most serious episode occurred when I'd just been discharged from hospital. I went to a local park to overdose, hoping that people would just assume I was a homeless person sleeping rough. But it didn't go to plan: while I don't remember doing it, I got up and collapsed outside of the BBQ area. A bus driver went past at 10pm that night, and when he saw me laying unconscious in the rain on my own he thought "That's not right," and called 000 for an Ambulance. To this day I'm really thankful the bus driver did that, because otherwise I wouldn't be alive.

I started dating the man who would become my husband, but my old behaviours kept returning no matter what. I tried to end the cycle with more DBT and focusing on my art, but

I couldn't stop harming myself. It took my boyfriend breaking up with me to experience a pivotal moment: I realised that I could keep going down this path to self-destruction and let it ruin my relationships and eventually take my life, or I could turn things around. That night I decided I was going to get my act together. It's been a long, hard, slow battle, but this is the longest I've been self-harm free and stable since 2007.

Hitting the books

I've been studying a Bachelors of Nursing Science part time for 5 years now, and I've only got two placements left until I'm finished. I access the University's support services, and I have a learning access plan in place which was individualised specifically for me. With my plan I can get easy access to extensions on assessment items, and with exams I can sit in a room with 4 or 5 other students as opposed to an enormous auditorium that seats thousands. As some Uni work can be done online, I will often skip out and finish it later when I'm in the right headspace (but a lot of face-to-face components like clinical lab skills have to be done in person). I can also have short breaks so I can take medication. This leeway helps relieve my anxiety and lets me get the rest I need when I'm extra tired. Accessing this support has really helped me to be successful with Uni.

Starting next week, I'm going to start applying for work as an AIN.

Staying well

My life is now a complete polar opposite. I've found if you want to stay well, it's vital to stay busy and do positive things. This gives me a sense of purpose, and has been a major part of my recovery. It doesn't have to be a job or a degree: it could be going into a Flourish Australia day-to-day living centre and spending time with your peers in a safe space. I also surround myself with positive people – I've learned that one the hard way – and be sure to cull negativity out of your life, as negativity breeds negativity. It's also good to give back to the community: for instance, I'm the Community Advisory Council representative for the Warana branch of Flourish Australia, and I also volunteer with the Nursing Student Association at the University as their

treasurer.

I've learned that recovery is about more than labels and medication. I used to see myself as a mental illness, but I've realised that my diagnosis is a really small part of me, and it's not how I am defined. My illness has become such a tiny part of my life that it's not even a problem anymore.

If you have thoughts of harming yourself, talk to somebody.

(As told to Grant J Everett)

Source:

www.sane.org/information-stories/facts-and-guides/borderline-personality-disorder

What is Borderline Personality Disorder?

People affected by Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) often have difficulty managing their emotions and impulses, relating to people, and maintaining a stable self-image. Other symptoms can include feeling empty, low self-esteem, paranoia, detachment, anxiety, a fear of being abandoned, self-harm or suicide attempts, and anger and moodiness. BPD symptoms usually appear in late adolescence or early adulthood, and are more common in women. While BPD can be highly distressing for the person affected as well as their family and friends, most people can recover with psychological therapies that teach you how to better understand and manage your feelings and behaviours.

Recovery Story



Hearing Voices, Sharing Recovery

ABOVE: Stephen facilitates the Hearing Voices group at Flourish Australia's Queanbeyan service PHOTO BY ELIZABETH WEBB

By Stephen

Stephen is a member at Flourish Australia's Queanbeyan day-to-day living centre. He enjoys running the fortnightly Hearing Voices group. Here, he tells Panorama how he came to become the group's facilitator (Editor)

I've been attending the Queanbeyan service regularly for about two years now.

The workers are all phenomenal to talk to, they don't push me into doing anything that I don't think will suit me, and they encourage me to live my life the way that I believe is best. They always keep me in the loop about what's going on, and are just generally an unreal bunch of people.

Why I'm a regular here

One of my favourite events on the calendar is the fortnightly Hearing Voices group. It's a non-medical, non-clinical gathering that starts at 2pm every second Tuesday. It runs for about an hour, and is open to anyone who wants to attend. Attendance varies depending on what everyone is doing on the day. This is a safe space that encourages

people who hear voices to gain an understanding of the way their minds work and to reach towards their definition of wellness. We've also collected the helpful strategies that members of the group use to manage their voices. We've seen the great value of sharing these on many occasions (see more on the next page).

Everyone is welcome to attend and contribute to the group, but we don't push people to share if they aren't ready. We're happy to let new members just listen to other people's stories, learn how the group works, and build up trust in their own time. When people feel ready to share, they can.

In addition to running the Hearing Voices group, I also attend the music group, the guitar group, and the art group. Music has always been a good strategy for keeping my mental health in check, but I'm always still learning.

Right place at the right time

When it comes to how I started running the Hearing Voices group on my own, to tell you the truth, I just sort of fell into it! The group used to be run by two people

at a time - somebody who hears voices, and a staff member - but a few months ago there weren't any staff members available, so Liz asked me if I could try running the group on my own, and she would pop in. Although I'd helped facilitate the Hearing Voices group in the past, I wasn't entirely confident that I'd be able to manage it without help, but I wasn't feeling overwhelmed or anything like that. So I said "Yeah, I will give it a go." I think I handled the pressure just fine, and afterwards I felt like I'd done a great job. Everything went so smoothly that I've been trusted to run the Hearing Voices group by myself ever since.

Healing from hardships

As I've done it pretty hard for much of my life, I think sharing my difficult experiences has helped the group members to find the strength they need to be able to get through whatever they're dealing with. Over the last couple of years I've found a lot of value in sharing my life story to inspire other people. Knowing that I can help people to get through their dark times simply by sharing my story is a great feeling.

The future?

I've discovered more and more that sharing my personal experiences and hardships definitely helps others who are struggling through their own problems. I think talking with someone who has lived through a really rough time can make you think, "Hey, if he can get through that, then maybe I can get through what I'm experiencing!"

As a result, over the last 18 months or so I've really begun to get interested in pursuing peer work. With the staff's encouragement I'm going to apply for a scholarship in November, and if I get approved I will start studying a Certificate IV that will allow me to become a fully qualified Peer Worker.

**Flourish Australia
Queanbeyan
Level 1, Suite 5,
7-9 Morisset Street
QUEANBEYAN,
NSW 2620
1300 779 270**



PHOTO BY PIXABAY

Over the years, the Hearing Voices group at Flourish Australia Queanbeyan have gathered a lot of helpful, non-medical, non-clinical tips and techniques about how to manage distressing voices. Here are some examples of practical tips taken from the **Hearing Voices Network NSW** document *Dealing With Disturbing Voices*.

Know thyself

First of all, hearing voices does not necessarily indicate psychosis or mental illness. Voice hearing experiences are actually quite common. One good question to ask is whether there's a chance the voices are simply a way that you're talking to yourself. By learning to refer to the voices as a part of themselves, some people have eliminated their distressing qualities.

Different strokes for different folks: Prevention

Preventing distressing voices is different for each person, as our triggers are as individual as we are. Learning what these triggers are is very important.

For instance, if stress and high emotions trigger you, then avoiding excessively distressing situations and learning emotional management techniques may help. Relaxation exercises like progressive muscular relaxation, meditation, and breathing techniques are an option, and are best practiced while you're exposed to anxiety-provoking situations. If you know the frame of mind that brings on voices, then controlling your mood may also

control the voices.

Periods of social isolation and inactivity tend to be a common time for voices to appear. If voices become worse when you are alone or isolated, then you can connect with people by firing up social media, joining a chat site, or commenting on a message board for a quick social pick-me-up.

Are the voices affected by your health? Physical health problems, an irregular diet or certain foods may be a trigger. In this case, maintaining your general health and fitness can help minimise problems with voices.

Control techniques

There are a large number of different techniques you can try out to control or stop the voices. Distractions like listening to music, playing a game, reading, writing, hobbies, or playing sports are all worth trying. Slight variations can make all the difference. For example, if you're using music as a control method, try listening to it with one earplug, and alternate ears to see if this makes any difference.

"Cultivating your self-esteem by repeating affirmations and consciously practicing positive self-talk can be very effective."

It might be worth keeping track of the timing, duration, and content of your voices. You can self-monitor by keeping a record of when the voices started, where you were at the time, and what the voices said. This needs to be done each time a voice is heard, and can help you to identify triggers. Do they occur at any particular time or in any particular situation? Are they louder or more aggressive at certain times? Is voice frequency affected by your mood or frame of mind? Is what the voices say related to the way you really feel? Are there any other factors which seem to affect the voices?

Some people find it helpful to reason with the voices, to set boundaries. Better yet, you can *challenge* the voices. If the voices make predictions, do they ever come true? If they claim to have special powers, is there any proof to this? If they seem to be able to predict the future,

are they only echoing what you might already know (even subconsciously)? If the voices threaten dire consequences for disobeying them, are their threats ever actually carried out? Vocal activity, like humming or singing quietly to yourself, can also help.

Quick tips

- Try sitting or lying quietly, and also try the exact opposite by walking, jogging, running, swimming, or doing aerobics. What worked best?
- You can simply try to deny the voices. As soon as they begin, say "Stop" under your breath, and think of something pleasant to occupy your mind. If the voices persist, try the technique again. If you're alone, dismiss the voices by saying in a loud and clear voice, "Go away, leave me alone". Emphasise this command by stamping your foot.
- Keep busy.
- If you hear both positive and negative voices, focus on the positive voices and ignore the negative ones. You can practice your selective hearing by talking to a friend while the television is on.
- Aversion therapy involves wearing a rubber band around your wrist and snapping it when the voices begin to intensify.
- Substance use (and substance withdrawals, like the DTs) can cause hallucinations, including voices. It might be best to avoid these.
- Being able to meet and share your experiences with other people who hear voices can be an important source of comfort. Always remember that you aren't alone.

Thanks to Elizabeth Webb at Flourish Australia Queanbeyan for assistance with this story.

"Maintain a positive attitude and expectations. Expecting you will hear voices can increase the likelihood that you actually will. If you believe something can actively prevent the voices, this belief can help reduce their frequency."



Finding better health, a better job, and a better life

ABOVE: Tim Franklin (left) saying hi to Gavin Blackwood, NDIS Support Coordinator. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

By Tim Franklin

In the time I've been with Flourish Australia, I've come leaps and bounds. I've engaged with study, well and truly taken control of my health issues, found ways I can give back to Flourish Australia's Newcastle service (The Centre) and even found open employment. I'm also studying to get my L plates, which has been a goal for me for ages.

The Centre has given me the chance to complete a few TAFE courses on-site. My most recent qualification was a six-week vehicle detailing course, and our classroom was the rear carpark! The teacher, Wayne, was from a TAFE college on the Central Coast, and he took myself and half a dozen other students through the basics of cleaning and washing cars. Before we started, I thought vehicle detailing would be as simple as putting dishwashing liquid on cars and rinsing it off, but there was a lot more to it than that.

The different parts of vehicle detailing need to be done in certain ways and it can be quite complicated if you don't know what you're doing. One of the toughest bits of the course was remembering what products you use for different jobs. We also learned how to wax vehicles properly, as getting a good, even coat requires a certain technique. For the practical parts of the course we cleaned and detailed some of the Flourish Australia company vehicles. I came out of the course with a lot of knowledge on the subject. I also got a TAFE Certificate for my efforts, so that's

another branch on the tree, another reference. It's good to show you've had plenty of training.

The first course I did through The Centre was a drawing course, run by Carole Gant (the Project Leader at The Centre).

Working in the open market

I've had a few different jobs over the years. I'm currently employed with Castle Personnel, a company that helps people find work. I started off trying to find a job through them, but one day they turned around and said, "We'd like you to be a part of our crew." I took them up on the offer, and now I work as a cleaner for that branch. I've been there eight months now and it's going really well.

My job is performing essential maintenance: vacuuming, changing bins, and general cleaning. I enjoy my job, and once I get my head in the zone it's easy to get through a shift. But the best part is the environment I work in. The other employees aren't only there because they're being paid, but because they care for their clients. They're a great team. So while I could go and get a job doing vehicle detailing, at the moment I'm happy with what I have, and I'd like to see how it pans out. I'm really enjoying it at the moment.

Choosing to take charge of my physical health

It's been eight years since I gave up smoking, and it's still one of the best things I ever did. Not only am I getting all the usual benefits of quitting (better health, it's easier to breathe, I can taste my food properly) I've also found that my medication works more effectively. This means I was able to arrange to lower my dose. I feel so much better. Nowadays I exercise and eat right. I used

"The staff at The Centre are always happy to talk if there's something on your mind, and you can tell it's more than just a job to them."

to have Type-2 diabetes, high blood pressure and I weighed 135kg, but I've been able to take care of all of these issues by cycling every day and dieting. Not only have I dropped down to 81kg, but I've reached the point where I no longer need to take blood pressure or diabetes medication. My friend Michael used to race as a cyclist, and he was the one who first got me into riding bikes. I really appreciate that, otherwise I'd probably still be experiencing all those health issues. At 81 kilos, according to my BMI reading, I'm almost at my ideal weight for my height.

(as told to Grant J Everett)



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

[f /CommunityBusinesses](#) [flourishaustralia.org.au](#)



ABOVE: Luke Niass, one of the awesome Peer Workers who work at Flourish Australia's Newcastle office

PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

Peer Work: Sharing Stories, Strengths, and Strategies

By Luke Niass, Peer Worker

I've been working as a Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Newcastle service, nicknamed The Centre, since October 2018. Before placing an expression of interest with Flourish Australia, I had researched a number of organisations and companies to see what they had to offer, and what instantly captivated me and made me want to be a part of the Flourish Australia team was how they actively encouraged people with

a lived experience of mental health issues to apply for jobs. Last I heard, more than 52% of Flourish Australia employees identify as having a lived experience of mental health issues, and I think it's a real shame that more organisations don't seem to see the value of employing people with a lived experience.

After coming into contact with Flourish Australia, naturally it wasn't long until I learned about Peer Work.

A little overview of Peer Workers

First off, all Peer Workers have a lived experience of mental health issues. What I like most about being a Peer Worker is that my history has equipped me with the empathy I need to use when I support people, and that's something no certificate alone can teach you.

"Identifying mental health issues in early development and providing the right kind of intervention can be critical for young people who are struggling."

But while I might have an understanding of what some people with mental health issues are going through, the focus isn't meant to be on me: it's about their recovery journey, helping them to reach their definition of wellness. It's very participant-focused, and although we don't generally compare our journeys, we can share strategies and discuss what's personally gotten us through our adversities. That can be of great value both to both of us.

Everyone wants to be a Peer Worker!

With the rise of the recovery movement and the massive contribution Peer Workers are making to organisations like Flourish Australia (and other organisations), a lot of people with a lived experience of mental health issues now want to get into Peer Work. However, it's important to understand that this job requires a certain professionalism, and there are professional boundaries that need to be observed. For instance, a lot of people are eager to share "I've been through the same thing as you," stories, but you need to be careful not to cause any retraumatisation in the process (see our

article "Peer Workers learn how to share their story in a way that really helps others" for more on this subject).

Peer Workers also need to remember to practise self-care, as there will be times when you will work with someone who has had a very similar journey to your own, and it might be necessary to engage with reflective practises to ensure your wellness or professionalism are not compromised (check out our "Managing Vicarious Trauma" article on page 20 to learn more - Ed).

Personally, Peer Work has been fantastic for my wellness. It's great to be giving back, it's a really rewarding feeling. I gain a lot of gratification knowing I can use my experiences to help others who are going through something similar to my past difficulties. By sharing helpful strategies and discussing how I got through my own hardships, this can give people hope, and it makes me feel really good, too. Peer Work is especially fulfilling when somebody tells me I've made their day or made them smile. That's what it's all about!

When people go through hard experiences, they can develop empathy to not want other people to feel the way they did or go down the bad paths they did. For me, personally, if I can help to prevent somebody going down that bad path or bring them back before they reach the point of no return, then I feel very, very fulfilled.

Future goals

Before becoming a part of the Flourish Australia team I was studying a Certificate III in Disability Individual Support. I finished my Cert III, and I'm now doing a Diploma in Mental Health. I started this Diploma to further my confidence in the field, and to formally build on my existing skills as a Peer Worker. I'm very interested in the numbers aspects of Flourish Australia, such as coordinated support positions and working closely with the NDIS. I've done some research into how the NDIS works in regards to organisations like Flourish Australia, and that's definitely an avenue I'm considering.

**Flourish Australia
Newcastle, "The Centre"
627 Hunter Street,
Newcastle, NSW 2300
(02) 9393 9700**



ABOVE (L-R): Flourish Australia members Anne Bell and Peter Allen, and Mental Health Worker Margot McKay from Katoomba) completed the entire City2Surf
PHOTO BY A HELPFUL PASSERBY

Accomplishing a life-long goal: The City2Surf

By Anne Bell

I try to set goals, as having something to work towards makes life so much easier. Sometimes these goals are very tiny, or they could be an ongoing task I'll do on a day-to-day basis. But there's one big goal that I've wanted to accomplish for decades: the City2Surf fun run.

The dream

My husband and my kids have always been runners, and while this made me feel like the odd one out, being physically active and keeping fit has always been important to me. I had always thought that building up to doing the City2Surf would be a great experience, but over time, the older I got, the less possible it seemed, until I reached the point where I was convinced it wasn't going to happen. So while it was on my Bucket List, I didn't think I'd manage to tick it off.

So when Flourish Australia offered to support me with entering the City2Surf, I thought "Fantastic!" I was going to do the race with a group of Flourish Australia staff and a number of people who access their services (such as the one in Katoomba, where I attend). This connection instantly made the run seem a lot less daunting. On top of that, the

Flourish Australia staff supported me in preparing for the City2Surf by starting a walking program that ran on Mondays and other exercise classes that involved FitBits. I continued doing long walks for two or three days per week for about 50 minutes per session on my own, and towards the end I'd really slap out the pace as fast as I could. I think finishing with power walking really boosted my fitness and stamina.

The big day arrives

On the day of the City2Surf, I was accompanied by fellow Flourish Australia participant Peter Allen and a Flourish Australia support worker who was there to encourage the both of us. I think the support worker was unsure whether they'd be able to finish the whole race, even though they were about 10 years younger than me. With Peter being in his late 40s, I thought, "No, I'm about as fit as you are, Pete."

"Sometimes, I think that a combination of things can convince us that our goals and dreams aren't likely, or even impossible. But then I think about that old Nike slogan: Just Do It!"

