

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

# panorama

Monthly Issue **January 2024 #92A**



Couch Surfing,  
Refuges, and...  
Buying a Home?

Busting Stigma  
Through Creative  
Expression

"Slice Silence"

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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?

You can ALWAYS email us at...

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Prefer snail mail?

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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...

**Deb Malone** is a Flourish Australia Peer Worker who went from homeless to home owner in just four years.

**Ed Maroubra** has discovered painting is the key to his recovery.

**Emile** found support and encouragement at Flourish Australia Leeton, and got out of attending his first Pride event.

**Daniel Johns** is from TAFE media.

**Merilyn Greig** is a Mental Health Worker at Flourish Australia Leeton

### Contributions are welcome!

#### Publications People

**Grant J Everett** writing

**Kylie Bolton** graphic design

**Warren Heggarty** writing

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Development Projects  
Manager



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](mailto: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 recognises 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: [flourishaustralia.org.au/family-and-carers](http://flourishaustralia.org.au/family-and-carers)

**Carer Gateway:** [carergateway.gov.au](http://carergateway.gov.au)

Mental Health Carers NSW: 1300 554 660

Arafmi Queensland: (07) 3254 1881

Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network: 1300 620 042

Mental Health Carers Australia: 1300 554 660

Kids Helpline : 1800 551 800

COPMI: Children of Parents with Mental Illness: [copmi.net.au](http://copmi.net.au)



# panorama

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Warren and Grant from Flourish Australia's Publications Team (LEFT) were over the moon to receive the Highly Commended Team Award at the 5th Annual Flourishing Awards for their dedication to mental health journalism, and for promoting the message that recovery is something all of us can experience.





## Keeping physically strong & healthy will help you reach your recovery goals

Talk with your local Flourish Australia team today about keeping your physical health and recovery on track.



Back On Track Health Program

## Preventative Health Check-In

2819 people supported by Flourish Australia completed a Health Check-In during the 2022/23 financial year.

The results include:

**86%**

of people have a regular GP for physical health



**33%**

of participants were provided with information or support to connect with a GP by Flourish Australia



**74%**

of people had an Annual Health Check-In over the last 12 months



**48%**

of people have been supported by Flourish Australia to seek a medication review in the last 3 months



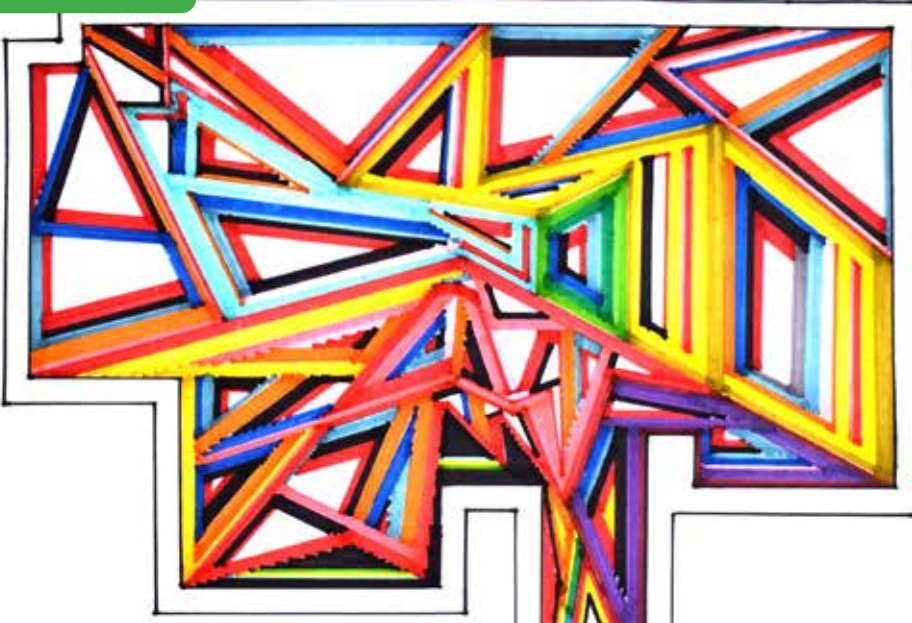
**76%**

of the people who used PhysiCards reported that it helped them identify a health concern



An increase of **150** people reported seeing a dentist within the last 3 months





# Creative Expression

## Helped Me to Understand Recovery

By Ed Maroubra (as told to Grant J Everett)

**Painting has been a long-standing interest of mine, dating right back to my teenage years, but it wasn't until recently when I experienced a mental health issue that I properly pursued it. Thankfully, this form of self-expression has helped me on my journey of recovery.**

Twelve months ago I left behind a two-decade career in nursing, and spent the next six months in a mental health unit. I engaged with art therapy sessions while I was there, and I soon discovered the power and the joy of creative expression. I started painting outside of that group and I have continued making art for the sheer enjoyment of it since returning to the community.

