

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

panorama

Monthly Issue **September 2023** #90C



**Motherhood,
Mental Health
& Employment**

**New
Therapeutic
Garden Opens**

Lived Experience Voices at TheMHS

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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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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...

Alison Gallagher is a proud Mum who's studying her way back to the workforce.

Nicole Charles is manager of Flourish Australia's Women and Children's service.

Taylor Rhodes accesses Flourish Australia's Women and Children's service.

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Contributions are welcome!

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Inspire
YOUR
Community
WITH YOUR STORY

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

Email us at: panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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

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

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



FAMILY & CARERS

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

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

Other Organisations

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

Mental Health Carers NSW Ph: 1300 554 660

Arafmi Queensland Ph: (07) 3254 1881

Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network Ph: 1300 620 042

Mental Health Carers Australia Ph: 1300 554 660

Kids Helpline Ph: 1800 551 800

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

PHOTO: Alison with her husband and two sons.

Heading Back to the Workforce

(after a very enjoyable detour)

By Alison Gallagher (as told to Grant J Everett)

I am a mother and a wife, and my husband and two boys have been very supportive of my mental health recovery ever since I had my stay in Bloomfield Hospital back in 2015. I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder while I was there, and I've been actively managing my recovery and wellness in a number of ways ever since, such as by meditating for half an hour each day.

My husband checks in regularly to make sure I'm doing OK, and he and my boys remind me to take my medication on time. My parents are also a huge source of support in my life, and I don't know where I would be without them. My whole family is constantly there for me, encouraging me to do all the things that I know keep me well.

I also see a peer support worker from Flourish Australia's Bathurst service for about an hour each week.

I first connected with Flourish Australia 12 months ago by ringing my local area coordinator for NDIS Social Futures, and explaining that I needed a one-on-one service that was tailored to my needs. After a bit of a search, Flourish Australia was clearly the right choice for me.

My peer worker helps to keep me well just by being there for support when I need it. It's wonderful to have a debrief with someone each week, and for them to check in with me to make sure that I am still on top of things. If I'm not feeling so great, I know that support is at hand.

I also see my psychologist Yin every month, and every six weeks I visit my GP Dr Jack. I would recommend that everyone on a mental health recovery journey should find

themselves a good GP they can talk to about their mental health. To my credit and thanks to the people in my life who support me, I have managed to stay well for the past eight years.

Doing Rewarding Things

I found that who you have as support can make all the difference, but I am also sure to do things that make me feel empowered, like reading. I believe knowledge is power, and the best way to gain knowledge is by reading as much as you can! I also love to colour in, and I have many complex colouring books that I can fill in with my boys. It's such a source of joy. Another way I relax is Diamond Dot painting; I love watching the picture come together as I stick the colourful dots on the canvas to make a beautiful scene. I also listen to music every day, and watch the occasional movie.

Becoming A Mum

Before I had my children I was a childcare worker. I had completed my Certificate III in Children Services through TAFE in 2004, and worked in several local childhood centres. I then went on to study a Bachelors of Early Childhood Education University at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst Campus.

After doing three years of my four year degree I met my husband, and it was clear to me that my future was with him, and that being a mum was a dream I wanted to achieve as soon as possible. So I left University, got married and had my family, a decision that to this day I don't regret one bit. I've been a stay-at-home mum for the past 13 years, and have loved every minute!

My boys are now 13 and 11, so I still have to do some motherly things, but they are quickly becoming more self-sufficient. I love having my children around, especially during the school holidays when we can enjoy each other's company more. Being a mum has shaped the person I am now, and I thank my children every day for encouraging me to be the best person I can be.

Back to the books!

Thanks to being well and in recovery for so long (and with my boys growing up), I have started studying at TAFE so I can gain some employable skills to get back into the work force. I am currently studying a Certificate III in Accounts Administration, and I am hoping to become a payroll clerk or some

similar role once I graduate. I've just passed my first subject, and I'm feeling pretty positive about the future.

In addition to checking in with me each week and going for a walk and talking about my mental health, more recently my Flourish Australia peer worker has been helping me to stay on track with my TAFE studies.

So that is my recovery story so far: eight years well, and counting!

Flourish Australia Bathurst
84 Piper Street,
Bathurst, NSW 2795

(02) 9393 9550
Weekdays 8am - 6pm
Weekends 9am - 5pm

How will YOU celebrate Mental Health Month? Watch this space!



