

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

panorama

Monthly Issue June 2023 #89C

Gerry Connolly:

*Looking Back
on 17 Years
with Flourish
Australia*



Introducing
The Connection Team

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Mental Health Issues
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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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Contributors include...

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Contributions are welcome!

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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



The Flourish Australia Connection Team: Your First Point of Contact

By Mark Cliff (as told to Warren Heggarty and Grant J Everett)

The Connection Team know all about the NDIS, and how to link you up with the services you need. You can get in touch with them by phone, email, or Live Chat on the Flourish Australia website.

The Connection Team started off in 2019 with just two Enquiries Officers, and has since grown to a team of six: Fiona, Patricia, Kathy, Maddie and Michelle. They manage both inbound and outbound calls, and are a core part of Flourish Australia's quality and safeguarding initiative.

Good customer service is very important, which is why the Connection Team provides "no wrong door" guidance for callers, even if what the person is

after doesn't fall within Flourish Australia's scope.

FIONA: People often call us asking what kinds of programs we have. It might be a member of the general public, or somebody calling on another person's behalf. Callers are usually interested in getting out of the house, making friends in their local community, applying for the NDIS, and finding a job. Increasingly, people are asking for assistance with finding stable accommodation.

We can connect people with Flourish Australia staff in their local area, which is as simple as making a call to the service or emailing the Manager, and we can also provide information about other support options in their area, like Commonwealth Psychosocial Support programs.

News about good service gets around!

Checking in

It's very important that we maintain our duty of care with everyone who accesses services. If somebody is meant to be receiving some kind of support, such as attending a day-to-day living centre or a face-to-face home visit, but the staff cannot get in touch with the person, then we will also get in touch to make sure they're okay.

Even if a person has decided to disengage from services, we still want to be sure that they're safe.

Farewell, and all the best

If somebody exits Flourish Australia services because they're doing really well and feel they don't need our support anymore, great! But we want to ensure that they have all the ongoing assistance they need to live in the community. For this reason, after 2 months we'll get in touch to ensure the person is okay, and that they have what they need. Follow up is vital to prevent the chances of a person relapsing, feeling isolated, or ending up back in hospital.

We also want people to know that they are welcome to come back to Flourish Australia in the future if the need arises.

What the Enquiries Team love about their jobs

FIONA: I enjoy this role because it provides a lot of variety. Every enquiry is different. Our aim is that every enquirer completes their interaction with us feeling heard and respected, and that their enquiry has been addressed.

I often need to access specific information very quickly for callers, and I enjoy researching and formatting our secure record keeping system to make it easy for our team to support callers in future.

KATHY: I love being part of a switched-on team that supports each other. I also know that for some callers, past trauma can make reaching out a hard thing to do, so I congratulate people for being brave enough to take this first step. It's a good feeling whenever I get the chance to encourage somebody.

MADDIE: I enjoy supporting people to learn and understand their options when they are feeling distressed. Sometimes, there is a sigh of relief once a person learns there are options out there. Another highlight for me is that our team works really successfully remotely, as I'm based in Tumut, a long way from the rest of the team.

MICHELLE: Whilst I have only been working with the Connections team for a short time and I'm still learning the ropes the team have been really helpful in supporting me to learn a little more each shift and I'm moving towards feeling confident in the processes. My favourite part of the role is knowing you are able to give someone hope that there are supports available to them, often observing a change from sadness in their voice to happier statements of gratitude.

How can you help callers?

PATRICIA: People may call us when they are faced with a crisis or feeling distressed. Communicating with sincerity allows the person to feel genuinely supported, and having a broad knowledge of our organisation's services and programs allows me to improve a person's journey.

PATRICIA: Overall, we create a safe supportive space for people to talk and discuss their needs. So if you know anyone who is seeking services, here are our contact details...



Link up with the **Connection Team**
Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, through...

LiveChat on the Flourish Australia website
(click the *Chat With Us* button on the bottom right of the screen)

Call on **1300 356 874**

Or email us at ndis.online@flourishaustralia.org.au

NOTE: The Connection Team is **NOT** a crisis service or emergency service. Dial 000 in an emergency, or call Lifeline for anonymous and confidential 24-hour crisis support on 13 11 14.

ABOVE: Maddie, an Enquiries Officer with our Connection Team. OPPOSITE, TOP: Enquiries Officers Fiona. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Enquiries Officer Kathy.



THE WELL OF RESILIENCE

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2023

By Tina Irving

She started life as a South Sudanese refugee living in camps in Ethiopia and Kenya and came to a new life as a lawyer in Australia. Flourish Australia was honoured to have Nyadol Nyuon OAM as special guest for our 2023 International Women's Day Let's Do Lunch event

With great humility, Nyadol told her audience that grace and luck have a hand in every woman's journey. "I credit what I've achieved to the kind and generous women all around me, who encouraged me to keep going whenever doubt crept in."

Born into a refugee camp, Nyadol shared that her mother was forced to flee on foot with her young daughters and newborn baby, for 40 days and 40 nights in pouring

rain. "The memory impressed upon me what a strong and determined woman my mother was. An excellent student, life circumstances beyond her control deprived her of the education and opportunities I've had in my life."

"I don't think of resilience as a wall," Nyadol says. "Experiencing trauma in my life triggered me to try to control everything to guarantee my survival, but it doesn't work. It just takes something big enough to hit it, and the barrier you put up to protect yourself will break." Instead, Nyadol suggests seeing resilience as a well that you need to fill daily, through self care, so it's full when you need to draw on it.

"When you exist in survival mode and a reactive state for so long, you mute certain aspects of yourself as a coping strategy" she explained.

"Limiting myself to an intellectual focus was a way of not feeling my internal world, where our true identity is found."

Separation from her family, and abusive situations, growing up in refugee camps, gave Nyadol a hunger to advocate for human rights. "Yet I pursued a career in commercial law as a sort of coping strategy."

