

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

panorama

Monthly Issue **March 2024 #92C**

**“Finally at a
Good Place
in My Life”**

**Japan’s
Peer Workers
Emerge**

**Making
Research Real**



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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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COVER: Kindness and validation. Taylor Rhodes and her child at the Women and Children's Centre. See story on page 8. Photo by Tom Greenwood GREENWOOD MEDIA.

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Contributors include...

Janet Meagher CF AM visited Japan to promote the value of peer work

James Jordan works at Prestige Packing Harris Park, and he also has the greenest of green thumbs

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



FAMILY & CARERS

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

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

Other Organisations

Sometimes families and carers want more information and other contacts. There are a range of organisations that provide specialist supports and information for carers.

A list with contact details can be found on our website at: flourishaustralia.org.au/family-and-carers

Carer Gateway: carergateway.gov.au

Mental Health Carers NSW: 1300 554 660

Arafmi Queensland: (07) 3254 1881

Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network: 1300 620 042

Mental Health Carers Australia: 1300 554 660

Kids Helpline : 1800 551 800

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



FINALLY AT A GOOD PLACE IN MY LIFE AT 73

By Don Jordan



I first connected with Flourish Australia when I wandered into their Newcastle day-to-day living centre seven years ago. As soon as I went inside and saw what everyone was doing, I instantly felt at home.

The Manager back then, Diane Carson, came right up to me and introduced herself and made me feel very welcome right away. She told me about what Flourish Australia does, such as the music group, art classes, day programs, outings and hot meals, and she said I was most welcome to be a part of all that.

The people who were accessing services that day invited me to play a game of pool, and I took them up on it. I could see myself in everyone there, and that was massive, because it made me feel like I fitted in. As all the people who attend the Newcastle service have some kind of lived experience, we all tend to "get" each other pretty easily.

This was a powerful experience, as I was very isolated at that point in my life. I have always struggled with

making and keeping friends, but now I had a place to go to where I was welcomed, and that was a biggie for me.

Sometimes, I'll visit Flourish Australia just to sit and chat. I can come in for half an hour, or I can stay for six hours. That's the beauty of visiting the service. If anyone seems down, the rest of us are sure to check if they're okay. This mutual support works really well. It's like being a part of a little village! And if a staff member seems to be doing it tough, we'll do the same thing for them.

When a new person visits Flourish Australia's Newcastle service, I'm always sure to introduce myself and make them feel welcome. I want people to feel like they're at home, because that worked so well for me. Making somebody feel welcome feels like a wonderful accomplishment.

My goal is to keep attending Flourish Australia as much as I can, because I have purpose here. I've got connection, and my friends here often feel like the family I never had. I'll be visiting for the foreseeable future.

Playing the axe

I've been learning to play guitar for the last five years since a support worker got me into it, so I really enjoy the music group. We have a member's band, which Daniella runs. She's very good, very skilled. We always welcome anybody who can sing or play!

At the moment I'm enjoying those online guitar karaoke websites where you can play along with what's happening on the screen. The website provides you with the chords, the songs and the words. All you really need to know are 2 or 3 chords. It's good fun.

Recycling beauty

Flourish Australia has a good art room with lots of high quality supplies. I've been to art school, and I do a lot sculpture. I've been working with mannequins lately, adding fabric and jewellery and stuff to them. I've got about 8 complete ones now. I have a bunch of CDs hanging from the ceiling in the front window that I've transformed into artworks, and I also decorate women's shoes and old records.

I like creating 3D art where I can recycle garbage into something beautiful.

My NDIS funding

When the NDIS rolled out, I applied for my funding through Flourish Australia. Their guidance made it an easy experience. The NDIS now funds my Flourish Australia support, both at the day-to-day living centre as well as one-on-one support in the community.

I see my one-on-one Flourish Australia workers quite a bit, anywhere from 2 to 4 days a week, and they'll usually get me out of my house for a walk or to drive me down to the beach. This was particularly valuable during COVID, as I became really isolated in the lockdowns. Thankfully, I was able to meet my support workers face-to-face so long as proper safety precautions were taken.