I find art therapeutic as it allows me to express my emotions more effectively than speaking about them. It also gives me a great sense of accomplishment, especially when I finish a piece. The tactile sensation of paint on paper is soothing, and I can create meaningful gifts for my children.

My most satisfying artworks depict how some people externalise their experiences with PTSD. This was the subject of one of my largest paintings and I frequently explore this theme in my work.

Securing NDIS support through Flourish Australia was a significant step forward in my recovery.



Thanks to NDIS funding I've been able to keep working with a private art therapist, I regularly consult a trauma psychologist, and I participate in DBT (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy). I've also been actively engaged with one-on-one support and group activities with Flourish Australia's service at Maroubra.

While I acknowledge that my recovery journey will not happen overnight, I am determined to lead a fulfilling life. My family, including my wife and two young children, serve as constant motivation for me to fully engage in support services and to keep taking steps towards healing, even if that just means getting out of bed each morning. As long as you keep moving forwards and making the effort, I think everyone can see results.

PHOTOS OF ED MAROUBRA'S ART PROVIDED BY ED

**Flourish Australia  
Maroubra**

*Gadigal and Bidjigal  
Country*

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## WHY IS FLOURISH AUSTRALIA'S YARNUP INFOHUB IMPORTANT?

By Grant J Everett

**The YarnUp InfoHub was a project of Flourish Australia's YarnUp Group, a collective of people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. This is a central resource where Flourish Australia staff can grow their understanding, knowledge and skills in delivering quality care for First Nations people who access Flourish Australia services.**

"We identified the need for the InfoHub because 11% of the people we support at Flourish Australia are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander," said Jade, Program Manager of Back On Track Health and a member of the YarnUp group. "First Nations' approaches to health and wellbeing are different from mainstream Western approaches, so the information, resources and support services contained in the InfoHub are designed, led and governed by First Nations people to better meet their needs.

"At present, the InfoHub can only be accessed by Flourish Australia staff through the Chirp intranet, though we are planning to create a platform where participants can directly access these resources in the future."

The InfoHub contains extensive information about First Nations culture and its intimate connection to the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, making it a relevant and meaningful resource for anyone who supports First Nations people.

In addition to being a serious resource in and of itself, the InfoHub also connects to many major websites dedicated to the needs of First Nations people and those who support them. Here are just a handful of the services on offer from the InfoHub...

**13Yarn** provide confidential crisis support 24/7. Phones are manned by First Nations people who will understand where you are coming from, without judgement.

[13yarn.org.au](https://13yarn.org.au)

**The Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet** provides a huge range of resources and information to those working in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care sector, closing the gap in health care between First Nations people and other Australians.

[healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au)

**The Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP)** is Australia's leading voice on Indigenous suicide prevention. The Centre empowers individuals, families and communities, and respects their culture.

[cbpatsisp.com.au](https://cbpatsisp.com.au)

**Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia** is the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention. It is governed and controlled by First Nations experts who work to promote excellence in mental health care.

[gayaadhuwi.org.au](https://gayaadhuwi.org.au)

**The Healing Foundation** is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that partners with communities to address the ongoing trauma caused by actions like the forced removal of children from their families.

[healingfoundation.org.au](https://healingfoundation.org.au)

**The Manual of Resources for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention** is a collection of practical resources and tools that can make a real difference in promoting positive mental health, social emotional wellbeing, and preventing suicide.

[manualofresources.com.au](https://manualofresources.com.au)

ABOVE: Jade Ryall, Program Manager Back On Track Health, and Brooke Sharp, Team Coordinator, Peer Specialist at Flourish Australia PHOTO PROVIDED BY JADE RYALL



# Couch Surfing, Refuges, and... Buying a Home?

By Deb Malone (as told to Grant J Everett)

**Deb has weathered many storms in her life, including mental health issues, homelessness and family breakdown, but now that she's achieved goals in her life that would have seemed almost impossible just a few years ago, she's ready to give back to the community. As a peer worker with Flourish Australia, Deb is able to use her life experiences to support those who are going through similar situations.**

When Deb was 20, she backpacked around Europe for a year, funding her trip by working as a Nanny in England and with a job at the Australian High Commission in London. After coming home to Australia, though, her Father told her he was concerned that she wasn't her usual self.

