

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

panorama

Monthly Issue February 2023 #88B

Walking the
Walk **In the**
Aboriginal
Community

TAFE 'Human
Book' Project

GROWing with
Yellow Ladybugs

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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 70+ of our services in New South Wales, Southern Queensland, Australian Capital Territory and Victoria.

Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 or
flourishaustralia.org.au

Chair: Prof Elizabeth More AM
Chief Executive Officer: Mark Orr AM
Chief Development Officer: Peter Neilson

About 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.

The faces behind Panorama...



Warren Heggarty



Grant Everett

Subscriptions, questions, feedback, praise, curses?

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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

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Inspire
YOUR
Community
WITH YOUR STORY

You don't need to be a writer to share your story with Panorama's readers: we can help you to write your story. We especially like recovery stories from people with a lived experience of mental health issues.

Email us at: panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Flourish Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, sea and waterways upon which we live and work.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and recognise their strong and continuing connection to land, culture and spirit.

Panorama magazine would like to acknowledge all people who live with a mental health issue, as well as those who encourage and support loved ones. Our universal right to lead full and inclusive lives is the driving force behind why Panorama exists. We also acknowledge the strength it can take to share our stories. The impact of reading about people's journeys cannot be overstated. Sharing our experiences has the potential to change lives and we hope by reading true recovery stories, it gives hope, optimism and support to our readers, especially those on their mental health recovery journey.



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: 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



TAFE 'Human Book' Project

What's it like in a 'Living Library'

First up, Panorama looks behind the scenes at TAFE where students of Peer Work have organised a Living Library. Then on the following pages one of the Human Books shares her recovery journey with us and provides tips that may help us with our own journeys.

Nowra mother Mel Banks decided to become a 'human book,' to be 'borrowed' by community members to spread the good news about recovery during Mental Health Month! The TAFE NSW Mental Health Living Library, was held on Friday 28 October. Mel and seven others shared their lived experience in online sessions organised by TAFE NSW mental health students.

The TAFE students gained valuable experience by having recovery conversations with Mel and the other participants following the event, similar to the recovery conversations which are one of the three 'vital behaviours' here at Flourish Australia.

Mel Banks, 43, lives with autism spectrum disorder and co-occurring mental health issues, including anxiety, depression and PTSD.

"I wanted to share my recovery story and hopefully someone listening will have had a light-bulb moment, Hearing other people's recovery stories has really aided my own recovery. It's really all about destigmatizing mental health. It's normal; everyone struggles."

Live Audiences

Mel was involved in three 30 minute online sessions with three different live audiences of up to ten people with 15 minute breaks in between. "It went really well," she said. "I think

the participants realised that there were gaps in the mental health system and that I had a bit of a struggle to overcome them."

Things have improved over time, but gaps still exist and Mel is doing her bit to help fill them! "I was also able to share about my role as carer for my daughter who is autistic."

"If you want to share your story with others as a living book or in some other way to support peers, it is important to have boundaries. You have to be mindful of the effect your sharing might have on others as well as on yourself."

She is hoping to study mental health in future at TAFE NSW. (Read about Mel's recovery journey starting on page 6).

TAFE NSW Wollongong, Lead teacher Mental Health Peer Work, Chloe Hancock said the innovative project helped foster a deeper understanding of mental health conditions in the community.



ABOVE: A library that lets you borrow books is awesome, like Eastwood Library above, but imagine a library that let's you borrow 'people!'
PHOTO: WARREN HEGGARTY

RIGHT: Chloe Hancock when she was Manager at Flourish Australia's New Outlook service in Wollongong. PHOTO NEIL FENELON.



"When people hear the unique experiences of others who are on a recovery journey, it is incredibly inspiring and powerful," Chloe said. "This can be a profound experience for both the 'book' and the 'borrower', and also gives TAFE NSW mental health students crucial experience in a real-world setting."

She said the event, which is being run in conjunction with local industry, also helped TAFE NSW students bolster their professional networks and tap into future job opportunities. The nation's mental health workforce is in a steep growth phase, climbing 6.5 per cent last year with more growth expected.

Before becoming a TAFE Lead Teacher, Chloe Hancock was the Manager of Flourish Australia's New Outlook service at Wollongong. Chloe added TAFE to her repertoire after completing a Certificate in Training and Assessment.

"I'm highly passionate about peer work and so this is a really beautiful position to be in!"

Favourite Role

Not only has Chloe changed career, but during this same time she has added a new member to her family: a two year old daughter. Chloe already had a 15 year old son. "I love being a parent," she says. "It's my greatest achievement and my favourite role!"

COVID has been a big challenge and is the main reason why the living library has moved online. Some years ago, while she was at the New Outlook service in Wollongong, Chloe participated in earlier 'live in person' human book programs.

"It is good that despite everything we can still connect online,"

says Chloe. "The twelve beautiful students who have organised this have worked hard to produce it in its second year online. There are eight human books and there are about 80 registered to participate."