I've worked with Lisa, my key support worker, for a while now, as well as with some of the other staff members. It's all going very well!

Living with Asperger's syndrome

I live with Asperger's syndrome, and as a result of that my social skills didn't develop very well and I've never really had any friends. This means I have been isolated throughout most of my life.

This made my career quite challenging (I was a diesel mechanic for 10 years, and after that I became a sewing machine repairman until I retired). While I was able to communicate well enough to do my job, I wasn't any good at being social with my colleagues. I wouldn't call any of them friends.

Now, I have regular social contact that I'm comfortable with, with people who don't stress me out.

Home base

I live in a housing commission home on my own in Warabrook and I love it there. I need to be able to spend time on my own, as it helps me to recharge my social battery.

Before this, I was living in a van. I was so depressed and anxious and finding it difficult to function, that even though I had enough

money to afford to pay rent, my crippling anxiety meant I couldn't bring myself to do it. Because I was homeless and had a note from my doctor and I was in pretty bad shape, living in my van while pushing 60, I was supported in finding my own home through housing commission, and I moved into a property within two months.

Mental health

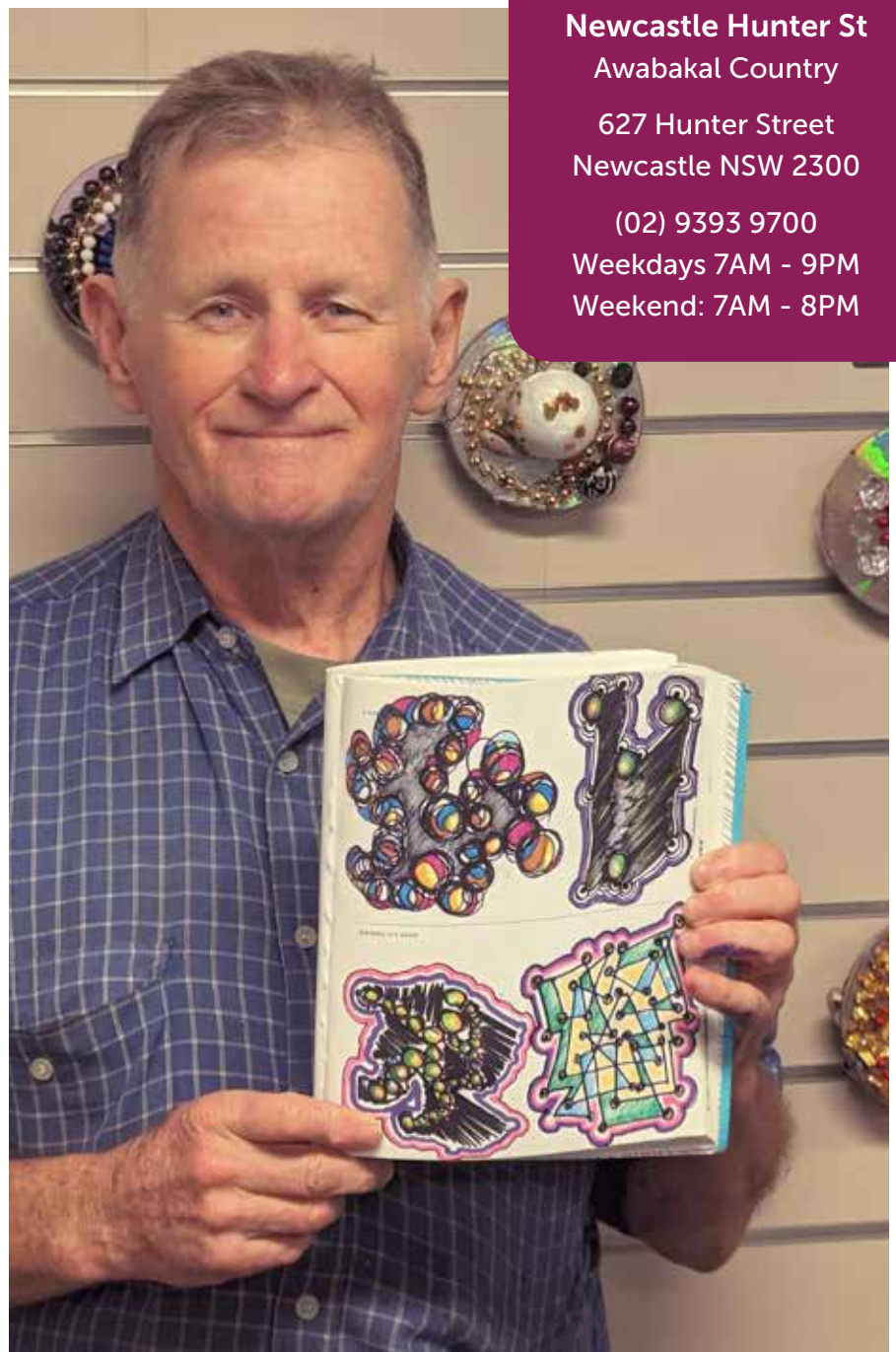
I tried to run away from my mental health for a long time, but that simply doesn't work.

