

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

panorama

Monthly Issue **December 2023 #91C**



**We Can Be The
Lifblood of Australia**

**Mental Health Month
2023 Events**

**Paula Hanlon:
Pieces of the
Recovery Puzzle**

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AUSTRALIA

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About us

Flourish Australia is committed to walking beside people with a lived experience of mental health issues as they progress along their recovery journeys. We passionately believe in mental health recovery, and are committed to providing the best possible support and encouragement to people so they can achieve their recovery goals. We offer this help across all 70+ of our services in New South Wales, Southern Queensland, Australian Capital Territory and Victoria.

Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 or flourishaustralia.org.au

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

About Panorama

Founded in 1996 in one of Flourish Australia's predecessor organisations (PRA), Panorama has grown to become a lifestyle magazine dedicated to informing and encouraging the recovery journey of readers. Panorama is written, designed and produced almost entirely by people with a lived experience of mental health issues.

The faces behind Panorama...



Warren Heggarty



Grant Everett

Subscriptions, questions, feedback, praise, curses?

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Disclaimer

Panorama's content is not intended as a substitute for the advice of any specialised or qualified professional. The views expressed herein are those of the authors, not necessarily of Flourish Australia, or any associated enterprises, their staff, management, employees, or service recipients

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PHOTO NEIL FENELON

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Contributors include...

Tricia Hooi is a supported employee at Flourish Australia's Marrickville Service

Paula Hanlon has been a peer worker for 25 years

Paul Vonwiller greatly enjoys meeting up with friends for very, very long walks

Luke, Penny and J.A. are members of Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council,

Michael Wren is a member *emeritus* of Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council

Dr Emily Hielscher is Senior Research and Development coordinator

Contributions are welcome!

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APOLOGY

At Panorama magazine, we believe it is essential to consult with everyone we include in our articles to ensure their approval of the final product. We adopted this practice because a large proportion of people who appear in Panorama access supports from Flourish Australia. As a courtesy, we extend this opportunity for review to all people who appear in Panorama, including those who do not access our services.

In the case of the article published in our April 2023 edition regarding Spiritual Health Association, we regretfully failed to seek final approval for the story and accompanying images prior to publication. This oversight was unintentional, and we sincerely apologise for our mistake.

We are committed to learning from this experience and implementing measures to prevent its recurrence. We have reviewed our editorial processes and implemented additional measures to ensure that all stories are thoroughly reviewed and approved by all relevant parties before publication.

Thank You to Our Readers!

All 30,000* of you!

It's December! It is time to stop the presses, put down our planning sheets, interview notes, cameras and correction tape and take a moment to THANK YOU.

Thank YOU to our family and carers who walk alongside us every day.

Thank YOU to those in the community and Flourish Australia staff who contributed to our many articles, but most of all...

Thank YOU to those who had the courage to share your stories with us and show that recovery is possible.

We KNOW that is sometimes not easy to do. We are honoured for the privilege in sharing your story.

Over the last 12 months we've run so many uplifting recovery stories about people who have found hope and strength through the support of Flourish Australia services and their own support network including their families and carers.

Our readership is growing rapidly over time, your incredible stories are reaching more people than ever before, you may never know the positive impact sharing YOUR story has on someone else, but we know, people tell us all the time.

So as we pack up our desks for the end of the year break, we want to wish each and every one of you a very happy festive season, however you celebrate it and we can't wait to share with you all that is to come in the new year.

Thank you, we are so grateful for your ongoing support.



Thank you from Grant & Warren

In 2023 stories have been shared from:

Nowra, Penrith, Wollongong, Caringbah, Newcastle, Maitland, Marrickville, Caboolture, Harris Park, Hervey Bay, Pinalba, Tamworth, Bankstown, South Australia, Penrith, Seven Hills, Blacktown, Bathurst, Liverpool, Kogarah, Buckingham House

Top 3 Topics Covered in 2023:

- Recovery, employment, independence
- Living a fulfilling life
- Self-care

Catch up on previous editions of Panorama:



*Adapted from CVC Audit (https://cvcaudit.com/corporate/e_news_article.aspx?rid=11) using an average household size of 3 using the methodology from rba.gov.au (<https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/bulletin/2023/mar/pdf/a-newmeasure-of-average-household-size.pdf>)





Bringing My Parents Closer to Care for Them Better

By Tricia Hooi (as told to Grant J Everett)

Tricia Hooi works at Flourish Australia in Marrickville and studies IT at TAFE. She also makes time to care for her elderly parents. Tricia told Panorama all about how she manages to live such a busy life.

Nine months ago I was able to get housing for my elderly parents right across the road from where I live, and since then I've been intensively caring for them five days a week. I used to only go and help them out once a week, as they lived a fair distance away.

My duties include bringing home groceries, cooking, cleaning, and I doing all the washing. As my dad has a bit of dementia, he can't leave the flat by himself, so this means I take him to his medical appointments: the hospital, his optometrist, his

pathologist, his dietitian, that sort of thing. Dad also has a physical therapist come around to support him to exercise, but I also take him to physical therapy. I do a lot of the same things for my mum.

My weeks are always busy, so I have to balance my caring role with two days of work and two days of study. On the days I work at Flourish Australia in Marrickville I have to wake up very early to get to the factory on time. On those days, I bring home groceries so my parents can have a meal straight away. I'm also just finishing up my last subject for the year in my Certificate IV in IT, and I need to devote time to that, too.