"Living Library is a world wide concept that aims to shine light on people's unconscious bias and foster human connection through compassion and empathy?"

The Mental Health Virtual Living Library was a collaboration between TAFE NSW and mental health organisation WayAhead NSW.

Over the Page: Mel Banks' story

GROWing with Yellow Ladybugs

Autism, Anxiety and Recovery

By Mel Banks
(as told to Warren Heggarty)



Think about it this way: Everybody has mental health issue of some kind! Labeling a person can be wide of the mark because people present to the world in a wide variety of ways. Not all people on the Autism Spectrum are like Sheldon Cooper!

I found out that I was autistic quite late in life after my daughter was diagnosed with autism. I am not the same as my daughter, she presents a lot differently to me, women present differently to men, too.

It was a bit of an eye-opener when it was confirmed that I WAS autistic! I found that it made my life better to know this and it took a lot of pressure off me.

For example I would try to do certain things in a certain way and become frustrated and think 'Oh why can't I do this!!!' Now that I understand what is happening I can tell myself 'take it easy! it doesn't have to be like this.

Right from the beginning, though, I had been anxious. I had experienced separation anxiety, I was what you might call sensitive and shy. I didn't cope well at school.

This anxiety existed even before I experienced sexual abuse. After that, it became much worse and I was diagnosed with PTSD, (post traumatic stress disorder)

My Toolbox

When you are on your recovery journey it helps to have a toolbox with things to help you stay well. I want to share a few of the things in my own toolbox.

Firstly there is peer support. I am a member of GROW. Having contact with a community of peers is very important. GROW uses methods similar to the 12 Step method and the fact that we testify – share our story – actually helped prepare me for my 'Living Book' role (see previous story). Sharing your story with others is beneficial and healing because you do not feel so alone.

Some other 'tools' are a little simpler. For example there are 'grounding techniques.' When I am anxious I name five things that I can see, five things that I can hear, five things that I can smell and so forth. This diverts me from my anxiety while helping me be present in my environment. I have found this really helpful.

Also helpful is doing a T.R.E. or 'Trauma Release Exercise.' This is a little less straightforward, but it is based on the fact that traumatic experiences actually program themselves into your muscles and central nervous system.

I read about this in a book by Bessel Van der Kolk called 'The Body Keeps the Score.' Trauma can actually get trapped physically inside your body. Trauma Release Exercises help to let them go.

I also used and went to a PTSD nature clinic on the NSW Central coast called "Wyla Wellness" run by Andrew Orion Mark.



The Wyla Way PTSD program aims to combine the best of all healing worlds, both psychology and traditional healing, whilst looking to create community in the process. It includes Sweat Lodge (a retreat pictured on the right) and community rituals. The retreat is a somatic process that helps release trauma from the body and aids you in finding peace by engaging the relationship between mind, body, brain, and behaviour.

This retreat helped me come to terms with my neurodiversity and made me feel more comfortable in my own skin.

As well as my participation in GROW and Wyla Way, after my Autism diagnosis, I began participating in the Yellow Lady Bugs. This is a similar self help group.

It is an autistic-led non-government organisation with strong bridges to the community. 'We are dedicated to the happiness, success and celebration of autistic girls and women. We believe autistic individuals of all genders deserve to be recognised, valued, accepted and supported in order to realise their full potential.'

So far you can see that my recovery toolbox has things to repair both my mind AND my body. I am also helped by being a very spiritual person. Recovery for me is a very holistic thing,

One of the things I learned is about TRUST. Childhood sexual abuse, or other severe trauma undermines your ability to trust people. You begin to see all people as a threat. But not everybody is dangerous.

It is important to make friends with people and doing that can involve getting comfortable with the uncomfortable, and getting used to feeling unpleasant feelings.

This naturally can't be done in one go. You need to take baby steps. As long as you are moving forward it does not matter how small the steps are.

There is an analogy with an elastic band. If you test the resilience of the band or try to see how far it will

stretch, you need to do it a bit at a time. If you stretch it out all in one go you may snap it!

I worked in the childcare sector for a while because I would really like to create a safe space for children. I am very interested in social work, but particularly in work supporting the Autistic Community.

LEFT: "We're not all like Sheldon Cooper." Mel Banks was a 'human book' PHOTO COURTESY OF TAFE NSW. ABOVE: Wyla Way Retreat. BELOW: one of Mel's artworks PICS BY MEL BANKS





Walking the Walk In the Aboriginal Community

By Danny Dalton (as told to Grant J Everett)

I'm a proud Aboriginal man, and I work as the Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Trainee at Flourish Australia's Tamworth service for my local community.

As a part of this traineeship, I'm doing a Certificate IV in Mental Health at Armidale TAFE. I love what I do, and I love working for Flourish Australia. The best thing about my traineeship is that it will hopefully be rolled out to other Aboriginal people so they can be trained as mental health workers to serve their communities on behalf of Flourish Australia.

In addition to connecting with a lot of Aboriginal people who access services at Flourish Australia, I'm involved in the YarnUP group, and I'm networking with other Aboriginal workers within Flourish Australia as well as other people in Tamworth who work in mental health in some capacity.

