

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

panorama

Monthly Issue April 2021 #80A



The **Easter Show** Returns

Suicide Prevention
and Postvention

Peer Support from a
Magpie With a Disability!

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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
CEO: 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.

Subscriptions, questions, feedback, praise, curses?

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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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Contents

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PHOTO COURTESY PENRITH/SEVEN HILLS YOUTH TEAMS

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Contributors

Eva Maraz took some on-the-spot pics of the 2021 Mardi Gras exclusively for Panorama.

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Oscar Lehman is Team Coordinator at Flourish Australia's Newcastle service.

Dylan formerly accessed Flourish Australia's Disability Employment Service.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?
We're All Ears!

You don't need to be a writer to share your story with Panorama's readers: we can help you to write your story and inspire others!

We especially like recovery stories from people with a lived experience of mental health issues.

To share your story contact
Panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au



Family & Carers

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

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

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

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

Mental Health Carers NSW

Ph: 1300 554 660

Arafmi Queensland

Ph: (07) 3254 1881

Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network

Ph: 1300 620 042

Mental Health Carers Australia

Ph: 1300 554 660

Kids Helpline

Ph: 1800 551 800

COPMI – Children of Parents with Mental Illness

www.copmi.net.au



Inspiring Words From **Sam Bloom** at Flourish Australia's High Tea

By Grant J Everett

Following a catastrophic accident that left her paralysed, Sam Bloom was falling into a deep depression... until she found an unexpected little helper who kept her going: a broken baby magpie called Penguin.

Sam shared her life story, equal parts tragic and uplifting, as part of Flourish Australia's virtual high tea, celebrating International Women's Day 2021.

"When my children were at school and my husband Cameron was working, Penguin was my constant companion," Sam told us. "She would chatter and sing, and she'd

never let me wallow in sadness. I didn't realise it at the time, but as we cared for one another, we were keeping each other alive. Penguin's ability to bring happiness into our lives is something I will always be grateful for. Sometimes, when things seemed too much to bear, Penguin would sit with me outside and we'd look up at the sky, hoping for better days."

As she was an avid surfer before her accident, Sam really missed being in the water. A friend suggested kayaking, as it only requires your arms. Sam found the idea terrifying at first, convinced something would

go wrong and she would drown. However, not only did Sam find that she was good at kayaking, she ended up competing with the Australian Paralympic team in the Italy World Championships.

It took longer for Sam to get back on a surfboard. Only after an encouraging letter from somebody with a spinal injury did she find the courage to try. Sam went on to be selected for the Australian team at the World Adaptive Surfing Championship, and reached the finals undefeated. It wasn't until Sam caught her last wave in that her teammates told her she'd won!

ABOVE: Sam Bloom with her best bud, Penguin the Magpie. PHOTO: SAM BLOOM

“Sam explained how the power of animals, sport, nature and family play key roles in giving her the motivation to get out of bed each day, and suggested these things to anybody who is struggling.”

Sam published a book about her experiences called “Penguin Bloom: The Odd Little Bird Who Saved A Family.” Actress Naomi Watts and her kids fell in love with the story, and Naomi decided that Sam’s journey would make an inspiring movie. The Bloom family have been involved throughout the film’s production to ensure accuracy, and the film was even shot in their home! Sam spent a lot of time on set, as Naomi would invite her to check that her representation of Sam’s experience was authentic; such as the effort involved in getting out of bed.

“Penguin Bloom” is currently playing at Australian cinemas and has had many positive reviews.

Sam answered a number of audience questions. She explained how the power of animals, sport, nature and family play key roles in giving her the motivation to get out of bed each day, and suggested these things to anybody who is struggling. Sam also said that when we suffer, we often feel alone, and she finds it valuable to speak to other people who have spinal cord injuries and can empathise. Using our difficult experiences to support each other on a deeper level is what peer work is all about.

“I can be deeply unhappy about my disability, but life is a mixture of good and bad for everyone. Everything can be taken away when you least expect it, through no fault of your own. Despite our challenges, even when life seems unbearable, leave yourself open to hope and love... even if it’s only from a scruffy little magpie!”

Notable quotables from the audience

Paula Hanlon, a peer worker who serves on Flourish Australia’s Board, confirmed the positive role that pets play in our lives.

“Having a cat has greatly helped with my recovery and literally changed my life,” Paula said.

Professor Elizabeth Moore AM spoke about how International Women’s Day is particularly important to Flourish Australia because 51% of the people who access our services, and 70% of our employees, are women.

“Sadly, the rights of women still fall far, far below those of men in many corners of the world,” Professor Moore said. “We need to celebrate the achievements made by women, and this can be as simple as learning to say “thank you” when it’s due. Together, we can create a safe and inclusive world for women, and that includes those who identify as transgender and gender diverse.”