My brothers do come and help out sometimes, but they both live a distance away, and my little brother has a young family of his own to look after.

Challenges

It was difficult getting my parents a place nearby, as so many properties have steps, and my mother and father have mobility issues. I learned that apartments almost always have steps! And then one day – I think it was God's will – I was able to find this unit literally right across the road from my home. We had to compete with about 20 other people who came to look at the flat. Private rental is so expensive nowadays! They've been living in this unit since September.

I'm trying really hard to find a cleaner for my parents who can do their kitchen, the bathroom and vacuum the carpet, so I've been in contact with the My Aged Care organisation for the last six months. My Aged Care is an option for people above 65 and do not receive NDIS funding who want to remain independent in their own homes. This would help me, and my parents, so much. I'm trying my best, and I hope to have some luck with it soon.

What I've learned

If somebody was going to start being a carer for a friend or family member, my advice would be to make sure to take time for yourself. Me time is very, very important. In my case, I go ballroom dancing every Wednesday night. I get dressed up, and get a lift there. I've been doing that for a number of years now and actually got an award for Most Improved Ballroom Dancer at my local club. I MUST have my me time!

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.

Read more here on support for family and carers





WE CAN BE THE LIFEBLOOD OF AUSTRALIA

By Grant J Everett



“Social citizenship” is the concept that all of us have ways we can contribute to society. Jatin and Jaya are both employed as People & Culture Administrators at Flourish Australia, and one of the ways they exercise their social citizenship is by regularly donating blood.

Jatin

I started donating blood because my friend had arranged to visit the Red Cross centre, and I decided to join him. I didn't know how much of a huge impact blood donations made til that day, and that's why I keep going back.

So far, I have donated 6 times. I've had low iron and other health situations that have stopped me from donating on a few occasions, but I still go back every chance I can.

Jaya

Like Jatin, I started donating blood after visiting a donor centre with a friend. I'd always wanted to do this, but didn't know how. I started donating regularly, but when the pandemic and the lockdowns commenced in 2019, I didn't go as frequently.

Jatin suggested that we go to the mobile donor bank at Sydney

Olympic Park when we're next at Flourish Australia's head office. This was the fifth time I've donated blood, and my goal is to donate regularly again.

I have a friend from Uni who has been going through treatment for leukemia, and I often think of her when I donate. She's shared the enormous need for blood donors with me, and she is so, so grateful to be receiving blood during her illness. It's really nice to know that something as simple as my donation is really helping people like my friend.

Grant

Before I visited the mobile blood centre at Olympic Park, I was under the impression that the medications I am taking for mental health issues and diabetes would disqualify me from donating. It was reassuring to know that medication isn't an automatic stop sign for those who want to exercise their social citizenship by giving blood

Summing Up

Jatin: If you're thinking about donating blood, definitely find out whether you can. It feels good to help people, it doesn't hurt to donate, and you can change people's lives. You also get cool gifts as milestones, like a keyring with

“It's likely you're eligible to donate blood.”

your blood type on it after your third donation. And you get cookies and milkshakes after donating, too!

Jaya: If you're eligible to give blood, do it! You'll never know who's in need. I know that a time may come where I'll be in need of donated blood, and I'm sure I'd be grateful for it. Plus, the snacks are pretty good, too!

Grant: While I was, unfortunately, not allowed to donate due to my blood sugar being too high, consider having a chat with the friendly Red Cross staff to know where you stand!

**ABOVE: Jatin and Jaya, recovered from their blood donations.
PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT**

**Find out more:
www.lifeblood.com.au
131 495**



Mental Health Month 2023

Some Highlights

by Warren Heggarty

Last month we promised to bring you more reports of Mental Health Month Events. Here are some photos and descriptions from the Events at Marrickville, Sydney Park, and Buckingham House in NSW.

Early in the month, Flourish Australia's Marrickville site threw its doors open as part of the Sydney Region celebrations.

Participants received Flourish Australia Showbags with exclusive Flourish Australia Colouring Books and scented candles and happy face squeazy-balls among other things.

Marrickville Employee Jennifer reminisced to Panorama about the Great Storm of 2018 which inundated the Flourish Australia Mental Health Month picnic of that year. Lightening and torrential rain forced everyone to evacuate to the Fig Tree Conference Centre.

Employee Laurie dressed up for the occasion as you can see in our Photo. He doesn't always wear a kaftan, but he has a number of them to choose from and feels they reflect his spiritual side. Laurie's impressive set of beads and pendants, red hat and shoes made for a eye-catching ensemble.

Both Jennifer and Laurie shared with Panorama that one of their biggest struggles has been with reading and writing. The school system had not served them well, leaving them to try to overcome their issues as adults. Laurie experiences dyslexia which makes it much more challenging to understand the written word.

Employee Edwina announced with glee that she has graduated from her TAFE CERT III and was later going off to celebrate at an exclusive Glebe eatery. Congratulations Edwina!

Flourish Australia's Marrickville Service is close to Sydney Airport and the planes fly fairly low over the roof tops. Panorama thinks this might have been the inspiration for the paper aeroplane race competition which was part of their celebrations. Participants were responsible for designing and building their own aircraft, though paper was provided with guide lines for folding. Winners of each heat were eligible to play the chocolate wheel for fabulous edible prizes. One participant used a bent nose like the famous 'Concorde' supersonic. It attained fabulous lift, but behaved more like a boomerang than a jet, returning to land at its launch point.