"I recall that I was being excessively joyful - what some would call manic - and at 22 years old I was admitted to a mental health unit in Canberra, where I was diagnosed with Bipolar 1."

After leaving hospital, Deb started working full time. She was managing her finances and her day-to-day life just fine for years, but was eventually admitted to another mental health unit, this one in Camperdown, for a short time. She met one of her best friends there and is still in touch with her to this day. Once Deb got out of hospital, she got back on track with living her life.

## Turning Point

Finding meaning and purpose in life can be an important part of recovery, and some can find this through religion. For Deb, her faith became central to her life.

At the age of 30 Deb became a Christian, and began attending an inclusive LGBTIQ+ church. With support from her church, Deb was able to reach the point where she could forgive everyone who had mistreated her, as well as forgiving herself. This changed the way Deb saw the world, and how she saw herself.

## Homelessness Can Happen to Anyone

There were still struggles in Deb's life, including a punishing work schedule. She would catch the 5:30am train from Newcastle to her job in Sydney, then after working all day she would get the train back up to Newcastle at 10:30pm, have dinner, and go to bed at 11pm. She'd be back up at 5am the next day.

Despite working full time, Deb was so underpaid that she ended up homeless. She stayed with friends



for a week, then her Mum paid for a hotel for another seven days while Deb looked for something more permanent. Thankfully Deb had a couple of female friends who let her stay in their home rent free for three months, and in return Deb cooked lovely meals for them.

Unfortunately, when many other people in Deb's life heard she was homeless, they deleted her from Facebook and ghosted her. Even some family members cut contact.

When the Newcastle-to-Sydney trains went on strike, Deb couldn't get to work anymore, so she called the Homelessness Line to find emergency accommodation closer to her job in The City. She moved into a women's refuge in Sydney, but had to leave most of her belongings in storage in Newcastle. It really humbled Deb that she couldn't afford anything better despite working 30 hours a week, and she learned that homelessness really can happen to anyone.

Deb found the women who ran the shelter to be amazing and very strong, as were the ladies who lived there. Deb and the residents would clean the shelter every day, and Deb would cook dessert for everyone.

"The women started attending church with me on Sundays, and I felt proud when they called me their mate."

Down the track, Deb's sister invited her to come and live with her rent free in Canberra in exchange for cooking and cleaning. Once Deb moved in she was able to find work locally, where she cared for elderly Nuns. It took 3 months to save up, but Deb eventually hired a removalist truck to collect her things from storage in Newcastle and drive them to Canberra.

### A Dream Accomplished

After Deb read "The Barefoot Investor," a book about accomplishing financial goals, she immediately started saving for a deposit on her own home. A number of people really close to Deb were not encouraging, telling her that she'd never own her own house, and that she was kidding herself.

It may have taken four years, two of those living with her sister, but Deb finally saved \$75,000. She used that to buy a home in the ACT Affordable Housing Scheme (where the government caps the price of the homes). It's a brand-new two-story, two-bedroom townhouse with steel frames, and it's insulated and fire-proofed with a courtyard and double glazing. Above and beyond what she'd hoped for!

### Giving Back

Today, Deb is employed as a peer worker with Flourish Australia in Queanbeyan. She started working there in early 2023 and her role is to support people with mental health issues to heal and recover and live the life they want to live. Due to her experiences of homelessness, one of Deb's biggest motivations is assisting women who have a disability to find a home. Deb really enjoys working at Flourish Australia.

"Another part of my role is helping to facilitate a cooking group. Below is a photo of a delicious spinach and parmesan quiche made by the people who access services."

**ABOVE LEFT: Deb Malone photo. PHOTO FROM DEB MALONE. BELOW: A delicious quiche cooked by participants in Deb's cooking class at Flourish Australia Queanbeyan. PHOTO BY DEB MALONE**



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Queanbeyan  
Ngunnawal Country**

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Queanbeyan NSW 2620**

**(02) 9393 9213  
Open 8:30am to 4:30pm**





## Busting Stigma Through Creative Expression

By Grant J Everett

**Flourish Australia's Newcastle Centre recently held an art exhibition as part of their Mental Health Month celebrations. The theme for this event was "Busting Mental Health Stigma."**

The ground floor of the Hunter Street office was covered with paintings, drawings, sculptures, dioramas and mixed media pieces from a total of 27 different artists. Many artworks were for sale, so for some creative types it proved to be a very profitable night!