Reaching my community

I've always been about my community, and what's good for their mental health. I've been closely embedded with my people for all of my 36 years, so I love to be able to use my knowledge to support those from an Aboriginal background to manage their mental health issues. That's what I'm really passionate about: working with my community, and being their voice when they want me to be.

We've definitely identified a great need for Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing staff in Tamworth's surrounding areas. You can see the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma in many places, and you'll find the community perceives mental health issues in a unique way. I'm very proud of the people in my community who are doing well in finding recovery with the support of their friends and relatives.

There is still some stigma towards mental health issues, and we've had to re-evaluate words we once commonly used to describe different aspects of it. Our word "womba" has an English translation along the lines of "crazy," but of course it's not socially acceptable to say somebody is "womba" anymore. We're learning to describe mental health issues in different ways as a community, with the hopes of lowering stigma as a result.

I definitely feel that people from an Aboriginal background benefit from connecting with their heritage and culture if they want to manage a mental health issue in a holistic manner. First Nations people have always looked at ourselves through the lens of who we are as a community, and we don't see any one issue as being the cause and effect of anything. So it's usually best to work holistically rather than focusing on just one isolated issue. You get stronger outcomes when you do it that way.

Walking the walk on my own path

I'm living with my own mental health issues, so I do a lot of self-care to stay well. I also keep in contact with a lot of people who help me with this task. I don't think I could be a very good Social and Emotional Wellbeing Trainee if I'm not walking the walk myself.

I am definitely managing my own mental health issues better as a result of what I've learned through my studies as well as working for Flourish Australia, and I've formed a really supportive network at the organisation. I work with a great team, and even though I've only been here a year, I feel a lot of support from them.

Photography: My Passion

My photography plays a big role in my recovery and wellbeing.

When I was younger, I experienced very poor self-image, so I would avoid cameras. Even at family events I'd refuse to be photographed. My attitudes towards photography changed when I was given my first camera. I could now control who was in my photos, and from there my passion grew. Pointing a lens at something or someone, exploring each visual aspect of a person or a subject, and connecting together an image of strength and truth, creates a connectedness between photographer and photographed.

I particularly love sports photography for the pure skill that it takes. Sport is played second by second, moment to moment, and as a photographer, the challenge to capture all of this action in a single image is something that I find really exciting. With sports photography, you either have it or you don't. Portrait photography is another great form of photography, because you're asking that person to trust you with presenting them in a way that is pleasing, powerful and something they can be proud of.

My camera has gotten me invitations to some very serious events that I'm very proud to be connected to, and I have the desire to capture culturally significant events. But as I get older, I have started to use my photography to celebrate my cultural connections and my community, and this has become very important to me.

The Future?

Once I'm done studying, my goal is to get a permanent job with Flourish Australia. I'll be networking within the organisation and looking for internal positions, and I'd like to think that my on-the-job experience and Cert IV could allow me to continue on with them. Like with any field, I think if you find ways to make yourself invaluable, it'll be good for your career in the long run. I'm not too concerned about any of this until June or July 2023 when my Certificate IV is done, so I'm really just focusing week to week at the Tamworth office and enjoying the experience.

ABOVE: Rosslyn Parker. Danny Dalton took a series of her on her family property near Tamworth. RIGHT: Danny adores sports photography due to the patience and skill it requires. Here's a shot of Netball players Amy Parmenter (orange uniform) and Helen Housby (blue uniform) in action at Suncorp Stadium. PHOTOS BY DANNY DALTON



ABOVE: Traffic Controllers keep motorists and pedestrians safe during road maintenance and construction. PHOTO FROM MOHAMED HASSAN, PIXABAY



Burning the Virtual Midnight Oil to Get Back to Work

By Brett Weiss (as told to Grant J Everett)

I had an admission to Sutherland Hospital about a year ago because I was suffering severe pressure on my brain. This led to an experience of a mental health issue that was like a battle going on inside of my mind.

One part of me wanted me to die, and the other part wanted me to live, so I was wrestling myself not to act on these voices and urges. I was living with constant mental chatter, and this mental health issue really flattened me. It's taken me a while to recover.

I was put on medication to manage these symptoms. The injections knocked me around a bit, causing nausea and headaches. These symptoms have, thankfully, stopped altogether now. I still live with depression, and I take medication daily and keep monitoring how it is.

I saw a psychologist and some other specialists in Sutherland Hospital, and everyone was telling me that it would make my recovery much

easier if I had a source of ongoing support once I returned to the community. This is why I originally connected with Flourish Australia. I now access the Flourish Australia service at Caringbah, where I am a part of the Connect and Thrive Program. I'll normally see William (Shade, a Peer Worker with Flourish Australia) on a Monday down near Cronulla, and we'll go on beach walks there, or maybe go for a coffee.