Fiona, Enquires Officer for Flourish Australia, told us what she got out of our International Women’s Day event.

“I’d actually just seen the Penguin Bloom movie. My friends and I were a little teary afterwards, but we felt much warmer inside and out! I greatly appreciated Sam’s raw honesty about her thoughts and feelings since her accident. Sometimes she feels okay, sometimes she doesn’t. Sam is a person who sets challenging personal goals and is determined to fulfil them. Despite this, one insensitive comment from a Doctor almost led her to give up hope. Sam’s true self has won through, though.”

“Sam provided some very helpful quotes,” Fiona continued. “The main one, ‘Never give up,’ especially resonates with this International Women’s Day theme of ‘Choose to Challenge.’ Her message was that we are stronger than we think we are, that we can’t let the misery of the bad outshine the good, and to have the courage to ask for help. It was especially encouraging to hear that Sam’s beliefs resonate with our values at Flourish Australia, such as offering people a ray of hope. This demonstrates empathy and can be exactly what somebody needs to muster the motivation to believe in a better future. It’s clear that Sam’s family and friends never gave up

on her, even when she pushed them away. That’s an important message, too.”

“Finally, Cameron Bloom’s photography is beautiful. He has masterfully captured his wife’s journey, especially her friendship with Penguin, with great empathy. Penguin is an amazing little Magpie!”

Gwen Challenger-Scotsman has been saddened and angered by recent acts of violence towards women reported in the media, and feels that Australia is moving backwards in some ways.

“I have a tee shirt I wear once a year on International Women’s Day. It says ‘Reclaim The Night.’ Sadly, some 20 years on from when I first started wearing it, now we have to reclaim the day as well as the night.”

Comments from the watch party at New Outlook

Members from Flourish Australia’s New Outlook centre at Wollongong held a live watch party for Sam Bloom’s presentation. The viewers shared how powerful they found Sam’s story.

“It made me cry. I was thinking, what if that happened to me?” wondered Christine Chamberlain. “I’m so happy the bird didn’t fly away. I related to this because I have a cat who has stayed with me, he hasn’t run away.”

“It hit close to home, as my Dad was in a wheelchair. What people don’t realise is that it doesn’t only affect the person involved, but has a flow on effect to everyone around them, really changing everyone’s lives, too,” said Harley Quinn. “Inspirational.”

“I found it to be very moving and very heartfelt,” said Totsi Todorovska, Team Coordinator. “Heartbreaking how a life can be changed in a split moment.”



A Call for Change Even a Pandemic Can't Silence

By Grant J Everett

Proving that not even COVID-19 can put a stop to the pride and the passion of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, on the 6th of March tens of thousands of spectators filled the Sydney Cricket Ground to cheer on more than 120 floats and a horde of marchers.

Mardi Gras has grown to become one of the world's most iconic LGBTI cultural festivals, and this year's theme was RISE: this was a call to action to share love, compassion, respect and understanding with one another. Everyone was urged to sign a personal pledge to take action on calling for laws that protect all of us equally, irrelevant of our gender identity or sexuality.

Live entertainment included electronic duo Electric Fields, ARIA Award-winner Montaigne and indie popstar G Flip. UK singer Rita Ora closed the festivities with a headline performance of many of her hit

tracks. There was also a reveal of the upcoming STAN series "RuPaul's Drag Race Down Under," which will be a competition between some of Australia's most fabulous drag queens, and the latest iteration of the popular RuPaul's Drag Race series.

Partnership

Flourish Australia has always been vocal in its support of the LGBTI community. All of our offices, businesses and services declared to be safe spaces, and our representatives have taken part in the Mardi Gras parade on a number of occasions. Here's what a few of them said about the 2021 event!

Mark

"For Mardi Gras, I usually celebrate by dining out by myself and buying something nice," said Mark, who's worked at Flourish Australia's Figtree Conference Centre. "It's like Christmas for me!"

Peter

"COVID-19 restrictions did impact the festival, but many events still occurred, albeit in a revised and COVID-safe format, like having a limited crowd, a reduced number of floats and a limited number of people per float," said Peter Farrugia, Manager Peer Work. "The floats paraded around the perimeter of the SCG grounds, and there was entertainment in the centre."

John

"As my family haven't really been anywhere in ages, the opportunity to go out and have a fun evening at the Mardi Gras was much appreciated after such a difficult year," said John Maraz, Senior Workforce Development Coordinator. "The kids were interested in attending something entertaining, but I don't think they were thinking too much about what this event represents."