Honestly, even with all this support, I wasn't totally convinced I could do it. But our group took it slow and steady, and there were many surprises along the way to make things easier, like all the

encouragement from the sidelines and how people in the crowd were offering us cakes and drinks as we passed. Once I got caught up in the atmosphere I didn't really think about how tired or puffed out I was. However, by the time I got through the first two hours of the City2Surf, I got very bloody minded to finish the darn thing! After hours of walking and finally crossing the finish line, these people had eventually come to feel like family.

To be honest, I think we were all surprised that we managed to do it!

Looking forwards

Following the race, I experienced a surprising "flow-on" effect. I felt there were so many other things that I could achieve now, and all I had to do was train and try it. I just felt really empowered, you know? And that feeling didn't go away: it's actually still with me!

"Finishing the race was life changing. It's made such a difference to how I feel about myself."

Since the City2Surf I've been more interested in testing my endurance, so another thing I want to tick off my Bucket List is the Cole Classic, a kilometre-long swim at Manly Beach. My reasoning is, "I was able to do the City2Surf, so why can I do this?" I'm certainly more of a swimmer than a walker, so I'm sure I can do it. Thankfully, I've got until February 2020 to train and prepare. My plan is to approach Flourish Australia to see if they can help sponsor me for this event.

What Flourish Australia offers me

In addition to the walking group I do with Flourish Australia, they've also connected me up with community food services, so they've supported me to do bulk cooking so I can freeze it for later. They've also helped me with budgeting, and given me several big reasons to get out of the house.

Before I medically retired 10 years ago, my last work was based in mental health at Westworks in Penrith. While I haven't really been able to do that in the last decade, at the moment I'm just happy with the services I'm getting.

As told to Grant J Everett



ABOVE: Peer Worker Troy Mahlberg having a tinker with the tools.
PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

It isn't old: it's vintage!

By Rachel Hannon

Repairing broken things can actually help people to regenerate as well! Rachel Hannon tells us about a program she's been running for a while now called the Repair Café.

Our Repair Café at Flourish Australia's New Outlook in Wollongong, allows us to breathe new life into broken items that would otherwise end up in landfill. It's just so easy to throw things out, and

the average person will usually only consider repairs if the item is expensive. A lot of the goods we see don't have too much wrong with them and are easy enough to fix. Sadly, we are a very wasteful society.

We've been fixing each other's items for a while now, and any member of the public is welcome to bring in their broken things. The Repair Café can either return the item to the person who brought it in, or we can sell it at our Market stall. It's a great feeling when somebody walks in for help with a similar repair issue to one we've already done.

My role is facilitating the program, and as I have skills in sewing, craft and repairs, I can teach new participants the basics. The Repair Café welcomes new members, and you don't need to have any preexisting skills to take part. Anybody can learn how to sew a button or fix a flat tire!

In the sewing groove!

Clothing alterations - such as sewing up a tear or replacing lost buttons - are particularly popular. We've fixed a lot of punctured bike tires and attached baskets to handlebars, and we've also mended household furniture like chairs and tables. Some of the more memorable things we've repaired include a mosaic table which had lots of little missing pieces that we replaced one-by-one, giving old jeans a new lease of life by inserting groovy hippy inserts into the legs, up-styling a denim jacket into a wearable piece of art by sewing lots of patches onto it, and repairing the stitching on a leather handbag. Just last week we had a woodchopper bring her axe in for a handle repair, as the head kept flying off. Definitely good to get that fixed!

“Just last week we had a woodchopper bring her axe in for a handle repair, as the head kept flying off. Definitely good to get that fixed!”

We're not doing electrical items just yet because you can't let somebody unqualified fiddle with electrical goods, and also sometimes the cost of can end up being more pricey than simply replacing the item.

The Repair Café is also about skill sharing. Learning practical skills is great for building a person's independence, and sharing your knowledge with others is a very rewarding form of social contact. Having a place to go and something to do with other people is a wonderful way to build a community, because bringing people together with a mutual goal can help form true, lasting connections. Often the members are “repairing” themselves just as much as the tears they're sewing or the chairs they're gluing.

The resources required to run the Repair Café are pretty minimal, really. We already have a pull-out workbench, tools, glue, nails, screws, and other basic supplies, and we've set up a bunch of sewing machines. People regularly

Employment Panorama

donate lots of fabrics and cottons and other useful materials, so there's no need to pay for what we can get for free. New Outlook runs a little on-site Op Shop on a gold coin donation basis, so we can raid that if we need to buy something.

In addition to the Repair Cafe, we also run a creative craft group where members make decorative things to sell, such as succulent plants in hand-decorated jars, and the Upcycling group transforms old shirts into trendy bags and old doilies into dreamcatchers. You may be wondering what we do with all these creations...

To Market!

We have a monthly stall at the local Wollongong Mall Markets where our volunteers sell the things that we fix, upcycle, or create.

Up to 15 members can be involved, but there is at least one keen volunteer who always meets us at the Mall at 7:30am to help set up, then spends the whole day with us!

At the end of the day unsold items are taken back to the New Outlook From that we can learn which are the popular items we need to produce more of to meet the demand. It's a good problem to have!

After noticing us at the Market, a member from Wollongong council approached our volunteers to ask if we could make them some Aboriginal bunting flags for an upcoming community event, so we've been working on that as well.

Who knows what this could grow into? We're planning for this Market stall to become one of our long-term social enterprises, and it would be nice to remunerate the people who generously donate their time.

Belonging and Connection!

This is a great opportunity to help people polish their social skills. Some of the volunteers have commented that the Market stall has helped them form a sense of belonging and connection with people in the local community, and we've also had glowing feedback from the members who have social anxiety

or might otherwise find it difficult to get out of their homes.

One member told us he regularly goes up to two weeks without talking to anybody, and sometimes he feels as though he might forget how to talk altogether. However, when he helped out with the last few Market days he was so on the ball and happily greeting people as they walked by, basically chatting away all day long. It was wonderful to see.

How did the Repair Café start?

Alisha Ford introduced New Outlook to the Repair Café movement when she used to work here. With a little investment of floor space and some help from a few members who donated their time and effort, soon we had it up and running!

The Repair Café is a worldwide movement founded by Martine Postma in Amsterdam in 2009, because she was feeling increasingly frustrated with the throwaway culture of the developed world. The Repair Café Foundation was officially established in 2011 as a non-profit organisation. There are now more than 1,500 official Repair Cafés worldwide.

Future repairs

I'm helping this program grow by getting the word out wherever I can. For instance, we use our Facebook page to post photos we place adverts around the Illawarra area.

In the long term we want to make this an entirely volunteer-led program, so I encourage all of our members to get involved. I've connected up with local Illawarra volunteer organisations for their support and reconnected with some old members as well, and I even went to a volunteer expo a month or so ago and recruited a few more helpers.

Just last week we were contacted by a woman from Victoria who was looking to open a Repair Café in her state, and she wanted to come over and see how everything worked. We wish her success!

We're currently seeking to partner with an Aged Care facility so we can have some intergenerational skill sharing, so that's one way we're looking to expand. Of course, we would also love for the Repair Café to run at other Flourish Australia locations.

www.facebook.com/repaircafewollongong/

BELOW, FROM LEFT: member Ron Solberg, Troy Mahlberg, and member Craig Roseworne. PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON



Helping people to get home



ABOVE: Jessica Donnelly at the Tamworth Homeless Connect Event PHOTO BY NICOLE PEARCE,

By Jessica Donnelly

Jessica Donnelly is the Housing and Homelessness Coordinator for the New England Regional Sustainable Housing and Homelessness (NERSHH) program. She is based at Flourish Australia in Tamworth and also covers surrounding areas. Jessica spoke to Panorama about what she and her service have to offer.

Overview

I support people who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. My role is service coordination, meaning that I link people up with the services and the supports they need in order to gain and sustain long term stable accommodation. This can be anything from specialist homelessness services, to community housing, private real estate agencies, financial counsellors, general practitioners, and mental health supports. It can also include organisations that provide material items such as furniture and food. Part of my role is also to ensure services are all on the same page when supporting people, so I coordinate and chair regular meetings across my region with services who are supporting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. I also facilitate early

intervention programs which aim to address homelessness and/or risk of homelessness in our community.

What we offer

As I refer a lot of people to local services on a regular basis, I have a good relationship with organisations like the Salvation Army, Community Mental Health, drug and alcohol support groups, community housing providers, private real estate agents and GPs, to name a few. Maintaining these partnerships is a major component of my role, as I need to ensure that all these services know who we are, what we do, and how we can work together to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. As everybody we help is a unique individual, all of these services need to work together to ensure the best possible outcome and to prevent people from missing out on the support they need. If somebody comes to us for help, we always want to be able to provide it.

Sustainability

If somebody already has a home but is at risk of homelessness, we can support them to sustain their tenancy. For instance, say that two people have been

referred to our program because they're in rental arrears (a common issue). Person One has been working with a community organisation to address the issue which caused the arrears, while Person Two isn't quite sure where to turn. With Person One, because they already have supports in place we'd focus on the issue at hand: how to pay off the rental arrears. This might look like making a payment plan with the real estate or applying for financial support through various avenues. With Person Two, in addition to figuring out a way for them to repay their debt, we would also put some supports in place such as financial counselling and a referral to the "Rent It, Keep It" course, which teaches people how to gain and sustain a successful tenancy. It's about identifying each person's existing skills and needs and building on them appropriately.

"Invisible" homelessness

While a lot of the people who come to us are experiencing similar issues, our support is tailored on a person by person basis. The situation we deal with most often is "invisible" homelessness. Invisible homelessness occurs when a person doesn't have access to long term accommodation; however does have somewhere to stay in the short term such as their car, with friends or family, or in emergency accommodation through community housing. The main factor in invisible homelessness is that their accommodation is not sustainable, and a long-term solution needs to be found.

Common options

While public housing and social housing are the two most affordable options, the waiting lists can be years long. We support people to obtain private rentals whenever possible, but it goes without saying that private rent is out of reach for just about everyone who comes to us for help.

The situation we deal with most often is "invisible" homelessness. Invisible homelessness occurs when a person doesn't have access to long term accommodation

We do our best to get people placed on the priority list for public housing, but until something permanent becomes available we might support them to access crisis accommodation and/or

Housing

transitional housing to ensure their immediate needs are met and they have somewhere safe to sleep.

There are varying levels of need. Some people may need support right from becoming at risk of homelessness (such as rental arrears, property damage, issues with landlords); some others may come to our attention only when they have nowhere else to go. We even see people come in for support when they have obtained their tenancy after being homeless. Often a lot of people have absolutely nothing to their name at this point, so we work with the person to formulate a plan to obtain essential household items. If they require a fridge, we'll see whether they can purchase one from a charity shop in town. If they can afford the repayments on a NILS (No Interest Loan Scheme) loan, that can be worth pursuing. We might also suggest that they check out Facebook marketplace or Gumtree if they're tech savvy. But even if they've exhausted almost every option, we'll still encourage them to avoid some offers and only do what is best for their current situation.

While we can connect people up with a lot of assistance, we also encourage them to be as independent as possible. This is good for their growth and personal development, and gives them a sense of "I'm doing this, I'm achieving this, I'm taking steps towards my own goals," which fits in with our recovery journey philosophy.

Homelessness: many causes

The two most common reasons for homelessness among the people that I have supported are mental health issues and substance abuse issues. But there are many other life factors that can leave somebody living on the streets.

Affordability is a major cause of homelessness. Considering NewStart only pays a maximum of \$550 a fortnight for a single person, when \$400 (or more) of that is going towards rent, you're not left with much to live on. This can lead to a worsening debt cycle when electricity bills, gas bills and phone bills arrive, and that can gradually lead to eviction.

When homelessness is caused by family breakdown or domestic violence it can be particularly tricky to manage, as volatile relationships can improve or degrade in unpredictable ways.

We also help quite a lot of people who are transitioning from incarceration at Tamworth prison. When somebody

gets released from jail they might only have a couple of days of emergency accommodation before they're out on the street.

Just to make things more challenging, a lot of the people who access our services will experience an overlap of several of these factors.

What I love about my job

Being the Housing and Homelessness Coordinator for Flourish Australia is a very big task, but a very rewarding one. To see someone walk off the street, cold, hungry, and with nothing, only to see them eventually receive the keys to their own house? It's an amazing feeling.

"The two most common reasons for homelessness within the population I have supported are mental health issues and substance abuse issues. But there are many other life factors that can leave somebody living on the streets."

We often get a lot of people who will ring us up three, six, twelve months down the track to let us know how good things are going. One lady has been calling us for 5 years, and every time she renews her lease she lets us know, "Hey, I'm still here, things are great." That's beautiful to be a part of.

Is all of this covered under NDIS?

The NDIS might be involved in this process, but it isn't a given. If somebody is interested in gaining NDIS support, I can refer them to appropriate support services to assist them through the application process. However, we do get a lot of people who have already been allocated NDIS support and ended up homeless anyway, so NDIS funding isn't always a guarantee of stability.

**Flourish Australia
129 Marius Street,
Tamworth,
NSW 2340
1300 779 270**

Homelessness under the microscope

Going Home, Staying Home

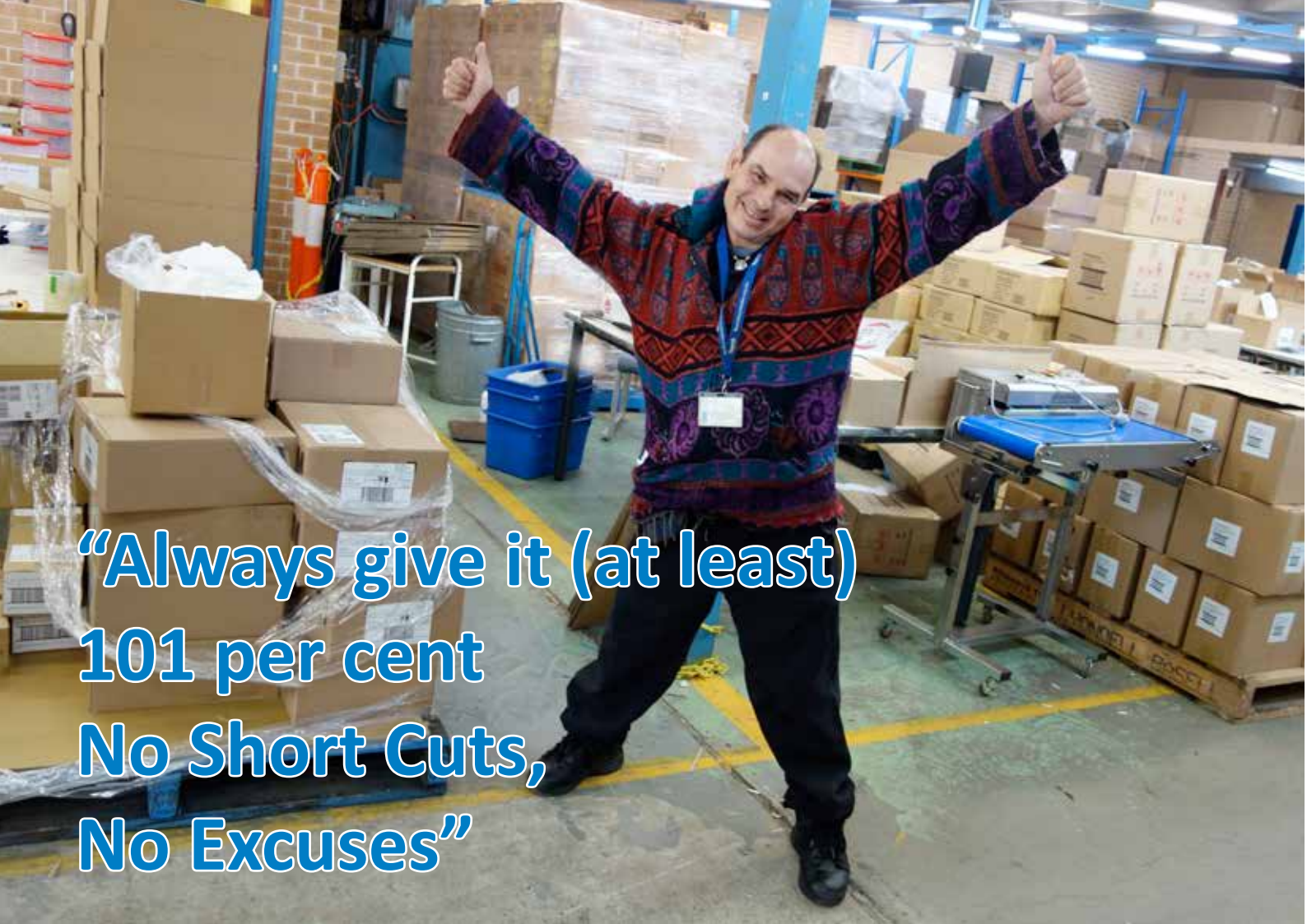
In 2012 the NSW government acknowledged that more needs to be done about homelessness by launching a program of reform called Going Home, Staying Home. The program's aim was to find ways to improve the situation of people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. One of the biggest problems they identified was that the many separate facets that make up Australia's specialist homelessness services aren't talking to each other, resulting in not-so-great outcomes for people in need.

If you want to know more, FACS has a webpage for Going Home, Staying Home on the Housing NSW website. Go to www.housing.nsw.gov.au and click on the Going Home, Staying Home button.

What is NERSHH?

The NSW government also allocated funding towards innovation and development in the homelessness sector, and this resulted in the creation of New England Regional Sustainable Housing and Homelessness (usually shortened to NERSHH). I'm currently the only NERSHH worker within Flourish Australia, and I cover everywhere between Tamworth, Armidale, and Gunnedah. Tracy Jack is the NERSHH Coordinator in Moree, and she covers Inverell, Moree, Narabai and Glen Innes. Between Tracy and myself, we're contracted to assist 235 people per financial year, but we always exceed that. There is a great need for these services, and this need isn't shrinking with time.

HASI is NOT a part of NERSHH. HASI is a separate program within Flourish Australia.



“Always give it (at least) 101 per cent No Short Cuts, No Excuses”

ABOVE: Murray displaying a bit of dynamism on his day job. A teacher once motivated him to give everything 101% Applying that principal to drawing helps empty his mind of unhelpful thoughts and voices and propels Murray along the recovery path PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

By Murray Dean

Murray Dean, who currently works at Flourish Australia's Prestige Packing Company at Harris Park, brought in a bag full of some of his drawings. The contents of the bag was about 1/30 of the artwork in his flat, according to Melissa Schwartz who has seen it with her own eyes. She, Nikkita Rajan and Warren Heggarty marvelled as Murray showed them through it while telling a small part of his recovery story.