Admitting to living with a sense of 'imposter syndrome', she screamed and jumped for joy when first accepted into a law degree at Melbourne University, after coming to Australia at the age of 18. "I was 100% sure I'd be rejected," she said, revealing a pattern of self doubt that has continued despite doors continually opening in her life. "I was painfully aware of a gap between myself and others and felt like a fraud. Then when I experienced a marriage breakdown and began a new life as a single parent, I worried constantly. I pushed myself to keep going, until my body showed me otherwise."

The gift of that experience was being held up by the women in her community, "something I might otherwise never have experienced, that has shaped me into the woman I am today."

Mental wellbeing comes with consciously cultivating healthy relationships, listening to your body, and nurturing an inner life you can retreat to when the world feels overwhelming.

With her own children, Nyadol chose to break the pattern of growing up without a mum or dad, by leaving the career she had fought so hard for, to be there for her children. "It felt like a form of dying to give up what I held as my identity, to change my family story," she said.

For all of the forms success has taken in her journey, Nyadol considers herself, first and foremost, a loving and supportive mum. Her hope for her daughter is that she will make the most of the opportunities made available to her by the women in her family who have gone before her, but that she will not need to fight so hard for future generations, "if we all do our part to embrace equity."

**ABOVE: Nyadol Nyuon OAM
PORTRAIT BY L. MCINTOSH**



Q&A With Nyadol

Q: What kept you going in the right direction in life?

A: I enter into any challenge or opportunity with the assumption it will be okay. It's helpful to find 2 or 3 valued things that anchor you and fill you up.

Q: How did you remain authentic to find your identity and maintain emotional and mental wellbeing?

A: I constantly question who I am and the choices I make. We are social beings who thrive when connected to others, so it's important to consider the choice that's right for me in each scenario, in what's relevant within the communities I belong to.

Q: Is there somewhere in the world you look to for inspiration around equity?

A: The Nordic countries are progressing well institutionally, and not just around shifting attitudes.

Q: How do you see an end to discrimination?

A: I don't see an end to it. I believe what matters is that we keep standing on the shoulders of those who've gone before us to bring hope through action, whether we succeed or not.

Q What would you say to teenage girls about embracing equity and wellbeing?

A: Embrace your stubborn need to be yourself. Insist on living life on your terms! When I gave up my law career, I didn't know what I was doing, Moving into another threshold isn't always obvious at the time.

Q: In your culture, how is mental health viewed?

A: When you live in survival mode, you are either 'OK' or you completely break down and are seen as "crazy," but that's developing and changing. The older generation can't understand the high rates of suicide among young people in my community in Australia "where there are no bombs," so the 18-25's are demanding to have the conversations and parents are listening.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Susan, Fay, Gwen, Doris

BIG QUESTIONS FOR NYADOL

By Grant J Everett

"What I got most out of Nyadol's talk was the metaphor of seeing resilience as a well," said Fay Jackson, Flourish Australia's General Manager Inclusion. "If you keep drawing from the well without replenishing it, eventually the well will run dry. We must do what we can to ensure our lives and wellbeing are sustainable. I will now always remember to check the water level of that resilience well so that I do not run dry."

"Nyadol is such an inspiring woman, and I found her comments to be really thoughtful, humbling, and very practical," said Susan McCarthy, Chief Operating Officer of Flourish Australia. "There is a lot to take away from her discussion, such as remembering to be kind to yourself and recognising you won't always react the same way to every situation, and it's all part of life and growing as a person."

"I feel challenged to face who I am," said Gwen Challenger-Scotman,

a pioneer of lived experience rights and a long-time supporter of Flourish Australia. "I'm going to avoid being a workaholic, and keep my authentic self by embracing stubbornness. Carry yourself with grace and joy, and live the life you have now, doing the best you can. We create hope by our actions, so start with the belief you are going to be okay."

"I thoroughly enjoyed the talk and agree that the strength of our community is measured by how we treat the most vulnerable," said Doris Kluge, Flourish Australia's Senior People and Culture Advisor. "Using reading and exercise as anchors for self-care is something I personally utilise and value. The advice to young women to not concede too much and embrace being yourself is so important in an often superficial society. Lastly, I liked the comment that fear doesn't go away, but we can turn up anyway and trust in ourselves and the people who support us."



Putting in the Work to Build the Life I Want

By Beau Mitchel (as told to Grant J Everett)

I access Flourish Australia's Hervey Bay service two days a week, and I've been going there for about 5 years. Most of the support I receive from this service is attending the Men's Group and the Mindfulness Group, and I use those as a recovery tool. The Men's Group is a good social opportunity, and the Mindfulness Group teaches meditation and relaxation.

My first contact with Flourish Australia was when a friend invited me to a group in the park at Maryborough, where I lived at the time. I enjoyed this so much that I moved to Hervey Bay specifically so I could attend the local Flourish Australia centre. There were also many more job opportunities, and I was unemployed at the time of moving.

I'm very fortunate to live at the Esplanade, right on the beach.

Cars And Careers

I didn't own a car for a long time, as I didn't have the need or the means. I relied on public transport, walking and cycling. But I recently bought a car off my brother-in-law and my sister, and this has allowed me to gain employment as a disability support worker.

This is a role that requires a car, as I regularly drive people to local events, appointments, BBQs, that sort of thing. The first person I supported was a young man with autism, and now I'm caring for a man who has a vision impairment and an acquired brain injury. He is about my age, and he needs a lot of support. I actually do 3 overnight shifts a week where I work until 9pm, then I do a sleepover.

Sometimes my work can be stressful, and that makes my downtime very important. I enjoy just kicking back and streaming some shows, or getting a coffee and sitting on the beach, just existing with nature. And while I'd like to support another person, then I'd be doing fulltime hours, and I'm not sure I want to do that just yet.