ABOVE: A shot from the stands of tens of thousands of people having a great time. RIGHT, TOP OF PAGE: The famous Dykes on Bikes revving it up! PHOTOS BY EVA MARAZ

"When we met at the SCG at dusk there was already a huge crowd of people, and many of them were dressed up in different and exciting ways. The atmosphere was electrifying, and there was a real sense that something special was about to happen, as well as a feeling of togetherness and happiness. It was a little unusual to be having fun with 41,000 other people with the pandemic still hovering, but plenty of precautions had been put in place.

"We watched the parade unfold as the evening progressed into a coloured sunset. First, the self-proclaimed "Dykes On Bikes" filled the stadium with smoke and revving, and a stream of performers came on stage with flurries of strobe lighting and dramatic spurts of fire. The diversity of floats and marchers seemed to come alive in a different way compared to going down Oxford Street: as everything was far more contained, you could really see all the different elements of the LGBTI community at once.

"My son Max is nearly 16, and he told me matter-of-factly that his school friend and the friend's boyfriend were just over on another stand. My daughter Eva, who is 13, was most intrigued by all the colourful groups parading about the stadium, finding it interesting and different. She took photos of her favourite outfits (many thanks to Eva for her great photography skills! – Ed).

"Fortunately we brought our own snacks and drinks, because the lines for everything were huge!"

The legacy

According to Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras CEO, Albert Kruger: "The parade has gone ahead every year since 1978, no matter what, so we're very happy we could continue to honour this commitment and deliver a safe event for our community during these times. We look forward to returning to our home on Oxford Street as soon as we can, but if the last 12 months has taught us anything, it's that our community is resilient. We have faced many challenges throughout history and we have always found a way to celebrate, to express ourselves and have our voices heard. Last night was proof of this."



Although he acknowledged Australia has experienced many societal strides, Mr Kruger highlighted ways the LGBTI community haven't achieved equality.

"Today, faith-based service providers, including schools, can lawfully turn us away, even when they receive public funding to deliver their essential services. Trans Australians are vilified, struggle to access critical healthcare and face insurmountable hurdles to updating their ID documents to reflect who they are."

And if any organisation knows a thing or two about the state of equality in Australia, then it would have to be Equality Australia! Their CEO, Anna Brown, said:

"...we see the demand for equality every day. We see it when a private school can lawfully fire a teacher because she's a lesbian. We see it when Service NSW will not issue a corrected ID document to a

trans person without first requiring invasive surgery. We see it when people born with intersex variations have no say in surgery that seeks to conform their bodies to someone else's vision for them. We see it when LGBTIQ people are made to change or suppress who they are in harmful conversion practices, which are still illegal in most states. These are some of the pressing issues for our communities today. But like we saw when Equality Australia helped lead the YES campaign for marriage equality, we can achieve great things when we rise for equality, together."

Still a long way from ideal

Sadly, following Mardi Gras, a number of assaults took place. Mr Kruger shared his sadness on the Mardi Gras website, and his full statement is available from this link.

www.mardigras.org.au/news/everyone-deserves-to-feel-safe-walking-down-the-street



After Suicide: The Importance of Postvention

By Warren Heggarty

The number of Australians who take their own lives is now around the 3,000 mark each year. The loss to our community goes far beyond what that figure might suggest.

When a person takes their own life there are many challenges for those left behind. There is grief, but there can also be blame, anger and misunderstanding. Self blame is common (“if only I had realised...”). Without support, families can be torn apart and lives can be ruined.

‘Postvention’ to support people after someone has taken their own life is very important. Ultimately, POSTvention is a form of PREvention.

If you read the personal story by Yvonne about the effect her husband’s suicide had on her and her family (<https://postventionaustralia.org/yvonne-story/>) you will see what we mean. We should warn you that Yvonne’s story mentions details of the suicide

itself. The tragic chain of negative effects in the aftermath of this suicide illustrates how widespread the effects can be and how important postvention is.

A number of organisations specialise in postvention or have special postvention programs.

Postvention Australia

Postvention Australia <https://postventionaustralia.org> is a not-for-profit organisation which “aims to promote life by supporting and representing those bereaved by suicide and all those impacted in the community by suicide loss. They envision ‘an Australian community that compassionately responds and empowers those bereaved by suicide.’

Postvention Australia can put people in touch with four types of support groups: There are peer groups (where everyone has experienced a loss through suicide), or groups

facilitated by a health professional. Then there is a further distinction between open groups and closed (private) groups.

Postvention Australia also provides resources and training. See their web site for details.

Indigenous: NIPS

The National Indigenous Postvention Service provides emotional and practical support to families impacted by a loss from suicide or other traumatic events. This service is provided by the Thirrili organisation <http://thirrili.com.au> which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to address social disadvantage. NIPS is an Australian Government initiative.

According to the NIPS brochure, advocates are experienced in listening and providing culturally responsive support. ‘We work to ensure people access the supports they need. We provide throughcare and continue linking people to supports as needs change over time.’