With the right support and the specific medications that work for

me, I've been stable for years now. I don't need to worry about getting unwell anymore because I've got excellent support workers and friends who care about me, and I feel grounded. It took me most of my life to find that, but I'm far happier than I've ever been.

Even though I'm getting older and I'm struggling a bit with being 73, I'm in a good place in my life. I'm really happy!

OPPOSITE & BELOW: Don Jordan with a few of his many, many pieces of art at Flourish Australia's Newcastle site. PHOTOS BY ANGUS PERRIN



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Brightening His Workplace:

James Just Keeps Growing and Growing!

By James Jordan



The famous actress Audrey Hepburn once said that, "to plant a garden is to dream of tomorrow." James Jordan, from the Flourish Australia Community Business at Harris Park, Prestige Packaging, has certainly been busy dreaming!

Recognition

James' gardening skills were recently recognised by his housing provider, Link Wentworth Housing, in a competition called Growing Communities Gardening. This annual competition encourages people to get involved in working bees, get out in the fresh air, and make friends. There are prizes in a number of categories, and no garden is too small to nominate!

The Growing Communities Gardening competition is supported by the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney.

"I really love gardening," James said. "My father was a great gardener, and he taught me lots of tips and wisdom."

Everyone who works at Prestige Packaging at Harris Park have also recognised James for his skills in planting and looking after the garden at the factory. Thanks to James,

Prestige Packaging has garden beds full of beautiful red geraniums.

"These little pops of colour really lift the spirits of everyone who walks through our gates," said Mihaela Stanculescu, Site Manager at Prestige Packaging.

James' key worker, Boris Borissov, feels very proud and inspired by how James has used gardening to boost his mental health recovery journey.

"The garden at the factory was James' own initiative and creation," said Boris. "We all know how important it is to do things you love doing."

ABOVE: James checking out the flowers at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney PHOTO FROM JAMES JORDAN

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JAPAN'S PEER WORKERS EMERGE 'TENACIOUS AND DEDICATED'

By Janet Meagher CF AM



In December 2023, I attended the Japanese Peer Work Conference at Taisho University, Tokyo. I gave a keynote address before the 200 personal attendees, with many more people joining in online. There is a palpable sense of imminent change in the air. I'm not sure how or when it will happen, but it will be most welcome to the peer workers.

There's a strong interest in human rights in Japan. There is also the need for a National Mental Health Policy and a set of national standards. There is a need for the peer workforce to have a better structural and ethical framework.

In the picture above we see Hisashi Higa, Janet Meagher CF AM and Prof Setsuko Sakae. Both Hisashi-san and Setsuko-san have visited Flourish Australia on their trips to Australia.