There was so much happening that we will have to save some of it for the next issue, like the fabulous art show at Newcastle!

ABOVE: Donna, left and Lenah, right, share a laugh at Sydney Park during the Sydney Region Team's Connect and Thrive Picnic in the Park. PHOTO PROVIDED BY CAITLIN TAYLOR

OPPOSITE: Top to bottom left to right: Laurie Foy at Marrickville. The chocolate wheel at Marrickville. Picnic at Sydney Park. P blamkeb 'Shall we dance?' Sophia Bakhos and Alex Mahite at Flowerdale. Under the tree at Sydney Park





From Blackwattle House to the Board

Pieces of My Recovery Puzzle

By Paula Hanlon

My recovery from mental health issues is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. Looking back now, I can see how the pieces of that puzzle came to fit together. But at the start, things were far from clear. Today I celebrate 25 years as a peer worker! 36 years ago I was referred to a service run by Richmond Fellowship, whereas now I am a long serving member of the board of that organisation's successor, Flourish Australia.

My life from the age of 18 was a series of hospital admissions, large doses of numerous medications, ECT (Electro-Convulsive Therapy) treatments and intermittent periods

of sobriety. In 1987, aged 22 I was homeless and in hospital when I was referred to Blackwattle House in Glebe run by Richmond Fellowship (a forerunner of Flourish Australia). I was scared and did not know what to expect, but the other residents interviewed me and I was accepted.

This house was like nothing I had ever seen. It was four stories with a level below the street. This was where our groups and house meetings were held. The back yard led to Blackwattle Bay on the Parramatta River. There were 12 people living in the house, with three people in each bedroom. The 18 months I spent living in that community gave me a sense of hope, a daily structure and something to live for!

Sobriety

Again, my sobriety did not last and neither did my job. I found myself on the hospital roundabout again until 6th February 1992, when I finally achieved sobriety. I was in the Salvation Army program for nine months, including three months working on a chicken farm on the Central Coast. 32 years later, my sobriety is strong and core to my recovery.

Whilst on the farm, it was discovered that I would lose time and strange things were happening. I was sent back to Sydney after nine months and was admitted to Rozelle hospital where my diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder was made, and I received correct therapy for the first time from a psychologist who knew what he was doing. I am forever grateful to David, whose care and respect was another part of the puzzle that is my recovery.

[For those unfamiliar with this diagnosis, Dissociative Identity Disorder is thought to be a reaction to trauma in which a person tries not to relive bad memories. As a result the person can have strange experiences 'lost time' and even display more than one personality. - Editor]

Homeless again, in late 1992/3 Richmond Fellowship came to the rescue once more. I was referred to another house in Glebe where three men and three women were staying. I found myself again in a living situation where we all had chores and we would have weekly meetings and therapy groups. During this time my disorder was particularly difficult, disruptive, and very challenging to live with. The psychologists who oversaw the house recommended that I be asked to leave.

Again, homeless and feeling helpless I was admitted to Rozelle Hospital. After 5 months I was provided with a Public Housing unit in Hunters Hill. This was my introduction to Northern Sydney Health. I had a wonderful Care Coordinator who undertook training to be able to support me and who worked closely with the psychologist. I consider myself incredibly blessed to have had these wise, wonderful clinicians involved in my recovery. Their communication and collaboration was another piece to the puzzle.

**TOP LEFT: Paula Hanlon
FLOURISH AUSTRALIA LIBRARY PIC.**

Oh, THAT kind of consumer!

In late 1993, a man name Michael Appleton approached me to join the 'Ryde Consumer Network.' I did not know the term 'consumer' was connected to mental health and thought it had something to do with the shopping centre. I said "no" until late 1994 when I found out what the term 'consumer' meant and what the group was that he was referring to.

In January 1995, I joined this fantastic group of people living with mental health issues to participate as a consumer representative, providing a consumer perspective on service development, monitoring and review processes. Following an admission to hospital, Michael called

and asked 'when are you coming back, we need you?' I was not used to people wanting me back. This was a special group. I did not know it then, but this was the beginning of a lifetime career.

In the same year, I began a degree in Psychology at Macquarie University. With time lost due to mental health and physical health issues, it took me 10 years to complete, but what a party we had to celebrate my finishing my degree...

My new career

In January 1998, I began my career as an employed peer worker. By the time I had finished my degree and graduated in 2006, my passion and commitment to my role as a peer worker was fixed. I found a role and

place where I fitted, I mattered and was cared about. Nothing could be better than this. 26 years on, I am still employed as a peer worker. My longevity in the role comes from feeling honoured to share other people's journeys, building relationships with the service providers and managers, getting involved in amazing system reform opportunities, and having monthly external peer supervision in my work plan.

My external peer supervisor for 21 years was Leonie Manns. She was a strong influence in my career and helped me remain true to the values of peer work.

Paula's story continued on next page...