Connecting

I've made a lot of friends at Flourish Australia, and found the social aspect the most rewarding part. I now have a good mate, Colin, who's a regular at the Hervey Bay service, and he attends the groups with me. Colin is really intelligent, and we have great conversations. We'll often meet up in the community for a coffee or for lunch when we can find time in our busy lives.

I haven't been too outgoing and social in the past; I was always a bit shy, and I experienced feelings of shame because of my mental health issues. I felt like I couldn't talk about them, and even nowadays there's still a huge stigma. However, Flourish Australia is a safe place where people relate to what you're going through, and a lot of the staff have a lived experience, too.

Anonymous

Back in 2001, I was working at an Op Shop in my early 20s when I was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. I was relying on drugs and alcohol to escape my issues at the time.

“Flourish Australia is a safe place where people relate to what you’re going through, and a lot of the staff have a lived experience, too.”

This led to spending 11 months at a Salvation Army rehab called the Bridge Program. It was based at a working farm, and specialised in what’s known as “Dual Diagnosis,” which means treating mental health issues and substance issues at the same time. I resolved to work on my problems rather than masking them with substances, and learnt the tools I needed to maintain my self-care.

I was so keen to get started at the rehab that I was calling the program every day from the Men’s Shelter.

Thankfully, I haven’t needed to attend AA or NA for 18 years. I don’t have any concerns about relapsing.

Elite

Long distance running is a big part of my story. I worked my way up to half marathons, and one year I actually won the Hervey Bay Quarter Marathon. That’s my claim to fame! I won that race 12 years ago, the same year my daughter was born, and she knows I used to be a sportsman.

I continued to compete in long distance running as a part of my recovery until an injury got me.

Family

I’m close with my brother, my sister, and my mum.

My brother is a bit of a couch surfer, so he stays at my place often, and I help him out wherever I can. I just let him do his own thing, and be there for him when he needs it.

My sister moved to Perth with her partner, so I’ve stayed in touch through social media nearly every day. She likes to use SnapChat.

I have a great relationship with Mum, but this wasn’t the case when I was abusing alcohol and smoking pot. Over the years she’s seen me do the hard yards, watched me take 11 months out of my life to do the rehab program, and she’s seen my transformation into a good father who makes wise, healthy choices.

Mum is only a half-hour away in Maryborough, so I catch up with her whenever I’m in the area.

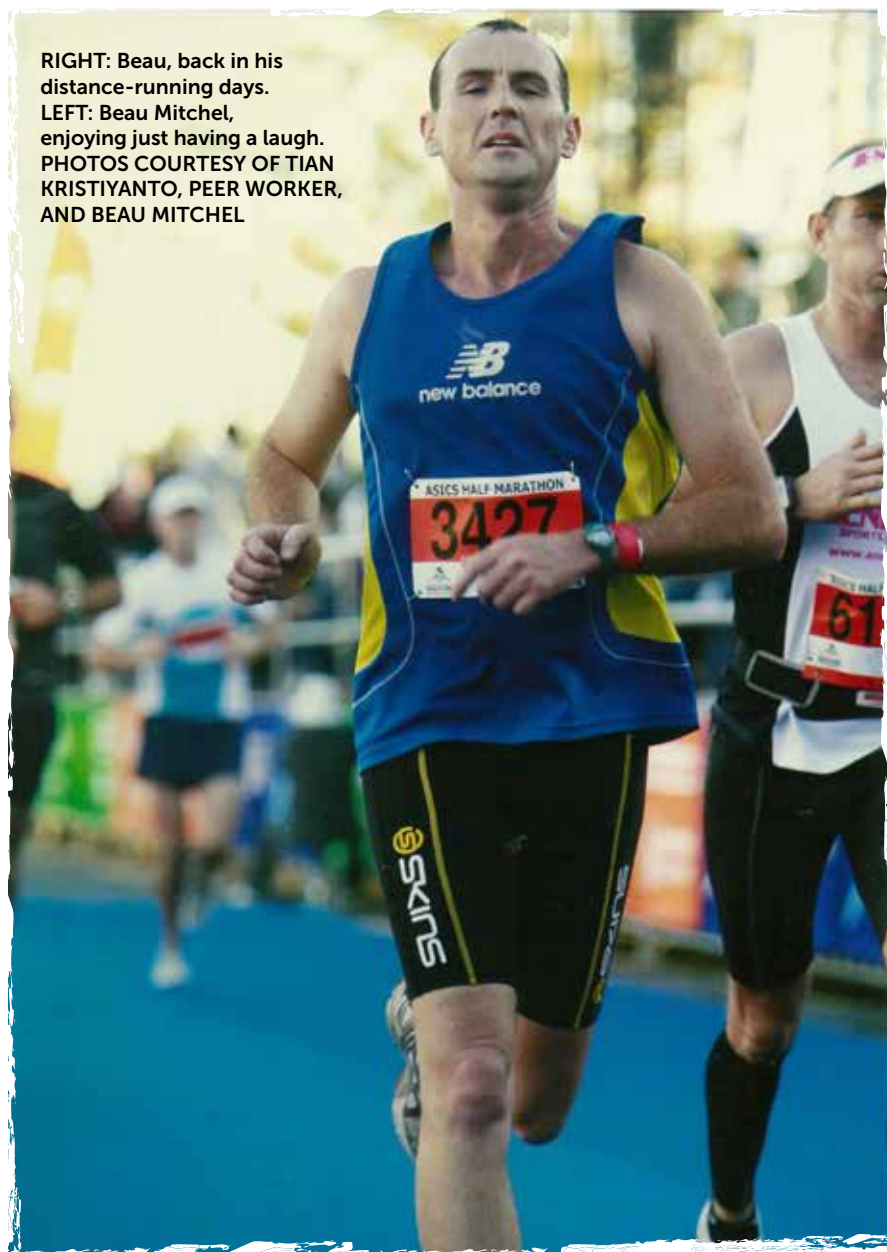
Goals

My goals are simple: I want to maintain a happy, sober lifestyle.