Hisashi Higa appeared in Panorama five or six years ago, during the time of the NDIS pilot program. As manager of a mental health welfare service in Okinawa City, Japan, I accompanied him for part of his trip. He was on a study tour learning about peer work in three countries; Denmark, Italy and Australia. He also

went to Brook Red in Queensland, which is a service familiar to many of our peer workers.

The lady on my left in the photo, Professor Setsuko Sakae, is from Osaka. She too was in Australia and visited us at PRA (one of Flourish Australia's predecessors) many years ago. She, together with Professor Chiyoe Sakamoto (Taisho University, Tokyo) facilitated the conference together with the Peer Workers Organisation.

They have been meeting like this for over a decade and they still struggle with lack of coordination and agreement on the nature, ethics and expectations of peer workers. This is because peer workers are mostly employed by individual agencies, local governments and companies involved in mental health service provision and are subject to whatever that employer decides for the peer worker position. Training, if it exists at all, is dependent upon what the employer designs and delivers.

Therefore, there is some confusion regarding who the peer worker is, what they do and what is required of them. They are hoping to address these diverse interpretations and expectations over time and are hopeful of interesting the National Government to fund and develop

some policies and guidelines for both mental health services and peer workers.

Recent scandals in institutions may have urge the government to make some changes along these lines.

Peer workers are supported in their development by a number of social work Professors who are seriously conducting peer work and advocacy research and acting as mentors, allies and collaborators. It is through their auspices that these conferences and meetings are made possible.

They don't yet have peer workers in the institutions. Everyone was saying that it would be far too difficult for anyone to do peer work in those places because of the "nature of those places." It is felt they would not be welcomed and other staff would object. Peer work often runs up against this obstacle!

They have been so tenacious and are dedicated to ensuring that they, and their roles, are constantly being respected and valued as they make efforts to improve their status and professionalism.

ABOVE: Peer worker Hisashi Higa from Okinawa, Janet Meagher CF AM, and Professor Setsuko Sakae from Osaka in the lovely autumnal shade of ginkgo trees! PHOTO PROVIDED BY JANET MEAGHER



Kindness Validated My Feelings: Now, I Advocate For Change

By Taylor Rhodes

Would you like to know more
about the Flourish Australia
Women's and Children's Program?

1300 779 270

As a single teenage mum, I was subjected to so much stigma in my hometown. I grew up without a mother and my home life was chaotic, so the idea of parenting my son alone was daunting, and I was also struggling with post-natal depression, so I also felt I'd lost my whole sense of identity. With no family or peers to turn to, I reached out to Flourish Australia.

Flourish Australia's Women's and Children's Program

The Women's and Children's Program is a nurturing environment staffed by women who are happy to listen with genuine care.

All my life, I've been told to just "get over" the deeply traumatising things that have happened to me. But the kindness and respect offered by the Women & Children's Program validated my feelings, confirming the domestic violence my son and I experienced was not okay. They have reassured me it's ok to feel the way I feel, and have shown me ways to manage while I work through all that's happened.

I've warmed to one of the other mums in the program, Larissa,

and I've felt safe enough to share my pain with her, to let it all out. Having Larissa walk alongside me has assured me that I'm not the only one who feels overwhelmed by motherhood at times. Talking things out has helped me to move past self-doubt. Just hearing someone say, 'You're a great mum,' is a huge deal.

Being shown such patience and kindness has helped me to realise what it must be like to have the guidance of a loving mum. It was challenging to connect with what a mother's love looks like when I'd never felt it myself.

This is what family should feel like!

Leaps And Bounds

After just three months of throwing myself into everything that the W&C program offers, my self-esteem has soared. Finding the freedom to be myself was life changing, and kindness was the key. I want better things for my life and my child now, I hold stronger values, and have learned healthier ways of living life and having relationships. I'm a completely different person now, not just surviving.