I taught myself to draw at four years of age. I later entered my drawings in library competitions and won every single one. At school, I was very very good at English...not so much in maths. I wrote an essay on squares in art. The teacher held it up as a good example to the class. Ha! The class really ribbed me after that. I trained as a signwriter. And studied towards a Diploma of Art at Pimlico TAFE in Townsville, Queensland. I also studied at Mount Druitt TAFE NSW. I must admit I was a bit of a teacher's pet

at TAFE.

Patrick Turner, my English teacher at High School, was a good friend of my family and sometimes, as I became unwell, he was the only one I could talk to. One day I was actually shaking and he came up to me and said 'are you OK?' I said, 'Yes I'm OK.' Famous last words! That was when schizophrenia set in. I experienced a lot of rejection at school. I always remember Pat. He gave me the idea of approaching everything 100 per cent. 101 per cent, actually.

I have been a consumer representative at Cumberland Hospital and I was a peer worker with Flourish Australia. At present, I do packing work at Harris Park, and I also scrub out tubs. I love doing the tubs. They say that nobody likes doing them, because it's supposed to be pretty hard work, but I look forward to it!

I used to do a hundred push-ups a day. I also had a big blue punching bag and I'd run up and down the stairs with it. I

was practicing Tae Kwon Do at the time. I really wanted to be a sensei (teacher), but it became too much. It got to the stage when it was too hard to do the housework. Later I set a goal to do 100 push-ups every day for a whole year. One day, I missed out on doing the push-ups, but before I went to bed at 2AM, I made sure I did the 100 push-ups then rather than quit!

I haven't done push-ups for a while, because I have had a few difficulties but I still have a goal to do push-ups again, only in a different way this time. Upside down against a wall is a pretty good way of doing push-ups. I would want to do gym every day. I'm already doing yoga at the moment at home.

I monitor my performance to see if I can do a personal best. I like it like that. For example, seeing how long can I hold a "plank" for.

I like to be well organised. You know the sort of thing: 1. Do 100 push ups,

Recovery Story

2. Have breakfast. 3. Do housework....

I don't have to schedule time for drawing though. I do that when I get home to help ease my mind. I tend not to have any thoughts when I do art. I like to copy drawings from comic books. I don't trace them, I copy them freehand. Characters like The Hulk, Batman and Robin, Wolverine, and other superheroes. Also the funnies like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam. I've also tried my hand at Anime drawings. I have a book showing you how to draw Anime.

I generally use 2B and 6B pencils. I wondered how I would do skin tones though, until I found a way using pink gouache, as you can see in some of my pictures (see top right). I've done a few funny cartoons over the years, including a series about a Doctor and patient where I make jokes about things that are familiar to people with mental health issues (see bottom right).

In Merrylands, near the council chambers there is a mural of aerosol art which I contributed to. You'll see my name on it if you're in the neighbourhood.

Thank you to Melissa Schwartz and Nikita Rajan NDIS support coordinators at Harris Park for assistance with this story - WH

BELOW: Some of Murray's drawings from his sketchbooks. Clockwise from the centre: **Supergirl** seems to just hover above the ground in her superboots; **Spiderman** showing Murray's pencil copy above the coloured magazine illustration; Manga characters get romantic; **Clark Kent** transforms into **Superman**; an original character by Murray Dean making light of a scene familiar to us all; and finally, **Wolverine**, ready to rock!



Prestige Packing is a Flourish Australia community business that offer job opportunities for people with a lived experience of a mental health issue. You can call them during business hours.

Flourish Australia
Prestige Packing Co
23-25 Station Street West
HARRIS PARK NSW 2150
1300 779 270



Charlie* reconnects...



...one step at a time

ABOVE: Hitting the gym. "I am taking one step at a time," says Charlie, "but I'm always improving. I always do the best I can and it all adds up." PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

By Megan Millemaggi

I recently had the pleasure of spending some one on one time with one of our regular group participants "Charlie" (not his real name) when others were away sick with the flu.

Charlie spoke openly about his diagnosis of schizophrenia and I was enthralled with his level of self-knowledge and self-management.

He was originally diagnosed in his mid-twenties and when I asked how this came about, he told me a story regarding his religious beliefs at the time. Charlie was involved in a local Christian revival church where the teachings often spoke of listening for the word of God. As a young person Charlie finally felt that he understood the "voices" that had been paying a huge part in his life.

Over time Charlie went on to join the armed forces and marry. His mental health issue became apparent and once his family recognised this, they sought appropriate support for him and this helped him come to accept his mental health issue as being part of who he is.

After he left the military, he initially

worked for JBS, a large feedlotting operation and then went on to pursue a career in IT, a career in which he was very skilled and worked for another large Agricultural industry in the local area. As is the norm in IT, it can be quite an isolating role.

Over time Charlie's marriage broke down and the isolation of his job took a severe toll on his health leading to quite a fall with him retreating into himself spending days and nights at a time playing computer games and closing himself off from society. He became a very heavy cigarette smoker at this time.

Charlie sought help once again and after working with his Psychologist and counsellor, he self-referred to the Flourish Australia service to try and reconnect socially, he connected with the local men's shed, the gym, TAFE and put in place some self-imposed restrictions on his computer and internet usage.

Charlie and I talked a lot that day about how now he knows he has someone to connect to at any time he is feeling unwell, he has a plan and activity on most days of the week and we have watched him blossom socially with our group. He has become quite a role

model for other participants and an inspiration to staff.

He has developed many interests, he enjoys wood working, the gym and looking after his diet and physical health, he loves to op shop and buy items to decorate his home which is very stylish. He shown a real talent in the art group and has an eye for detail. The quiet young man who originally joined Flourish is now up for any activities, he is very bright and interested to learn about anything and he laughs and smiles often. Charlie is no longer a smoker and has encouraged many others, including workers to change their habits due to the example he has set.

The power of connection, knowing he can trust that there are people to connect with and his willingness to connect have helped to change Charlie's outlook on life.

**Flourish Australia Leeton
18-22 Kurrajong Avenue
LEETON NSW 2705
1300 779 270**

Recovery Story

One step at a time on the recovery march

By Charlie W*

On isolation

I tended to be fairly isolated from the age of 12 until the age of 28, sometimes just me and the computer. That even includes the time I was in the Army.

On becoming a non smoker

I gave up smoking two years ago. Being unwell and being on the Disability Support Payment, it became impossible to afford \$50 a day, which was about what I was spending. So as I was no longer working in IT, I had the time to get off them. I was on the Nicorette™ gum for a year but then on 1st January, that was it, I stopped the patches as well. One of the support workers at Flourish Australia Leeton had also been a smoker, for quite a long time and when I gave up she wanted to give up to, so I helped her do it.

On self control

I was playing computer games non stop for something like eight hours a day, which is very isolating. When I turned thirty, I decided that I wanted to get over the addiction and get my body back into order again. So now I just game once a week with a mate of mine. I have also given up drinking.

On the Men's Shed

This has helped me get out of my little bubble. I've been going to the local Men's Shed (a place where men can go for social contact and to make things) for nearly a year now. I once completed most of a multi media degree, so drawing on that I've been doing woodwork, making furniture. I've made coffee tables, made a bar, worked on an old meat safe that needed repair, for my parents. The guys are always there to help and mentor me. For example, Mark* who used to be a painter helped me with a project. I wanted to do a stool for my parents and dad wanted it done with oil based paint for outdoors so Mark helped me sanding it back.

On the fitness routine

I got my weight down from 95kg to 71kg through working out at the Gym. I start out at 6AM and then after my visit

to Flourish Australia I like to do a pack march- that's something that has carried over from my Army experience. I walk with a full pack. I've been doing that for four months. I got a 'Fitbit' in March and it can measure things like the number of steps you take in a day. 10,000 is what most people aim for. On Monday, I did 20,000 steps and Megan said 'You should be our personal trainer!' That made me feel like doing another 10,000 steps, which I did!

On career

I am taking one step at a time, but I'm always improving. I always do the best I can and it all adds up. It takes a bit of a commitment. Once I am confident at maintaining what I have already achieved I look at going on to the next thing. Next year, perhaps, I am looking into doing a Cert III or a Cert IV in fitness. I'm looking at becoming a personal trainer.

On the NDIS

It's a full time job, doing the paperwork for the NDIS! But fortunately I'm coping with it. I got onto it last year. For example I have a few services to help me at home and I can be reimbursed for that.

*The Editors have changed the names of these people to protect privacy.

There are tremendous benefits from working with your hands, as discovered by Charlie and demonstrated here by John the Concreter. The local Men's Shed could be your gateway to some new and useful hobbies. Maybe even employment.



Recovery Story



Susmita

ABOVE: 'I would like to obtain open employment.' Susmita has a Bachelor's Degree, plus qualifications in Aged care and First Aid. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

By Susmita Kundu

I came to Australia from Kolkata (Calcutta), India with my husband and six-year-old son in 2010. Not long afterwards, I experienced mental health issues which led to long term hospitalisation, separation from my husband, limited access to my son, and at times even homelessness.

Today, I am feeling very healthy and happy with myself. I have many friends in my workplace at Flourish Australia's Prestige Packing at Harris Park and outside in the Community. I feel very lucky to be here, thanks to the support workers, the NDIS, my manager and supervisors. They all help me whenever I need it.

Before coming to Sydney I finished my Bachelor Degree in English Literature from University of Calcutta. Some of the writers I studied there included the poets Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Blake, and Shelley. I did my first poetry recitation when I was very young.

I actually speak three languages: Bengali, English and Hindi. My native language

is Bengali, though Hindi is the language of Bollywood movies. I do like the actor Salman Khan, but lately he has been in quite a bit of trouble! Did you know he has been involved in a twenty year long court case? This could only happen in India!

Some of the Indian writers I have studied include Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul and Joy Goswami. I donned a saree and recited one of Joy Goswami's poems for a multicultural event once.

I had my first hospital admission for mental health issues to Cumberland Hospital in 2011. Six months later I was discharged on medication. After a holiday in India, I got a job as an aged care service employee. I started off working in the laundry section for three days. By that time, I had finished my Certificate III and IV in Aged Care. I also have a First Aid Certificate from TAFE and trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) with the Red Cross.

Around this time, my husband and I separated. I was living in various different places and I stopped taking my medication. This was a difficult

time. The police were sometimes involved and I was often not allowed access to my son. I also had trouble with my accommodation, becoming homeless at times, sometimes living in my car. The police eventually took me to Cumberland Hospital where I was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and they trialled me on different medications.

While in Hospital I applied for Housing with the help of a Social Worker. People from HASI helped me apply for my passport and get my driver's licence. They took me to lawyers so I could see my son and husband. They helped me get a job at Flourish Australia. Parramatta Housing advised me about a unit available in Toongabbie and I was referred to a doctor in Blacktown

I think that if I had a choice of work, I might like to do sales. At Prestige Packing Company, Harris Park, I do various types of packing work. I've been trained to do the pallet jack, the carton sealer, the shrink-wrapper and the piler to crush boxes. I would like to obtain open employment. I am qualified and willing to do Aged Care nursing, and I have applied with many organisations; however without a car it can be difficult.

I am a Member of WSLARS in Parramatta I go there often for barbecues. They also have a Games Night with Bingo. I have dinner there and go on outings, for example, to Blacktown Markets. I am also a member of the Bengali Association of NSW. We have picnics meetings and cricket games. There is a seniors' group and a Drama Festival at Bryan Brown Theatre in Bankstown this year, as well as a singing festival and a Puja (Hindu prayer ritual).

Puja happens in October and centres around the goddess Durga who is married to Lord Siva. Their children are Ganesha, the god of beginnings who has an elephant's head, Kartika, Saraswati the goddess of education, and Laxmi the goddess of wealth. Everyone is welcome!

Thanks to Kathy Te Nuku and Mihaela Stanculescu for their assistance with this story.

**Flourish Australia
Prestige Packing Co
23-25 West Station Street
HARRIS PARK NSW 2150
1300 779 270**



ABOVE: Owen is well along the path to recovery PHOTO BY OWEN

by Owen

I've been seeing doctors about my mental health issues for as long as I can remember. As a child I was aggressive towards children and teachers at school, though it wasn't until I was in Grade Six that I was put on medication. After years of treatment and numerous doctors I was finally diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of sixteen. The voice first appeared when I was having emotional issues about a friend who moved overseas. I was scared at first and didn't tell anyone for a few months, though once I told my doctor, things started to make more sense. However, my parents didn't understand my illness, didn't believe I was as unwell as I claimed, and that I just had a bad attitude. This led to home life being very stressful for everyone. We would constantly fight.

I finished Year Ten, but dropped out halfway through Year Eleven. I'd been missing up to three days of classes a week, which made it hard to stay in touch with friends and impossible to keep up with my schoolwork. After dropping out I spent two and a half years at home. I was mostly isolated during that period, and this made me feel stressed and angry. I was lucky enough to have a couple of childhood friends

come over and visit once a week, and while this was a massive help, it was all the social interaction I was getting outside of my family.

At the start of 2017 I stopped taking my medication consistently, missing three or four days at a time. I was arguing with my family a lot and my parents didn't know how to help me. Eventually we had such a huge fight that the police were called. They took me into custody and an AVO was placed between my family and me. This meant I was suddenly homeless, and I had to sleep at a youth refuge that night. The next day St Benedicts community centre found me accommodation, where I still live to this day.

I was very depressed after being kicked out of the family home, and it reached the point where I wanted to take my own life. I was admitted to a local mental health unit where they adjusted my medication, and I was discharged two weeks later. Upon getting back into the community I was referred to a mental health organisation called Flourish Australia that had a branch in my hometown of Queanbeyan. Flourish Australia helped by supporting me socially, encouraging me to engage with groups, and cheering me on towards my recovery goals. After attending this

service for a while I decided to become a Peer Worker so I could use my lived experience to help others. I mentioned this to Elizabeth Webb, who thought I'd make a good Peer Worker, and she helped me apply for a scholarship at the Canberra Institute of Technology. These scholarships support students who have a lived experience of mental health issues and substance use to do a Certificate III and IV of their choice. I recently completed my Cert III in Community Services leading into a Cert IV in Mental Health Peer Work. Once I graduate, my plan is to work at Flourish Australia's Queanbeyan service. There's quite a few Peer Workers located there, but the peer workforce is always growing.

"For a while I was attending Flourish Australia's Queanbeyan service every day, but with my studies that's dropped down a bit."

I'm receiving NDIS support now, but when I first applied back in 2017 I got underfunded, so this period was a bit rough. The staff helped me apply for a review, but this never came through. I had to wait until the start of 2019 to apply for adequate NDIS funding, but thankfully this time it was really easy, mostly because the Queanbeyan staff helped me with all the paperwork. Flourish Australia is helping me to be more independent, and encourages me to engage with the community to make new friends and connections. With their support I've started visiting my brother, sister and parents again, and we've even attended sessions of family therapy. This has helped me to understand my parent's point of view on how rough things were, and our relationship has greatly improved. I have a long way to go, but with help from Flourish Australia and my family I believe I can finish my studies and continue with my recovery.

Flourish Australia Queanbeyan
Level 1, Suite 5, 7-9 Morisset
Street, Queanbeyan
NSW 2620
(02) 9393 9213

“I wouldn’t be alive today if it weren’t for Him”

By Neil K

ABOVE: Neil relaxing in the home he has maintained independently for over 20 years PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

My name is Neil. Since my first admission to Cumberland Hospital in 1973 I’ve returned almost 50 times. But through a lifelong battle with mental health issues I’ve learned how to rely on the strength and grace of God to get me through anything that comes my way.

From the top...

My battle with mental health issues started after I’d suffered a number of traumatic experiences in my childhood, and by the time I reached high school in 1965 I was a difficult combination of brilliant student and insecure adolescent. My grades were good, and I captained the school Tennis team and the 2nd Grade League side. Good grades or not, my first attempt at the HSC in 1970 was unsuccessful. There was a question about the English metaphysical poet John Donne, and although he was a favourite of mine, for some reason I wrote the total opposite of what I’d always believed about his poetry. I handed in a load of rubbish, basically, and it cost me my HSC. Funnily enough, that same year I had the unusual distinction of being the first student at Blacktown Boy’s High to achieve 1st level French, coming 26th in the state...but somehow I failed my own language!

I didn’t realise it until years later, but this confusion about John Donne was the first crack in the wall of my mental health. At the time, I simply reasoned that surely ALL the students had each got SOMETHING wrong on their tests.

Luckily for me, the Headmaster – who couldn’t believe what had happened – allowed me to redo Sixth Form, and I graduated just fine. Even though I only did five subjects, one of them being third-level maths, I still finished in the top five percent for every subject and

obtained a Commonwealth scholarship. I had my pick of Universities, and ended up choosing to attend Sydney Uni. Unfortunately, it wasn’t long before my illness really took hold: I became delusional, I had hallucinations, and I couldn’t sleep. During all this chaos my mind was telling me that I was nothing, and my insecurities grew until they were overwhelming. I eventually reached the point where I had no choice but to leave Uni, and I spent several months working in a factory. I did go back to Sydney Uni some years later, and like with my HSC I went brilliantly the second time round.

“When I think about the word “recovery”, I see it as living a normal life, to be regarded as normal by the people who matter. It’s about being in charge of my mental health issues instead of them being in charge of me.” - Neil

After dropping out of Uni, the last three months of 1972 were utterly dreadful: I developed insomnia, which still affects me to this day, my love life was causing me some serious anxiety, and those unfortunate incidents from my younger years were still haunting me. I was constantly battling racing thoughts and other symptoms that are hard to put a name to, such as a “static electricity” sensation crackling in my mind.

Despite this difficulty, on the stroke of midnight New Year’s Eve 1972 I decided to give my heart to Christ as my Lord and Saviour so I could start 1973 as a

new creation. A miracle healing didn’t occur, unfortunately, but I don’t doubt that God has since given me the strength to soldier on for the last 45 years in spite of any hardships. While I’m not an evangelist, over the years I’ve shared my faith in many one-on-one conversations, and told a lot of people about the huge impact God has had on my life.

Admission one

On Monday the 5th of February 1973, I was hospitalised in Cumberland for the first time. I was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and the huge amounts of medication I was prescribed caused massive weight gain and no end of discomfort and side-effects. After leaving Cumberland on Remembrance Day in 1973, it took almost 3 years to recover from what I’d been through in that ward. I believe that those 9 months only damaged me more. Despite how dark this time was, I knew God loved me, and that everything would be all right, and that kept me going.