When it comes to employment goals, I do a lot of nightwork, so I’d like to move back into normal office hours. It would be good to dial work back a bit and focus on myself more, as it can be emotionally and mentally draining. I’m actually interested in becoming an independent support worker, so

I’m planning to find out what I have to do to become qualified.

Most of all, I want to maintain a good relationship with my daughter, to be a good dad. I’m going to meet the faculty of her school today, and I’m glad I can be the dad she deserves. If I hadn’t done the hard yards years ago, I might not be able to offer her this.



RIGHT: Beau, back in his distance-running days. LEFT: Beau Mitchel, enjoying just having a laugh. PHOTOS COURTESY OF TIAN KRISTIYANTO, PEER WORKER, AND BEAU MITCHEL

Flourish Australia Hervey Bay
Unit 6 & 7, 10 Liuzzi Street, Pialba QLD 4655
8:30AM - 8PM Weekdays
2:30PM - 8PM Weekends
(07) 5293 5350

Looking Back on 17 Years with Flourish Australia

By Gerry Connolly
(as told to Grant J Everett)



After working at Flourish Australia’s Prestige Packing community business at Harris Park for 17 years, Gerry is retiring on the 21st of April. He was kind enough to share his experiences...

I’ve always known that I need to do constructive things with my hands for the sake of my mental health, so when a nurse at Cumberland named Debbie encouraged me to give Prestige Packing a try, I did. It’s been a major part of my ongoing wellness ever since.

When I first started, there were only two people I knew: Warren and Charlie. I’d actually been employed with Charlie at another workplace. Over the years, though, I’ve made a lot of friends, and I’ll be keeping in touch with them even after I retire.

The factory has changed a lot over the years. It’s definitely busier, especially with the constant work we get from a major office product

supplies company and a beauty products company. We’ve done heaps of packing for those two clients for ages.

Variety

In addition to packing duties, I’ve been trained to use all kinds of machinery, such as pallet jacks, shrink-wrappers, tape guns, and various cleaning products.

While I’ve been almost entirely based at Harris Park, I did spend a little time at the packing lines at Marrickville and West Ryde when they needed my help with huge jobs. I spent six weeks at Marrickville at one point, working five days a week in order to get everything

done according to schedule. After induction, I went on to set up 126 display shelves.

I’ve worked in other places in my time before Prestige Packing, such as roof tiling for 4 years. In addition to my 17 years at Prestige Packing, I also installed Rheem hot water systems for 25 years.

Creativity

My art is very important to me. I’ve exhibited my works a number of times, and sold many pieces. I was the one who made the mosaic out front of the Buck House day-to-day living centre at Surry Hills, and it’s one of the first things people see on their way in.

I was a part of the Recovering Creativity Research Project at Western Sydney University at Kingswood with a number of other artists. This was a study about the value of creativity for mental health. After the project finished, the researchers held a catered exhibition of our works at Flourish Australia's Head Office, and all the artworks were auctioned off. We were certainly well paid for our creations! The researchers also put together a book with all of our paintings and drawings in it, and I still have my copy.

At one point I used to sing professionally. I even did some live television appearances on the Australian music program Bandstand before my voice cracked on me, which is why painting is the way I express myself now.

Home

When I started at Prestige Packing I lived right across the road in a shoebox room I rented from Mission Australia. Three of my neighbours from that time have worked at Prestige Packing, and one of them still does lawnmowing for Flourish Australia's St Marys service.

I now rent a two bedroom house. I use one of my bedrooms to sleep in, and the other is a home office where I do my projects and paintings. I'll be temporarily moving out for three weeks so they can paint the walls, replace the carpet, and install a new kitchen. They'll be putting me up in a hotel during that time.

A New Phase

I've got lots of plans for my retirement. First off, I'm going to access more day-to-day living services. I used to attend Buckingham House at Surry Hills, but I haven't been there for a long time.

I've been volunteering with my church over at Guildford for about seven years now, and I'm going to continue helping out. They provide the essentials to a lot of people who need help in making ends meet, and I actually get most of my groceries through them.

When it comes to travel, I'll be visiting some friends down at Sussex

Inlet, then head up to Queensland to visit two more. After that, I'll be heading to Holland in December, the land of tulips and windmills. Apparently it will be minus 10 degrees when I'm there, so I'll have to make sure I take all of my Winter clothes.

I've actually got three grandchildren who live in Holland, so I'll be spending quality time with them. They're aged 18, 17, and 16. My daughter also has two younger children, aged 8 and 3, who live close to me. I'm pretty sure the youngest ones think I'm deaf,

because they're always so loud! I actually took one of my grandsons to a concert, and he climbed up on the stage and started singing!

Somebody said I'd get bored being retired, but I don't think so. I can always find something to do!

LEFT: Gerry Connolly at his workplace of 17 years. He's holding a prized photo of himself at the City 2 Surf in 2018 with Peter Farrugia (Manager Peer Workforce), Jade Ryall (Back On Track Health) and CEO Mark Orr. OPPOSITE: If you want to describe Prestige Packing in a word, that word is BUSY! PHOTOS BY GRANT J EVERETT



Been out of work for a while, or no work history at all?
 Want to learn valuable job skills and life skills?
We can help!

PRESTIGE PACKING
 23-25 Station Street
 West Harris Park
 NSW 2150
 (02) 9393 9170
 Weekdays 7:45am to 3:15pm

PLAN RETIREMENT NOW!

You Will Not Regret It

By Warren Heggarty



If you read our story on Gerry Connolly in this issue, you will know that he will find plenty to do in retirement. What about you? We know that work is such an important thing for people, not just financially but socially too. What can you do to make sure you make the best use of the opportunity when retirement comes?

Panorama ran an article a while ago which revealed that research shows loneliness has roughly the same negative effect on your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It is so important to stay connected in your senior years, and of course, this becomes increasingly challenging within your own generation. For those who have children and grandchildren or friends of younger generations, this might be a little easier. But how do you create and maintain new connections.