Pieces of Paula's Puzzle



Correct diagnosis, therapy and sobriety



Good communication and collaboration with support team



Joining the 'consumer' movement and becoming a peer worker



My studies, my advocacy and my work



Settling in a place that really felt like home



Developing a sense of confidence in my abilities



Pieces of Paula's recovery puzzle from p. 11

Over the years I have been fortunate to participate as a Surveyor with the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (1999-2022) reviewing mental health services across Australia. In addition, I have served on the NSW Mental Health Commission Community Advisory Council (2012-2016), Chair and member of the NSW Consumer Peer Workers Forum (2011-2014), and the TheMHS Learning Network (since 2000). In the academic world, I am involved with The University of Sydney's Matilda Centre for Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Research and spend a week teaching Occupational Therapy Students in Campbelltown each year. My studies and my work, including the various state and National roles I have had over the years, are other pieces of my recovery puzzle.

It was hard to settle into a home. I would experience strong urges to move every two years...and I usually did. Eventually, I found my home in Gladesville in 1998, even though it took a decade of living there to feel it was my home. I have not moved home in 26years. Feeling settled and comfortable in my home is yet another piece of my recovery puzzle

Getting on Board

In 2007, I was approached to join the Richmond Fellowship Board, which I found extremely welcoming. After a break during which I focused on an appointment to the Northern Sydney Local Health District Board, I was approached to rejoin the new combined RichmondPRA board in 2015. As a Board Director, I participate in Board Meetings and chair the Services Quality and Risk Committee. I attend various functions and I like to visit Flourish Australia services wherever I can.

I have been honoured to participate as Mrs Claus with Mr Claus at numerous Flourish Australia Christmas celebrations as you can see here. I am very proud to be a Board member of the organisation that first gave me a sense of hope and security.

Supervision for peer workers is an interest I have had for many years.

In 2022, I was fortunate to be one of 15 peer workers from across Australia selected to participate in a Leadership Program from Yale University, co-sponsored and facilitated by the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum and the Mental Health Lived Experience Engagement Network.

As part of this program, I conducted and reported on a National survey of Peer Workers, Supervisors and Managers regarding experiences and values of supervision. Having faith in my ability and skills is another piece of my recovery puzzle.

Gratitude and trust

I am grateful to the many people who have put their faith in me, trusted in my recovery and

continued to encourage and support my journey. I live with my mental health issues including a history of trauma and self-abuse. I still have periods of un-wellness and hospital admissions. I have developed strong resilience and know that recovery is an ongoing journey of self-discovery and building the puzzle. I also live with a commitment to my self-development, a passion for supporting other people and being part of the systemic growth of mental health services in NSW and Australia.

Editor's note: Flourish Australia was formerly called RichmondPRA. before that it was two separate companies, PRA (Psychiatric Rehabilitation Australia) and Richmond Fellowship of NSW.



PHOTO: Paula as Mrs Claus with Michael Appleton as Mr Claus at a Flourish Australia Christmas party PHOTO NEIL FENELON.

SCALE IT UP SCALE IT DOWN

'NDIS needs to be more flexible' – APA

By Warren Heggarty

The NDIS needs to adapt and include greater flexibility for people living with psychosocial disability to prevent beneficiaries losing funding due to episodes of improved health. This was one of the main issues discussed in a major forthcoming submission to the review of the NDIS.

The Australian Psychosocial Alliance held a webinar on 15 September 2023 in which a panel and 240 participants from across the nation's psychosocial support providers discussed the submission. Flourish Australia is itself a member of the Australian Psychosocial Alliance.

There were four main focal points in the webinar; firstly that Psychosocial disability should remain covered by the NDIS; secondly, the need for flexibility in planning and support; thirdly, improvements in coordination and capacity of supporters (including 'recovery coaches'); and fourthly, that there needs to be continued emphasis on lived experience.

The general mood among the 240 nationwide participants in the webinar was one of support for the four issues as included in the submission.

One participant told the meeting via 'chat' feedback that they had seen the tragic situation of a person penalised with reduced funding due to recovery only to experience a relapse of their mental health issues due to lack of support.

This has been a commonly discussed reality during the 10 years the NDIS has been with us. Complex mental health issues are often episodic, meaning that people's wellness fluctuates. When a person experiences a period of wellness requiring less support there is a fear that their overall support funding may be cut down. This means that as their need for support increases again, they are caught short and unable quickly to re-engage supports. This can lead unnecessarily to crisis and hospitalisation.

Kathi, a panelist from One Door mental health, told the webinar that the NDIS needs to have 'flexible plans that can be urgently scaled up or scaled down when needed.' The fact that such a mechanism is absent seems to stem from the view that 'disability' is something that cannot really improve or fluctuate in the long term. This is simply not true of episodic psychosocial disabilities.

Panellist and peer worker Deb told the webinar that what had worked well for her own recovery, and

allowed NDIS to change her life, was the ability to engage an independent support coordinator. She questioned whether people were doing enough to address the struggles that people go through sometimes just trying to access NDIS.

Structure and regularity are important for recovery. Another panelist said that having a knowledgeable and consistent support worker was important, rather than people having to chop and change between different service providers of varying quality. Deb warned, however, that it was important that such consistency is not imposed upon people. Freedom of choice is vital in her opinion.

Panellist Keri said that NDIS is still not 'fit for purpose' and that unfortunately we are still seeing people being retraumatised by the system that is supposed to help them. She called this 'structural violence' and said that often when people think the difficulties lay with the individual they really lay with the system. She also mentioned that the dominance of 'biomedical psychiatry' can be an obstacle where we are trying to enhance social citizenship.