I'm very independent by nature, it's just how I am. I've always fought my own battles, and my accident hasn't prevented me from living my life. For instance, I don't need any help at home, as I've always been fine to look after my own place, cook my own meals, drive a car, and manage my bills, so I haven't needed any practical in-home help. I even get back onto my motorbike from time to time. But on the not-so-great days, it's good to have Flourish

Australia's support on offer. If I'm unsure about something, they can help me to figure it out.

This pressure on my brain stemmed from a serious head injury I sustained in a motorcycle accident a decade ago. Due to my brain injury, I also experience nightmares every night, and I sleepwalk. I'm taking medication for both these issues. I've found that if I get stressed throughout the day, then the medication doesn't work as well. Sometimes the nightmares will really rattle me, and I'll connect up with the Flourish Australia staff if I'm not feeling my best because of that.

Burning The Midnight Oil Online

Before my hospital admission, I was doing an online TAFE course and a number of edX courses through University. I was pretty much living on the computer. On top of my online studies, in the real world

I was learning how to operate an excavator.

I was studying so much because I was made redundant at work, and I found that trying to get a new job during COVID-19 was a waste of time. I really wanted to become re-qualified and get back to work in another field, so I pushed myself hard to get through my courses. On a lighter note, I'd actually started an online Tourism course just before COVID hit. Not the best time to join the tourism industry!

Unfortunately, the pressure on my brain hit me a month before I finished my TAFE course, so I had to put my education on hold for a while.

What is edX?

My online Uni courses are called "edX" courses, and they're provided by Universities and Colleges all over the world. So far I've done edX courses through Universities in Queensland, Perth and South Australia, as well as Unis in America and England. A lot of these courses consist of watching videos and filling out question sheets, followed by completing a 500 or 1,500 word essay to graduate. Exact details depends on which Uni you go through, but it's pretty straightforward.

You can do six-week courses, or eight-week edX courses. I found I could comfortably complete an eight-week course in a month. These edX courses are only \$150 each, and there are around 3,000 courses on offer worldwide, so everyone should be able to find something they'd enjoy learning about.

Botox: Not just for the Hollywood Glitterati

When possible, I try to get all my medical stuff done through Medicare. But I also have

NDIS funding for seeing a psychologist, and for getting botox injections.

Getting shots of botox in my arm and head every three months to stop the muscle spasms has really helped. Usually people associate botox with cosmetic procedures and getting rid of wrinkles, so my friends are always joking about how

I should save some of it for them! After the botox injection I feel a bit sluggish, and as it wears off over several weeks, the muscle spasms in my arm gradually come back.

Something else that helped after my motorbike accident was doing physio, but I was already a regular at the gym, and I've continued working out ever since to keep fit. I also love to surf, but since the accident I haven't done it as much. The beach is only a five minute drive, so it's easy to reach if I ever feel like it.

Returning to Work

I've actually just found a new job role. I completed a Traffic Controller course, and I've found work in the Occupational Health and Safety field. So I'll be doing things like putting out the orange cones to divert traffic, using the Stop/Start sign to guide drivers, and I'll be working at building sites doing safety tasks for a construction company. I told the company about all the details of my accident and how it impacts me now, and I did some function tests to demonstrate that I could do the job. The company is currently working out if they'll need to make any reasonable adjustments to allow me to do my job properly, so I just need to wait for them to sort out all the nitty-gritty things before I can start.

One of the long-term effects of my accident and traumatic head injury is that I have my arm in a brace due to muscle spasms, but that won't get in the way of doing my job. I'm sure people will wonder about it, and I don't mind explaining it to them.

I went through a Disability Employment Service to get this job, so the employer automatically knew I had a disability of some kind. But the DES was sure to point out that I'm capable of doing this job, or they wouldn't have suggested it to me. The DES has been in ongoing talks with the company to make sure everything gets arranged smoothly. The company and the bosses and the site manager will know who I am, and what adjustments I'll need, when I turn up for work.

I'm excited to finally get back to work, and I feel hopeful about my future.

What is a Traffic Controller?