Joining supportive social groups is one way. For example, Gerry is part of a church congregation. Look at your interests and how you can combine them with social interaction.

- Join a club or start your own based on hobbies, interests or talents
- Become a member of your local men's shed
- Start a team sport or take regular exercise classes. How about low impact Aqua Aerobics?

- Contribute to your local community garden
- Attend local council meetings
- If you live in a retirement village or receive home care, take part in community events or social outings organised by your provider.

What about learning. Not THAT kind of learning, but finding out about what INTERESTS you. For example, if you like history, Workers Educational Association in Sydney runs historical walking tours. In fact, they and other continuing education providers run hundreds of courses on everything from Tunisian Crochet to Story Writing.

How about learning a language- or a culture? For example, in Leichhardt NSW you not only have a large Italian population, but the CoAsIt social centre and a multitude of Italian eateries- plus you can listen to the Italian Top 40 on 'Rete Italia!' There are many continuing education courses for languages and some even include overseas travel (for those with a bit of spare cash!)

What about new hobbies- or pursuing old ones with increased enthusiasm. If you like model trains but can't afford it, you can visit the exhibitions put on by those who can. The same with car collecting. Gawking is usually free.

Did you know that the Sydney Conservatorium of Music holds frequent classical music concerts at lunch time for FREE, or for a 'gold coin' donation.

Start thinking about all of this NOW, well before your eligibility for the age pension. You only need to talk to some older people to know how dreary it can be to have gone into retirement with nothing set up to occupy your mind and your hands. Speaking of which, how do you feel about gardening? Or volunteering for a worthy cause? Now is the time to prepare for the future. Some people regard their senior years as the best time of their lives. Make sure you are among them!

ABOVE: What will you be doing in your retirement? PHOTO: ART TOWER/PIXABAY

Things that help balance negative bias

- Can you see any positive aspects of a negative experience?
- Change your daily routine so you are not 'triggered' to ruminate on negative thoughts
- Savour positive moments. Replay them in your memory! Talk about them!
- Be aware of your 'self-talk.' If it is negative, make an effort to acknowledge good things.
- Have gratitude for what you have.
- If you have problems, take ACTION to solve those problems.

Positive Action FOR NEGATIVE BIAS

By Warren Heggarty

For the sake of survival, humans are hard-wired to pay more attention to negative things. We are no longer in the stone age, yet we find ourselves surrounded by non-stop negativity! How do we return things to balance?

Studies by psychologist John Cacioppo say 'negative information causes a surge in activity in a critical information processing area of the brain.' Research also shows that we 'learn more from negative outcomes and experiences' and 'make decisions based on negative information more than positive data.' (Cherry, Johnson, & Swain, 2022)

Negativity bias is likely a way of protecting us in 'life or death' situations that crop up in nature; situations that for most of us don't crop up nowadays. What we do have are the Media, especially Social Media and the constant warnings of doomsayers.

Environmentalist Zion Lights, who was formerly a member of XR (Extinction Rebellion) writes about this (Lights, 2023). Worried about

the future because of climate change, she attempted to address this by joining 'environmental groups where other members... assured me that my panicked feelings about the state of the planet were justified...'

Lights says 'It was years before I realised that I had a distorted and anxiety-driven worldview, that the nightly panic attacks that left my heart racing and sometimes paralysed me with fear were ... [signs that] I needed professional help... **Although I still have concerns about the future of our planet, I now channel these worries into taking effective action rather than raging against the system.**'

Light made a 'shift in perspective' which moved the 'locus of control' from outside of herself to inside herself, from a hopeless situation to one where she at least tries to embody hope.

Lights says that COVID lockdowns (she is from the UK) put in place to protect physical health have also contributed to a surge in mental health issues.

Even in her more anxious younger days, however, she found things that gave her life meaning and HOPE for the future- such as David Attenborough documentaries and Gene Roddenberry's visions of space exploration.

She also did a reality check, looking at those things in this world which have actually improved. There is less poverty, less child mortality, greater wealth (though unequally distributed), better education, higher literacy, and higher levels of vaccination from disease.

'When it comes to climate change' she says 'the challenges are real but manageable. Many things are not awesome but they can be fixed.'

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ABOVE: 'Tis better to light a candle than curse the darkness. PHOTO CONGERDESIGN PIXABAY



Could the Solution to Mental Health Issues be a Virtual One?

By Grant J Everett

When you think Virtual Reality, do you instantly think of video games? I bet “therapy” isn’t the first thing that comes to mind.

VR exposure therapy uses artificial experiences that would normally cause a person anxiety in real life to allow them to safely build up their defenses against it. This could be a fear of heights, a fear of flying, a fear of water, or pretty much anything else. For instance, 75% of the population report fearing public speaking more than death.

While there have been experiments with using VR to address anxiety and phobias all the way back in the 90s, with the astonishing levels of graphical fidelity we now have, the line between virtual and real is thinning by the day. In addition to the traditional head-mounted display, VR now incorporates multi-sensory feedback systems like haptic gloves and scent delivery devices to cement the illusion of interacting with the real world.

A closer examination

A world first study led by Western Sydney University found that the use of Evenness Virtual Reality Sensory Space technology significantly lowered the levels of anxiety, depression, and distress in a number

of adults with neuro-developmental issues such as being on the autism spectrum or intellectual disabilities, and also boosted their sensory processing skills (Mills, C., & Tracey, D. K.). Their paper has been published in Nature Journal.

“Our findings have shown that VR technology may offer a promising avenue for the provision of sensory interventions and an effective calming tool, with the most prominent benefit reported by users being a reduction in anxiety,” said Dr Caroline Mills, co-lead researcher from Western Sydney University’s School of Health Sciences and Translational Health Research Institute.

Big Business?