To contact the National Indigenous Postvention Service, call **1800 805 801**, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Calls are responded to by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Advocate.

School Support

When a student takes their own life, it can increase the risk for other vulnerable students and people. Headspace, the youth mental health organisation with which Flourish Australia works in partnership, publishes a school support postvention kit which can be found here <https://headspace.org.au/assets/School-Support/Compressed-Postvention-Toolkit-May-2012-FA2-LR.pdf>

If you or someone you know is suicidal, please call one of the following national helplines:

- **Lifeline Counselling Service:**
13 11 14
- **Suicide Call Back Service:**
1300 659 467 (cost of a local call)

ABOVE: Suicide has profound effects. Postvention can be a form of prevention. PHOTO BY ‘MARKZFILTER’ ON PIXABAY



Veteran Suicide

By Warren Heggarty

Last November, 2020, the government appointed magistrate and reservist Dr Bernadette Boss CSE as 'National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention.'

Her job is 'to examine deaths by suicide of serving and ex-serving Australian Defence Force members, [and] to support the prevention of these deaths in the future.' (NCDVSP, 2020) However the full legislation empowering the Commissioner had not been passed [at the time of writing] and her status is acknowledged to be 'interim.' In the meantime there have been increasing calls to establish a Royal Commission to look into this same matter. The push followed revelations the suicide rate among Australian Defence Force personnel, once returning from service, was "more than double that of the general population." (Sky News, 2021)

So how does the veterans' and services' suicide rate compare to the rate in the general Australian population?

A number of things complicate measuring this rate. Firstly we need to take into account the fact that we are including the deaths of EX service people, most of whom are still alive. Secondly, suicide rates for the general population can be measured for all age groups simultaneously, but not all ages are represented in CURRENT service people. So for comparison, of current and ex- figures needs to be statistically 'adjusted for age.'

According to the Australian institute of Health and Welfare, the suicide rate among service and ex-service personnel differs markedly depending on a number of factors.

Compared to the general Australian population:

- CURRENT SERVICE personnel have a LOWER suicide rate. It is 37 per cent lower, or 47 per cent lower adjusted for age (because only a limited band of ages are found in current military service)
- EX-SERVICE males who discharged voluntarily have a similar rate of suicide to the general population.

- EX-SERVING males who were discharged on medical grounds have a higher suicide rate.
- EX-SERVING males who were discharged on other non-voluntary grounds have a higher suicide rate. (AIHW, 2020)

Details for Females have sometimes not been published because the small numbers involved could identify them and breach their privacy. However a figure of '127 per cent' higher than the Australian population is shown for EX-SERVING female personnel. The AIHW says that, statistically speaking, this figure has a high degree of unreliability, but it is obviously high.

In a 2018 report, AIHW had already identified the 'reason for discharge from the ADF as a significant predictor of suicide among ex-serving ADF personnel, with medical discharge found to be associated with an increased risk of suicide.' (AIHW, 2020)

Why is it that medically discharged people in particular have this increased risk? Knowing the actual reason will allow us to look at ways of saving lives. There are a number of theories of course, but many unanswered questions. However it is looking increasingly likely that a full enquiry is about to be launched which would hopefully settle the matter, at least from an official perspective.

Anyone who may be feeling distressed can contact the following organisations for support: SANE Helpline 1800 18 72 63 Lifeline 131 114 Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636.

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 Sky News. (2021, March 19). Pressure on PM to launch royal commission into veteran suicide. Retrieved from Sky News: https://www.skynews.com.au/details/_6241709854001

ABOVE: Understanding veteran suicide will help us to prevent it in future.. PHOTO BY BEC TOWNSEND/PIXABAY



Good Health is for Everybody

World Health Day 7th April

By Warren Heggarty

April 7th was the World Health Organisation's designated World Health Day and the theme this year was "Building a fairer, healthier world."

www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2021

The WHO points out that access to health care is unequal throughout the world. 'As COVID-19 has highlighted,' the WHO says, 'some people are able to live healthier lives and have better access to health services than others – entirely due to the conditions in which they are born, grow, live, work and age.'

Some of the factors that lead to this world inequality in health care include:

- Low income or unemployment, being unable to afford to pay for health care
- Poor housing, unhealthy or dangerous living conditions, lack of sewerage
- Poor education, lack of knowledge about hygiene, how disease spreads etc.
- Lack of access to clean water, lack of running water in homes
- Lack of access to health services in some places

WHO also mentions gender inequality as a reason for inequality in health care. These issues tend to be particularly acute in poorer countries, however, even in Australia we experience some of them. For example, people living in isolated and remote indigenous communities, and people living in rural areas, often have problems of access.