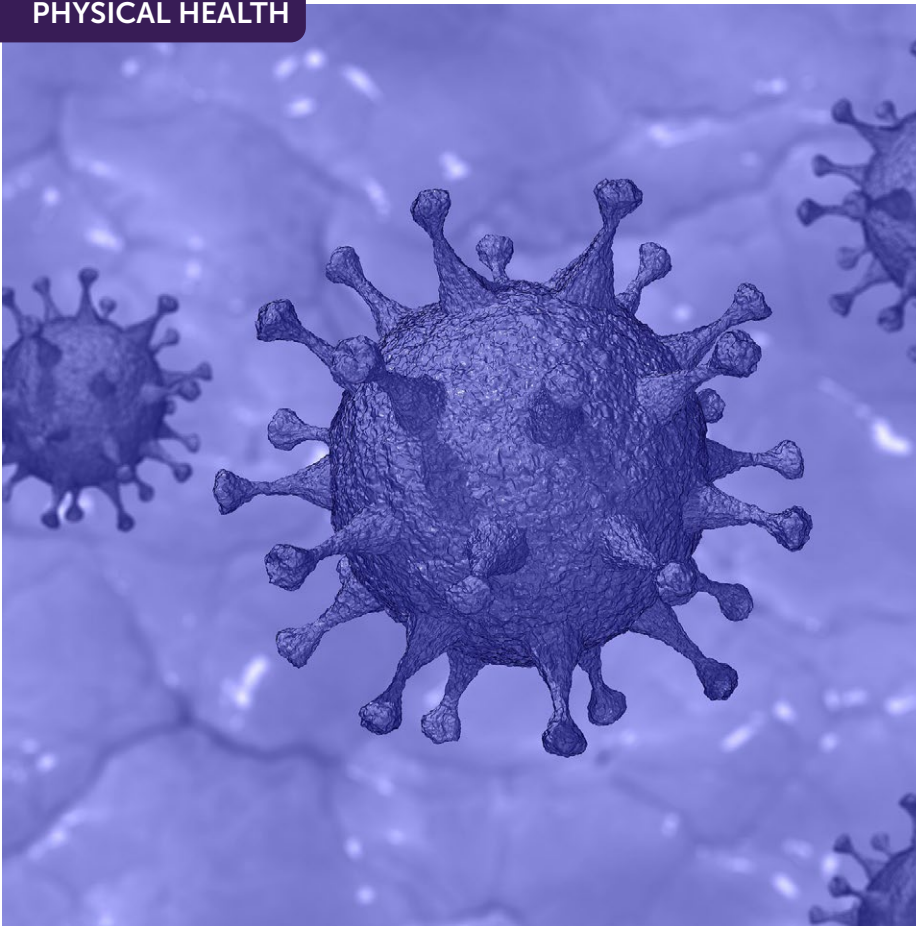
A traffic controller directs the flow of vehicles, machinery and people on roads and other work sites, as well as setting up signage and safety barriers.

Traffic Controller accreditation is available at many colleges and training institutes.



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International HPV Awareness Day: Why We **Need** To Talk About It

By Grant J Everett

March 4th is International HPV Awareness Day. HPV is short for "human papillomavirus," the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) on Earth. 80% of us will catch a strain of HPV at some point in our lives, and it affects people of every background, nationality, race, and gender.

HPV is easily passed from one person to another by skin-to-skin contact, and does not necessarily require sexual contact to be transmitted. Considering how common HPV is, general community awareness is shockingly low.

There are almost 200 strains of HPV, and a lot of the time they don't cause any problems. However, the strains of HPV that are most commonly spread by sexual contact

can increase your risks of cancer in the mouth, throat, cervix, vagina, vulva, anus and penis.

Why we need to screen

Most people who have an HPV infection won't even know they have it. This is either because their body's immune system destroys the virus before it causes symptoms (most people will get over HPV within a couple of years), or because it's asymptomatic (presents no symptoms).

What can we do to stay safe against HPV?

While you can't entirely protect yourself against HPV short of never coming in contact with another human being ever again, there are precautions you can take to reduce your risk. As always, it's advisable to use condoms whenever you have

sex in order to minimise the spread of HPV, but as condoms don't cover the whole genital area, you can still be infected by skin-to-skin contact.

Modern HPV vaccines have proven to be 90% effective in preventing infections, so getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself against HPV and its related cancers. Unfortunately, once you get HPV the virus is immune to antibiotics and antivirals, so there's not too much you can do once you have it.

Sometimes, HPV can cause genital warts. So if you notice any small bumps shaped a bit like cauliflower, or have itching and discomfort around your genitals, you should contact your healthcare provider. There are treatments available for genital warts, but no cure.

The Most Important Thing To Screen For

For a small number of people, HPV can cause persistent infections that cannot be cleared by their immune system, and over time this can lead to cells turning cancerous. Of the cancers caused by HPV, cervical cancer in women is by far the most common. Combined, HPV cancers claim almost half a million lives globally every year.

As with any cancer, early identification will often lead to better outcomes. Some HPV-related cancers, such as cervical cancer, have specialised screening tests that can catch cell changes before they lead to tumors. While a lot of women often feel uncomfortable at the thought of being checked, the cervical swab is not painful, and it is over before you know it. You only need to do this every five years.

While cervical cancers in women accounts for most HPV related cancer diagnoses, it's also responsible for 60,000 cancer diagnoses in men each year. At the moment, there is no approved screening test for HPV in men.

With the right tools and knowledge, many lives could be saved. Increasing awareness is vital, so having a conversation with friends and family about HPV is a very simple way we can fight the stigma, and the silence, that's commonly associated with this STI.

Source: www.askabout HPV.org



SHOPPING ETHICALLY ON A BUDGET: KEEPING YOUR SHOPPING LIST PLANET-FRIENDLY

By Grant J Everett

1. Can you repair something you already own?
2. Can you buy a reusable product instead of a disposable one?
3. Can you get it second-hand from a charity shop, online marketplace, or actual markets?
4. Do you really need it? Try holding off buying it for 24 hours.