I was no stranger to Cumberland for the rest of the 1970s. Thankfully, God has given me the superhuman strength necessary to get me through the toughest of times. I know God is in my heart, and that other people can experience this, too. He deals with us according to our individual needs, and He’s used my experiences to transform me from an egotistical boaster into somebody who can love other people. I have a lot of time for everyone I meet in those wards, and I often get told by staff members, “Oh, you’re helping so many people, Neil.”

During a particularly hard admission in 1979 I’d become so severely depressed that I didn’t even know where I was, and had my first experience of electro-

convulsive therapy (ECT). I had ECT on a number of occasions between 1979 and 2006, and it made a real difference to my depression. After completing my first course of ECT in 1979 I felt perfectly well, and I was back in the community within a fortnight.

A long holiday away from Cumberland

Between 1979 and 1988 I actually lived in the community in total remission with only a very small dose of medication to keep me balanced. I also continued to see a private psychiatrist. I told him what medication I thought I should be on, rather than vice-versa, and he actually agreed with me! All of a sudden, after many, many admissions, I was finally as well as I could be. While I can't quite understand why, all those dreadful feelings of anxiety suddenly left me. It was almost a miracle how it just happened overnight.

During these eight years I was fully employed at a number of jobs, including 4 years at the tax office, which is where I met my future wife, Vikki. Vikki was a single mother, and her son Andrew was already 8 at this point. And while I haven't legally adopted him, Andrew is my son, and he even changed his surname to match mine. Years ago he asked, "Can I call you Dad?" And I said, "Of course you can, I'm going to marry your Mother!" And I've been Dad ever since.

I married Vikki in September 1986, and soon we were blessed with a little girl. We called her Jessika Hope. My life changed when I became Jessika's father, as for a start I had to curb my language. My whole family is very important to me, but I don't think I've ever loved anyone more than I love my daughter. She's the light of my life. I know that God is working in her life, sometimes with my help.

While I'd like to say that my kids help with my ongoing wellness, I think it's the opposite! I'm always worrying about them, always thinking about them. For instance, it would be nice if Andrew and Jessika got along a bit better.

Backwards

In May 1988 I was admitted to Cumberland for the first time in eight years. My daughter was only four months old at the time. While there were many factors in play, there were two major ones: I wasn't a very good husband, and I was working two jobs.

I'd been working as a Wardsman from 6am to 10pm and surviving on about 3 hours sleep a night. As I was employed in a nursing home, my job required a lot of heavy lifting, and in addition to being extremely physically demanding it was also heartbreaking: you see a lot of elderly residents pass away, and you think, "This was somebody's mother." In hindsight, I could have avoided this relapse by cutting back on my hours, which would have allowed me to spend more time at home and also have prevented me from burning out.

Over time, the strain of my mental health issues eventually caused the breakdown of my marriage, and Vikki and I were divorced by July 1992. I went onto the Disability Support Pension on the advice of my treating psychiatrist around the same time, as working wasn't an option for me anymore.

Can a label actually be helpful?

After decades of thinking I had schizophrenia, in 2000 I finally discovered that I actually have Bipolar disorder. Compared to the average person on the street, my normal mood is usually slightly more manic, and I can go "up" quite far sometimes. While I still experience the occasional highs, thankfully nowadays it's very unusual for me to be depressed for more than a few minutes. I go up, but I don't tend to plunge down like I used to. I was up for a couple of weeks earlier just this year, in fact.

It's common for people on a high to make poor financial decisions, such as being too generous or spending without thinking, the sort of stuff you regret later on. While I don't have that issue, one of the major, classic symptoms of Bipolar that I do experience is promiscuity. I've battled with this my whole adult life, and it's caused me a lot of difficulty.

Proving that staying out of hospital for 8½ years wasn't a fluke, after returning to the community in 2008 I had another great run where I didn't have a single admission until 2017. This admission was my 48th, but it was only a eleven day stay. Since then, with help from my private psychiatrist and a total medication overhaul, I feel that I'm in charge of my illness, not the other way around.

Could I see myself achieving a third 8-year wellness streak? Perhaps even a permanent one? Absolutely. I'm already thinking about how to do it now.

Other tips for staying well

I try not to put too much pressure on myself, but as I'm a perfectionist, that can be difficult at times. I take it easy on the coffee, as caffeine can affect my anxiety levels. Decaf is a better option if I'm having multiple cups. I also pray a lot: for myself, for my immediate family, and for my friends. Finally, have a sense of humour. Laugh. We all need it. I have also found doing a Bible reading every day for about 30 minutes is very helpful.

Three things that make me me

I like to know everything about everything, and I can thank a lifetime of reading for helping me to acquire all my knowledge. I particularly like reading biographies about real people.

I played competition tennis for 20 years and invested time in rugby league and basketball, but cricket has always been my greatest sporting passion. I used to play 1st Grade cricket, opening the batting and keeping wickets. I was an A-grade all-rounder, and I've got all the trophies to prove it! (*he certainly does!* – Ed) I have a whole library of cricket books and quite a few signed bats. I'm such an expert on test cricket that my ex-wife calls me a walking encyclopaedia. My father put that love of cricket into me, and I shared it with my own son, who now loves it just as much as I do.

I'm seriously into rock music, particularly Australian bands, who I consider to be the best.

Bottom line

I honestly wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for Him. I've only withstood everything because He gave me the strength to do it. And while there's no guarantee I will stay well, I lean on God by immersing myself in His word. I don't argue with myself about whether God is real because I know it, pure and simple, 100%, no doubt at all!

"I'm the only one who knows me as well as I do, so the rest of the world can take me or leave me. I don't deliberately set out to be rude, but I can be very abrupt." - Neil



ABOVE: Helen’s sculpture “PULL” displayed in the foyer of TAFE NSW Hunter Street, Newcastle. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

Re-engaging with creativity after 30 years

By Helen Fenner (as told to Grant J Everett)

I used to really enjoy doing art, but once I had my three children I put all my energy into raising them the best I could. By the time my kids were adults it had been thirty or so years since I’d done anything artistic. However, when I started receiving support from Flourish Australia, the workers encouraged me to reconnect with this passion.

I started off doing craft at the Maitland service, and I’m still getting one-on-one support from them, but I also access Flourish Australia’s Newcastle service over at Hunter Street, The Centre, where I do art classes with Carole Gant. A while back I was asked if I’d like to go to Art Reach to meet up with other artists once a month, which I thought was a brilliant idea, so I said yes.

Besides the arts and crafts, I’m receiving a lot of support from Flourish Australia. This includes things like going on trips to art galleries, and having someone accompany me to my appointments. It’s all absolutely first class! I really wish the government would set aside more funding for mental health services like Flourish Australia so their programs can grow and new ones are introduced.

Study

After spending time refining my skills,

I thought I’d try doing an art course at TAFE to see if studying was for me...and it turns out that I LOVE it! The teachers are fantastic and the other students are good to me, but the most important part is that I’m learning and getting more and more skilled. We do all kinds of practical and theoretical classes, such as Art History, Printing, Sculpture and Drawing, so the teachers will show us different techniques and aspects of artforms, then it’s up to us to apply an idea and work

“Over time I’m getting stronger and stronger, like the pit pony that only gets more powerful the longer it pulls its heavy load.”

on it to make the piece our own. I’ve already finished a Diploma in Fine Art, and I’m 14 months away from completing my Advanced Diploma.

Sculpting

At the moment, three of my sculptures are on display at my TAFE: two in the foyer, and a larger piece upstairs. The pit-pony horse sculpture carrying a load of coal is called **PULL**, and it represents strength, about how I’ve gotten stronger and stronger with each difficult step, like how the pit pony pulls his load behind

him. I lost my husband in January 2018, so I’m still grieving, but over time I’m getting stronger and stronger, like the pit pony that only gets more powerful the longer it pulls its heavy load. My second sculpture, of two sneakers poised to step on a row of eggs, is called **WALKING ON EGGSHELLS**. It’s about the 60s, how the political climate meant that a lot of people were too scared to speak up for fear of opposition or stigma. There was the Vietnam War and assassinations and Women’s Lib, and it was a chaotic time. My sculpture upstairs is **CARTWHEEL**. It’s about black and white freedom in the 1960s and 1950s, of fighting for equality. I’ve had my work shown in exhibitions such as *Journeys* and *Connections*, as well as in the art room at The Centre.

Living a full life

Flourish Australia were a fantastic help when my husband Steven passed away in January 2018. The support they offered was like planting the seed of recovery in me, which they watered with their encouragement so I could grow. When Steven was still alive he was very happy with how much Flourish Australia had helped with making me a happier person. I feel good about my life now.

BELOW: Helen’s “CARTWHEEL” sculpture. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT



From Customer to Kitchenhand

By Chad K

Somehow Chad managed to take a break from a busy day of hospitality tasks, band practise and socialising with his friends to discuss his involvement with Flourish Australia's Newcastle's "The Centre"...

I'm employed as a kitchenhand at The Centre. I work as a part of a team with a professional chef and other workers. We offer a delicious hot lunch on weekdays, and as we're a non-profit, cost-neutral kitchen (below), we only charge just enough to cover the ingredients and keep things operating. As a result, our food and drinks are very affordable. For instance, it's only \$3 for a large cafe-quality coffee.

Connecting

About 5 years ago, prior to connecting up with Flourish Australia, I had a stint in James Fletcher hospital. I decided to make the most of my time there, and so I started working at Monet's Functions and Catering on the grounds. Once I was ready I took part in a transition service that smoothed the path between

hospital and being free on the outside. It's the next step on from hospital. I was then put in contact with Flourish Australia on Hunter Street in Newcastle, and I gradually started attending more and more. I soon got involved with their Recovery program, and this helped me to apply for my current role as a kitchenhand at the same Flourish Australia site. Seeing as though I used to do the same work at Monet's and I have a lived experience of a mental health issue, I thought I was the kind of person they like to employ. I got the job, and the rest is history.

Sharpening

Over the years I've learned many skills such as knife skills, food prep, hygiene, how to operate the till and how to handle money, and I've also done some on-site training with the coffee machine, so now I have some barista skills. Learning how to make good coffee was new for me.

What else keeps me coming back?

We have a music group that gets together on Mondays and Fridays. We play a mixture of original songs and covers (but mostly covers). A number of our musicians actually took part in a music night recently and played for a crowd (see full story on pp 10-11).

The art room's big, and there's always people in the art room. There's a computer setup and a pool room, a music room and a gym.

My recovery

I live independently in my one-bedroom flat in Mayfield. I've been a tenant there for 11 years, and it's on a quiet street. I have heaps of friends here, though we mostly see each other when we hang out at The Centre. The staff are really cool, too. They're all really good here.

Honestly, all up, I'm pretty settled and content with life at the moment. I enjoy the amount of work I'm doing, I'm happy to continue in my role here, and I've reached a point in my journey where I'm happy with where I'm at.

Goals?

Musically, I'd like a few of the other musos to get together into a little band and maybe doing some work outside, maybe get some gigs on the open market. I've been playing music all my life, and we have a few talented people here, so we're looking to do that, yeah.

**Flourish Australia
'The Centre'
627 Hunter Street
NEWCASTLE NSW 2300
1300 779 270**

BELOW: Chad in action in The Centre's kitchen. PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON





What Flourish Australia is doing right now to prevent suicide

ABOVE: Learning to listen can make all the difference. PHOTO BY PIXABAY

By Warren Heggarty

According to Flourish Australia Chief Executive Mark Orr AM, an increase in the number of Australians dying by suicide last year has made us stop and think. Flourish Australia's immediate response has been to make a large commitment towards suicide prevention for 2019 and beyond. This includes mandatory training in suicide prevention, with a priority for front line staff.

Mark told Panorama, "We need to keep suicide prevention front of mind and dig deep into the well of hope."

However, it's not just about knowing how to support people in distress in order to get them through that period of crisis, but making sure we follow people up in the wake of an attempt. This is critical.

Mandatory training

From August 2019, a mandatory two day Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) course will be held for all staff. But we haven't been sitting idly by in the meantime: since October 2018 Flourish Australia has been running a half-day Mental Health First Aid Suicide Prevention Course. As of the end of July 2019, about 460 staff have attended this half-day course. Developed by Mental Health First Aid, it is based on the expert consensus material "Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours: First Aid Guidelines." The content is evidence-based, and was created with input from mental health professionals, researchers and lived

experience advocates. It's worth noting that Janet Ford, Flourish Australia's Professional Practice Manager, told Panorama that people in the Newcastle region have already done a similar short course called "Safe Talk" developed by Living Works, the same suicide prevention organisation behind our current mandatory training.

People who are confirmed to present at the Suicide Prevention course include Fay Jackson, a veteran of countless mental health first aid sessions, Alana Rawlinson from Newcastle, and Janet Ford and Kara Lyons from Olympic Park. In the past, Kara has worked alongside Fay in presenting the Mental Health First Aid seminars. Once Alana, Janet and Kara are accredited by this course, they will be able to work as in-house ASIST trainers.

"Everyone is very impressed"

This ASIST training will build on top of the Mental Health First Aid Suicide Prevention course that's already been rolled out. Kim Jones, Project Officer Inclusion, told us that Flourish Australia's Mental Health First Aid Suicide Prevention series has already run in Armidale, Buckingham House at Surry Hills, Caboolture, Figtree Conference Centre, Hervey Bay, Maitland, Marrickville, Moree, Newcastle, Penrith, Queanbeyan, Seven Hills, Tamworth, Ulladulla and Wollongong. Kim added that, "...overwhelmingly, the feedback indicates that everyone is very impressed with both Kara and Fay's facilitation of the training: they are informative, approachable, compassionate and comprehensive.

This training is a good mix of learning techniques (audio, visual, theory and practical) and includes role-playing, scenarios, videos and workbooks. It's also very comprehensive: we're fulfilling people's learning expectations, and they've learnt valuable techniques in how to prevent suicide by gaining an understanding of what to say and knowing the right questions to ask."

Fay Jackson General Manager, Inclusion, said, "We have undertaken pre-course and post-course feedback. The scores post-feedback tend to increase by two points, that is, roughly going from a score of three to a score of five."

"At times," cautions Kim, "the suicide content of this training can be confronting, but there are supports in place so participants can debrief either during or after the sessions."

Assisting other organisations

Fay also said, "We have offered this training to some of our partners in remote areas like Bourke, Moree, and Birrang, including the Aboriginal service at Bourke and Bensoc and Anglicare at Moree. It's important for all services to collaborate wherever possible, but it's even more important in rural and remote services where the tyranny of distance and the lack of transport can make it difficult for services to receive training. We see it as our civic duty to work in collaboration with other services in remote locations. Relationships matter very much in the bush, and this can create opportunities for us in the future. For example, Birrang have since said they would like to work with us more often."

More depth

According to Kara Lyons, compared to the previous Mental Health First Aid training she presented, this new one is: "...a much more intensive Suicide Prevention course. I believe it to be a hugely valuable and recovery-focused course that goes into greater depth about listening to suicide stories, sitting with pain, and finding connection to life and hope." Kara added, "Janet Ford, Alana Rawlinson and I were asked to prepare ourselves to become ASIST trainers. I think one of the reasons we were encouraged to take this step was that we already had a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment."

Flourish Australia staff members can look forward to meeting (or remaking the acquaintance of) Kara, Janet and Alana as they take their two day course on the road.



Do the Squat!

By Warren Heggarty

Our legs are designed so that the more you use them the better they work. Actually, the same goes for our whole bodies AND our minds, but let's concentrate on the legs today.

It is very fashionable nowadays to spend lots of money to stand up. Some of us even have specially made 'standing desks.' Readers of Panorama, however, know that you don't really need ANYTHING but your legs to get your legs working well.

Ralph is in his 50s and carries a lot of extra weight since starting on medication for his mental health issues. The medication really slows him down, but over time he had begun to notice that when walking up stairs, his knees feel like they are unable to cope with the job. After visiting a doctor to rule out anything serious, Ralph consulted an exercise physiologist who prescribed SQUATS for him.

The squat is one of the best exercises to tone legs and it is a 'functional movement' in that people squat every day while lifting boxes or playing with children (healthline)...activities which



ABOVE: Squatting is useful and can be done anywhere by almost anyone...as demonstrated by this reporter. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

Ralph always found a bit of a challenge.

Squats are ideal if you have back problems because you do them while standing up and without extra weight, they won't strain the back. (healthline)

For balance and extra support, Ralph began to perform his squats using a large ball between his back and a good firm wall. Some people steady up using chairs and tables. After a while, you will find it easier to keep balance, but at first Ralph felt a bit wonky.

To get the maximum value, whenever Ralph does leg exercises with each repetition he pauses and contract your muscles- in the case of squats he contracts his gluteus maximus (backside).

Build up gradually and don't overwork your legs because that can cause more harm than good. Start off squatting at a higher (easier) level and with a smaller number of repetitions. Then, as you get better increase the number of repetitions. When you get really good, aim to squat lower and lower.

When performed correctly, squats are an extremely safe exercise. The primary

muscles involved include the gluteus maximus, hip flexors, and quadriceps. Your abdominal muscles, calves, hamstrings, and lower back also get a good workout.

Proper form is important for getting the most out of the exercise and protecting yourself from injury. You can see instructions and watch videos of various types of squats here: www.healthline.com/health/how-many-calories-do-squats-burn#how-to Or try this you tube in which Tom and Lisa tell you, "How to do a squat correctly" at www.youtube.com/watch?v=acHkVaku9U (Bowflex, 2016)

References

Bowflex (Director). (2016). Squats for Beginners: How to do a squat correctly [Motion Picture]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acHkVaku9U>
healthline. (n.d.). How many calories to squats burn. Retrieved September 13, 2019, from Healthline.com: <https://www.healthline.com/health/how-many-calories-do-squats-burn>
healthline. (n.d.). Toned Legs exercise tips. Retrieved September 13, 2019, from Healthline.com: <https://www.healthline.com/health/toned-legs#exercise-tips>

If you access Flourish Australia's services, see our Physical Health microsite
<https://both.flourishaustralia.org.au/>



Three important questions to ask yourself about your BREATHING

1. Do I ever have problems breathing? e.g., wheezing, shortness of breath?
2. Do I have a dry or persistent cough, or a cough without phlegm?
3. Do I get short of breath when making an effort? e.g., walking, difficulty in keeping up with others, going uphill or up stairs?