ABOVE: With episodic mental health conditions we need NDIS to provide flexible funding to keep us afloat.
PHOTO SALLY WYNN /PIXABAY

Mind the Heat And Drink Plenty of Water!

By Warren Heggarty



There are not many places in Australia where you can hide from the heat. One of them is the refrigerated section of your local supermarket, but you can't stay there all Summer. Heatwaves can be particularly distressing for people with mental health issues. Not only because heat itself is stressful, but because we often have 'comorbidities' that can worsen in the heat, and we also tend to have lower incomes, meaning no home air conditioning. Some medications can make it more uncomfortable too.

'The best way to prevent heat-related illness is to drink plenty of water...' says NSW Health in its fact sheet 'Beat the Heat.' (NSW Health, 2013) When the temperature is over 40 degrees, the evaporation rate is usually pretty phenomenal. If you are dehydrated you can't sweat, and if you can't sweat you can't maintain a stable body temperature. Preventing dehydration is paramount!

Does heat cause mental stress? Dr Haseltine says that rising temperatures can trigger stress

by elevating levels of cortisol. The parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes calmness and relaxation, becomes less active at higher temperatures.

Aside from the medical reasons, I can think of few things more stressful than being in a 90kmh Nor'westerly gale, with 5% humidity and 45 degrees centigrade, while being ringed by bushfires.

A 2022 study published in JAMA Psychiatry of over 2 million people found that hospital emergency visits for mental health conditions rise during extremely hot days (Haseltine, 2023).

Another way that severe heat impairs your mental well being is by disrupting your sleep. The severe humidity of late Summer in Brisbane and Sydney combined with high minimum temperatures can really make you cranky. Not only that but heatwaves affect our ability to think clearly, and reduce our productivity.

Dr Haseltine says 'All of the evidence from [various] studies points to a reduced ability to think clearly, quickly and efficiently when the body is overheated.

NSW Health says 'If you have a medical condition such as heart disease, diabetes or kidney disease and if you take certain medication, heat can make your symptoms worse.

The four key messages from NSW Health are 1. Drink plenty of water, 2. Keep Cool, 3. Take Care of Others (especially old people), and 4. Have a plan in advance for how you are going to deal with a heatwave.

A lot of people head for the Malls because they are air conditioned! Once, when I became convinced a nasty heatwave that had been going for a month might never end, I purchased a \$300 portable air conditioner! It worked brilliantly, because the heat wave ended two days later! Now THAT was money well spent.

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PHOTO: Maroubra Beach NSW INSET: Drink this PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY.





PENRITH MEN'S WALK AND TALK:

By Billy Beggs (as told to Grant J Everett)

The Penrith Men's Walk and Talk group was founded by 6 local men in March 2019 in support of a friend who had lost his 17 year old son to suicide. The idea was to provide a safe, non-judgmental space where all men could improve their physical health, mental health and make new friends. As some of the men who joined our walk felt socially isolated, this group has been a great opportunity for them to interact with new people and make connections.

We do The Great River Walk around the Nepean River every Thursday evening, rain, hail or shine, and all men are welcome to come join us! This is a 6.4km long track, and we start and finish at The Coffee Club cafe. We've had as many as 306 walkers, and there have been some gatherings in the 100s and 200s. The regular turnout is mostly around the 40 to 50 mark, which is still really good. The walkers range

A HOLISTIC EXPERIENCE

between the ages of 15 and 85, though most are between 40 and 60.

Some walkers try to maintain a certain completion time, while others want to lose weight and increase their fitness levels. Sometimes people are going through some bad times, and really need to talk to someone outside of a clinical setup.

Growing and Connecting

We now facilitate some other fun social activities, such as a group tailored to Gen Z participants between the ages of 15 and 25, and we celebrate special events such as NAIDOC Week, RUOK? Day, Mental Health Month, and Christmas, to name a few. Our Community Nights are an opportunity to focus on the great work done by local charities such as Westcare and Mama Lanas, and our Toolbox Sessions involve connecting local businesses with

the men who take part in these walks. We have also formed close links with Emu Plains Sports Club and Penrith Cricket, and some of their members have started attending our walks.

We have been taking part in men's health forums, promoting our weekly walk and other activities in surrounding suburbs, and we hold ZOOM meetings with groups across Australia to discuss people's experiences with the sort of thing we are doing, and to learn all we can in order to implement best practice. We also promote the group on our lively social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, by giving out flyers, and by word of mouth which has proved powerful.

You can get in touch with the Penrith Men's Walk and Talk group at walkandtalk.org.au



Getting *Out & About* for Good Holistic Health

By Paul Vonwiller (as told to Grant J Everett)

On Friday 18th August, 2023 I walked the Turramurra Loop to Macquarie University at West Ryde with friends and staff members from the Southern Cross Outdoor Group (SCOG).

SCOG regularly contacts me about upcoming bushwalks, suburban walks and other events. Each outing has a leader who leads the way, and as I know my limits when it comes to navigating, thankfully they provide us with maps for each walk.

My latest scenic walk started at Turramurra Station, and was almost all downhill. The first leg passes through the amazing trees of the Blanche Sheldon Forest, down to the Comenarra Parkway, and then along an undulating fire trail to Brown's Waterhole. I went as far as the Loop for a 5 kilometre walk. It got overwhelming for me at this

stage, so I let the others know about my situation to opt-out.