The WHO says that governments need to take a 'whole of government' approach in tackling health inequities. This means that it is not just a job for the Health Department to follow up. Public infrastructure such as sewerage, drainage and clean, running water supply are crucial to reducing health problems.

We all have a role to play

The problem of affordability of health care may involve generating employment, or introducing affordable insurance schemes, if not publicly funded health care. Schools play a role because children can be taught basic ideas about staying healthy, such as washing your hands, covering coughs and sneezes, cleaning and covering injuries.

One topic that has been highlighted recently is the availability of

vaccines. In some countries (for example Australia), common diseases like tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough and polio are rare. Smallpox has practically been eradicated

Tetanus is one example of a disease, related to injuries or childbirth, which until the 1980s caused over a million deaths each year in poor countries, chiefly among children and women in childbirth. Without treatment it is usually fatal, and treatment is not readily available in many of the poor areas where it is found. According to WHO Neonatal and maternal tetanus was reduced from 787,000 deaths a year in 1988, to being almost eliminated by 2021. (WHO, 2021) This was achieved in two ways. Firstly, by training birth attendants in better hygiene, and secondly, by vaccinating people.

Since the introduction of vaccination to Australia, in 1953, the chance of contracting Tetanus in the first place has been reduced enormously. With access to hospital care, the likelihood of dying is significantly reduced, even if you DO get it. In Australia, deaths from Tetanus were reduced from about 120 per year in 1910, to less than one per year by 2010. (AIHW, 2018)

In poorer countries where there is better adult employment and business opportunities, children are less likely to have to do the garbage-foraging work, which often exposes them to Tetanus infection. Adults who are employed to do this dirty work should have the benefit of working to safety procedures and be provided with access to protective clothing and first aid.

This shows that good health care is intertwined with everything we do and is not just the responsibility of doctors and nurses. Nor is it simply a matter of access to vaccines. The work needed to make a healthy world must be done by shopkeepers, mothers and fathers, tradespeople, drivers, teachers, labourers, and every one of us!

SOURCES

AIHW. (2018). Tetanus in Australia fact sheet. Retrieved from Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing: www.aihw.gov.au/

WHO. (2021). India achieves the goal of maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT) elimination. Retrieved from World Health Organisation India: www.who.int/india/

ABOVE: Plumbers have an important role to play in health. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

The Easter Show Returns

Reported by Ruby Golding (Penrith), Oscar Lehman (Newcastle)

This time last year we ALL missed out when the uncancelable Sydney Royal Easter Show was... well, cancelled.

Much of NSW goes to the show, especially young people. Missing out is just not on! It is something fun to look back on later in life.

Fortunately, the show went ahead as usual in 2021 and to celebrate, people From Flourish Australia's various youth teams headed to Sydney Olympic Park to see the livestock and produce in all its countrified glory!!

Georgia M who accesses Flourish Australia's Newcastle service said "the crew had an amazing time at the Easter Show. We spent the day collectively viewing art, enjoying rides and trying tasty food. We had to go outside our comfort zone as it was a long day with lots of travelling."

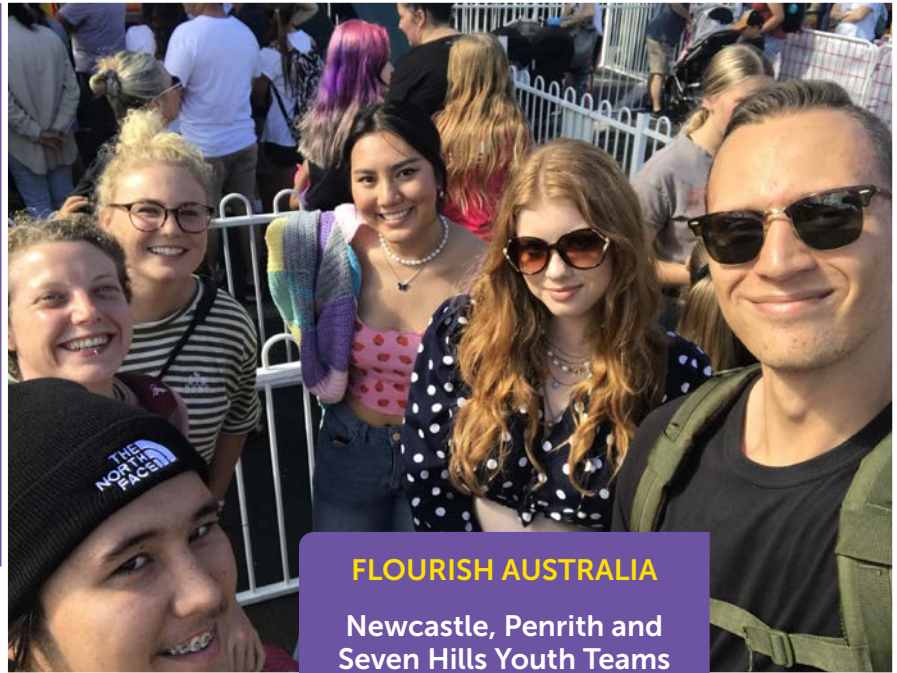
Staff member Georgia Ongley (no relation to the other three Georgias in attendance!) agreed that one of the things that made their outing special was how a number of the young people challenged themselves.