Lovers of fine art were welcomed to the exhibition by Broughton Manning on piano, and the talented Flourish Music Group played a catalogue of popular music throughout the evening. Drinks and hand-made refreshments circulated through the crowd as they admired and discussed the many different artforms on display.

There was interactive fun to be had for guests of all ages on the Curved Wall. Everyone was welcome to create and attach blue artworks with the theme of "What helps you when you are feeling blue?" Within a couple of hours, the Curved Wall was almost completely covered with dozens of inspirational quotes.

Towards the end of the night everyone gathered to hear which artist had won the People's Choice Award and the Packing Room Prize award. Helen Fenner, who recently had her own art show at Maitland in mid-November, won the Packing Room Award, and Darryl "Daz" Soo (left) won the People's Choice Award. Mental Health Workers Nina Katzmarski, Lisa Hyde-Mills and Kristina Freeman were thanked at this point with beautiful bouquets of flowers for working so hard to make this event a success.

This event was also covered by local media, with Stephen Dodd (and his amazing chunky Aztek-style sculptures) gracing the pages of one Newcastle newspaper.

Thanks to Peter Boyd, Don Jordan, Daz Soo, Helen Fenner, Laurie Lutovac, Kristen Olson and Angus Perrin and all the other staff and artists for the warm welcome and for sharing your passion for creativity.

There were so many amazing pieces that we simply don't have the space to include them all. But you'll be seeing more of the artists and their masterpieces in upcoming issues of Panorama!

Want to know when events like these are happening? Follow us on Facebook!

**LEFT: Darryl Soo, winner of the People's Choice award. OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left): Multiple artworks by Stephen Dodd, Pixel Art by Paavo Kunkel, Mother And Child by Peter Boyd, Victory in Tunisia by by Marcus Vernon, leatherwork by John Beaman, Grace of Life by Helen Fenner.**

**PHOTOS BY GRANT J EVERETT**

**Flourish Australia  
Newcastle  
Awabakal Country**

**627 Hunter Street  
Newcastle, NSW 2300**

**(02) 9393 9700  
Weekdays: 7AM - 9PM  
Weekends: 7AM - 8PM**









# LEETON PRIDE FAIR DAY & PARADE: CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

By Emile and Marilyn Greig

**The first ever Leeton Pride Festival celebrated and supported the local LGBTIQA+ community and its allies, welcoming everyone regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.**

Although Emile had never been to a Pride event before, he got a lot out of it.

I attended the Leeton Pride Festival with friends and workers from the local Flourish Australia service. This was the first event of its kind that I've been to. As I have social anxiety, I don't tend to go to anything that involves a lot of people. However, I've been trying to push myself to get out of the house and do stuff like

this, and the Flourish Australia staff also encourage me to get out and feel like I'm a part of the community. As I am trans and asexual, I felt it was important to be involved.

When I actually got to the Festival, I was surprised with how comfortable I felt. I didn't realise just how many trans and asexual people there are in Leeton and its surrounding areas. I'd never actually met another asexual before attending the Festival.

When I first came out as trans, I hadn't met any other met any other people from this community before, and that made me feel quite alone. When I told the Flourish Australia staff about this, I found out there was an employee at the Deniliquin service who was trans, and they were more than happy to meet up and talk with me. That meant a lot. Since then, I've become

friends with more people within the LGBTIQA+ community.

## Flourish Australia

I've been attending the Leeton service of Flourish Australia since halfway through 2019. I'm getting more social interaction now than I used to, which has made my life better, and I also enjoy the groups. Leeton's a bit remote, so services can seem thin on the ground, but thankfully I'm quite happy where I am, accessing Flourish Australia services.

The Flourish Australia staff have also looked out for my physical health, encouraging me to see a doctor about why I was in constant pain and felt tired all the time. One staff member mentioned that my symptoms had a lot in common with fibromyalgia, and it did actually turn out to be what I had.



### Getting there

My recovery journey can be a bit touch-and-go, depending on the day. My body dysmorphia can make me feel down, though my depression isn't anywhere as bad as it used to be. If I start heading downhill, I have people who will listen to me without judgement, and they won't jump to putting me in hospital unless I really need it. The staff are helping me to not go down that path again. If I hadn't connected with Flourish Australia, my recovery wouldn't even be close to where it is now.