Did you answer “YES” to any of these questions?

Have you spoken to a doctor or other health provider about your breathing?

If not, call your doctor **today** and make an appointment.

Tell your doctor what you have noticed about your breathing.

There may be nothing to worry about, but it’s always best to speak to your doctor so you can address things early if you need to.

How can **Flourish Australia** support your **health**?

Your Flourish Australia Support Worker or Mental Health Worker can assist you with connecting with your doctor to talk about your concerns.



Ask about our Physical Health Website <https://both.flourishaustralia.org.au> and physical health cards in preparation for seeing your doctor.

Some useful websites:

Asthma Australia

www.asthmaaustralia.org.au

National Asthma Council Australia

www.nationalasthma.org.au

National Health Services Directory

www.nhsd.com.au

If you access Flourish Australia’s services, see our Physical Health microsite <https://both.flourishaustralia.org.au/>

What is Asthma?

By Warren Heggarty

Asthma affects the tubes that carry air into our lungs. From time to time, people with asthma find it harder to breathe in and out, because the airways in their lungs become narrower – like trying to breathe through a thin straw. At other times their breathing is normal.

There is no cure for asthma, but most people with asthma can stay active and have a healthy life. It can usually be well controlled by:

- Taking the right medicines in the right way at the right time
- Having regular medical check-ups
- Making an action plan, so you know exactly what to do when symptoms happen.

An asthma attack is when a person’s airways tighten up, thicken up or fill up with mucus. Sometimes all three things can happen at once. Over 2.5 million (about 1 in 9) Australians have asthma.

The exact causes of asthma are not known. Asthma can run in families. The risk of getting asthma partly depends on genetics. For more information, ask your GP or see web site of the National Asthma Council of Australia <https://www.nationalasthma.org.au/understanding-asthma/what-is-asthma>

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

- Self-checking (skin, teeth, breasts)
- Skin exams
- Dental checkups
- Testicle checks
- Pap tests
- Pregnancy
- Blood pressure
- Blood tests
- Obesity tests
- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Diabetes
- Breast cancer
- Prostate cancer
- Bowel cancer
- Eye health
- Bone density
- STIs (if sexually active)

Back On Track Health Your Physical Health and Wellbeing

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



You can do something RIGHT NOW about self managing your diabetes!

by Jade Ryall, BOTH program manager

People living with mental health issues are twice as likely as other people to have Diabetes (NMHC, 2016).

THREE FAST FACTS ABOUT TYPE 2 DIABETES

1. According to the National Diabetes Service Scheme, with Type 2 diabetes, the pancreas makes *some* insulin, but it isn't produced in the amount your body needs, and it does not work effectively.
2. Type 2 diabetes results from a combination of genetic and environmental factors.
3. Although there is a strong genetic predisposition, the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes is greatly increased when associated with lifestyle factors

such as high blood pressure, being overweight or obese, insufficient physical activity, poor diet and the classic "apple" body shape where extra weight is carried around the waist (National Diabetes Service Scheme).

How do I know if I am at risk? Find out today!

Step One: Complete *The Australian Type 2 Diabetes Risk Assessment Tool* (AUSD Risk) included with this article. You can find it on the next page.

Step Two: Make an appointment to see your Doctor today to talk about how you can reduce your risk.

I have been diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes. Where can I go for information and support?

Diabetes Centres can provide you with specialised advice to help you manage your diabetes. Diabetes Centres are located in most public hospitals, some private hospitals, and some community health centres. Your doctor can arrange a referral to a Diabetes Centre near you.

According to Diabetes Australia, there may be a few people that are a part of your support team who can help you manage your diabetes and live well.

- Diabetes Educator
- Dietician
- Endocrinologist
- Podiatrist
- Optometrist
- Ophthalmologist
- Pharmacist
- Dentist
- Counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist or a social worker
- Exercise physiologist/physiotherapist

(National Diabetes Services Scheme)

What is the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS)?

The National Diabetes Services Scheme can support people with diabetes to understand and self-manage their life with diabetes. They also help people to access affordable and reliable support services and products when they are needed. Registration with the NDSS is free and open to all Australians who are diagnosed with diabetes.

To see if you are eligible to register with the NDSS you can call the National Diabetes Service Scheme Helpline on 1300 136 588

How can Flourish Australia support me?

Your Flourish Australia Support Worker can assist you in connecting with your Doctor if you want to talk about your Diabetes risk or support you to complete the AUSD Risk Tool if you need it. Flourish Australia's physical health website also contains information sheets about all sorts of topics like "Finding a Doctor" and "Annual Health Checks". You can check out the physical health website here:

both.flourishaustralia.org.au

Works Cited

National Diabetes Service Scheme. (n.d.). Understanding Type-2 Diabetes Fact Sheet. Retrieved from National Diabetes Services Scheme: www.ndss.com.au/
National Diabetes Services Scheme. (n.d.). Services. Retrieved from NDSS: www.ndss.com.au/services/
NMHC. (2016). Equally Well Consensus Statement: Improving the physical health and wellbeing of people living with mental illness in Australia. Sydney: National Mental Health Commission.

If you access Flourish Australia's services, see our Physical Health microsite <https://both.flourishaustralia.org.au/>

The Australian Type 2 Diabetes Risk Assessment Tool (AUSDRISK)

1. Your age group

- Under 35 years 0 points
 35 – 44 years 2 points
 45 – 54 years 4 points
 55 – 64 years 6 points
 65 years or over 8 points

2. Your gender

- Female 0 points
 Male 3 points

3. Your ethnicity/country of birth:

3a. Are you of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Pacific Islander or Maori descent?

- No 0 points
 Yes 2 points

3b. Where were you born?

- Australia 0 points
 Asia (including the Indian sub-continent), Middle East, North Africa, Southern Europe 2 points
 Other 0 points

4. Have either of your parents, or any of your brothers or sisters been diagnosed with diabetes (type 1 or type 2)?

- No 0 points
 Yes 3 points

5. Have you ever been found to have high blood glucose (sugar) (for example, in a health examination, during an illness, during pregnancy)?

- No 0 points
 Yes 6 points

6. Are you currently taking medication for high blood pressure?

- No 0 points
 Yes 2 points

7. Do you currently smoke cigarettes or any other tobacco products on a daily basis?

- No 0 points
 Yes 2 points

8. How often do you eat vegetables or fruit?

- Every day 0 points
 Not every day 1 point

9. On average, would you say you do at least 2.5 hours of physical activity per week (for example, 30 minutes a day on 5 or more days a week)?

- Yes 0 points
 No 2 points

10. Your waist measurement taken below the ribs (usually at the level of the navel, and while standing)

Waist measurement (cm)

For those of Asian or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent:

- | Men | Women | |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Less than 90 cm | Less than 80 cm | <input type="checkbox"/> 0 points |
| 90 – 100 cm | 80 – 90 cm | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 points |
| More than 100 cm | More than 90 cm | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 points |

For all others:

- | Men | Women | |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Less than 102 cm | Less than 88 cm | <input type="checkbox"/> 0 points |
| 102 – 110 cm | 88 – 100 cm | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 points |
| More than 110 cm | More than 100 cm | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 points |

Add up your points

Your risk of developing type 2 diabetes within 5 years*:

- 5 or less: Low risk**
 Approximately one person in every 100 will develop diabetes.
- 6-11: Intermediate risk**
 For scores of 6-8, approximately one person in every 50 will develop diabetes. For scores of 9-11, approximately one person in every 30 will develop diabetes.
- 12 or more: High risk**
 For scores of 12-15, approximately one person in every 14 will develop diabetes. For scores of 16-19, approximately one person in every 7 will develop diabetes. For scores of 20 and above, approximately one person in every 3 will develop diabetes.

*The overall score may overestimate the risk of diabetes in those aged less than 25 years.

If you scored 6-11 points in the AUSDRISK you may be at increased risk of type 2 diabetes. Discuss your score and your individual risk with your doctor. Improving your lifestyle may help reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

If you scored 12 points or more in the AUSDRISK you may have undiagnosed type 2 diabetes or be at high risk of developing the disease. See your doctor about having a fasting blood glucose test. Act now to prevent type 2 diabetes.



Learning and Development Course Review

ABOVE: a group of keen workers from Flourish Australia’s Seven Hills, Blacktown and Marrickville services gathered at Seven Hills for Safe Story Telling, presented by the Mental Health Coordinating Council. Gill Abadines is front row on the left.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY PETER FARRUGIA

Peer Workers learn how to share their story in a way that really helps others

By Warren Heggarty

This workshop explored how we can share aspects of our own recovery story when engaging in strengths-based recovery conversations with the people we support. “Safe Storytelling” was presented by the Mental Health Coordinating Council and hosted by Flourish Australia’s Seven Hills service.

The Safe Storytelling workshop provides skills to workers who use their lived experience in their service provision... and “equips workers with the knowledge to understand safe disclosure” and “purposeful, meaningful and sustainable storytelling.” One of the participants said that this course would be useful “to prime people for sharing their story on a public platform.”

Readers should keep an eye out for Flourish Australia’s very own workshop *Peer Work: Using lived experience in the peer space*. Flourish Australia’s approach to peer work is:

- Strengths based
- Trauma informed
- Person led
- Recovery oriented.

Two of the challenges that peer workers may encounter when sharing their story are:

- 1) How do I ensure support remain focused on the person and not on the peer worker when I’m talking about my own experiences?
- 2) How do we avoid inadvertently triggering or re-traumatising the person we are supporting?

According to participant Gill Abadines, learning the practical side is “something that can’t be read. Having the course taught from the perspective of someone who was also a peer worker allowed us to have an insight to the realities of the job. This course allowed us to practice saying our story and how to respond when someone we support may not have reacted well to our own story.”

“I think after you have your own experience with mental health issues and recovery, you become more in tune with a person’s need to ‘vent’ and to talk through whatever they may need to talk through,” says Gill. “In this time I think most have a natural tendency to engage in active listening. Sometimes one may not want to talk - and that is okay - being comfortable to sit in that silence with a person as you support them may also be enough for them in that time.”

Peer Workforce Manager Peter Farrugia describes this silence in various ways such as “being present,” “holding space,” and “being in company and not necessarily having to fill every moment with words.”

Gill went on to say, “through the course, it was suggested that we check in with someone before and after we share our story. This is to ensure that this is an appropriate time for us to share, as well as checking to make sure that we have not triggered or re-traumatised the person we are supporting.”

So through practice and collaboration with fellow workers, peer workers need to deliberately and consciously develop a sense of when disclosure is appropriate. Allowing time and debriefing may also be necessary.

“If in the event the person is feeling distressed afterwards,” says Gill, “by asking about it, you allow time for debriefing to occur before both parties return to the rest of their day.”

To avert this kind of thing, another peer worker Panorama spoke to suggested that sometimes it is best not to share your own story in a peer work context. Safety is a relative thing. If you’re in a domestic violence situation you might see that as “safe” compared to living on the streets. There is a risk with disclosure of our own lived experience that we might do more harm than good through triggering a person’s own emotions, or uncovering a past trauma.

“When choosing whether to talk to a person we need to be aware of the possible fallout,” said the peer worker. “With peer work, the most important strength is active listening, moreso than talking.”

Thanks to Deanne Blackstock and Peter Farrugia



Learning and Development Course Review

ABOVE: "All Emotions are contagious...both the ones that are pleasant and the ones that are unpleasant", Babette Rothschild quoted in (Mischke-Reeds) *ILLUSTRATION-GROUP ARTWORK BY THE PEOPLE WHO ACCESSED FLOURISH AUSTRALIA'S HAWKESBURY SERVICE APRIL 2016.*

Managing Vicarious Trauma

By Warren Heggarty

If you are a manager, ask yourself, do you know the difference between burnout and vicarious trauma? And what about compassion fatigue? Are they the same? Are they different? What can you do to ensure that staff under your supervision are provided with the proper means to avoid vicarious trauma.

Vicarious Trauma, according to the Blue Knot Foundation (a national centre of excellence for complex trauma) is an 'occupational hazard' in services which support people who have been traumatised.

Staff who work at the front line of organisations like Flourish Australia are often exposed to the traumas experienced by the people we support. This can lead to a problem known as 'vicarious trauma'. Vicarious refers to someone being in place of someone else, so it basically means being traumatised by someone else's trauma. Just as post traumatic stress disorder is perceived as a normal reaction to an abnormal event, vicarious trauma can be understood as a normal reaction to

the stress of exposure to multiple and repeated trauma.

According to Mischke-Reeds, Caregivers are at even higher risk... if they have a history of trauma in their own backgrounds and/or if they extend themselves beyond the boundaries of good self-care or professional conduct.'

'It has long been recognized that emergency workers, physicians, nurses, police officers, fire fighters, journalists, clergy, social service workers, colleagues, family members, and other witnesses and bystanders to disasters and other trauma can experience symptoms of trauma themselves.' (Mischke-Reeds)

Blue Knot foundation presented a course on Managing Vicarious Trauma at Flourish Australia's Figtree Conference Centre in December last year which was attended by staff from our various services. It promised to allow us to recognise it, mitigate the risks that produce it and respond to it when it happens.

The Blue Knot Foundation is described

as a national centre of excellence for complex trauma and has a national helpline 1300 657 380. Enquiries about their in house training can be made to (02) 8920 3611.

The course also looked at post traumatic growth and vicarious resilience.

Some people are not yet aware of what distinguishes Vicarious Trauma from burnout and compassion fatigue, all quite different things. This course looked at all of these things and compares their differences and similarities. For more on the difference between these three things, have a look here <https://www.tendacademy.ca/what-is-compassion-fatigue/>

Vicarious Trauma is not only a topic for front line staff. It also impacts those who manage the staff even if they might have minimal contact with the people who access our services. This is because one of the strategies for identifying and mitigating the effects of vicarious trauma is proper supervision.

If you are a manager, ask yourself, do you know the difference between burnout and vicarious trauma? And what about compassion fatigue? Are the same? Are they different? What can you do to ensure that staff under your supervision are provided with the proper means to avoid vicarious trauma. Here are some of the suggestions from the Blue Knot Foundations 'Fact Sheet For Managers/Supervisors: Modelling the Message:

- Are there opportunities for debriefing?
- Is supervision scheduled regularly?
- How much support is given to work/life balance?
- Are there opportunities to seek or provide peer support [to staff], such as a buddy system

If you are a front line worker, this course will provide the opportunity to conduct a wellness assessment and create a wellness plan so that you can monitor your response to your exposure to trauma.

References

Blue Knot Foundation
<https://www.blueknot.org.au/Training-Services>

Mischke-Reeds, M. (n.d.). Chapter 9 Role of Trauma in Community Health: a somatic perspective. In Various, Praeger Handbook of Mental Health.



ABOVE: The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, Chaired by The Hon Ronald Sackville AO QC (seated, centre). PHOTO FROM ROYAL COMMISSION WEBSITE

- Incidents of violence, neglect, abuse or exploitation of people with disability
- Complaints processes and outcomes
- Lack of access to support or services
- Quality of disability support services
- Examples of best practise and innovation

If anybody who accesses a Flourish Australia service wishes to make a submission to the Royal Commission, then Flourish Australia staff such as peer workers, mental health workers, supervisors and others can provide support with this process. It's important to remember that writing or talking about past abuse, neglect, exploitation or violence may bring up difficult memories of trauma for some people, so it's important that all parties are sensitive and responsive to that possibility.

If you have any questions about what to do, please raise them with your.

Thanks to Mark Orr AM, Chief Executive of Flourish Australia, for his input.

The Disability Royal Commission is now accepting submissions

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability is an important opportunity for people with disability (including psychosocial disability) and their supporters to share stories of violence, neglect, abuse or exploitation. It covers all people with disability in all settings and contexts.

The Terms of the Reference for the Royal Commission are broad and cover what the Commissioners need to consider and report on. This includes specifying what can be done to prevent and better protect people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. The Royal Commission also wants to achieve best practise in reporting, investigating and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, with the of promoting a more inclusive society that supports the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. In the end, the major outcome of the Royal Commission will be to ensure people with disability can access safe, high quality supports that help them lead the life in the community they want.

The Royal Commission commenced its work earlier in 2019 by meeting with disability advocates and relevant organisations. They have appointed Special Senior Counsel Chris Ronalds AO, QC, to assist the Commissioners in their work to uncover the truth of what has happened, and is continuing to happen, in the sector.

Back in August, the Royal Commission announced it was beginning to take public submissions. Filling in a submission is an important way you can provide information to the Royal Commission about your experiences as a person with disability. Anybody can make a submission online, by post, or over the phone. The contact details of the Royal Commission are provided at the end of this page.

Importantly, the Australian Government is funding legal and advocacy support for people who might need assistance in preparing and making a submission. You can also just call the Royal Commission and make a verbal submission,

The Royal Commission is looking not only at problems but also at best practise and innovation. They particularly want to hear about:

The Royal Commission can be contacted in several ways, including by telephone on 1800 517 199 from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday AEDT excluding public holidays, by post at GPO Box 1422, Brisbane Qld 4001, or by email at:

DRCenquiries@royalcommission.gov.au

Everything you need to know about the Royal Commission, including information about making a submission and the exact scope of their work, can be found at:

disability.royalcommission.gov.au

The members of the Royal Commission are...

The Hon Ronald Sackville AO QC
 The Hon Roslyn Atkinson AO
 Ms Barbara Bennett PSM
 Dr Rhonda Galbally AC
 Ms Andrea Mason OAM
 Alastair McEwin AM
 The Hon John Ryan AM

Establishing your financial independence

by Elizabeth Kempers



A question: what do you need to consider in order to start building financial independence TODAY?

Some key factors include being able to afford your essential expenses, such as electricity and rent, when they arise, having money to spend on short-term happiness (such as on going out with friends) and storing up some money for long-term goals, such as travel. If you're in debt or you owe money, it is important to set aside enough to pay back what you owe as soon as possible. It is also a good idea to keep an emergency fund just in case money is required for an unexpected expense, like the fridge breaking down or if your washing machine needs to be replaced.

Free, expert advice

While not all online advice is good, below are three money websites that have stood me in good stead. All three of these sites provide online newsletters that anyone with an email account can subscribe to.