Many Little Ways to Buy Ethically

Buying local produce greatly reduces the impact of long-distance transport, clothing rental services can be a great option if you need an outfit for a one-off formal occasion like a wedding or a job interview, and if you like reading, then libraries and op-shops are the way to go for reading on the cheap or even for nothing.

Cheaper products may be tempting, but they're likely of a lower quality and less durable due to cost cutting. High prices aren't always an indicator of quality, however, so do your research.

It's a good idea to check the running costs of appliances, like how much electricity or water they require, before you buy them. The Energy Star or WELS water-use rating is a good way to gauge how much it requires to run. The more stars, the more efficient it is, and the better it is for the environment... and your bills.

Australians throw away almost 2 million tonnes of packaging each year. Buying products with less packaging reduces how much ends up in landfill. Also look out for recyclable packaging.

The "Shop Ethical" website can help you to make informed ethical purchases by reviewing the social and environmental track record of well-known brands. Other websites that can educate you about issues like child labour and sustainability include "Be Slavery Free," "Good On You," and "Good Fish."

SOURCE:
www.choice.com.au/shopping/everyday-shopping/ethical-buying-and-giving/articles/ethical-shopping-on-a-budget

Ethical shopping means making choices at the checkout that have an impact on injustice, waste and unsustainable practices. Green options include buying organic or free-range products, choosing recyclable packaging, identifying products that are fair trade and slavery-free, or just eating less meat.

Ethical companies will proudly declare their policies on their products and their websites. They may be transitioning to green energy, working towards being carbon neutral, or eliminating worker exploitation. To see if they're walking the walk, look for ethical certification labels like Fairtrade Chocolate, BCI-Certified Cotton, Rainforest Alliance Coffee, Australian Certified Organic or Vegan Australia Certified items, or paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

Analysing the cost

Ethical, sustainable products are often manufactured to stricter standards, resulting in higher costs for materials and workers' wages. Being certified organic, vegan or fair trade will also add to the cost.

Consumer demand for ethical products has increased over time, so many mainstream chains and companies are producing these options. The hope is that as ethical products become more popular and the manufacturing infrastructure is built, the price should go down.

Some options

With the cost of living always going up, and with greener and ethical products usually costing more, making ethical choices can be difficult for those of us on a budget.

Buying less is even better for the planet than buying green, and it's great for your budget. Over-consumption takes a huge toll on the environment, so before getting out your debit card, ask yourself some simple questions...



BELOW FROM LEFT: Mental Health Worker Peter Harvey, and Adrian Broughton. Adrian enjoys the CPS Program at Penrith. PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

Flourish Australia’s Penrith Service Opens its Doors to the Community

By Grant J Everett

Flourish Australia’s day-to-day living centre at Penrith is only a ten minute walk from the train station. This service held an Open Day to show the locals what’s on offer.

This Open Day was kicked off by a Welcome To Country and a smoking ceremony run by Uncle Colin, an Aboriginal man who used to work for Flourish Australia at Bathurst.

The Flourish Australia staff and the people who access services were all very hospitable and keen to answer any questions that visitors (such as myself) may have. Information booths handed out goodie bags filled with Flourish Australia information and little presents, and every visitor was welcome to a tour of the premises to get a feel about what’s on offer.

There were opportunities for artistic expression on the day, like painting and sand pouring, as art classes are a regular and popular part of this service’s calendar. There were also a lot of animated conversations happening all day.

Following a spread of sandwiches, fresh fruit and juice, the member’s band entertained us with a wide variety of popular songs, including Heartbeat, Born On The Bayou, Rebel Rebel, Feeling Groovy, I Would Walk Five Hundred Miles, Three Little Birds, and Bad Moon Rising. Musicians Adrian Broughton, Karl Zirn and Flourish Australia Mental Health Worker Lisa Crawford gave it their all.

Penrith’s “bread and butter”

Penrith offers a wide range of support, but its two core services are the Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program (CPS), and the Young People’s Program (affectionately known as YPP). Both of these services are recovery focused, and tailored specifically to each person’s unique needs and situation in a safe and culturally appropriate way.

CPS Program

Flourish Australia’s CPS Program provides support for people with a mental health issue and psychosocial disability who aren’t already supported through the NDIS or any other arrangement. Any support

person, clinical or otherwise, can refer you to the CPS Program, and you’re also welcome to refer yourself! You don’t need a formal diagnosis or a letter from a medical professional to get involved.

Psychosocial support is about being there for you while you build capacity, manage your day-to-day life, take part in activities, and develop and maintain good social connections. The CPS Program can support your recovery journey by helping you to increase your independence, learn new skills, and build your confidence as you work towards your goals. They can help you with your NDIS plans and paperwork, and provide a sympathetic ear when you need it.

The Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program can also help with financial literacy and budgeting, finding and maintaining a home, pursuing vocational skills and educational goals, maintaining your physical health and wellbeing, managing drug and alcohol addictions, including tobacco, building confidence and resilience, finding employment that’s right for you.