### Merilyn Greig is a Mental Health Worker at Flourish Australia Leeton, and she helped to run Flourish Australia's part in the Pride Day.

Flourish Australia had a stall at Leeton's first ever Pride Fair where staff and participants gave out pride flags, lollies, mugs, and bags with information booklets and other goodies, such as pens and stress balls. So many people engaged with our stall that we ran out of merch! We also had a bubble machine that the kids played with, and staff addressed any questions attendees

had about Flourish Australia's services.

Flourish Australia also had a walking and vehicle group in the Pride Parade. The walking group held a big banner and flags and gave out stress balls to the crowd, while the vehicle group played music and engaged with everyone who was watching. All up, 8 participants and 5 staff represented Flourish Australia. They didn't just attend because it was a fun day, but because they believed in the message behind the event: celebrating inclusivity and diversity in Leeton.

There was a variety of people in the walking and vehicle groups, including emergency services, local businesses, people on roller blades and stilts, drag queens who traveled from all over Australia, and acrobats. There were also some 78er guest speakers who spoke about their experiences during the first inclusivity rallies in Australia in the 1978.

The fair had heaps of food, information, and market stalls.

There were more people at the event than I expected, so I would say it was a good turnout.

This may have been Leeton's first pride event, but I suspect this won't be the last!



**Flourish Australia  
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Wiradjuri Country  
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18-22 Kurrajong Ave  
Leeton NSW 2705  
(02) 9393 9510**

OPPOSITE PAGE: Flourish Australia staff and participants march to show their support for inclusion. PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE VAN REE

LEFT: Victoria Murray, Flourish Australia mental health worker, and Amy Nugent, Flourish Australia participant. PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE VAN REE



# Elaine Empowered by TAFE

## *Community services are growing*

By Daniel Johns

**A Newcastle mum has vowed to use the skills learned at TAFE NSW to return to her home community and help address the “tsunami” of mental health and substance abuse issues among her mob.**

Elaine Abraham, 37, a proud Bigambul/Gomerioi woman, has recently completed a Diploma of Mental Health at TAFE Digital and is employed as a youth worker at Oasis Youth Services in Hamilton.

“There’s a lot of addiction issues happening back home and they seem to be starting at a younger and younger age,” she said. “I want to use what I’ve learned at TAFE NSW to go back home and implement programs.”

The Diploma of Mental Health is the second TAFE NSW qualification Ms Abraham has completed with the support of a scholarship from the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health.

“I wouldn’t have gotten this far without the scholarship or the amazing support from my TAFE NSW teachers,” Ms Abraham said.

“The course has really given me the hands-on skills to do my job, especially around how to best talk to people with mental health issues. And while it’s sad dealing with young kids with addiction issues, it is such a rewarding job when you can help them.”

TAFE Digital community services and mental health teacher Yasin Bagci, who formerly worked with Flourish Australia, said demand - and pay packets - for community services workers were surging post-COVID.

According to LinkedIn’s Jobs on the Rise report, some community services roles were among the most in-demand roles nationwide. This has led to an average 6.7 per cent salary increase for the industry in the past year, the second highest rise of any industry.

“Community services means supporting people to make positive changes in their lives, supporting the wellbeing of individuals, families or communities, and being an agent of social change...,” Yasin said.

“Demand is constantly growing, especially in areas such as mental health. TAFE NSW gives graduates the practical skills and work experience they need for the job they want.”

A range of community services courses are currently being offered fee-free through TAFE Digital, he said, including a Certificate III in Community Services, Certificate IV in Community Services and Certificate IV in Mental Health.

The courses are run via virtual classroom, allowing students to study when and where it best suits them. For more info, check with TAFE online in your state.

**ABOVE: Elaine Abraham credits TAFE Digital with helping her make a difference in her community. PHOTO TAFE MEDIA**





# Council Clean Ups:

## Get Rid of Household Clutter, Free

By Grant J Everett

### Need to dispose of large, bulky items that are too substantial to fit in your wheelie bin? Your local Council is happy to help.

I've had my lounge for seven years and it has certainly been through the wars. One of the recliners is busted, the middle seat has been smashed in twice, and it's been painted with hundreds of small spills. But how was I going to get rid of this junk to make room for my new, shiny items?