1. MoneySmart

The MoneySmart website is operated by the Australian Government and is designed to educate people about how to be savvy with their money. There are pages on how to save, setting financial goals, mortgage advice, and even some budgeting calculators to see if your plans are viable.

www.moneysmart.gov.au

2. The Barefoot Investor

Scott Pape is the author of the New York Times bestseller *The Barefoot*

Investor. His books are easy to read and the information is reliable. Hundreds of thousands of people subscribe to his newsletter. He welcomes readers to ask money-related questions on his website.

www.barefootinvestor.com

3. Simple Savings

The Simple Savings website has lots of ideas on how to save money. They post all kinds of monthly challenges in order to help you to change your mindset about your current budgeting and spending habits. My favourite is the \$21 Challenge, where the cost of your weekly food budget comes to \$21. I did this challenge and managed to spend only \$21 on groceries in a month!

www.simplesavings.com.au

Getting back in the black

If you are in financial distress, there are many charities that employ Budget Counsellors who can provide a free service to help you. These charities include the Salvation Army and the Society of St Vincent de Paul, though for each area different charities are involved depending on what volunteer staff are available. There are also Financial Officers at most Centrelink offices who can help.

Remember, by squirrelling a little away each pay cheque you can help yourself become more financially independent. For me, I've managed to save money towards going overseas on numerous occasions. My next trip will be to England to see a relative, so I have a savings plan in place and aim to see him around March 2020.

Simple tips to keeping your money where it belongs

Predators have become more sophisticated since the days of exiled Nigerian princes, which is why Americans lost \$900 million dollars to fraud in 2018. No matter who you are, you need to actively protect your money if you want to keep it. Here are some strategies to keep your money in your wallet rather than a scammer's.

Reject robocalls

You may be familiar with scammers calling you about zero-interest loans or issues with your credit cards, but you can put yourself in serious risk by simply saying "yes" to a question over the phone, as your voice can be recorded and used to fool services that check your voice as part of their security. Unfamiliar with a number? Let it go to voicemail.

Sounding boards

Speaking to friends about financial matters can give you a fresh perspective. If you're unsure, consult a financial planner or a lawyer. If anyone approaches you with a financial proposition, make it clear you have a team of advisers who you have to consult. This will help deflect scammers.

Don't rush in

If somebody presents a today-only deal and pressures you into signing on the dotted line right now, this is often a red flag. Refuse to be rushed.

Play it safe with email

It's best not to email your tax file number or bank account numbers. If a scammer hacks your inbox, these numbers can be used to drain your account or steal your identity. If you're performing financial tasks, use your bank's online tools.

Don't use gift cards to pay anyone

A current scam demands that you repay a serious debt with gift cards, possibly to the tune of thousands. The problem with this scam is that unlike getting your credit card swiped, paying with gift cards makes it impossible to recover what you've lost.

"7 Smart Ways to Protect Your Money", by Kate Rockwood 23rd of August 2018.
www.realsimple.com

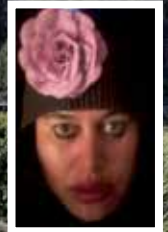


Brisbane.

Setting of the 2019 TheMHS conference, got Edwina thinking about the ups and downs of travelling with a psychosocial disability.

Hi Tech Travel

Travel with Edwina Keelan



ABOVE: Mt.Cootha is the place to visit! suddenly rising 287m, you can see all of Brisbane. There you will find the Kuta Café where you can buy some souvenirs. PHOTO BY EDWINA KEELAN

Technology has changed the way we book and pay for a holiday. This is so convenient if you are used to using the apps. If not, it can be a bit daunting and you might need to ask for some support until you are used to it.

There are mobile apps such as Zip and Afterpay which allow you to book now and pay later, but for me, a travel agent is still the best way to book a holiday.

You can go onto the internet at Expedia or Skyscanner for flights and hotels. The amounts quoted must be paid in full via Mastercard or Visa Debit.

Remember a long while ago when the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a \$1500 pension bonus? One pensioner I know booked nine days in Bali to follow her passion! This was mountain bike riding. She came first in her group. She was asthmatic, but being bipolar and fit she felt great!!!

Today, some NDIS participants can be approved to receive money to assist them to travel. One participant I know who needed to work on her anxiety issues, used UBER taxi overseas and locally, including once for long trip to the airport after a fall. She writes voluntary for a magazine enjoying tasting good food from other cultures when travelling abroad.

Why do people need assistance to help them travel. Well, I heard of a retired

pensioner forgot to pack underwear. You go figure! It's no secret, because they wrote about it on facebook catching viewers attention.

Unlike underwear, packing toiletries are optional, 100ml bottles are accepted. Any bigger than that they will likely be confiscated by airport security.

I recommend packing medications and supplements into small zip lock bags. Try marking them with texta including the days like this: MonAM/PM, WEDAM/PM, FriAM/PM etc. Pack them in your carry on bag (the bag you take on the aircraft) along with a signed letter from Doctor,

As for your Itineraries, insurance, emergency contact, I recommend three copies of each should be made. One for your carry on, one for your checkin luggage or main bag and one copy of these documents to be left with a neighbour.

I would advise carrying a passport in your bag rather than your pocket. Report to Police if stolen or missing.

It is good to send yourself an email of all documents and and passport number.

Digital passport photos need to be made before you leave overseas. Digital photos are available at any Australia Post shop. Just walk in.

Insurance, is best bought from a travel

agent. They will tailor the right cover for you for trip.

If you have a pre- existing medical health condition, or are a smoker the insurer needs to know.

Now to BRISBANE. If you want a getaway take a train from Sydney to Brisbane and then flyback.

On the train, take in the Hawkesberry River views during the late afternoon, traversing through tunnels and enjoying the food menu onboard.

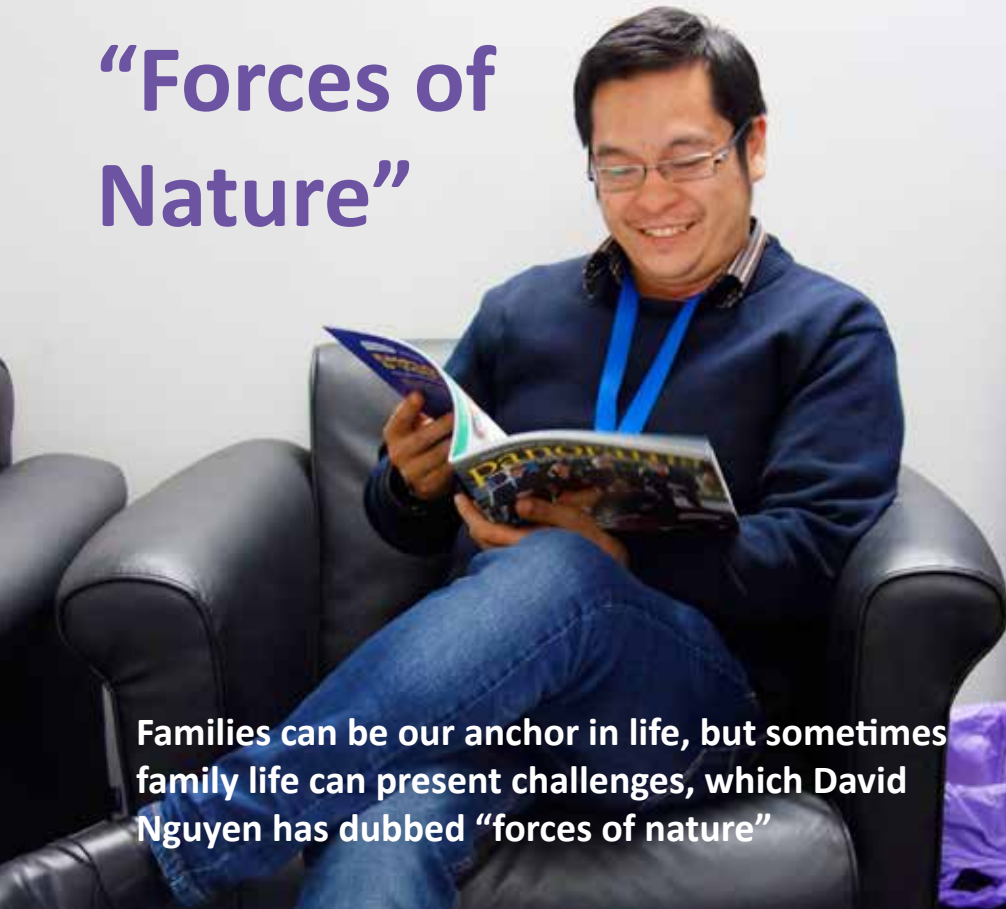
Great as it is, pensioners from NSW need to be warned of the cost of bus fares! It can make getting around icons and landmarks a lot dearer than you might expect. But there are plenty to see: The Gabba, Southbank, Fortitude Valley, Suncorp Stadium. Another activity is The Queensland Art Gallery and The Queensland Modern Art Gallery which are adjacent to each other.

And no, that is not a cockatoo you hear. Lately there has been a big issue with loudly screeching trains!

But I was impressed that Brisbane is a very clean city. And in winter, the weather is stunning.



Dealing with “Forces of Nature”



Families can be our anchor in life, but sometimes family life can present challenges, which David Nguyen has dubbed “forces of nature”

ABOVE: “Yes, the Government helps you, but ultimately you’ve got to help yourself.” David from Bankstown reading one of his favourite magazines, Panorama. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

By David Nguyen, Peer Worker from Bankstown

I have recently moved back to my family home so that I can be with my father who has a serious illness. When I was kicked out of home some years ago, I guess my father, who is from Vietnam, did not understand that I was unwell. Traditionally, mental illness is not really recognised in that culture. I guess he thought I was just being a naughty boy.

I would say that study was my recovery. My father wanted me to finish University, so I did. I got a Bachelor of Community Welfare from the Western Sydney University at Bankstown. I proved to him that I was worthy of being his son.

During my recovery I was inspired by a peer worker to become a peer worker myself. So since May 2018 I have been working with Flourish Australia at

Bankstown on Chapel Road.

Aunties

After I was first kicked out of home I went to live with an aunty. Of course, I could not openly discuss my mental health issues with her either, for the same reason as with my father.

At one stage, I wasn’t taking my medication. The treatment team from Bankstown Mental Health Service decided to come to my aunty’s place to check on my compliance. That is how my aunty found out about my being diagnosed with a psychosis. This led to me being kicked out of there as well...

Fortunately I had other aunties. I moved in with an aunty in Fairfield. There, as you would expect, I laid low. I was neither working nor studying. All I did was turn up to appointments with mental health professionals.

I was not very aware. I automatically walked all the way to the clinic without realising that there was a bus I could have caught. I guess the exercise was good for me.

I had to move around a lot and I got into trouble moving round a lot. People complained about my loud music at night. (Editor’s note: The Hearing Voices Network maintains that listening to loud and stimulating music can help some people who are troubled by voices or disturbing thoughts, but please consider the neighbours and use headphones!)

Peer work has been so important to my mental health recovery process. It was a peer worker I worked with at Marrickville who helped me gain the strength and confidence to become a part of society again. I had been totally isolating myself. I was in my own world.

Focus on study

Eventually, I moved to Revesby which is right near the Bankstown campus of UWS (University of Western Sydney) where I was studying. At last I found a decent room of my own so I could not be kicked out. This enabled me to focus on my study.

I was compliant, too. I “behaved” myself. I proved to the doctor that I was well. If I had done otherwise, it would have been a much worse outcome because they threatened a community treatment order on me: “We’ll nab you, then we’ll jab you.” I did not want that.

“It was a peer worker... who helped me gain the strength and confidence to become a part of society again. I had been totally isolating myself. I was in my own world.”

I am resigned to taking medication for the rest of my life. There are just some things you can’t do much about, and I call these forces of nature. There have been others. For example, my mother passed away from a stroke when I was

17, my brother Thanh was born with Down Syndrome, and I put on weight because of the medication. These and other issues are “forces of nature.”

On the bright side, four years ago I got married. My wife is a great support to me.

Home again

I moved back home to Campsie with my wife, my father, my brother and now my 4 month (in July) old baby Angelina Rose. She was born on St Valentine’s day. She just made it in, born only 5 minutes before midnight. Everyone is very supportive to me now. I have an anchorage.

Your thoughts can make you float away... sometimes I like to call myself the Asian Bart Simpson. I’m a born smart Alec. For example, a doctor once asked me “Do you hear voices?” and I said, “Sure I hear voices. I can hear you right now.” That wasn’t the answer the doctor was looking for...

Every doctor I have seen ALL say I should take medication. But of course, it has bad side effects. Still, I decided that I needed to be more mature about it. Besides, working in the system has given me greater insight. I can identify with what the people who access our services go through.

I have also stopped watching TV and I find that I am more at peace now. The relationship with my wife has brought me back to responsibility. The Government helps you, but ultimately you’ve got to help yourself. And now I’ve got a baby.

I really identify strongly with my brother, who is two years older than me. Thanh has Down Syndrome. I find that a lot of people complement me for the person I am and I have my brother to thank for that, for being a good influence on me.

Thanks to Cathee Andrews for assistance with this story

Flourish Australia
Unit 4, 432 Chapel Road
BANKSTOWN NSW 2200
1300 779 270



ABOVE: Wagga celebrated R U OK? Day with an afternoon tea and catch up. It was a wonderful day had by all. PHOTO BY JAMIE HILL ACTING MANAGER FLOURISH AUSTRALIA WAGGA WAGGA

Asking the big question: R U OK?

By Jamie Hill, Senior Peer Worker, Flourish Australia Wagga Wagga

This year, the Wagga Wagga branch of Flourish Australia celebrated R U OK? Day with a social afternoon tea. R U OK? Day is an event where everybody is encouraged to contribute to suicide prevention simply by asking their friends, colleagues and loved ones, “R U OK?”

Nyssa, one of our mental health workers at Wagga, organised this event and invited all of the people who access our services to attend. There was a cake, balloons and big silver R U OK? Day signs, and everyone was encouraged to bring a plate of food for afternoon tea. Some of the plates were homemade, some was bought from the supermarket, but all of it was delicious. Nyssa also handed out R U OK? Day arm bands to everyone, and many of the people

who access our services are still wearing them!

There were 15 people at the afternoon tea, and we all enjoyed each other’s company...and the cake, of course! But what made this day truly special was each of us took turns recognising and sharing the things we are grateful for, such as being surrounded by awesome people, and having something to celebrate.

While R U OK? Day can be a great prompt for the wider community, it’s common practice for all of the participants who access the Wagga service and the staff to make sure everyone else is OK, not just during special events. We encourage each other by checking in regularly and offering to help in whatever way we can.

Flourish Australia
Wagga Wagga
Unit 2, 84-86 Fitzmaurice
Street, Wagga Wagga
NSW 2650



How my community connections support my recovery

By Matthew Cheyne

ABOVE: Matthew Cheyne presenting his talk at TheMHS 2019 Brisbane. PHOTO BY PETER FARRUGIA

When I was admitted to a mental health unit in September 2017 just before my 40th birthday, I soon decided that I wanted to be one of the people who recover, get out, and remain well in the community long-term.

As I found that my community of choice – the Sydney Buddhist Centre in Newtown – was absolutely crucial in helping me to succeed at this goal, when I had the opportunity to do a talk about wellness at the 2019 TheMHS Conference at Brisbane (one of the biggest mental health events on the calendar), I knew exactly what I wanted to present: a talk about the many benefits of community support. My presentation was named “Healthy Communities Help Consumers Help Themselves Heal and Recover Faster and For Longer.”

This is a topic close to my heart. During my struggles in 2017, there were numerous Buddhists who would visit the hospital in support. Some would simply be present with me. One Tuesday

Recovery Story

lunchtime I actually had four different Buddhist friends coincidentally visit me all at once! That so many people from the Sydney Buddhist Centre cared so much for me really reinforced my self-esteem and made all the difference.

A holistic recovery

Something else that greatly helped my recovery was Buddhist meditation. When I was in hospital they had a retreat room, and I’d spend hours meditating every day. This helped keep my mind clear, which was very important to me.

Once I was prescribed the right medication, though, I began to recover even faster. I think it took maybe two weeks to figure out an effective dose. I suddenly had a lot more clarity in my thoughts, the sort that would usually take 6 hours of meditating to achieve.

I was also lucky enough to have some really good doctors who shared my core passions. For instance, I come from Victoria and I follow Essendon religiously, and the psychiatrist I was paired with was *also* from Victoria and barracked for Essendon. On the medical side of things my other doctor happened to be a Buddhist. Because of these shared factors I felt my doctors were able to relate to me on a deeper level.

Flourish Australia have also supported me in a number of practical ways, such as putting a roof over my head at a supported independent-living property at Petersham, where I reside quite affordably with three other tenants.

Choosing the right path

Now that I was seeing things clearer, I could examine my circumstances to understand how my past choices have led me to where I am, and assess whether my *current* choices are wise ones that will provide the most beneficial future outcome possible. Thankfully I haven’t gone backwards, and I’ve only been going from strength to strength.

So that’s my recovery in a nutshell! It’s been one step at a time, one day at a time, but I’ve been purposefully going forwards. I’ve been very deliberate in my recovery, so it hasn’t been a fluke.

Presenting

To be honest, I wasn’t all that nervous at the TheMHS Conference. Those who have walked beside me during my journey have often told me there’s been a huge boost in my confidence since I left hospital, and that’s very important for public speaking.

Going up to do my presentation, I was thinking, “Well, these people will mostly be consumers, doctors, and nurses, they’ll have the same interests I do, and they’ll be understanding of my story.” It wasn’t until I had the microphone hooked up to me, the PowerPoint running over my shoulder and everyone listening that I was like, “Oh my God, this is real!” It was a flash of realisation that I was presenting in front of a big crowd, but things went great. The audience was really supportive, and it was a fantastic experience. I got a lot of applause at the end, and the lady who Chaired the workshop said I was very brave to talk about my recovery the way I did.

I had no less than 20 people between Wednesday and Friday tell me how much they liked my talk and the way it moved them. They really valued me being real. So, it was all worth it in the end. I had a great time, I made new friends, and it all turned out to be a really good experience.

Aspirations

As much as I enjoyed Brisbane, most of my time was spent at the Conference, so I’d love to go back and tour its art galleries and museums. It’s at the top of my travel list, and I’m going to save my money to stay in the same hotel. I’ve asked about their rates, and they’ve got budget rooms that only cost a little bit more than a hostel. I should be ready to go back in 6 to 12 months.

I’m doing a Certificate III in Community Services at the moment, and I’ve got to organise work placement so I can get some experience. But what I really want to do is become a Peer Worker, to be a part of the solution. I want to give something back, and this is one of the best ways I can think of.