Other Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Programs are available at more than 25 Flourish Australia locations, so even if you're a long, long way from Penrith, there's likely to be a Flourish Australia service within range of where you're at.

YPP

If you are aged 16-24 and receiving support from a GP, a psychologist, a psychiatrist or some other professional, you're likely eligible for support from Flourish Australia's Young People's Program. Anybody can refer you, and this includes self referrals.

YPP supports young people who are at risk of developing functional limitations due to a mental health issue. Penrith's friendly and supportive YPP staff can help you to establish your goals and develop strategies to help you work toward achieving them. They also offer non-clinical support from community-based Peer Workers who have a lived experience of a mental health issue of their own, and they can come to where you live.

The most common goals of YPP participants are connecting with education and employment, getting involved with social activities, developing their people skills, forming healthy habits such as a good diet and regular exercise, and

connecting with their culture and heritage. Staff proceed at your pace as they learn what works best for you, and can work collaboratively with any support people you want to involve.

YPP offers more than one-on-one support. For instance, the Social Group is a chill-out space that's all about fun and games with the other young people. The group decides what they want to do, so they'll often go on dinner outings, sing at karaoke nights, attend dance competitions, and just generally HAVE FUN while making new friends. We also offer lots to do during the school holidays.

We look forward to sharing your recovery journey with you!

NDIS

A third major service the staff at Penrith offer is support with your NDIS applications and planning, so be sure to get in touch to find out how they can assist with what can often be a complicated process.

A Long Legacy

Flourish Australia has decades of experience in helping people who have a lived experience of a mental health issue to live contributing lives in the community. Our staff recognise the importance of being in control of setting your own direction, so how we support you has to be

agreed on by YOU. We listen when you tell us what you need, and if you aren't sure what that is just yet, we're happy to help figure it out with you.

In addition to formal qualifications, many Flourish Australia staff have a lived experience of a mental health issue. This gives them an invaluable perspective, and makes them excellent role models. These workers can tell you about what works and doesn't work for them, and many people have found that sharing their problems and concerns with staff members who have a similar lived experience can be inspirational.

Flourish Australia services offer a non-judgemental, realistic perspective as you create your own "roadmap" of realistic goals. We'll help you break down your goals into measurable, achievable chunks, and support you with each step. We won't dictate when and how you should do things, though. We just see you for who you are, and believe in your potential. Our support really works!

Flourish Australia Penrith,
 232 Derby Street,
 Penrith NSW 2750
 Open 9am-5pm, Mon to Fri
 Call us on 1300 779 270



R-L FROM TOP:
 Manager Ruby Golding, and Team Coordinators Lisa Nattrass, Sarah Mitchell, Cassandra Williams, and Sophie Boschenok. PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

In Recovery, We Are the Holders of Hope

By Annie Sykes (as told to Grant J Everett)



ANNIE SYKES is the Senior Independent Advocate for Flourish Australia. Annie’s contribution to improving the lives of people with a lived experience was celebrated in the book “Hope, strength and determination - Celebrating 50 years of women activists and reformers in mental health in NSW 1970–2020.”

We’re honoured to give Annie the opportunity to share her inspiring story...

Wanting To Change The Status Quo

I first became interested in working in the mental health sector after having a lived experience of a mental health issue and many hospital admissions.

Back in the early 1970s, the only job role I could do in the mental health system was psychiatric nursing, so I studied that at Tokanui psychiatric hospital in New Zealand. Those four years at hospital were tough because I was constantly relapsing and going in and out of hospital, and I left the course three months early.

The System, Then and Now

The mental health system was difficult back then, it’s still difficult now, and everybody knows it. I have always questioned how things are run in mental health, and while I believe my hospital admissions saved my life, there was a lot of ugliness in how the patients were treated. We had no rights, and no real way to complain about our poor treatment. I found the Australian system very similar to the New Zealand system in regards to their attitudes and the ways they ran things. For instance, the staff wouldn’t even bother to tell us when somebody died; sometimes we’d get up for breakfast and one of us simply wasn’t there anymore. There was no respect.

A New Calling

My focus switched to advocacy work almost as soon as I discovered it. During my last admission to Roselle hospital in 1995 there was a major breach of my confidentiality, so I made a formal complaint, and Peter Scharken (a respected peer worker and consultant from the old days) advocated for me. I ended up receiving a formal apology, and disciplinary action was taken against the staff member who was at fault. As advocacy was based on providing justice and fairness for all, something that was a new experience for me, I was certain I wanted to do this as a career.

After doing my training at North Shore Hospital, in 2001 I gained my

first advocacy job with PRA (now known as Flourish Australia). Since then, I've seen people's human rights greatly improve.

My Career

Becoming an effective advocate meant combining my formal training with my lived experience of a mental health issue. Due to my history, I am also well equipped to work with people who may have experienced trauma, and it's always my top priority to avoid retraumatizing the people who seek my support.