VR treatments are already relatively common across the Veterans Health Administration healthcare system in the United States, where it is used to treat PTSD in returned soldiers. But as with any breakthrough, VR therapies are already being offered as a commercial product by a number of providers.

American company XRHealth offers drug-free virtual reality treatment options for a variety of anxieties, mental health issues, sleep disturbances, chronic pain and more. An extensive interview personalises their services for each client, and customers are provided with VR equipment that they can use in the safety of their own home. The programs are designed to be fun and easy to use.

On top of the VR, XRHealth also offers traditional counselling like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, as well as digital face-to-face appointments with a licensed therapist.

The Pioneer

Back in 1995, Chris Klock faced his fear of heights thanks to the use of a head-mounted VR display. His therapy included staring down from a 20-story balcony, walking along narrow bridges far above water, and riding a huge glass elevator. Klock was eventually able to ride a real glass elevator to the restaurant at the top of Atlanta’s Westin Peachtree Plaza, which is much more convenient than struggling up 72 flights of stairs.

This was thought to be the first controlled study of using VR to treat a psychological disorder, and its results were published in the American Journal of Psychiatry.

Summing up

There are still some downsides to using VR. One major issue is that it can make you feel nauseous after 20 or 30 minutes, and this is especially true if the program is disorienting or involves too much movement. The headsets can also become heavy and uncomfortable over a long period of time, but they’re constantly getting smaller.

SOURCES:

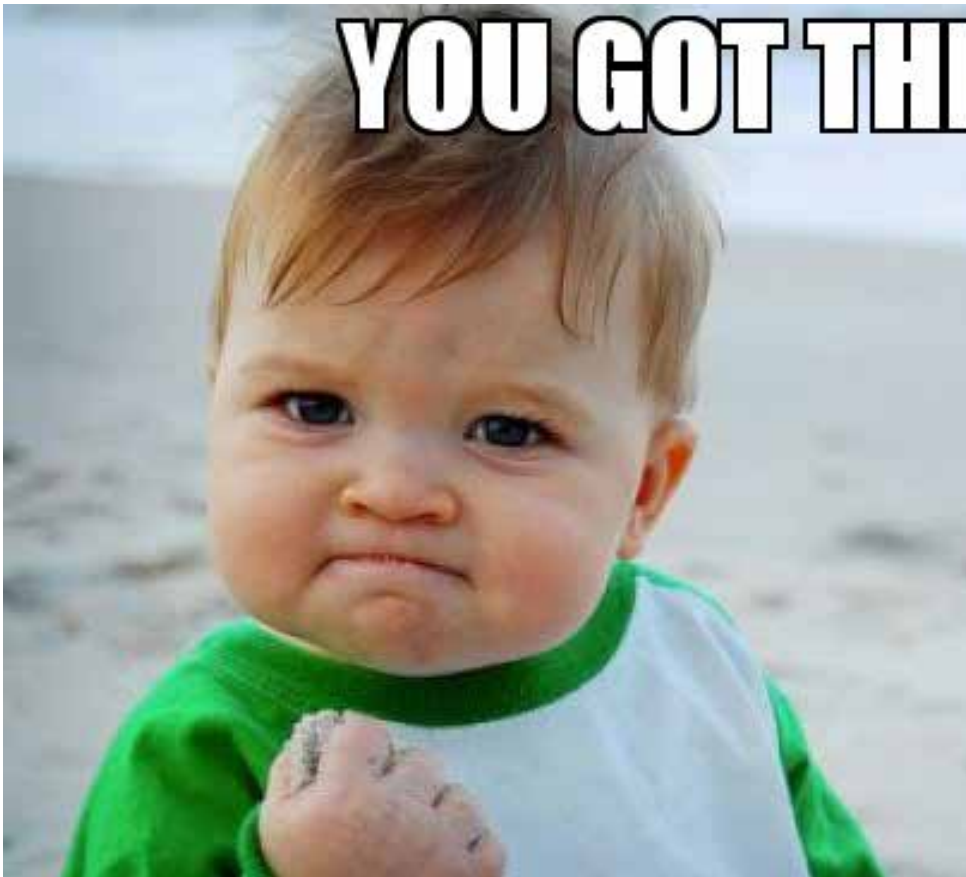
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YOU GOT THIS!



EXAMPLES

- Dentist check-up
- GP for check-up
- Ring your mother
- Learn Italian
- Save up for Delta concert
- Get your car serviced
- Top up your Opal card
- Unblock that gurgling sink.

PHOTO: Admit it, you need encouragement now and then!
SOURCE: THE INTERNET

Grab Your Accountability Partners! And Get Stuff Done!

By Warren Heggarty

Getting things done is difficult when you have no one but yourself to answer to. You might have a boss at work to crack the whip, but when it comes to your personal life, it is so easy to say 'who cares?' You make up excuses not to do what you actually WANT to do. Having an accountability partner can help you stay on track- and you can help them as well.

Annabella was frustrated. There was so much stuff that she wanted to get done, but she was always too tired or too lacking in motivation. Work exhausted her and always seemed to take priority over everything else.. Procrastination was always easier than taking action. She needed help.

Miles was frustrated, too. He had lists of hundreds of things that needed doing, but even the thought of these tasks made him exhausted and overwhelmed.

One day they had a lunch time meeting in Roselands Shopping Centre. Why there? Because a shopping centre is a place where you can get things done. They made lists and agreed to report back to one another whenever they got something done.

Later, they refined this approach and made it more specific. Each morning they would message one another a list of three things they wanted to get done that day. Then as they did the three things they would send photographic evidence via their smart phones to prove it. If one of them slacked off, the other one would say:

'Hey you were supposed to buy new pillow slips today!'

'Oh, I was too tired to go to the homeware shop.'

'Well, then tomorrow you have to complete FOUR tasks!'

The best things to go on the lists are IMPORTANT things that are not urgent, Urgent things tend to get done anyway. Important things get put off. Naturally, the accountability partners can have completely

different things on their lists. It is about what the individual finds important.