This is part one in a series of articles on TheMHS 2019. Next issue includes stories on Quality Services and Healing Language.

Upskilling to better dinners



By Robert Keegan

I've been accessing services at Flourish Australia's Newcastle service ("The Centre") for around 4 years since I was originally referred by ISMHU (Intermediate Mental Health Unit) on Church Street. The Centre offers lots of interesting things for me to do: fishing, lawn bowls, long walks, going for coffee, and more. I especially like the outdoor events.

When it comes to support at home, I was put in touch with ICC (Interactive Community Care) by Kate, my Support Person from The Centre. ICC staff take me shopping and help me with my cooking and cleaning, and this support is funded through the NDIS. However, when I was first given this help I told Kate that I felt a little bit shy about having someone assist me. But she said, "Robert, you're eligible for this support, so let them support you." They've been a great help.

I enjoy doing a bit of volunteer work around The Centre, even if it's just doing the dishes. There's plenty of opportunities when it comes to helping out around the place to support The Centre and the people who access it, more than I have time to do! So much choice.

Upskilling opportunities

I recently completed a TAFE course through The Centre: a Certificate II in Kitchen Operations. We had TAFE

teachers come and run the class right here, and they taught us many practical cooking skills and safety practises, such as hygiene and food storage. I used to feel quite ignorant when it came to using and maintaining my home kitchen, so when I heard about this course I realised this was the perfect time to change that fact.

While I enjoyed getting familiar with the many processes of preparing food, such as chopping and cooking techniques, I didn't do this course to get a job: I did it so I could use these practical skills at home. The best part is I've been getting better at preparing some of my favourite foods, such as curried chicken or vegetable stir fry, and I cook a lot more often than I used to.

Observing food hygiene in a kitchen environment was a major part of the course. "Safety first" and all that. A few of the safety facts surprised me, though. For instance, you're not meant to thaw frozen meat on the bench: you have to take it out of the freezer the day before you want to cook it and defrost it in the fridge. This keeps the meat at a very low temperature, which prevents the growth of bacteria. I used to defrost meat on the bench quite a bit, but not since I learned how dangerous it was.

"Kate believes that I could hold down a job in Hospitality, perhaps starting at one day a week or something like that. I'm a little bit scared about it, but we'll see how we go."

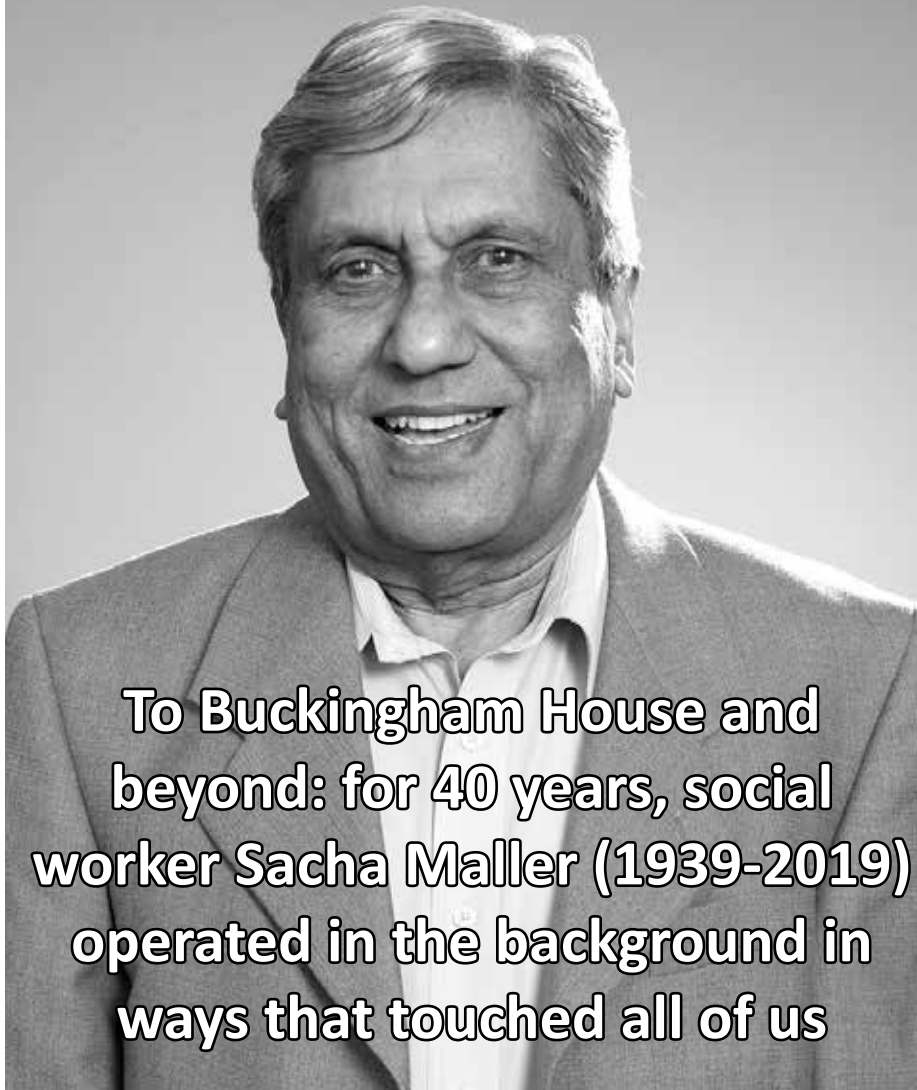
One time, our class was shown how to use the espresso machine. I learned how to make a nice hot cappuccino, and they asked, "Who wants it?" As nobody answered, they said, "Well, you should have it, then, Robert." It was nice and strong and hot and I was pleased with how it turned out.

We had our graduation ceremony on the 12th of September at The Centre, where we were awarded our certificates and had a party afterwards. Around five of us took part, and I think everyone enjoyed the course and got a lot out of it. By the way: I'm already back doing another Hospitality course!

ABOVE: Robert Keegan relaxing at Flourish Australia's Newcastle service on Hunter Street ("The Centre") in front of a display of artworks by various artists who also access this service. BELOW: The on-site kitchen where Robert and his class did their Certificate II in Kitchen Operations. PHOTOS BY GRANT J EVERETT



The Quiet Pioneer Departs



To Buckingham House and beyond: for 40 years, social worker Sacha Maller (1939-2019) operated in the background in ways that touched all of us

ABOVE: A portrait of Sacha Maller taken about 2005 PHOTO FROM FLOURISH AUSTRALIA ARCHIVES

By Warren Heggarty

On the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the eleventh year of this century, Sacha Maller retired after working with PRA - one of Flourish Australia's predecessor organisations - for over four decades. Yet the influence of what Sacha accomplished in his career is still felt strongly in our services today, and that includes many innovations from the very beginning of his career. Sadly, we've learned that Sacha passed away on the 20th June 2019.

Sacha was a true pioneer of the "psychosocial" movement that grew in the decades prior to the Richmond Report triggering the trend of moving people with mental health issues away

from hospitals and towards community based care in 1983.

In 1975, while still relatively new to the organisation, Sacha wrote a book covering the history of the first 20 years of PRA, and he was still around to play a part in the 50 year Gold Jubilee version of the book in 2005.

Sacha was quoted in that very book describing the way things had changed: "In the early days of PRA, the association would approach an appropriate State or Federal Department with an innovative idea for a rehabilitation service or program and request funding. Nowadays a Government Department will tell us what they want and then we tender for it...There is little dialogue between the people who give the money and

the people who provide the services." (Turner, 2005, p. 82)

This may have changed thanks to the NDIS funding system, but one thing that has remained in place to this day - in fact, it has actually increased - is the emphasis on building the capacity of people to take responsibility for their own recovery.

Calm

"He had a gentle calmness about him, no matter what was happening," remembers Jasmin Moradides who worked closely with Sacha in the years before his retirement. "People were always at the forefront of his mind in everything he did, whether it was people accessing the service, or staff. He was always fair and extremely funny."

Sacha was a big contributor to services being run by people with a lived experience, including Flourish Australia's Hervey Bay site. He also had a lot to do with the setup at Flowerdale, the former 'PRA on King' in Newcastle and, of course, Buckingham House, which was the original psychosocial program.

"He truly was a mentor to everyone who came into the sector," said Jas.

"He introduced so many new things to PRA," said Sacha's long-time colleague and Flourish Australia General Manager of Business Excellence, Mohammed Alkhub. "More or less he had a hand in every new program from the early 70s until his retirement in 2011."

The Buckingham House Revolution

Buckingham House had been opened in 1963 at 39-41 Buckingham Street, Surry Hills. It included a workshop that employed people with mental health issues as well as being an office for PRA. But it would also be the site of PRA's first psychosocial program.

Sacha's study "Sheltered Existence" led to PRA making contact with Fountain House, a service in New York that had been established in 1948 and was considered very progressive in terms of its focus on the wellbeing of its members. That turned out to be Sacha's first major project with PRA. PRA's Executive Chairman at the time, Adrian

Powles, visited Fountain House in 1971 and was impressed by its “self-help” approach, so much so that he wanted to adopt many of its elements.

A new Buckingham House, expanded to include neighbouring terraces, was opened in 1975 as a psychosocial rehabilitation project similar to the one run by Fountain House. According to the book PRA The Story 50th Anniversary 1955-2005, (Turner, 2005, p40): “Buckingham House changed PRA, which had been founded to help former patients relearn social and workplace skills. PRA had now adopted a holistic psychosocial rehabilitation philosophy. This was a therapeutic approach that encourages a mentally ill person to develop his or her fullest capacities through learning and environmental supports.”

Employment

Sacha also introduced the Enterprise business model in 1992. This included lawn mowing and cleaning services, because he believed that employment was a major contributor to overall wellbeing. Sacha also helped build and develop the Prestige Packing Co’s

Harris Park site after PRA moved from Rydalmere Hospital back in 1990. At one stage he started up a coffee shop in Callan Park (Rozelle) Hospital to provide employment for people.

“He was a big advocate for people with mental health issues who touched the lives of so many people,” said Mohammed. “He also promoted the employment of people with lived experience in the mental health sector. Sacha, Janet Meagher and myself actually began to employ people with lived experience on PRA’s staff in the early 2000s. We didn’t use the term ‘peer worker’ at the time, but these roles developed into peer worker jobs. He wrote so much on the subject of mental health and we would do well to refer to his writings.”

Sacha was one of the first people to hold a disability conference dedicated specifically to mental health issues, rather than disability in general.

Respect

Mohammed said, “Sacha was ahead of his time and worked tirelessly in support of people with mental health

issues, improving their lives. He was also the type of man who works quietly in the background rather than wanting the accolades. He was a private man who got on with the job and was very well respected nationally in the mental health sector. He worked with so many of the well-known people in our field like Leanne Craze and Dr Peter McGeorge and others. He also worked with so many government departments and agencies.”

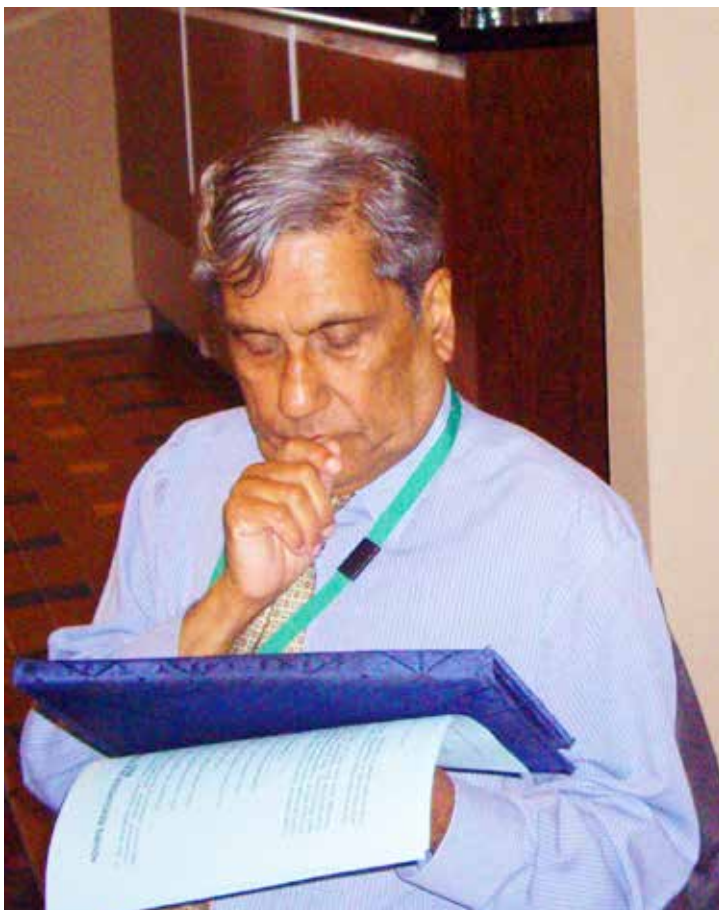
Nowadays, with people changing jobs more often than their fashion, it may seem unusual for a person to remain with the same organisation for over four decades. Sacha didn’t see it that way. In the 50th Anniversary Book, we find a quote of his to prove it: ‘When people ask him why he stayed in the same agency for many years, his reply is, “it’s not the same agency.”’ (p. xiii)

Sacha was born in Tellicherry, India, in 1939. He was married to Anya from Finland for 49 years. He is survived by two sons - Derek and Marcus - as well as a number of grandchildren.

References

Turner, B. (2005). PRA The Story 50th Anniversary. (J. Chesterton, & S. Maller, Eds.) Redfern: PRA.

BELOW LEFT: Deep in thought at a Staff Conference. PHOTO FROM FLOURISH AUSTRALIA ARCHIVES **BELOW RIGHT: Sacha at a conference in 2009** PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY





By Jim Booth

With the Advent of the NDIS, some familiar Commonwealth programs like PIR have closed. Cluster Manager Jim Booth talks about what is taking their place in his region of North Western New South Wales.

Partners In Recovery was one of the biggest new mental health programs when it was announced in 2012, and it was going for a few years before the NDIS started expanding from trial sites (including the Hunter) and across the rest of NSW and Australia. There were nearly 50 PIR programs across the country, with Flourish Australia involved in seven consortia, including as the lead agency in the New England. However, Partners In Recovery officially came to an end on June 30th 2019, and while this service may be gone in name, this doesn't mean the people who relied on PIR support aren't receiving services anymore.

While PIR was very much centered around partnering and coordinating with a wide range of service providers, over the last couple of years its main goal changed to transitioning as many people as possible over to the NDIS for ongoing, long-term support. Prior to becoming an NDIS transition program, the original scope of PIR was to connect people up with all the services and supports they need, and this remains the core of what we do, whilst also supporting people who want to make an access request to

the NDIS.

However, the transition from Partners in Recovery support to NDIS support has brought some challenges for the staff and some of the people who access our services. A number of people weren't successful in gaining NDIS funding, and this put them off from going through the testing process again. It's an unfortunate fact that not every single person in need will get an NDIS package on their first attempt. Many people had to apply for funding a second or a third time before being successful. One person was actually tested four separate times before being accepted! While this was eventually a good result, testing for anything four times would frustrate anyone.

"The good news is that even if you don't have an NDIS package, we can still support you."

The good news is that even if you don't have an NDIS package, we can still support you. Our Primary Health Network funding now offers a program called Continuity of Support, which is specifically on offer for anyone who has been unsuccessful at receiving NDIS funding. Continuity of Support is basically a safety net for the people who have fallen through the cracks of the NDIS, and stems from the 2017-2018 budget when the government

announced changes to the way that services tailored towards people with chronic mental health issues would be funded. A year earlier the Government announced the National Psychosocial Support (NPS), a program aimed at those who were not supported through the range of Commonwealth-funded mental health programs such as Partners in Recovery, Day to Day Living and Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs). All of these programs closed on 30 June 2019, but Flourish Australia operates the NPSM in a number of regions across New South Wales including New England and the North West, in partnership with Anglicare.

A new program, known as NPS commenced on 1 July 2019 and takes over from the former Commonwealth programs. It is solely aimed at supporting people to transition to the NDIS and is only funded for 12 months to do this. If people attempt transition and are not successful in gaining a package they automatically move to Continuity of Supports, with no action required by people accessing the programs, but providing ongoing support.

Our focus is still on people who have severe and persistent mental health issues, and we will continue to keep their entire support network - family, friends, carers, loved ones - in the loop. Those are core parts of our philosophy. We are still providing just as complete a service under a new name, although the overall funding is significantly reduced.

There is an argument that if people were receiving sufficient coordinated support in the first place, then everything should be established for them by now. That may be OK in the physical health world, but we know with the episodic nature of mental health issues that there's always a chance that somebody might be fine today and not fine tomorrow, meaning we may occasionally need to go back, re-engage, and start the support process all over again. With Continuity of Support, we will continue to provide ongoing help for as long as it is required (and funded), and increase it or decrease it to match where the person is up to.

live within our area and we support more than 600.

We're also opening lots of new offices, so while it used to be just be Tamworth, Armidale and Moree, we've also picked up Inverell, Glen Innes and Gunnedah, and we're continuing to expand so we can support more people in need. Accordingly, our staff numbers have grown from 15 in 2012 to over 80 staff members as of 2019.

(As told to Grant J Everett)

Further reading about changes in psychosocial support services in the Hunter, New England and Central Coast regions:

<https://hneccphn.com.au/planning-commissioning/changes-in-psychosocial-support-services/>

NDIS Coordination of Support

Flourish Australia employs a lot of Support Coordinators, in fact, at least one in each major town and city in the New England region. Under the NDIS, Support Coordinators provide one-on-one support to link to other organisations and supports, plus our own range of supports. The NPSM program also runs group activities at places like Mallam House in Armidale or the new activity centre in Tamworth. Coordination of support is an NDIS item and is not granted to every NDIS participant, but means connecting people up with the services they need to manage their daily life, and depending on the person, this can involve a number of kinds of support: housing support, help with their daily living skills, looking after their general health, or making sure they get to their appointments, for instance. Our Support Coordinators have a comprehensive knowledge of everybody across the region who can help with their needs.

The regional span

In the New England and Northwest New South Wales areas we offer services from the Liverpool Plains to Tamworth, Armidale, Glen Innes, and further up the New England Highway to Tenterfield, just south of the Queensland border. This is a distance of around 400 kilometres. We also have offices at Inverell and Moree. Across the programs, we also have consortium partners from the PIR days in Tenterfield, Narrabri and Gunnedah. All up, around a quarter of a million people

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
📍 flourishaustralia.org.au
📱 /FlourishAus

flourish
AUSTRALIA | NDIS

Registered NDIS provider



Commissioner Lourey Visits the Hunter Street Wellbeing Centre

ABOVE: Commissioner Lourey (middle, speaking with Neil and Graeme) wanted to hear everyone's story during her visit. PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SIMON SCOTT PHOTO.