Back when I started off, there was no set model with how advocacy was supposed to work, so I was truly breaking new ground almost every day. It's now been two decades, and I'm still creating new roads! For instance, recovery is a huge deal in the mental health field now, and I've always lived and breathed recovery. It plays a major role in my advocacy work.

In recent weeks I've had a lot of advocacy cases come in, so I'm looking at doing more hours to cover the workload, and Flourish Australia is exploring whether we might bring a new independent advocate on board.

I am still passionate about my work, and I know I have a lot more to offer as an advocate.

What I've Learned

Being on a recovery journey can make it very easy to be down on ourselves. We can be our own worst critics, and the stigma and discrimination we face doesn't make it any easier. But I always try to remember that I am the best version of who I am at this moment in time. We all have the potential for growth, and Flourish Australia can help.

I would say building a support network is vital. I'm so grateful to those who helped me grow and recover and achieve my potential. I've reached the point where I get through relapses a lot quicker, and thankfully I'm no longer experiencing that constant negative internal dialogue that

tells me, "You're a failure, you'll never get anywhere in life." We all need people who encourage us to explore the possibilities of our futures.

We also need to gain an understanding of ourselves. If you have an appreciation of where you've come from, this will provide insights into where you are today and where you're going next. I used to feel like every relapse was a failure on my part, as though the bar was set too high and recovery was out of reach. But I now accept and embrace my mental health issues as a part of who I am, rather than a defect. I no longer live in

"Recovery is not linear, and wherever you are in your recovery journey is the right place for you for now. It's where you need to be, and that's the principal of recovery."

– Annie Sykes

What is a

SENIOR INDEPENDENT ADVOCATE?

The Senior Independent Advocate is a person who is independent from Flourish Australia staff. They work collaboratively with people who access Flourish Australia services, staff and management to resolve problems and achieve a positive outcome.

Independent advocacy is available for everyone who accesses Flourish Australia services, and is a FREE service.



fear of relapse or beat myself up for taking time off work.

Above all, I think it's important for everyone to know that we are all holders of hope. When we're feeling a bit wobbly, then somebody else can hold that hope for us. And as we continue along our journey, it's important to know that we can come back to this hope in time.

I'm very proud of being 70 years young, and I feel a real sense of peace and contentment with where I am in life. I'm no longer just surviving: I'm thriving and flourishing! I'm finally comfortable in my own skin.



When the Levee (Almost) Breaks Floods Test Our Mettle Again

By Warren Heggarty

Flourish Australia operates services all over Eastern Australia, including remote areas, so we never underestimate the psychological impact of flood and fire. Most recently floods have caused so much difficulty for staff and for people who access our services.

We also never underestimate the positive impact that good preparations have. That is why our various sites have developed Person-Led Emergency Preparedness Plans so that everyone knows what to do. These include maintaining communication with the people who access our services, and checking that people are prepared and safe whether it is flood or fire.

One staff member who really knows what to do is Tim Owers from our

Wagga Wagga service. Tim is a volunteer with the NSW Rural Fire Service. A couple of years ago he sent us some spectacular pictures taken while he was fighting the fires during the summer of 2019/2020. More recently, he has been sandbagging at Moama.

Moama is the twin town of Echuca on the Murray River. In October these towns (along with many others throughout the East) were threatened by floods that seemed likely to break the record levels set in 1993. Low lying areas in the east of the town were already under water when Tim went down there as part of an advance party of 12 RFS volunteers.

The advantage of getting in early was that they got to stay in hotels and eat at the RSL at Deniliquin (where Flourish Australia also runs a service). Moama itself was shut and the Base Camp which normally

accommodates volunteers had not been set up.

The Mayor was sure the levee banks would hold, but there was one small problem. According to Tim there was a place where the levee bank crossed over a road, but did not resume until about 250m later. That point had to be sandbagged urgently.

'The locals were fantastic,' says Tim. 'We all formed chain gangs that passed the sandbags along until we had plugged the gap.'

But there was more to do, 'We also worked with local council staff to protect some of the council assets from damage.' One important job was to set up pumps to move storm water from within the levee banks.

While thus occupied, Tim still found time to check on the people back in Flourish Australia Wagga Wagga. 'I was working with our Team Coordinators about our emergency

preparedness plans, about checking on people who access our local services from low lying areas.

Tim of course has some experience doing this kind of thing and so we would do well to heed his warning. 'During floods never enter the floodwaters while driving. You never know whether the road beneath the water has been totally destroyed. So many people have to be rescued because they have driven where they shouldn't.'

At the time of writing (November) there are still a lot of roads cut by floodwaters. Tim says, 'I know that some roads are still closed from Wagga to Narranderra and at Corowa and Temora, Forbes and Parkes. We're having a training session on Wednesday (early in November) and I'm not sure if everyone will be able to get in for it!' Let's hope it dries up soon – but hopefully not TOO much!

LEEFT: The damage caused to some roads is pretty disastrous. RIGHT TOP, MIDDLE: The RFS crew and locals formed a sandbagging 'chain gang' PHOTOS BY TIM OWERS



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