Annabella and Miles discovered over the following month that this system really worked. They found that they were CROSSING THINGS OFF their lists left, right and centre at an undreamed of rate! They found it was actually fun to give one another permission to be stern supervisors and hard task masters of the other.

Limiting the daily list to THREE things may seem futile if, like Miles, you need to do 300 things all up. But just reporting those three things as finished to Annabella gave him the energy to keep going with even more tasks.

To be honest it can become quite competitive once you start to get things done!

INTERNATIONAL PLASTIC BAG FREE DAY: SAVE THE PLANET FOR ONE DOLLAR

By Grant J Everett



Social citizenship is the idea that we can all do things that contribute to our community and the world itself. Even if a person isn't ready to find employment or return to their studies, events like International Plastic Bag Free Day are a simple, cheap and effective way to do our bit for our planet and our fellow Earth natives.

International Plastic Bag Free Day takes place on the 3rd of July. Created by the Bag Free World organisation to encourage eco-friendly alternatives to single-use plastics, we can all do our bit to save our world from one of the most common pollutants.

What Can We Do?

You can celebrate International Plastic Bag Free Day by simply bringing reusable bags when you do your shopping. Simple as that. You may even want to decorate your bags, making them your own. Not only does this ensure that you are fighting plastic waste, but it's the perfect way to show off your style and individuality.

If you aren't sure what your favourite shop's stance on single-use plastics is, you might want to email them and ask. All businesses know that when customers vote with our wallets, we can potentially move mountains.

Thankfully, most major supermarket chains in Australia have been doing their bit by simply not offering single-use bags anymore. There were teething problems with this, as some shoppers were inevitably very, very unhappy at having to pay for something that was traditionally free.

Why We Need To Do Our Bit

Plastics can take up to a millennium to completely decay, meaning every discarded bag will be hanging around, affecting our planet for

generations to come. If we choose not to use single-use plastic bags, that means they won't end up in our oceans and waterways, and this will help keep our beaches pristine, rather than riddled with microplastic garbage.

If you want another reason to take part, there are massive floating reefs made from trash that stretch across hundreds of kilometres of ocean, and single-use plastic bags are one of the most common components. Researcher Charles Moore first discovered the Great Pacific Garbage Patch in 1997, and reversing it will take a global effort. As with all global efforts, this begins with YOU and ME.

Plastic is also harmful to sea life. According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Australia, 88% of marine species are now contaminated by plastics, with many seabound mammals and sea birds ingesting them or getting entangled in them. Sea lions, seals, and dolphins have all been found with plastic in their stomachs, and plastic bags are particularly notorious for killing sea turtles, who mistake them for tasty, tasty jellyfish. In 2008, a beached sperm whale was found with almost 25 kilograms of single-use plastics in its stomach.

And don't forget that if the ocean is being harmed by pollutants, the food we harvest from it will become less safe for us to consume.

Quick facts

Global plastic production doubled between 2000 and 2019. According to the Australian Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, plastic pollution is expected to triple again by 2040. Plastic production is also thought to have an impact on global warming. The Center for International Environmental Law estimates that plastics production generates 53.5 billion tonnes of Greenhouse Gas emissions every year.

The polyethylene single-use shopping bag was patented by Swedish company Celloplast in 1965, quickly replacing fabric and paper bags all over Europe. Single-use bags hit Australia in the late 1970s.

Bangladesh was the first country to ban single-use plastic bags in 2002 after discovering that draining clogs caused by discarded plastic waste played a huge role in the severity of recent floods. This has thankfully led to many countries following suit.

The Good News

There have been years of effort in growing public awareness surrounding the impact of plastic waste, and a landmark treaty against plastic pollution was passed in March 2022 by the United Nations. Hopefully, the nations of our world will all be doing their bit to win the struggle against plastic waste.

Google: *International Plastic Bag Free Day* or *click here*.

Entering the Field:

New Disability Employment Platform

By Warren Heggarty

'Despite the widely documented skills shortage in Australia, over 500,000 working-age people with disability are currently actively looking for work.'
– The Field

You may have seen employment platforms like Seek, and Linked-in, but now there is one which is aimed specifically at matching people living with disability to jobs on the open market. Panorama spoke to Portia and Courtney from The Field to learn more about it.

People living with disability often have a lot of unnecessary barriers between them and open employment. The employment landscape definitely needs levelling. The Field has been created by people with disability to do just that.

One of the co-founders is wheelchair tennis great Dylan Alcott, OAM, He gives some great encouragement to employers to lift their expectations of what people with a disability can do.

Portia Chapman, Snr Account Manager and Courtney McMahon, Marketing Manager at The Field spoke to us about the service which opened for business late last year.

'We have a lot of employers wanting to take part already' says Portia. 'We are not just looking at entry level jobs, but all levels of employment. This includes part time and casual'

Jobseekers can 'craft their brand' with flexible resume types. 'We can cater for traditional written CVs, as well as video or voice CVs, depending on your preference,' says Portia,

'The Field has been set up by people living with a disability FOR people with disability.' Both potential employees and potential employers can showcase themselves.

Jobseekers can take virtual tours of organisations and check out suggestions from the Field's own AI [Artificial Intelligence] job matching algorithm. This is handy because a lot of employers are using such algorithms to assess candidates nowadays.

Courtney says that like other employment platforms The Field contains job seeker tips, only they cater for people who need accessibility.

I gave it a try to see what it offers. I found that unlike any other platform I have used, The Field goes into great detail to ensure that accessibility is considered from both the employer's and employees' perspectives.

So this platform does more than simply connect candidates with employers. The Field aims to be innovative, accessible, and trustworthy for people with disability.

For employers, it gives hiring managers 'a tool that removes barriers and equips them and their organisations to hire more inclusively, 'There is an incredible amount of talent needing to be unlocked, across all industries, roles, and levels of experience.

www.thefield.jobs

Thanks also to Mark Cliff

ABOVE: There have been on-going recruitment shortages in our economy for years. People with a disability can take advantage of this.