Mental Health Month is celebrated every October in NSW.

This is an ideal time to assess our **mental health and wellbeing**, regardless of whether we have a lived experience of mental health issues or not.

It's also a great opportunity to learn about the importance of **good mental health** in our everyday lives, and to seek help when it's needed.



ABOVE: 'Different textures underfoot are for grounding.' PHOTOS BY GREENWOOD MEDIA

A LITTLE GARDEN WITH A BIG JOB!

Women and Children's Centre By Nicole Charles

Audrey Hepburn said:
"To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow."

On May 15, 2023 we opened the new Therapeutic Garden at Flourish Australia's Women and Children's Centre in Western Sydney NSW.

The support we provide at the Women and Children's Program is deeply grounded in trauma recovery, connection and relationship building; within families, with peers who have shared experiences, and with our community. So our little garden has a lot of work to do!

This garden has been a long time coming. In designing it, our hope was to create a space that would give back in a therapeutic way to those who engage with it, people of all ages and walks of life.

We took down the old equipment that was rusted and worn, and like a caterpillar it went into a COVID cocoon. Eventually it emerged changed, renewed and ready for exploring new possibilities.

We all know about the many benefits that connecting with nature has on both mind and body. Evidence shows that gardens make you feel happier and reduce stress. What's not to love?

We've provided mothers with spaces for social gatherings, and quiet contemplation. Different textures underfoot are for 'grounding' and barefoot walking: on the grass, on the mulch, and along the sensory path of stones and sand. There are plants with different colours, textures, smells and seasonal changes. It's a calming place to soak in sounds that crunch and rustle, and plants that gently sway in the wind. And you can pick some of the edible native and non-native plants to taste or add to a dish. It is an interactive experience that appeals to one, two or all of the senses.

Interactive play-spaces are important for children because play is a vital part of childhood. Children learn through play to develop social, emotional, and physical skills. Providing children with an outdoor learning environment that incorporates areas for quiet, natural, creative, active, and stimulating play, will support them to learn whilst using their imagination.

We have given children plenty of space to engage with the elements of nature, play with water, grow plants for smelling, taste something new and imaginative play props, observe insects, lizards and birds, dig and explore beneath the soil, move round on interesting pathways, and ride over bumps.

This therapeutic play-space will have a unique meaning for each child who is welcomed into it and offer special memories for families to share.

Flourish Australia were fortunate to get the funding support of Perpetual Foundation, as well as funding and practical support from two Western Sydney businesses, NJ Ashton Group and Cirillo Civic.

A garden is never really complete. You need time to see how we interact with it, and move through it, and how nature changes it over the seasons. We've laid some strong foundations and the team have dreams of greenhouses, potting benches, horticultural classes, a mud kitchen, classes for cooking what we grow, equipment for occupational therapy, and the list goes on...

It may not be grand, but it's wonderful to say the garden is again open for business.

On the next pages you will find a story adapted from the speech given at the garden's official opening on 15 May 2023 by Taylor Rhodes. Taylor will show you how important an impact we - and our garden - can have on the lives of women and children.



Breaking the Cycle: *Generational Domestic Violence*

By Taylor Rhodes

PHOTO: Women and Children's Centre participant Taylor (far Right) is pictured with (from Left to Right) veteran mental health activist Janet Meagher AM, Annie Sykes, Taylor's cousin and supporter Hayley, and supporter Alice PHOTO BY GREENWOOD MEDIA

Some readers might find parts of this story disturbing. Taylor's childhood was not typical. She was exposed to domestic violence, drugs, and a family murder.
- Editor

"Taylor's cousin Ireland participated in The Women and Children's Centre's residential program in 2019. Now, Taylor is a wonderful mum herself and when things became challenging for her, she was able to reach out for support from The Women and Children's Program, recognising the benefits of the support we provided her family in the past. We have been inspired by Taylor's strength, resilience, self-determination, and fierce advocacy for those recovering from domestic and family violence."

- Nicole Charles

My name is Taylor Rhodes, I am 18 years old and this is my story.

I have a 16 month old baby boy named Kayden. But many know him by his nickname "Choppy".

I had Kayden at the age of just 16, and he is the rainbow after my storm.

I had a tough upbringing as a kid, but the traumas I experienced have enabled me to mature into the person and mother I am today. My mother wasn't around while I was growing up because she was caught up on the wrong side of life. And I struggled with that a lot.