I ended up walking to Pymble Station by carefully making my way along the Pacific Highway. There were some interesting sights of great historical significance here in the quiet zone, where the railway bridges are.

I took the train from Pymble to St Leonards. The new Friedland Park airspace development of the railway Pacific Highway is located opposite St Leonards Station, and there's also a new basement shopping complex with a library and Coles supermarket. Thankfully, they've also finally reopened the new pedestrian subway that goes from the St Leonards concourse to link with the new Friedland Park. Historically, there used to be trams running through here until 1961, and others until 1985.

The rest of the walking group moved on after crossing near Lane Cove Creek, and we ascended through the well-landscaped grounds of Macquarie University. Some of the walkers exited at the 9 kilometre point at the Uni and caught the Metro.

The second part of the walk, a North Shore track which is 4.5 kilometres long, is less scenic than the first section, but following the water pipe down to the West Ryde pumping station and railway station is very good exercise! The paved streets, parks and postwar housing are all built on the remains of Granny Smith's apple orchard and Mr Shrimpton's piggery.

It was a long walk, but we got there in the end. Thanks to Mark for leading the walk: I went as far as I could, as fast as I could!

Southern Cross Outdoors Group

I've known about the Southern Cross Outdoor Group (SCOG) since the late 1980s. I feel good about taking part in their walks and group activities and being friends with the guys.

Walking and taking in the sights is always interesting and inspiring, and every outing is different. For instance, if it's hot and humid, we'll go and find a good swimming spot to cool down.

A while back, I helped to lead a walk up in Newcastle. We started at Hamilton Station, went over to Cook's Hill, and finished at The Junction. We've also visited the Valley Heights Train Museum near Springwood, the Illawarra Light Rail, Museum, Albion Park, and the South Coast. One time I helped run the Hornsby to Turramurra walk.

I get a lot out of being a part of SCOG. Their walks are great for my physical health, it's an opportunity to meet people for social reasons, and having something to do with like-minded people helps with maintaining good mental health. I would recommend that everyone gets their boots on and explore the world!

Paul, all ready to do some serious walking!
PHOTOS BY PAUL VONWILLER



Past, Present and Future

Peer Worker Forum Turns 25

By Warren Heggarty

Flourish Australia played a big role in the Consumer Peer Worker Forum 2023 hosted by BEING at the University of Technology, Sydney on 31 July and 1 August. It brought together 250 peer workers from Local Health Districts and Non-Government Organisations. It looked at the history, development and future of peer work in New South Wales.

Chris Grumley, specialist peer worker with Flourish Australia, gave one of the three peer work keynote speeches, looking at Supervision of Peer Workers. The others looked at training and leadership.

Chris is one of 10 accredited peer supervisors in NSW. He is part of Flourish Australia's People and Culture Team, but also provides supervision to outside organisations including Local Health Districts and other NGOs.

Flourish Australia also ran a stall at the forum which BEING describes as a 'highlight of the peer work calendar providing important professional development and networking opportunities.

Fay Jackson (General Manager Inclusion) was a member of the panel presentation on History, Chris Grumley was a member of the panel on Development and Kristen Olsen (Team Coordinator Peer Specialist)

was a member of the panel on The Future.

Of the total 250 participants, 165 were from local health districts, and the other 85 were from non-government or suicide prevention organisations. Flourish Australia's contingent of 14 was the largest of the NGOs. 'I believe the tickets sold out within three days,' said Chris Grumley who was also a part of the forum's organising committee this year.

Increasing scope

In the past, the forum was mainly for NSW government Peer Workers in local health districts but it recently opened up to include Suicide Prevention Workers and peer workers in Non-Government Organisations like Flourish Australia.

The forum is a place to share information between workplaces. Flourish Australia Board member Paula Hanlon, who manages a peer workforce in another health service, said of the forum 'It's really good to see what other LHD's [local health districts] are doing because that way we don't have to reinvent the wheel. We can say to others "How did you do that?" or "Could WE use the presentation that you used..." (BEING Highlights video 2023) -WH

BEING Highlights video (2023) <https://being.org.au/events/consumer-peer-workers-forum-25-anniversary/>

ABOVE Chris Grumley of Flourish Australia presents. PHOTO BEING

Psychiatrist Shortage

RANZCP

Insight+ (The Medical Journal of Australia) reported that 'the existing psychiatry workforce cannot support the mental health needs of Australians.' (Whitehead, 2023)

"Right now, the mental health system is fragmented, under-resourced and unable to keep up with the burgeoning demand for mental health support," said Dr Elizabeth Moore, President of the Royal Australian And New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) (NOTE: This is not Prof Elizabeth More AM, Chair of Flourish Australia)

"We also have a critical and chronic shortage of psychiatrists. As a result, many Australians, particularly those in regional, rural and remote areas, and First Nations people, are going without the mental health care they need."

The shortage is a world-wide phenomenon that pre-dates the pandemic.

The RANZCP said the solution lies in the government quickly implementing the recommendations of their new National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2022-2032, which has four parts: attracting more people to psychiatry, aligning workforce skills with needs of consumers, improving pay and conditions, and improving access to data. (Australian Government , 2023)

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Making a Difference

From Maitland to the UK to India!

By Anne Hoffman

I have been writing most of my life and also practicing other creative art forms for decades. A couple of years ago, I saw a great opportunity to help reduce stigma, by submitting a poem to an international publication!