PHOTO STYLE 66 PIXABAY

Peers on the Panel are Voices for Inclusion

By Kim Jones



'Nothing about us without us!' Flourish Australia puts this into practice. Kim Jones, who works closely alongside Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council, describes the historical background behind our current practice of including not only Peer Workers but the people who access our service on some recruitment interview panels.

Lived experience is the Key!

Our Affirmative [Action Policy](#) (Note 1) says 'Flourish Australia supports Affirmative Action as it applies to employment of people with lived experience' [of mental health issues] because it is 'advantageous to the organisation, [and] it also aligns with our values and commitment to... co-production.'

In addition, our [Recruitment Policy](#) (Note 2) states that the interview panels that select candidates 'must ... includ[e]... a person who has a personal lived experience of a mental health issue.'

'Every interview panel has to include someone with lived experience' says General Manager People and Culture Tim Fong, 'unless there is an approved circumstance in which

case you would need approval for an exemption.'

Talent Acquisition Lead Rochelle Murray says, 'Lived experience perspectives play an important role in [all decisions](#) across the organisation. I'm thankful for involvement of our Community Advisory Council members. Their participation in recruitment actively demonstrates Flourish Australia's values to potential employees. Council members bring valuable insights on the suitability of candidates for our services'

These policies have deep roots in Flourish Australia's history. In former times, however, because of stigma, fewer people felt safe to be open about their experience. We relied heavily on people like Paula Hanlon who today sits on our Board.

More recently, thanks to the dedication of Flourish Australia's General Manager Inclusion Fay Jackson, we implemented the 'Why not a Peer Worker?' Strategy. It made our default position one of including lived experience, and if it was NOT included, you needed to ask WHY NOT?

With this position, people began to be more open in disclosing their lived experience- because it was seen to be valued. Many existing

staff were wanting to be not just a Support worker but a Peer worker. This further acceptance of lived experience within our workforce led to other staff (like me) in head office administrative positions, to be comfortable in disclosing that they also have lived experience. The way was now clear, for staff at least.

The ideal of course is to include people who access our services in the process.

Tim Fong expresses a note of caution here. 'People who take part in our recruitment process need to understand that process. We make training available so that people are made aware of the principle of merit based selection. Before participating in a selection panel people learn about the legal requirements as well as what kinds of questions are suitable or not suitable.'

The Community Advisory Council has been the vanguard here. With the obstacles of COVID, online monthly Council meetings allowed the Flourish Australia Senior Leadership Team to see first hand that the Council could still perform their roles. Post-COVID, the People and Culture Team, led by Tim Fong and Rochelle Murray has been busily conducting many online interviews. With such high demand, the logical

“We recognise the unique perspective people with lived experience bring... ‘People with lived experience have a valuable insight into the people we would like to employ.’

next step was to make better use of the Council by including them in recruitment panels which are increasingly taking place online.

This benefits Flourish Australia. Tim says ‘We recognise the unique perspective people with lived experience bring to the panels. People with lived experience have a valuable insight into the people we would like to employ.’

Industry wide, it also shows that Flourish Australia is leading by example. It also benefits the Council members themselves.

Council members have said being involved in interview panels has given them:

- further experience to include in their resumes.
- insight into the Flourish Australia people and culture processes.
- insight into the different mental health support positions and duties
- insight into the experience/ education/training that is required.

Importantly it shows our potential staff members that [people with lived experience really are a contributing part of this organisation](#). Council members are paid for their time spent on interview panels.

The involvement of the Council on interview panels, inspired the Council to implement a new recruitment process of its own! Today, in order to gain a place on the Council, candidates submit an Expression of Interest and go through an Interview panel process! This process has resulted in a more co-designed, inclusive and stronger Council.

*Additional reporting by Warren Heggarty
oe1 (HRP 05-3-820, p. 1)
Note 2 (HRP 12-4-0820, p. 3.4.2)*

**ABOVE LEFT: Every Flourish Australia interview panel has to include someone with a lived experience says Tim Fong General Manager People and Culture
PHOTO PIXABAY**

Back On Track Health You Can Prevent Type 2 Diabetes

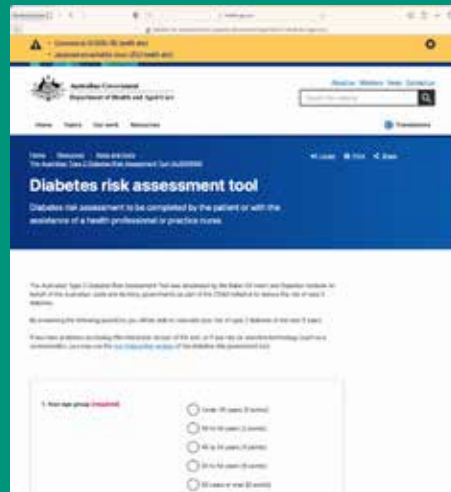
Here are some things you can do now:

AUSD

Complete the AUSD Risk Assessment Tool.

This is a quiz that you fill out which will tell you whether you need to speak to a doctor or diabetes educator.

Google “AUSD Risk Assessment Tool” or [click here](#).



If you access Flourish Australia services, please speak to your support worker about accessing the Back on Track Health PhysiCards resource.

NDSS

Consult the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS)
1800 637 700
www.ndss.com.au



YOUR JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT




Every year **1 in 5** Australians will experience **some form of mental health issue.**

Flourish Australia provides mental health specialised disability employment services (DES) supporting people living with a mental health issue to access sustainable employment.

Flourish Australia DES locations:

Bankstown • Broken Hill • Caringbah • Cessnock • Harris Park
Hornsby • Liverpool • Maitland • Penrith • Seven Hills

To see if you qualify for our free service, please call us for a confidential discussion or visit our website for more information.

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