I came to be in my paternal grandmother's care at the age of three with my two older cousins, and my beautiful younger brother Brayden. Nan always tried her very best to shield us away from generational trauma, but it just became a norm in our household. Growing up, I never really took notice of how it affected myself and the loved ones around me until it was too late.

This next part may be hard for some to read: on the 8th of September 2015, my uncle returned home in an ice-induced psychosis and took the life of my Nan and my baby brother, aged eight, in front of myself and my two older cousins, Hayley and Ireland.

It was extremely hard to learn that what we went through growing up wasn't so normal at all. It became a

long battle with mental health from there. But us girls fight everyday to make a change in the community, and spread the word of the severe repercussions of drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Most importantly, we help educate people on how to break the cycle – for the new generation and the generations to come.

Strong Determination

The thing that brought me to Flourish Australia, was my strong determination to find a safe and stable place for my son and I so that we can learn, grow and break that cycle. I have learned many things in the short period that I have been a part of their program.

I have learned that it's okay to ask for help, that it's okay to feel the emotions we have whilst raising children and that it's okay to speak up and learn strategies so that we can change things for our baby's future.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

Breaking the cycle: Taylor Rhodes' story continued

I will say the groups run here at the Women and Children's Centre are absolutely amazing. My favourite is Women's Choice and Change. I was able to openly talk about domestic violence in a relationship, which myself and Kayden were unfortunately exposed to by my ex-partner. It really helped me to understand what domestic violence looks like in an intimate relationship. I thought I already knew what domestic violence was, but I was wrong.

I want people to understand that there are two completely different circumstances: domestic violence as a family member (which I had already experienced) and domestic violence in an intimate relationship. Flourish Australia taught me how to get out of that situation I was in and to become independent. I felt like I needed to go back to my then-partner because I wanted my son to have that "perfect family" with a mother and father figure in the picture, as I had never had that growing up.

I have grown and will flourish, having shaken loose from that toxic mindset. Flourish Australia has helped me grow from generational trauma and taught me so many beneficial parenting skills for the future.

The workers here have also inspired me to one day become a peer worker to work with families, women, men and children who have experienced what domestic violence is.

Using my experience, I want to help mothers that struggle to walk away from abusive partners rather than stay with them because that is all we have ever known.



So I would like to say a huge thank you to all the workers and the people who have made this place, the Women and Children's Centre a place for mothers to have a second chance, and allowing us to become the mothers we wish we had. My own mother would have greatly benefited from a program like Flourish Australia when she was a young mum, so she could have broken the cycle for us.

It would've been a beautiful safe space for my baby brother Brayden, to enjoy this lovely sensory garden we have here today like his little nephew Choppy does.

ABOVE: This therapeutic play-space will have a unique meaning for each child that is welcomed into it.

PHOTOS BY GREENWOOD MEDIA

From work to workout!
John Retires
 After 1/3 of a Century



What will you be doing in your retirement? Remember our story on preparing for retirement in May Panorama? It is important to prepare.

Well, John Taubert is looking forward to working out in his home gym! Flourish Australia's Marrickville service wished John a happy retirement on Monday 5th June 2023 after 33 years of continuous service!

These days it is common for people to change jobs a lot more frequently, but John had staying power! In fact, John remained constant while the company he worked for changed its name from PRA (Prestige Packing Co) to RichmondPRA to Flourish Australia. He also served at two main sites, the original PRA Redfern site in the old Renault Factory and, from 2012, in our Marrickville plant.

Pictured here is John receiving his retirement certificate from service Manager Kate Paraha on the shop floor at Marrickville. To prepare for his retirement, John had slowly reduced his shifts down to 1 day a week.

Kate says John has always been a keen athlete, regularly completing marathons and the Sydney Tower stair climb twice!

Flourish Australia's General Manager of Business Excellence Mohammed Alkhub, (who is also a keen marathon runner and a veteran staff member) told Panorama that John formerly served on the Workplace Health and Safety Committee.

"We would like to thank John for his long and loyal service and wish him all the best for his retirement."