By Michaeli Gwilliam, Manager

Commissioner Catherine Lourey of the National Mental Health Commission visited Flourish Australia's wellbeing centre at Hunter Street, Newcastle, for a tour of our facilities. Cluster Manager Neil Mawson and I showed her around.

The Commissioner was at the halfway point of a big tour for the Living Well Report, and as she was going to be in the area she decided to take this opportunity to have a look at The Centre and what we have to offer (thanks to Aidan Conway for helping to arrange this visit). Catherine was keen to have an informal look around to see things in action, rather than holding a big formal event. She brought along a photographer to take snaps of the day.

Wellbeing centres like the service on Hunter Street encourage people to pursue their interests and goals, meet new people, and really engage with life. Catherine could see the many benefits of providing a safe place that people with a lived experience of a mental health issue can visit, and when you include the many opportunities they have for engaging with fun and meaningful activities, these places become even more valuable.

The grand tour

We escorted the Commissioner through The Centre and introduced her to all the people who were in the space at that time. We didn't plan who would be there or anything like that, so the Commissioner received a genuine view of The Centre on a standard day. It was all very informal, and that's what the

Commissioner wanted. Funnily, while she had only allocated a short window for her visit, she kept on extending it and extending it until three hours had gone by. I think that's evidence she was having a good time!

Like a lot of the people who come through our doors, I think the Commissioner was blown away by just how much is on offer at The Centre. Most visitors don't expect how big this space is, and we often get an "Oh, wow," kind of response when they walk in. We have so much going on throughout the week in regards to music and art and the computer area and yoga and tai chi and the gym that there's certain to be something for everyone. People who access our services have often complimented The Centre for always providing them with something to do.

We ended up showing the Commissioner everything The Centre had to offer. When it comes to the highlights of her tour, the art room always draws people in (no pun intended...). Catherine had a long conversation with Darryl about his work as an artist and how he's reached the point in his craft where it's become financially viable for him to sell his pieces. Catherine also spent time with Ben, the coordinator of the Flourish Learning Network, and spoke with Rachel Jeans, the chef and vocational trainer (which visitors often do). Our fully-equipped gym was another focal point for the tour.

Quality time

Morning tea was freshly-baked scones from our kitchen. We all sat at a big long table in the dining room with the Flourish Australia staff and the people who access The Centre in one big group, and there was a huge conversation. The Commissioner was really, really easy to talk to, she made time for everyone, and treated everyone the same. She asked a lot of questions about people's life experiences, such as, "What do you like about coming here? What don't you like? Do you think the NDIS has helped your situation?" The Commissioner was definitely listening, as she was writing down the major issues people raised on napkins. She was making jokes about how if she knew she was going to hear such great ideas, she would have brought a notepad! I was very proud that so many of the people who access our services came and joined in.

A lot of people got to tell their quirky little stories, and the conversation went in all different directions. As there had

BELOW, L-R: Juan Du (Administration Support Officer), Amber Grace (Student), Rebecca Tsang (Peer Worker). PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SIMON SCOTT PHOTO.



been a mental health forum held in Newcastle a day earlier and some of the people who access our services were involved with it, that was one topic of discussion.

Overall, the people who access our services gave Flourish Australia a good rap. For instance, Catherine had an in-depth conversation with Libby Oates, a person who accesses the service. Libby had recently spent 18 months in hospital, and now that she's back in the community Libby comes to The Centre four days a week in addition to receiving one-on-one support. She credited Flourish Australia for playing a major role in her recovery and her ongoing wellness. Graeme Moyle also receives one-on-one support from the Outreach team in Newcastle, and was glowing about the support he gets from Flourish Australia. Neville and Darryl Soo both took the opportunity to speak about their time with Flourish Australia.

The Commissioner had a question for me: "If you had a direct line to the Health Minister, what would you say?"

So I told her about one of my personal bugbears: there's always a lot of talk about "choice and control", but how many people in need are actually informed enough to be able to make the best choices based on their personal situation? I also spoke about the two advocacy gaps in the NDIS: the first gap is when somebody needs help getting their NDIS plan, and the second gap is when somebody has a plan, but doesn't know where to access the services they require. I believe both of these gaps are far too common and can be very hard for people to cross on their own. Neil and I also mentioned how there is a limited choice of providers when it comes to helping people with mental health issues access the NDIS.

All up, it was a beautiful day, and there was lots of positivity from everyone. I think many people got a lot out of it, and we hope to see Commissioner Lourey again.

As told to Grant J Everett



PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Commissioner Lourey walking with Neil Mawson and Michaeli Gwilliam; in the Art Room speaking with Darryl Soo; and Rachel Jeans, Chef and Vocational Trainer, getting the scones ready. PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SIMON SCOTT PHOTO.



**Newcastle Hunter St
Wellbeing Centre
627 Hunter Street,
Newcastle, NSW 2300
(02) 9393 9700**

Another Door Opens 2019

ABOVE: Ray Morgan's artwork "Jivjago". BELOW, RIGHT: Third-place winner Scotia Hennessy's "Life Is So Wonderful". BOTTOM RIGHT: Runner-up "The Rangers" by Pete Donovan PHOTOS BY JANE MILLER

Photos and interviews by Jane Miller

Every two years, Buckingham House organises the Another Door Opens exhibition. It gives us an artistic glimpse of lived experience of Mental Health Issues and Recovery.

ANTHONY

Anthony Thornton entered two artworks in the ADO exhibition: "A Dumb Leader on the Loose" and "NSW - A Tremendous Hit".

"They're sketches. I get my inspiration from the Telegraph. I sketch from the cartoons. With "A Dumb Leader On The Loose", it's a bit different to the original so I could make it my own."

"This is my first exhibition, and one of my pieces has already been sold. It's a real honour for me. It's a good feeling that someone likes your work enough to pay for it."

"I go to Buckingham House on a Thursday in the morning to do art, and I do a lot more at home now than what I was doing."

"Art calms me. I'm able to just get absorbed, and when I focus everything ceases to be a problem. Time passes quickly, and afterwards you get a sense of accomplishment from finishing it, or at least making progress on it."

GERRY

Gerry Connolly has been a regular contributor to Flourish Australia's art exhibitions for years.

"I like to show that I can paint, and I

enjoy doing it as well. Getting my art out there is very important. I've only sold two of my artworks at the moment. Art, for me, is relaxing. At present, I've got a couple of commissions going up, so I'm busy with that."

"A while back I did the large mosaic out the front of Buckingham House, so now I have an interest in mosaic work."

GABRIELLA

Gabriella Kozlowski entered a poem into the Another Door Opens exhibition, as she sees it as an important artform. This was the only poem that was entered. Gabriella attends Flowerdale Cottage.

"I make my own cards and write poems on them for special occasions. So if somebody was getting married I'd write the day of the wedding and put the bride and groom's name on the card to make it personalised for each couple."

It's a nice memento for them, and you can write what comes from your heart."





PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Georgios Galanos with "Still Alive" self-portrait; Gerry Connolly with his Water/Acrylic works "My Brain That Doesn't Work" and "Body With A Heart" (top and middle); Monique McKenzie with her painting "Flowers From My Mind"; and "Art Pouring" by Mirjana Mrkusic ALL PHOTOS BY JANE MILLER



And the winner is...on the following page



Practicing and teaching art, and winning Another Door Opens 2019

ABOVE: Stephen Correy with his exhibition-winning work “Busking At Dusk” getting congratulated by Mark Orr AM
PHOTOGRAPH BY JANE MILLER

By Stephen Correy

I’m teaching a drawing class at the Wayside Chapel, and I’m drilling people with drawing, making a difference in their ability to draw. In some cases I’m revolutionising what they can do. At some other places I’m unofficially teaching people about visual arts and music, showing people the benefits of how to be creative.

Most Thursdays, I attend the Buck House art group, but I also attend art groups at Wayside Chapel, Mission Australia, Rough Edges and Ozanam Learning Centre. I’ve had my drawing in the Art Gallery of NSW, and St Vinnies auctioned it, and that allowed me to get a fairly chunky motorbike that helps me to get around to all these different places. I take the bike away touring when I get the chance. I’ll pack up my camping gear and take off, do some camping off the back of the bike.

I do a bit of busking with music as well. I play the flute, clarinet and saxophone, woodwind and attend the Buck House music group. I’m currently teaching myself the piano accordion and music theory.

I have to practise my art, both the visual kind and musical kind, otherwise my head doesn’t work proper. I have to do it. I like to express myself in public so I can engage with people.

I’m a printmaker. So with the work that won the Another Door Opens first prize, I carved that into a plate, and for all the ones that were on the wall, there’s another four of each of them. So I’ll make multiple copies up, printing five at a time, and I hand-colour them all the same. To do five takes me about 40 hours, which is a week’s work. Hand colour them and finish them with pen.

I just don’t have enough time because I have so many ideas, and I probably never develop most of them as fully as I want to, with the printmaking.

The prints I do are all done by hand. The technology goes back to the 13th Century. They’re like etchings and lino cuts, where you make a plate or a block, and you print off the plate or the block, then you can hand colour them. It’s called relief printing. So you carve lino, like the type that goes on the floor, or you can make an etching plate, where you etch onto the plate.

I’ve sold a few works and I’ve put work into the Another Door Opens exhibition before. I’ve been a member of Buck House for 30 years now. Goes back a fairly long way.

Winning first place at Another Door Opens, felt good. It feels good to get some acknowledgement of what I do, you know? I’ve put so much time and

effort into my art. I’ve won a few prizes in my time. I took out one of their major prizes just last year at One Door Mental Health. I won the “Adrienne Brown” or Blue Fringe in the Blue Mountains, three times,

I got into the Dobell Prize in the Art Gallery of NSW as a Finalist, which was pretty good. Auctioning that drawing earned me \$8,000.

The materials I need aren’t cheap. I have to get good quality, because when people buy art that’s what they always expect. People are paying up there money, you need to get the good materials.

If somebody is interested in taking up art, my advice is to start off with a little bit of training. Also, keep at it.

Anyone can do art if they put in the time and effort. When I help to teach people, if they listen to what I say, their ability to draw is going to improve.

Most of the art I do is traditional, I haven’t done any installations, I don’t really do conceptual art, I don’t do abstractions (mainly), it’s quite figurative what I do, it’s quite graphic, and sometimes there’s a narrative. I’ll tell a story, sometimes it’ll be emotional.

Stephen spoke to Grant J Everett. Thanks also to Krissy Gram



Family & Carers

At Flourish Australia, we understand the important role many families and carers play in supporting someone with a lived experience of a mental health issue to stay well and part of their local community.

When someone comes to us and asks for support we discuss with them the involvement of their family and other important people in their lives, and what supports they provide. If we are able to obtain that information we will record it so our staff know who is important to the person and their recovery. We will also make contact with you to check what supports you may need to undertake your important role and discuss your involvement and communication preferences.

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Sometimes families and carers want more information and other contacts. There are a range of organisations that provide specialist supports and information for carers. A list with contact details can be found on our website at: <https://www.flourishaustralia.org.au/family-and-carers>

Mental Health Carers NSW
Ph: 1300 554 660

Arafmi Queensland
Ph: (07) 3254 1881

**Private Mental Health
Consumer Carer Network**
Ph: 1300 620 042

Mental Health Carers Australia
Ph: 1300 554 660

Kids Helpline
Ph: 1800 551 800

**COPMI – Children of Parents
with Mental Illness**
www.copmi.net.au

NAIDOC 7-14 July 2019 Voice Treaty Truth

ABOVE and below right: Tens of thousands of years old, The Brewarinna Fishing Traps in North Western NSW are claimed to be the oldest human made structures in the world. Uncle Bruce Pasco's book Dark Emu says that the degree to which Aboriginal People employed agriculture has been drastically underestimated. PHOTO BY DIEGO FIGUEROA

By Jade Ryall

Worimi everyone, on Sunday 7th July NAIDOC Week celebrations began across Australia!

NAIDOC is an important time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and the wider Australian community to come together to recognise and celebrate our history, culture and achievements.

This year's NAIDOC theme was **Voice. Treaty. Truth. Let's work together.**

In the lead up to NAIDOC week, I spent some time in Darwin where I, along with other first nations people from all over the world gathered to think, speak, listen and reflect together, to understand how we can continue to connect and reconnect with culture and spirit, so we as a people can heal and thrive.

There were many inspirational speakers. One notable talk I had the privilege to attend was delivered by Uncle Bruce Pascoe- the Author of the much celebrated book 'Dark Emu'.

As this year's theme focuses on hearing truth through the voice of Indigenous

peoples, I decided to share what leaders in our community are talking about with my colleagues in Flourish Australia.

So, I invited everyone to join me at a lunch time screening of the inspiring keynote that Uncle Bruce Pascoe delivered.

Here is a review of the Keynote by Warren Heggarty:

The main focus was that, despite what you've heard, agriculture was practiced by aboriginal people. Uncle Bruce went so far as to say 'our food is our medicine' implying that the change to high yield post colonial farming has led to poor health both for people and country.

One of the interesting points he made in his speech was how in colonial times, language was used to give aboriginal society a brand of inferiority. For example, 'For example aboriginal houses become 'huts' or 'humpies,' aboriginal bread becomes 'damper [from danga].'

In fact, Uncle Bruce tells us that traces of starch have been discovered which suggest that aboriginal people were baking damper, that is BREAD, 35,000 or

more years ago, long before the Ancient Egyptians thought of it.

Another is that evidence which did not fit the colonial narrative that aboriginal people were somehow primitive was hidden away. Uncle Bruce tells of agricultural tools hidden away in the bowels of a museum and never displayed, or labelled 'stones of unknown use.'

Many rivers contain evidence of ancient traps which were deliberately constructed to harvest fish. The Brewarinna fish traps, according to Uncle Bruce could be the oldest human made construction anywhere in the world. He laments, however, that the traps have not gained the attention they deserve from either public or scientists.

It just happened that NDIS coordinator Diego Figueroa was in Cobar recently and managed to get to see and photograph the Brewarinna Fish Traps for Panorama readers.

You can read more about Uncle Bruce's ideas in the book Dark Emu. We got our copy from Better Read bookstore at 265 King Street in Newtown NSW.

Tribal Warrior

Overcoming mental health issues, drugs and other issues by restoring connections

By Deonny Zaroual

One of the things Flourish Australia's Social Citizenship Think Tank has been looking at is how we can overcome the challenges of mental health issues through developing a sense of belonging and community connection. Deonny Zaroual from Figtree Conference Centre spoke to Panorama about a Police/Community program run from Redfern known as 'Clean Slate- Without Prejudice.' [Editor]

I found out about Tribal Warrior and its programs because of a young lady I know who now works as an Aboriginal Peer Worker.

At one time she had a lot of issues. Struggles with mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues, suicide issues, police issues and homelessness issues. The thing that made a big difference was her involvement in programs run by or in partnership with Tribal Warrior.

Tribal Warrior Aboriginal Corporation Training and Mentoring (to give its full name) does cruises, charters, performances, training and mentoring. 'They have a long and proud history working with disadvantaged indigenous and non-indigenous youth, providing mentoring and training leading to self-esteem, empowerment and employment.' (Tribal Warrior, n.d.)

Never Going Back and Clean Slate Without Prejudice are joint initiatives between Tribal Warrior, TAFE NSW, Long Bay Gaol, Redfern Police in conjunction with Tribal Warrior and the local aboriginal community.

Clean Slate Without Prejudice is a boxing program begun by Police Superintendent Luke Freudenstein, and local Redfern Elders Mick Mundine, Mark Spinks and Shane Phillips (Tribal Warrior CEO) for at-risk young people. According to Supt Freudenstein, taking part in Clean Slate is no easy way out. He told Nakari Thorpe of NITV News that, "They don't get anything off their sentence. So they're up at four to come boxing, the other inmates are sleeping till seven or eight, so they're doing it pretty tough," (Thorpe).

Now to return to the young lady I know, she had been associating with a gang and got into some trouble. The police, seeing that she identified as Aboriginal, thought that she might benefit from taking part in Clean Slate. They were right.

Police from the program will visit young aboriginal and other offenders in Long Bay gaol to help them not become recidivists, that is, not to go back to gaol. They look at how these young people can be reconnected to their communities

In the Aboriginal community, there are very high rates of suicide and also domestic violence. To fight this, the Tribal Warrior organisation is working to develop people's connections to their culture. So as well as programs like Clean Slate, you will have everything from canoe making, to snake shows at La Perouse each fortnight, to boomerang throwing and jewellery and candle making... plus there are historical walks with an Aboriginal guide to help people develop a connection with country. It's better than rehab!

A lot of the young people who get into trouble have had trust issues. There are a lot of kids from broken homes who

need someone they can trust so they can get close to them and talk things out. They are trying to find their family and trying to find where they fit in with life. The idea is to bring people closer and to mix with one another.

When you do the program, you are assigned a peer worker to buddy up with you and to mentor you. They look at things like housing, things for the home, mental health, problems with the family. If you had a choice between rehab or gaol or lying on the streets, I think this program is better.

Tribal Warrior Cruises is another part of it. The boats take part in events on Australia Day, New Years Eve, NAIDOC week cruises and so on. They have on board Aboriginal Dancing. The public performances are all about Aboriginal Heritage and they visit schools and also Long Bay Gaol. They are passionate about Heritage, and they also want non-aboriginal people to participate and understand as well.

The Never Going Back program trains people from Long Bay Gaol in maritime operations. This means that when they are out of prison, they have a TAFE qualification and experience that enables them to break the prison cycle.

I know another fellow who went through the program who does smoking ceremonies professionally for special occasions. Tribal Warrior Association has helped a lot of people and are very well respected.

References

Pascoe, B. (2014). Dark Emu. Broome: Magabala Aboriginal Corporation.
 Thorpe. (n.d.). From Prison Cells to Navigating the Seas. Retrieved July 22, 2019, from Tribal Warrior: <http://tribalwarrior.org/training-mentoring/>
 Tribal Warrior. (n.d.). Training and Mentoring. Retrieved September 11, 2019, from Tribal Warrior: <http://tribalwarrior.org/training-mentoring>



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

[f /CommunityBusinesses](#) [flourishaustralia.org.au](#)