I access Flourish Australia's Maitland service. I usually go there for support one day per week, plus every fortnight I participate in an art group.

In 2021, I responded to the 'Invitation to submit poems on stigma in mental health' which was run by the Lancet Commission on Stigma and Experience in Mental Health in the UK.

Each poem had to be less than 250 words, refer to experiences of mental health stigmas or to experiences of how to reduce or overcome stigma.

This invitation went to people across the world – that's like trillions of people worldwide. Well, billions at least!

I thought about it and created 'Make a Difference,' which you can read at the top of this page.

In March 2022, I received notification that my poem was one of six chosen to put in the report. This is so amazing as there are so many people in the world, and I won one of the places! I was feeling overwhelmed and honoured. I needed to record a video of myself reading the poem. This was planned and was sent off to the institute.

This poem (along with others) was put in the commission's report. To look at this, please follow the QR code at the end of this article.

Just recently, the Eklavya Foundation for Mental Health in Pune, India showed interest in my poem. They would like to translate it into the Marathi Language. The Eklavya foundation is working to create awareness, remove stigma and conduct self-help group meetings. I have given them permission to use my picture in their publication and they also asked me to write a few lines about myself.

Eklavya is a non-clinical not-for-profit (like Flourish Australia) that offers Group support through virtual and face to face meetings.. It allows people to discuss their experience of mental health issues and it extends support to carers as well.

Make a difference

Sometimes when I'm on the bus,
I tell people about my
schizophrenia story.

I don't hold back or make a fuss
Some listen, while others leave in
disgust.

Every case is unique
Not everyone is violent or scary
It all comes down to belief
If people can understand and feel
relief.

The media portrays fear
They inform the public about the
tragic side

As individuals, we need to make it
clear

Tell people our story,
achievements

What they like to hear.

Make a difference

It's up to you

It can't hurt

To give your point of view

Tell the truth, how it feels to you

Change people's image and point
of view

Some people get up and walk
away

There's always hope it will change
one day

Anne Hoffman

What I have written about in the poem is from personal experience. Sometimes in the past when I began to talk to people on the bus or elsewhere they would move away and sit in a different seat. For some people though, it is an opportunity to learn. They say 'Oh wow, I didn't know people have those kinds of experiences with schizophrenia.'

So in the long run, the more we share our story with people, the more people will listen, and the better people will understand.

What an incredible journey I have been on. I urge anybody to try as you never know where it will take you. Thanks to Sue Matynia and Anastasia Bogdanov.

ABOVE: Anne with her artworks PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNE HOFFMAN

Watch Anne
and others
read their
poems here:





THEMHS PAPER:

“Let There Be Life; Let There Be Employment”

By Luke Wrightson

Penny Bartholomew, J.A. Menzies and myself are members of Flourish Australia’s Community Advisory Council, and we attended the 2023 TheMHS Conference in Adelaide on behalf of Flourish Australia. Our talk was called “Let There Be Life, Let There Be Employment.”

Penny, J.A. and I believe that employment can be very important to people. “I have a job” can be the most important four words that anyone can say. Our team values the work that we do, and Flourish Australia supports us in many ways. The Community Advisory Council that Flourish Australia runs can be a good stepping stone into work for someone who has been unemployed for a period of time. Sometimes just having some work to do, even volunteering, can calm our nerves and get us back into the swing of things. At the Conference,

I talked about the practicality of working, explaining the cleaning work I do for three days a week for Flourish Australia, and on the Council.

All three of us presented. J.A. introduced the talk with some theory-based information around NDIS and work and also gave the conclusion, while Penny closed our talk with some more work theory at the end.

I have had some very high-stress and high-pressure jobs in the past. I’ve served in the Army, worked in IT in an abattoir, and an IT helpdesk at SunRice. Now, I have chosen less stressful jobs with mostly minimal pressure. I try not to take on more than I can handle. Since I now work in mental health, I want to be able to pass on the lessons I have learned to my colleagues. Instead of loading up myself and other people, I take a kinder approach and try my best to make each work day balanced and productive with minimal stress and pressure.

Our target audience is anyone who is working or is looking at getting a job.

The paper was a group effort between the three of us. We met on Zoom a few times to collaborate on the talk. We each put together our 5 minute speech and read it to one another. The total time was 15 minutes. We then made changes before they day until we were happy.

The outcome we were hoping for was to bring attention to the need for employment styles and goals that are a good balance of pay conditions and time. It’s not all about money, so getting the equation down pat was our goal.

To prepare for writing our paper, we met with Fay Jackson (General Manager Inclusion) and Kim Jones (former Project Officer Inclusion) over Zoom. They provided some guidance, but we wrote the final product ourselves. J.A., Penny and I met one last time on the Friday before TheMHS, and we were confident that we would nail it.

The three of us have had some experience at presenting. Penny and I gave a talk at last year’s TheMHS in Sydney, and J.A. has had plenty of public speaking experience.

The Conference was intense. There was a lot of information to take in, and TheMHS is very heavy on talking. Some topics were complicated, but others were explained simply and were easy to understand. Being in Adelaide was a challenge: just getting from the airport to a taxi and finding something to eat was an ordeal, but we overcame all this and had a good time. The accommodation provided by Flourish Australia was very nice and situated close to the Convention Center.