If you need to get rid of large, unwanted items from a residential property that are simply too big to bin, your local Council can help. As a resident, you may be entitled to book a free clean up by your local Council up to 4 times each year, though this may vary depending on where you live. You can book clean ups online, or you can call them. Please note that you need to give them AT LEAST two weeks' notice when you book your clean up.

Commercial properties, such as shops and other businesses, are

not eligible for this specific kind of clean up.

Your Council will take away furniture, white goods such as fridges, washing machines, dryers, dishwashers, and microwave ovens, mattresses, bundled-up tree and plant clippings (that are under 2 metres in length), and carpets, rugs and other floor coverings (please roll and tie them up).

The Council will NOT pick up building materials, construction waste, hazardous items such as paint tins, batteries, light bulbs, or gas bottles, electronic waste (e-waste) such as computers, mobile phones, DVD players, and TVs, large sheets of glass (like windows or mirrors), asbestos, motor vehicle parts like engines, car batteries or tyres, fence material, or items that are too heavy for two people to lift.

If what you want to get rid of can be recycled or reused (for instance, if you're getting rid of an undamaged lounge set because you've bought

a new one to replace it), then you might want to consider donating your goods to some kind of charity like St Vinnies or the Salvos.

On the night before your scheduled collection, leave your items stacked neatly on the kerbside outside of your home. The guideline is to stack them no higher or wider than 2 motorbikes parked together, otherwise they may not be collected.

### Illegal dumping and fines

If you leave your garbage on public space for others to dispose of, including your own kerbside, it is considered to be illegally dumped. This pollutes the environment, it's a safety risk to other people, it looks unattractive, and it devalues neighbourhoods. Also, as illegal dumping can lead to fines of up to \$8,000, it's very important to do the right thing.

Want to find your local Council? It's easy! Just Google: "What Council does (your suburb name) belong to?"



## Kindness &

## Flourishing

### Go Hand in Hand at the AGM

By Warren Heggarty

**'Kindness and flourishing go hand in hand' said Flourish Australia Chair Professor Elizabeth More AM at our Annual General Meeting on November 7th 2023. This was also the launch of our 2023 Annual Report entitled 'Kindness.'**

Professor More spoke with great gratitude of the contribution of the various people with lived experience who shared their stories in the annual report. Two of them were present at the AGM where they were presented with framed photos as a memento of their role: Rohan (Cranebrook Service) and Taylor (Blacktown Women and Children's Centre) and her little son who we have all come to know as 'Choppy.'

Professor More told us that the organisation was in a strong financial position and this was backed up by our Treasurer Andrew Pryor. She also mentioned some of the great achievements of the past year and the enormous ongoing task of updating our 'CIMS' information management system so as to better serve people.

This year the AGM Keynote speaker was Laurie Leigh, CEO of National Disability Services which is the peak body representing disability providers (like Flourish Australia) all across Australia.

Laurie's address focused on two main topics: The recent Disability Royal Commission and the Review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. (See the story "Scale it up, scale it down" in Panorama December 2023, page 11)

Laurie went through some of the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission and noted one issue on which there is considerable division: segregation. The lived experience commissioners, among others say that the existence of group homes, special schools and disability enterprises are 'by their very nature segregated.' They advocate full integration. Special Schools would be phased out by 2051, ADEs by 2034 and group homes by 2038.

Others argue that it is to the advantage of some people who live with disability to retain these three things.

One interesting issue that came out of the review and about which there are differences of opinion is 'Unified Regulation.' Laurie explained that often one worker might be involved in two or all of three separate sectors, those of Disability Care, Aged Care and Health Care. In the United Kingdom there is an overarching body that governs uniform standards for all three. Should we have the same approach here? There are pros and cons to this idea and as yet there is no final decision. Laurie pointed out that for one worker to be subject to three separate forms of registration is 'surely not a good thing.'



**TOP LEFT: Laurie Leigh was Keynote speaker. PHOTO NEIL FENELON. ABOVE: Dolly gets the message from our 2023 Annual Report PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY**





# Massage Therapy

## Does it Work for Chronic Stress or PTSD?

By Warren Heggarty

**A lot of people report that having a massage reduces their feelings of stress. There is also evidence that levels of cortisol (which is associated with muscle tension and stress) can be reduced by massage. A one-hour massage, according to the Mayo Clinic also releases serotonin, which may be beneficial for anxiety. (Marsolek, 2020)**

So in general, the evidence does suggest that 'massage may have some positive mental health effects.' (Gerlach, 2023) It won't hurt to give it a go! Many people however find the very idea of massage unpleasant. This can include people with chronic stress, including a background of trauma. Would it be worthwhile to try to overcome that feeling of awkwardness to see if it worked?