PHOTO BY MOHAMMED ALKHUB

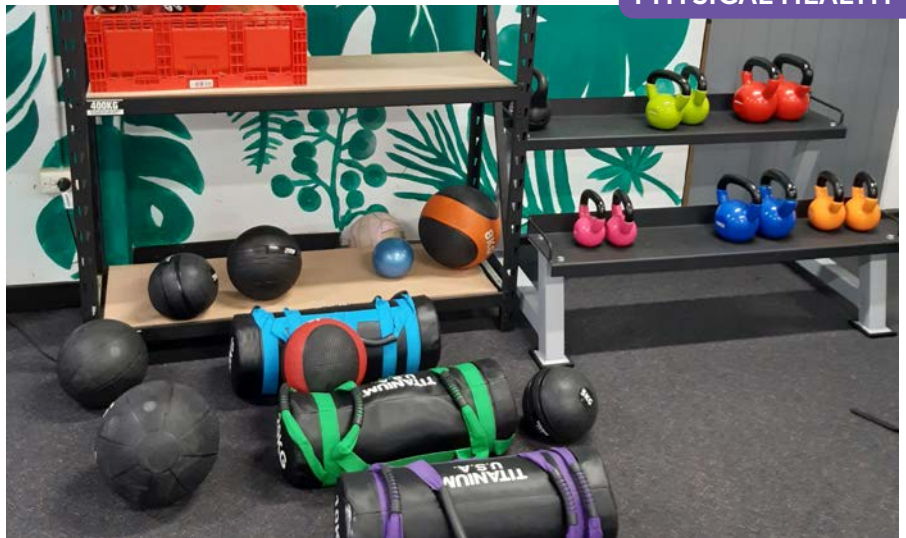
**Be Active,
 Stay Active**

'Boxercise is a favourite here!' said Emily the exercise physiologist. Gloves, punching bags, weights and medicine balls were in abundance when we stumbled upon the fabulous gym located at Flourish Australia's Buckingham House service in Surry Hills.

Emily is there two days per week but Buck House participants can come and go as they like. We found Chris hard at work on one of his twice weekly visits. There is even a 'Multi-station gym' which allows you to do numerous workout routines without changing location.

But Emily says that the best beginners exercise is walking!. 'It's free, it's easy and you can progress it' to harder things later.
 -WH

PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY



PHYSICAL HEALTH



LEFT: Ryan and Emma at Flourish Australia's New Outlook service in Wollongong.

CPS and NDIS: How **Ryan and Emma** Holistically Support All Needs

By Ryan Harriott and Emma Bradshaw (as told to Grant J Everett)

Ryan, a Mental Health Worker, and Emma, a Peer Worker, are both employed at Flourish Australia's New Outlook service at Wollongong. They have a lot of experience in providing support and services that are the right fit for people with a lived experience of mental health issues. Their goal is simple: to assist people in figuring out how to live the life that they want to live.

Ryan and Emma were kind enough to share how they support the recovery and wellness of all the people who access their services.

Ryan: I work in our Commonwealth Psychosocial Support (CPS) program, and a lot of the people who visit New Outlook will engage with this program during their journey with us.

The criteria of who can get involved with CPS is quite broad, but it often just boils down to a person acknowledging that they are

managing a mental health issue, and expressing that they'd like us to support them. They might want support in getting back to how things normally are, or be seeking to make new friends in the local area, or may want assistance in getting out of some kind of rut.

Basically, if somebody has a lived experience of mental health issues and they want more out of life, New Outlook can help. If anybody wants to make contact with us to find out more, we have a referral service that's managed by our colleague Veronica (Cox, Peer Worker), but we also offer a walk-in option where people can just stroll through the front door and ask to see us.

No formal diagnoses or letters from medical professionals are needed.

Looking After The Whole Person

Ryan: As the CPS program is designed to assist people who have complex needs, we offer a range of holistic supports by connecting people up with services that will help them to live life on their own terms. We also regularly check in with people in case they need any adjustments to their existing support.

This might include things like creating a routine, making healthier lifestyle choices, assistance with Centrelink paperwork, finding appropriate accommodation, or exploring study or employment options. If a person wants help from a specific professional like a Drug and Alcohol counsellor or a psychologist and they don't know where to begin, we can connect the person up with appropriate service options across the Illawarra.

People who access the CPS program will usually take part in it for around three months, but we can extend that timeframe if the person requires it in order to work towards their goals. If they're ready to engage with the NDIS before the three months is up, I can arrange the paperwork so they can start receiving ongoing NDIS support from Emma early.

Emma: I usually start supporting people with their NDIS paperwork once they've finished working with Ryan.