For example, the anxiety of being in large crowds can be excruciating for some of us.

This is why there were a number of breaks during the day to allow people to gather their thoughts and utilise strategies for being outside their comfort zones.

So it was a big experience for all!

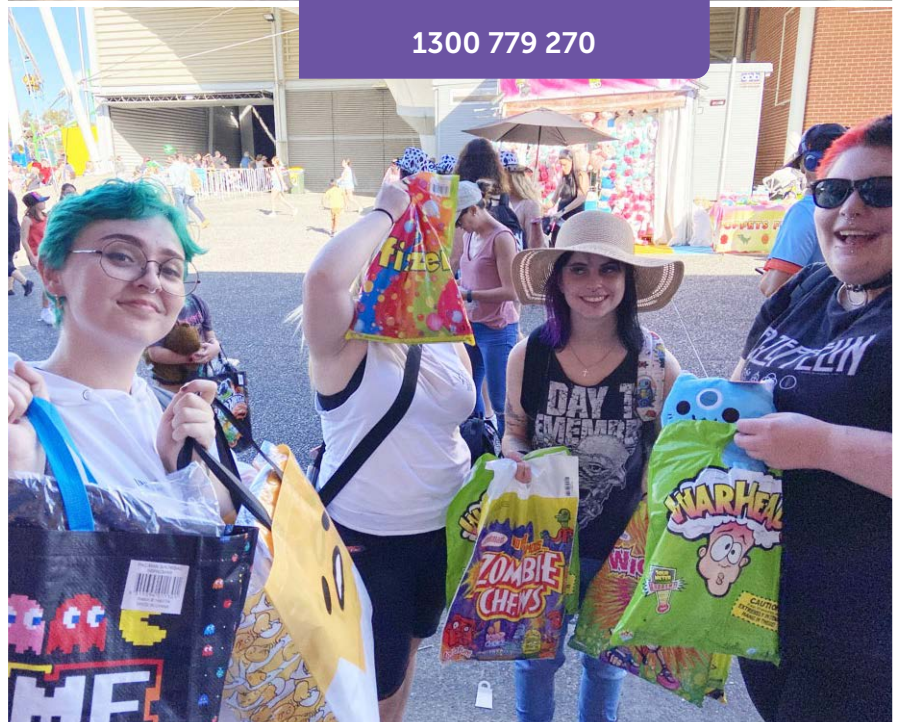
We should also give a massive thank you to Tyler Smith of Seven Hills YCLSS) for securing the free tickets for all the Youth Teams across Flourish Australia.



FLOURISH AUSTRALIA

Newcastle, Penrith and Seven Hills Youth Teams

1300 779 270



The Challenge of Fun!

Young people in these photos include... NEWCASTLE:

Ness Brown, Georgia Dagger, Oscar Lehman (staff), Georgia McColl, Jujan Dela Cruz, Lisa Nguyen. PENRITH & 7 HILLS: Sarah Adams, Ariel Boyle, Gypsy-Lee Cummins, Michael Terrasin, Georgia Ongley (staff)

TOP: Smiles all round from the Newcastle crew! MIDDLE: Showbags! RIGHT: Sideshow Alley is still popular. Some of the rides are ideal for people who would like to become astronauts or stunt daredevils. PHOTOS BY THE YOUTH TEAMS



Your Kidney Health

By Warren Heggarty

There are a lot of things that most of us can do to help keep our kidneys in good order until old age. Kidney health is an important issue for everyone, not in the least for people who live with mental health issues and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

According to Kidney Health Australia, 'psychological factors' such as depression, having a poor quality of life and impaired thinking have associations with chronic kidney disease, as well as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. 'Depression is highly prevalent in persons with [these diseases]. Along with other 'metabolic syndrome' diseases, Chronic Kidney Disease

causes a 'reduction of quality of life on top of increased risk of complications, hospitalisations and death.' (Kidney Health Australia, 2021)

Indigenous Australians

You might be able to recall a number of Indigenous Australians who were taken from us at a young age by kidney disease. I am thinking of a prominent public servant/footballer, a well known NT teacher and singer (remember the song 'Treaty?') and more recently another world famous singer who was blind.

Kidney Health Australia tells us that in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, chronic kidney

disease 'occurs at a younger age and progresses faster than [in] non-indigenous individuals.'