Massage therapist Pamela Fitch has extensive experience working with people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and has written a book about it 'Talking Body: Listening Hands' which emphasises professionalism and communication.

"People experience PTSD when their choices over what happens to their bodies are taken from them... when actions are taken that they have no control over, then no place or person feels safe." (McCafferty, 2016)

"For a person to allow you to touch them, they must trust," says Pamela Fitch, "People with PTSD have difficulty trusting, and that's why it's so essential that therapists work first on building trust and ensuring the client understands they can refuse treatment. Without client trust, there is no proceeding."

What sort of scientific evidence is there of benefits to people living with chronic or severe stress? Psychotherapist Jennifer Gerlach writing in Psychology Today suggests that a good way of measuring the benefits would be to look at the effect of massage on reducing sleep disturbance.

She concludes though that 'research on the effects of massage on sleep quality among individuals who experience chronic stress is lacking,' due partly to lack of funding and the small numbers of people surveyed.

WH

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- Gerlach, J. (2023, October 1). Can Getting a Massage Improve Mental Health. Retrieved from Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com>
- Marsolek, A. (2020, July 20). Can massage relieve symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress? Retrieved from The Mayo Clinic: [https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/McCafferty, I. \(2016, May 24\). In Safe Hands: Massage and PTSD. Retrieved from AMTA: https://www.amtamassage.org](https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/McCafferty, I. (2016, May 24). In Safe Hands: Massage and PTSD. Retrieved from AMTA: https://www.amtamassage.org)

**ABOVE: More research is needed before we can know how much benefit massage has for people with PTSD. PHOTO: MASSAGENERDS/ PIXABAY. OPPOSITE: WARREN HEGGARTY**



## Fire Safety Visits

Did you know you that in Qld and NSW you can request a fire safety visit in your home? Other states also have free home safety resources. Bushfire season is here but don't let it distract you from the need to keep your home safe on the inside!

According to NSW Fire and Rescue EVERYONE can benefit from a free safety visit, but ESPECIALLY older people, people who live alone, who have limited mobility or sensory impairments, or who need support from carers. The only people who cannot get this free service are landlords of premises with no tenants,

'During your safety visit, we will attend your home and check that you have working smoke alarms... if you do not have one, firefighters will install one at no cost. If you ask them to, they can check out your whole residence and give you personalised safety advice. Details of home fire safety services for each state can be found online here:

### NSW

'Safety Visit' Fire and Rescue NSW  
<https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au>

### Qld

'Safehome' Queensland Fire and Emergency Services <https://www.qld.gov.au/emergency/safety/safehome-booking>

### Vic

No equivalent service from Fire Rescue Victoria, but free group speakers and online resources are available: [frv.vic.gov.au](http://frv.vic.gov.au)

### SA

The Metropolitan Fire Service holds home fire safety group meetings through neighbourhood watch etc [mfs.sa.gov.au](http://mfs.sa.gov.au)

### ACT

<https://esa.act.gov.au/be-emergency-ready/smoke-alarms>



# PREVENTION COALITIONS

## NIPPING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN THE BUD

By Warren Heggarty

**Can the rising tide of mental health issues be stemmed by preventive measures aided by Community Coalitions? The Wellbeing and Prevention Coalition outlines how this might work in a recent 'policy brief.'**

Today there is greater investment in mental health than ever before, yet the situation seems to be growing worse especially among young people. The Wellbeing and Prevention Coalition therefore recommends we try a new approach. 'Exploring the role of Community Coalitions in the prevention of mental health conditions' outlines how this might work.

One starting point is to look at risk factors for developing mental health issues and factors that protect us from developing mental health issues.

Risk factors include certain traits such as inhibition, irritability and

'high stress reactivity.' Then there are experiences themselves such as a child's exposure to threats, parent-child difficulties, poor peer relations, a sense of being excluded or being poorly evaluated, low socio-economic status and finally adverse experiences such as abuse and being bullied,

Factors that might protect us from developing mental health issues include

1. Emotional competence
2. Supportive Family
3. Supportive Peer group (ie, good friends)
4. Social Competence
5. School adjustment

Looking at the 'protective factors,' it could be argued that these are chiefly in the domain of parenting. Perhaps to a lesser extent they are influenced by our teachers and schools.