For example, one of the people who currently accesses services at New Outlook, Scott, has recently exited the CPS program, and I've supported him in getting approved for NDIS funding. Next I will be offering Scott some recovery coaching in figuring out how best to allocate his NDIS funds so he can live his best life independently in the community. We're also figuring out how we can increase his general wellbeing, and what enjoyable and fun things we can introduce into his routine. So I'm basically walking side by side with Scott, building on the work that he's put in with Ryan.

Choice

Emma: Once I help a person with their NDIS paperwork and they receive their funding, they can spend it on whatever supports and services they feel they need. This can include services provided by other organisations, and as we have a No Wrong Door Policy, we can also refer people to other services if they require something that falls outside the scope of Flourish Australia.

However, we find a lot of people who start accessing services at New Outlook create a lasting rapport with the Flourish Australia staff and the other people who visit the site, so they're welcome to keep on attending the centre. A number of members have been regularly attending New Outlook for well over a decade.

Widely Available

Emma: I would say that NDIS support would be one of the most common services that people with a lived experience engage with at Flourish Australia services across the country. CPS is pretty widespread, too.

But there are many more programs Flourish Australia offers, like housing programs and employment programs, depending on the location of the service. Based on the paperwork and the conversations we have with people who are new to our services, we're usually able to help figure out what supports would work best without any difficulty.

If you want to know more, get in touch with us today!

Call us on 1300 779 270 or email us at hello@flourishaustralia.org.au

Where Can You Access the Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program through Flourish Australia?

- Goulburn
- Queanbeyan
- Ulladulla
- Wollongong
- Canberra
- Bankstown
- Liverpool
- Maitland
- Muswellbrook
- Singleton
- Nepean
- Taree
- Upper Hunter
- Caringbah
- Kogarah
- Maroubra
- Marrickville
- Surry Hills
- Balranald
- Broken Hill
- Windsor
- Central Darling
- Unincorporated NSW
- Wentworth
- Katoomba
- Lithgow



Flourish Australia New Outlook

3 Station Street, Wollongong

NSW 2500

1300 779 270

Weekdays 8AM to 4PM

UPSKILLING ON THE JOB: A MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY PERSPECTIVE

By Tricia Hooi (as told to Grant J Everett)



Tricia traveled to Adelaide to help present the paper "Leaders of New Mental Health and Wellbeing Communities: New Leaders, New Services, New Attitudes and New Outcomes" at The Mental Health Services Conference (usually abbreviated to "TheMHS Conference") for 2023. She shared this responsibility with Mental Health Worker Karina Kouck, Training and Assessment Coordinator Dimitar, and her colleague Darren, all from Flourish Australia's community business in Marrickville.

I asked to present at TheMHS so I could talk about my lived experience journey and my career with Flourish Australia. My hope is that my story

helped other people who are in my situation to believe they are capable of holding down a job, and brought them to a better understanding of themselves.

All up, my part of the presentation was only for five minutes. It went really fast!

Leading up to the conference, Dimi asked for my opinions about the content of the paper, and also recorded some words of wisdom I came up with so I could use them in my part of the presentation. He also helped with filling in all the forms I needed to complete to cover my airfares, hotel costs, and so on.

I told the audience at TheMHS how much Flourish Australia has helped me with my career and all the other kinds of support they've been offering me for five years now. I am very grateful for this because

you never know how life is going to go. It can turn for the worst without warning.

However, we can still choose whether we see the glass half full or half empty, and it's important to think positively. Though I have to admit, I don't always manage to do this!

Rights and Responsibilities

People with a lived experience have the right to find work like anyone else. We also need to take responsibility for doing our job properly and following Work Health and Safety guidelines. Every year the Marrickville staff do a Work Health and Safety (WHS) training course, and this includes identifying hazards and wearing the right personal protective equipment (PPE) on the factory floor, such as hi-vis vests, gloves, hairnets and enclosed shoes, that sort of thing. I'm happy that the Marrickville site trains us, as I want to keep on learning new things and gaining skills.

My role

I'm kept busy with my scanning work at Marrickville, which includes digitising mail for a commission that deals with insurance claims, and recording toll information for the Roads and Maritime Service. My colleagues Courtney and Li Ern have a similar role to mine, and they're both fantastic, and I've learned so much from them. I've also trained other people to do my job.