One of the recipients of the 2020 Shine awards, Lauwana Blackley is a dialysis nurse on the largely indigenous Palm Island Qld. The main part of the township, Bwngcolman (Great Palm Island), is 57km North of Townsville, Qld and has a population of 2,455 of whom 94.1% are indigenous.

Dialysis keeps people alive whose kidney function is fatally poor. Dialysis is a gruelling treatment involving being hooked up to a blood filtration machine for five hours three times a week.

ABOVE: Kidneys remove excess fluids from the body, but not having enough fluid hinders their work. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY. OPPOSITE: Cross section of a kidney. The kidney is a filter for your blood, extracting toxins, waste products and flushing them out of your system. If kidneys don't work well, these impurities build up. IMAGE BY BALIK/PIXABAY

One of the contributing factors to kidney failure is Type 2 Diabetes, a preventable condition which is four times as prevalent among indigenous people than the general Australian population. Lauwana Blackley's 12 patients (in a population of 2,455) range in age from 30 to 70-something. Her main focus though is to help people avoid this kind of debilitating disease in the first place. (Smith, 2020)

Kidney Transplant

People who have end stage kidney disease who require a transplant to recover. Currently there is only one kidney transplant unit in Queensland but the government has promised a second unit for North Queensland.

It has been reported that there has been some controversy over whether to locate the unit near to Cape York Peninsula at Cairns or further south in Townsville. According to The Australian newspaper, the Mayor of Cairns says that his city is easier to access for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The mayor of Townsville points out that her city hosts a university hospital. The difference is not trivial. Both are in North Queensland, but it takes four hours to drive from one to the other! (Peel, 2021)

Life expectancy

According to Wikipedia, as recently as 28 September 2006, Former Queensland Premier Peter Beattie claimed in an interview on Stateline with Chris O'Brien from ABC Brisbane, that the average life expectancy on Palm Island was "50 years, 30 less than the Australian Average." (Wikipedia, n.d.)

According to the Palm Island Health Action Plan 2010 to 2015, 'life expectancy and mortality data is unavailable for small communities such as Palm Island.' However if you look at some of the health statistics in the same report you will see that the health statistics on Palm Island compare very poorly to the general population.

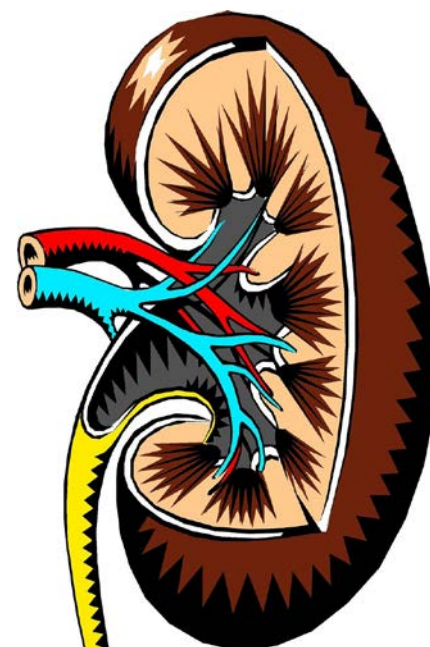
The Plan shows that the rate of Endocrine disease (includes Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes) was 50.9 per 1,000 population. Compare this to the figure of 5.7 per 1,000 for non-indigenous people in the State of Queensland. (Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council, 2011)

For many years now, Panorama has often reported that metabolic syndrome (which can include diabetes, obesity, kidney and heart failure) disproportionately affects people who live with mental health

issues. It reduces the life expectancy of people (of any race) with serious mental health diagnoses by 20 or 25 years. Yet there are many things we can all do to help reverse this. A few of these things are listed in this article!

What do kidneys do?

- They get rid of any excess fluid in your body
- They filter out waste and toxins from your blood
- They help regulate your blood pressure
- They activate vitamin D
- They help produce red blood cells
- They make sure you have the right amount of minerals in your blood.



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What you can do to save your kidneys!

- 1. Take the test:** I decided to 'road test' the Kidney Health Australia Kidney Risk Test, found on its web site. Surprisingly, my result was that I was 'at risk' because of family history, being overweight and being a former smoker (twenty years ago!). However my doctor recently tested me and found no actual kidney problem.
- 2. Ask Your Doctor:** The reason it is a good idea to get tested by a doctor even if you feel OK is that you can lose 90 per cent of your kidney function before the symptoms appear! That's how people get caught.
- 3. Do regular exercise**
- 4. Avoid putting on excess weight**
- 5. Eat a balanced variety of foods**
- 6. If you smoke, quit smoking**
- 7. Don't drink a lot of alcohol**
- 8. Drink plenty of water, don't let yourself get dehydrated**
- 9. Have a regular check up with your doctor**
- 10. Know your family medical history and tell your doctor**



Job Vacancy Rebound

By Warren Heggarty

If you take a walk down the main street of your town, you might be surprised at how many signs you will see in the windows asking for staff to fill vacancies. These are likely to be very popular, quality suburban restaurants, yet before you even make it to viewing the menu, you are confronted by a job advertisement!