What exactly are Community Coalitions and how do they counteract risk and promote protective factors.

Coalitions 'seek to empower, mobilise, and organise community members to influence resource allocation and decision making. Which sounds a lot like lobbying.

Co-design is important, 'involving the intended beneficiaries in the initiative's design design, implementation and evaluation.'

The Brief describes some evidence for the effectiveness of Community Coalitions, most of which seems a little modest, yet the Brief insists that 'small preventative effects in population interventions can accumulate to reduce the development of large numbers of disorders.'

Communities that Care Geelong supported 'Australia's first trial of the Strengthening Families program. Evaluations showed that disadvantaged families experienced improved parent and child mental health and family life.'

Communities that Care Warrnambool ran Australia's first trial of the Good Behaviour Game leading to 'significant reductions in emotional and behavioural problems in schools.

The Brief recommends that more funding be put behind Coalitions so that more research can be carried out. It recognises that where there is a significant preventive benefit, it will save the taxpayer money.

This leads us to the subject of Social Investment Bonds. Community Coalitions might have the potential for applying local knowledge, but they are dependent on public funding. Social Investment Bonds involve private investment for profit. Investors obtain returns on their investment based on the savings to the taxpayer. This suggests that bigger projects can be handled over longer periods. An example is the Resolve Program run by Flourish Australia.

Toumbourou J.; Westrup, E.; & Rowland, B. (2023) Exploring the role of community coalitions in the prevention of mental health conditions

**ABOVE: Community Coalitions have knowledge of their local areas. 'WHAT'S FOR DINNER' by Virginia Arregui. A mural on cultural diversity from Canada Bay Civic Centre, Five Dock NSW PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY**



# “Slice Silence”

## Unhiding Trauma and Self-Harm

By Warren Heggarty



**How do we approach self harm? In a past issue (December 2022) we read about Megan Paull's 'alternatives to self harm.' In the short film 'Slice/Silence,' Indigo Daya talks about how self harm can be seen as an alternative to the enforced silence. This enforced silence often follows from serious trauma such as child abuse.**

The film premiered on Mental Health Day, 10 October 2023, at an event at THE BANK, University of New South Wales, Kensington. Afterwards, Indigo gave a talk about her lived experience and research into this area. Following that a group of academic colleagues engaged in a panel discussion with the public audience.

All of this is part of Indigo's PhD project at the National Health and Medical Research centre ALIVE Centre. It is described as a 'creative, survivor-led space to explore and witness together.'

According to event publicity, guests at last year's Big Anxiety event in Melbourne had been 'invited to sit with art cushion objects, hold them, injure them, stitch them, bandage them, destroy them, tattoo them...

whatever they wanted. Over time the cushions became layered with testimony, pain and response. Conversation circles were held where we talked about the things that are normally silenced about self injury, trauma and injustice.'

This evening at the BANK, Indigo spoke about how her self harm was related to having been abused. To her, the greatest element of this trauma was not so much the abuse itself as being told not to tell anyone. She kept quiet for 27 years!

Through silence, the shame that rightly should sit with the perpetrators, remains solely with the victim.

Self harm, then, can be seen as a kind of voice in the silence to express the inexpressible. The fact that the scars of self harm are themselves taboo and not able to be discussed 'perpetuates the abuse.'

Worse, Indigo says, the medical model sees self harm as something that takes place entirely within the individual and brands it a 'pathology' to be eradicated.

One of the most frequently repeated messages of the mental health system is the advice to 'ask for help.' Indigo asks in all seriousness why someone with her experience

WOULD ask for help when so many clinicians evidently do not understand the experience of people who self-harm.

She recalled a doctor once saying to her 'I'm not going to waste a local anaesthetic on YOU,' before stitching up her self made wound without anaesthetic.

Even after decades of the 'consumer movement' fighting against certain practices, she says we still face things like 'shock treatment,; strip searching and medication that makes you zombified.'

Many of those present had lived experience and during the panel discussion spoke of nurses and doctors taking a punitive approach to them, displaying 'cold, damaging, brutal responses' to their injuries that effectively retraumatised them.

'Your experiences seem more real when people hear them' explained Indigo. If one is condemned to silence then one may even begin to doubt that the abuse even happened. This is like a silent 'gas-lighting' which serves only the abusers.

**ABOVE:** Some of the pillows that are the focus of the Slice Silence art installation. **INSET:** a close up of the markings on one of the pillows.

PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY

# 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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