Upskilling

I've been studying Information Technology at TAFE for the last six or seven years, starting with my Cert II and Cert III. I recently completed the last of twenty subjects for my Certificate IV in IT at the Granville campus, though this took a couple of years due to the COVID lockdowns. It feels like it took a long, long time. I also did a Business Administration course three years ago.

I am happy with where I am, and I want to become a more valuable employee by gaining skills that I can use on my job. That's why I've been studying Information Technology: I want to improve myself. I just want to be good at what I do here at Flourish Australia. That's the crux of it.

At The Core

This paper was very personal for me, as I've always had a passion for improving the mental health sector. And although services like headspace are doing great work, I feel the lived experience voice isn't being reflected enough in new policies and guidelines elsewhere. Some services out there are instead being created through a purely clinical lens, and that can leave major gaps in how helpful they are.

I would love to see more co-production with lived experience voices, as well as those of carers and support people, as that's essential in creating a good service. We need a lived experience perspective and a compassionate recognition of people's struggles when we create new policies.

Walking The Talk

I am already doing all this in my work with headspace Bankstown's Youth Reference Group. We are consulted when the service wants to bring in new programs or change the way things operate. We always give our honest opinion and seek to improve on their proposals, but our decisions always come down to what works best for the young people we support. Our most recent project at Bankstown was Individual Placement Services, or IPS, which supports young people with their education and career goals.

In addition to helping headspace with general engagement, marketing and running events such as open days, I've done workshops at high schools a few times, and that's always been great. We've gotten so much wonderful feedback from the students about that.

I'm also involved with a reference group at Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital with a community of carers and people with a lived experience. We review policies and assess the way the hospital runs, particularly the mental health aspects.

Summing Up

My advice to anyone who has not found a service that suits their needs is to keep looking. Once you find the right service, it's an amazing opportunity to give yourself a better quality of life. The right support is out there!



A Call to Lead the Way: Why the Lived Experience Voice is Crucial

By Rania Omar (as told to Grant J Everett)

Rania is a Member of Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council (among many other roles). She helped to present the paper "Leaders of New Mental Health and Wellbeing Communities: New Leaders, New Services, New Attitudes and New Outcomes" at The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Conference for 2023 down in Adelaide.

What Was Our Message?

The paper my group presented was about how important it is for every person to have access to inclusive services that improve their quality of life. We highlighted the need for support that is easy to access and empathetic, because too many people are being re-traumatized by services.

Whilst I didn't create this beautiful paper, I helped present it, and I thought its message was really great. I love its hopefulness and how it motivates people to use their lived experience to change the system for the better. This was the first time I'd presented a paper in front of a live audience, though it was a team effort with Fay Jackson, Flourish Australia's General Manager of Inclusion and Amie Verrall, Flourish Australia's Regional Manager of South Australia services. Leading up to TheMHS, I got to know their perspectives and what they each had to offer.



Regular Eating for Recovery

The Road to Recovery is Paved with Routines!

By Warren Heggarty

Regularity and routine are often very important in people's recovery from mental health issues. It seems that following patterns can be good for us (as long as we are not too inflexible). This is true of sleep routines, work routines, physical activity and of course eating.

'Ideally, humans function best when we eat regularly throughout the day. This means eating [approximately] every three hours.' (Fleming, 2018)

For many people, this consists of three meals and two or three snacks spread across the sixteen hours they are normally awake. Naturally, because our personal needs and life habits are highly individual, there is no single hard and fast plan that works for everyone.

Irregularity in eating

Our feelings (happy, sad etc) can affect when we eat and how much we eat. Sometimes this interferes with regularity in our eating.

Emotional eating describes where a person eats as a response to their feelings, or in order to feel better. This is not ideal, because the eating is not triggered by 'feeling hungry.' It is possible, therefore, for a person who 'emotionally eats' to eat more

food than they need, not to mention eating food that is poor in nutrients (e.g., lollies, beer, hot chips) but from which they get a temporary feeling of 'wellbeing.' Likewise, when a person feels overanxious, this may ruin their appetite.

In the case of eating disorders, irregular eating habits can be a major obstacle to recovery. This is because the usual rhythm of nutrition is disrupted. A (in) famous experiment from World War II, the Minnesota Starvation experiment, shows that long term undernourishment has serious psychological effects (eg. loss of interest in life) in people who might otherwise be well. The same experiment found that in order to reverse this starvation syndrome, it was not sufficient simply to boost calorie intake, but to resume a nutritionally balanced diet regularly over a period of time. The symptoms of starvation often persisted for a long time afterwards, which is one reason why eating disorders can be so challenging to deal with. (CCI, 2018)

Group activities in Flourish Australia

Food and nutrition are highly individual things, but it can be a fun learning experience to take part in

food groups. Many Flourish Australia services hold regular group activities centred around cooking, food preparation, meal planning, grocery shopping, nutrition and so forth. Here are a couple of examples.