According to a report by Patrick Commins in The Australian, national job vacancies from the National Skills Commission are at a twelve year high as at April 2021. Meanwhile, hospitality businesses have said they were struggling to fill job vacancies. (Commins, 2021)

Commins gives the example of Merrivale which now receives half as many job applications as they did prior to the pandemic, for advertised hospitality positions. This business is struggling to fill 200 vacancies, raising serious concerns about how they will manage to resume normal operations as restrictions are lifted. One complicating factor for the hospitality industry is that, because international borders have been closed, they are cut off from a major source of casual employees; backpackers and overseas students!

According to Wes Lambert, chief executive of the Restaurant and

Catering Industry Association, in February 2021 there were 200,000 fewer people in Australia who had student, working holiday or skilled worker visas, than in previous years. 'Short term workers play a vital role in sectors such as hospitality.' (Lambert 2021)

As one door shuts, another door opens

As a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns, 100,000 jobs were lost in hospitality and related fields, Australia-wide.

One of the consequences of lockdown and subsequent restrictions for Flourish Australia was that our social enterprise, Figtree Conference Centre was forced to shut down. Figtree had for many years provided training and work opportunities for people with mental health issues who wanted to work in hospitality. This closure was a great blow to everyone involved, but all of the supported employees who worked at Figtree were redeployed to other roles, in our other community businesses. Two have now moved into open employment!

Surging demand for labour is being experienced in hospitality, residential construction and

professional services. The field of residential construction is facing delays because of shortages of key trades peoples. Both skilled and unskilled labour is needed.

According to Lambert, restaurants and catering companies are calling for a new, short-term visa class to be created, called the COVID Recovery Workforce Visa, for pre-vaccinated foreign workers.

Whether that happens remains to be seen. However, now is a good time to update your resume and head down to the shops, if you are willing to work in hospitality.

This surge in demand for labour is likely to be a temporary one, because it appears to be linked to the 'COVID Recession' last year, when many people were laid-off. Nevertheless, it does demonstrate that opportunities can emerge as hard times pass.

Thanks to Sue O'Rourke for assistance with this story

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ABOVE: The entrance to this restaurant in Sydney tells a story. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY



Work experience with Ultra Tune gave Dylan

The Start he Needed

By Dylan and Flourish Australia's Online Editors

Connecting with Flourish Australia was the best thing I've ever done for my job prospects.

For a long time, my lived experience made it challenging for me to get a start in employment. Thanks to Flourish Australia's support over the past four years, I feel ready to find work and have set my sights on finding an apprenticeship.

When my Job Placement Manager at Flourish Australia's Disability Employment Services approached Ultra Tune Car Service in Newcastle about offering me an apprenticeship, they agreed to a work experience opportunity as a start point. I grew up working on cars with my Dad so working alongside qualified mechanics really appealed to me.

I loved being part of a professional team and picked up a lot of valuable knowledge.

Although the manager, Karen wasn't in a position to offer me a job, she wrote a wonderful reference. I used this to secure a trial with another company which I hope will turn into a full time position.

Having a job I'm passionate about is so important to me. I was raised with a strong work ethic and want to achieve financial independence for myself and my partner.

Ultra Tune Manager Karen says;

I would absolutely love to have Dylan on our team but due to the pandemic, we're not in a position to put on another person. We were introduced by his Job Placement Manager, Holly, who took the initiative to walk in and ask me about an apprenticeship. Flourish Australia is very professional. They organised the insurance needed for us to offer Dylan work experience and followed-up to ensure everyone was happy with the way things were going.

Our mechanics all appreciated Dylan's positive attitude. He was super keen to learn as much as he could from them and his dedication earned him a glowing reference. I can see he's serious about succeeding.

Dylan tells me he's now on trial with another business. I really hope he gets the job.

Talk to Flourish Australia today on 1300 779 270

Our approach to supporting you is different because more than 50% of the people we employ have had their own lived experience of mental health challenges and many of them make up our peer workforce. They get it, because they have been there, so they're able to come alongside you with genuine understanding and insight.

ABOVE: '[I] want to achieve financial independence for myself and my partner,' says Dylan.
PHOTO BY FLOURISH AUSTRALIA'S ONLINE EDITORS

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	Cessnock
Caringbah	Newcastle
Harris Park	Maitland
Hornsby	Morisset
Liverpool	Nelson Bay
Penrith	Raymond Terrace
Seven Hills	Wollongong
Surry Hills	

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