I really hope to attend next year’s conference! It was a blast, and I thank everyone involved.

ABOVE: Luke Wrightson of the Flourish Australia Community Advisory Council presented at TheMHS with fellow Council Members Penny Bartholomew (right) and J.A. Menzies. PHOTO PROVIDED BY LUKE WRIGHTSON

The YES Survey: Change On The Horizon for Mental Health

By Dr Emily Hielscher (as told to Grant J Everett)



The YES (Your Experience of Services) Survey has been gathering detailed feedback from people who access mental health services. Dr Emily Hielscher, Senior Research Coordinator explains.

The YES survey collects data from people who access community managed organisations (CMOs) in Australia including Flourish Australia. This enables all organisations to share information about people's experiences. We are aiming for every person who accesses our services to take part.

What makes the YES Survey special is that Flourish Australia is conducting this research with an unprecedented level of cooperation and codesign between many other CMOs including Neami, One Door and Stride, with the aim of building better services for all.

The YES Survey consists of 28 multiple choice questions. The survey focuses on asking people about their experience of service in the past three months; age, gender, main language, and Indigenous Status of each person. However, we didn't find any significant differences in responses between these different groups.

In the past year, about 10% of the people Flourish Australia supports completed a YES Survey, either online or via hard copy. 53% identified as male. A little under half were aged 45-64, and over 80% identified as non-Indigenous, spoke English as their main language at home, and have been receiving

support from Flourish Australia for longer than 6 months.

It's been reassuring to get a solid sense of how we are traveling as a service provider, and the positive feelings people have about what we offer. The vast majority of people (~90%) reported that their feelings, privacy, individuality and personal values were respected, and that they felt safe using Flourish Australia services.

"How considerate, empathetic, understanding, and knowledgeable my support workers are,"

respondent from Wagga Wagga, NSW

We will be conducting this survey twice a year from now on, and we've been creating new methods of data sharing and analysis to guide positive changes to service delivery, now and in the future.

So Many Good Things!

So many respondents shouted from the rooftops that the support they received from Flourish Australia peer workers and other support workers was the pinnacle of their experience with Flourish Australia. People felt these workers understood where they were at, and this made them feel safe.

People also loved being supported in finding employment and gaining new skills, identifying this as a crucial part of any recovery journey. There were also a number of comments about wanting more supports after hours and on weekends. People also indicated that they want to be more informed about changes to staffing and service delivery.

Ideally, we want to encourage people to move onto bigger and better things once they're ready, and we'll support them as they advance towards independence. The best result is when people don't need support from Flourish Australia at all anymore!

Thanks to everyone who took the time to fill out this important survey, the Flourish Australia staff who organised this project and the Mental Health Coordinating Council for pushing for YES Survey distribution across the sector.

I'm really excited about this, and I hope it's exciting for you, too!

Look out for our story on the Community Research Advisory Committee coming up in a future Panorama!

ABOVE: Responses to the YES survey inform the direction taken by Flourish Australia. It enables people who access our services to influence what lies over that horizon!
PHOTO WARREN HEGGARTY

A Country in Chorus



During Mental Health Month, Australians for Mental Health promoted a campaign called 'A Country in Chorus.' Members of the public were invited to share AFMH's message for change in the mental health system. They were also invited to "join us in digital chorus workshops during mental health month in October to amplify our voices and drive change."

One of the leaders was Dr Jonathon Welch AM, [above] creator of the 'Choir of Hard Knocks' and an ambassador of Flourish Foundation Australia. One of the things that AFMH wants is a 'centralised waitlist system' so that services can be better targeted and funded. -WH



Better Digital supports for Youth

The Australian Bureau of Statistics released figures that showed mental health is currently a real concern for young Australians.

Clinical psychologist from the University of Sydney Professor Adam Guastella told The Advocate newspaper that what he found surprising was the lack of support for young people including a lack of quality digital tools."

"In this sort of society where young people are on their phones and use computers all the time, it really surprised me that they're not getting supports using digital technology." Professor Guastella is talking about evidence-based supports.

"We don't need media influencers providing evidence about what works," he said. "What we need is reliable information about supports that can help young people deal with anxiety, substance misuse and other mental health concerns, and also as a source of truth that they can rely on this information and get the supports they need." (Lyons, 2023) -WH

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Equity in Social Housing



At present, through the Supported Disability Accommodation (SDA) scheme, for-profit developers are given financial incentives to create housing for people with disability, but why not provide incentives for the people themselves to become home owners?

'Everyone is facing issues around housing at the moment' El Gibbs of Disability Advocacy Australia recently told the ABC, 'but for people with disability it is even bigger.' (ABC, 2023)

People living in group homes and public housing in general do not have the same kind of housing choices as everybody else. They don't really have choices about 'where we live and who we live with.'

El Gibbs described how people with disability often live in group homes making a contribution for years and years but at the end of it they own nothing. What if a part of their contribution was held back and went towards ownership?

The plan being put forward by Disability Advocacy Australia and allied organisations would allow people with disability to build a share of equity in the properties in which they live, and governments are being urged to match their contributions.

The benefits of having your own place are many. You get to decide who else comes there, you get to decide what colour to paint it, you get to choose your furniture and what books to go on the book-case. You can come and go as you please! These choices are all choices for recovery, so it is clearly beneficial to get as many people as we can into their own places. -WH

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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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