Westclub, at Penrith has been running regular Grocery/Cooking Groups on Wednesdays and Fridays. These groups include meal preparation and purchasing with bus trips into town for shopping (see opposite). The Leeton service has been running cooking classes on Wednesdays with a different recipe every week. During Bread Week in February for instance, they learned how to bake a 'sundried tomato and olive pull-apart loaf.' (PLEASE NOTE: groups can vary with demand - please check with your local service for up-to-date details on what is available now).

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CCI. (2018, January 25). What is starvation syndrome? Retrieved from Centre for Clinical Interventions: www.cci.health.wa.gov.au

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ABOVE: Peer Worker Trish Standing and Leanne who accesses Flourish Australia's Penrith Service combine regular shopping with regular cooking and regular eating!
PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY



What's cooking at Westclub?

Let Cooking Take You to Another Place!

By Warren Heggarty (NOTE*Some names changed to protect privacy)

Panorama joined in with the Wednesday afternoon 'Bargain Shopper's' group at Penrith 'Westclub' and found that it also includes recipes and cooking and lessons in teamwork and 'trial and error.'

The group usually has about five participants who will chip in a modest amount of money to cover the expenses. Leanne, Madeleine,* Jacinta,* and Dale* arrive at 12:30 to join staff member Trish Standing, who is standing in for Jacqui Holland, and Warren from Panorama.

'I like cooking' said Leanne. 'It takes me to another place!'

'We did banana bread once' said Dale 'and I have made it myself at home four times.'

The group decides to postpone using the recipe prepared for today because it would take three hours and both Madeleine and Jacinta can only stay for a short time. Instead, they do something a little simpler: make some chocolate cupcakes.

There are actually quite a few tricks you can learn from a group like this as we shall soon see. But first, the group goes shopping.

Walking over to Coles Supermarket sparks a conversation about prices and the relative merits of Woolies, IGA and Aldi etc. Dale recently found a kilo of Yoplait on sale at ABCOE for \$1.79. He, Leanne and Trish then discuss buying drinks by the carton. Depending where you go, it might cost \$36, \$24 or as little as \$16 for the same thing!

'You can't just eat whatever you want on a budget' said Leanne. 'You have to look for Bargains.'

Jacinta* told us that she was once using a weight loss product which turned out to be so expensive, she had to discontinue it!

Looking for eggs In Coles, Leanne was excited to find a half dozen for less than \$3, but alas, the last carton left had a broken egg in it. She and Trish decided on a \$4 carton that was intact. We also bought some chocolate cake mix.

Back at the kitchen, we took out the cup-cake trays and liners. First, we sprayed the trays with canola oil to help stop sticking. Dale, reading the instructions said 'It says 40 to 50 minutes baking required.'

'Ah, good! Someone who reads the instructions!' said Trish.

Leanne and Trish said that because they were doing CUP cakes, not a full cake, they should rather take more like 10 or 20 minutes.

Dale said 'I need a bowl to crack the eggs into first.' This is a good idea, in case you get egg shell in the mixing bowl. However Leanne has had more practice and was able to demonstrate how to crack them straight in.

How much milk do we need?' asked Dale. 'I can't tell if it says ¼ cup or ¾ cup.'

'It says 200mils, so whatever that comes to' said Trish. 'And it helps to heat the butter up first to soften it for mixing.'

'Should we save some of the mix and mix it in bit by bit slowly?' said Leanne.

Dale located an electric mixer which made the job easier- once they found the right attachments.

Spooning the mixture out, we realised we had enough mixture for another half a tray, which Dale organised as Leanne kept spooning it out.

It became clear to Panorama by this time that if you cook on your own, all you have is trial and error and 'the instructions.' But if you cook with others, you have teamwork and collective experience to fall back on! Give it a go!

Thanks also to Sarah Mitchell and Karen

ABOVE: 'How much mixture should I use for each of the cupcake liners?' When you cook as a team, you can learn a lot from others. PHOTOGRAPH BY WARREN HEGGARTY

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