My life experiences have motivated me to advocate for more to be done

about domestic violence. I once found myself talking passionately about it with Flourish Australia's CEO Mark Orr, not realising who he was. He engaged with the conversation like we'd known one another for years. That's what's so unique and wonderful about Flourish Australia's whole approach: every person is equally respected and valued for what they bring to the conversation.

More Services, Please!

So many single mums out there are doing their best to cope without any support, so I'm speaking up for more services of this sort to be funded for more women. I'm living proof that programs like this can completely turn life around for survivors of DV and their children, and it's so much more than a Band-Aid solution.

Flourish Australia has saved my son and I with their kindness, changing the course of our entire future, and I believe we'll be the ones to finally break the cycle of domestic violence. Without Flourish Australia's support, it would have been very easy for my baby and I to fall through the cracks. God knows where we'd have ended up had they not taken us under their wing and modelled such a caring and kind support system.

SAFE AS HOUSES/ FLATS/VILLAS

Why Housing is so Important for Recovery

By Warren Heggarty

Housing is a big issue for everyone. If you live with mental health issues, having adequate, stable housing is very important. Recovery is made all the more difficult if you are simultaneously facing concerns about your living conditions. Many people living with mental health issues do not have adequate, stable housing and this can hold back their recovery.

Some of our readers have experienced homelessness first-hand. Where a person does not get adequate support for mental health issues, it may lead to them being forced from accommodation.

Sometimes it can come down to a misunderstanding. One story we ran in Panorama described how a landlord was displeased with the way a person who was accessing our service was maintaining their flat. With the support of Flourish Australia staff the tenant was able to come to an agreement with the landlord. The landlord made some modifications which made it easier to clean and the tenant was then able to do his part. Both parties were pleased with the outcome.

When a person with complex mental health issues finds themselves in this sort of misunderstanding without support, it could even lead to eviction. Both landlords and tenants have responsibilities towards one another and sometimes they need a little support and reassurance from support workers like those at Flourish Australia.

Lack of safe housing is a lack of a basic human necessity. There are mothers and children who are fleeing domestic abuse. There are people who have lost their homes due to drug and alcohol issues. Some people sleep rough, some ride the trains back and forth all day because it is better than being out in the rain. People who do not have a safe home are more vulnerable to crime.

Flourish Australia's Women and Children's program at Blacktown NSW Programs like the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) are designed to help people meet the challenge of gaining and maintaining a home. Public Housing and rent assistance are other forms of support for people on low incomes. Given the benefits for our mental health, Panorama would like to encourage our readers to aim for the very best that you can achieve in housing!

This series of stories will look at everything from accommodation support like HASI to home ownership. If you think home ownership is impossible, we have stories from people who have had lifelong mental health and accommodation issues who eventually bought their own houses.

Your circumstances can change. In fact you can make your circumstances change. Your recovery journey may lead to employment; and long term employment may well open doors you never dared dream would open. You may partner with another person making it easier to save money. You might even inherit money through a will. Next thing you know, you have a home loan deposit. Here's what to do when you find yourself in that situation.

In April issue we will learn about looking after your own interests when renting or purchasing. Later, we hope to bring you stories about solving the rental crisis and how HASI (Housing & Accommodation Support Initiative) has helped people.

ABOVE: However modest it may be, stable, safe housing is essential for good mental health. Even better, is housing that you have had a hand in choosing. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

LONG TAIL OF THE PANDEMIC

How to Shake it Off

By Warren Heggarty



Living through the pandemic restrictions has had a long term impact on people's mental health. How do we deal with the aftermath? Some advocate that employers should take on a 'pastoral role' towards affected employees. Others advocate government action. What can we do for ourselves to overcome the fallout?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has found that the overall mental health of Australians has declined recently, specifically in the areas of anxiety and depression. A private study by global mental health company Wysa suggests the situation may be even worse than the ABS says.

A recent article in HRD (Human Resource Director) Magazine, quotes Professor Sharon Lawn of Flinders University, SA, as saying COVID 'disrupted people's usual flow of life and the impact of that ... has a long tail... people are still impacted years later.' (Terry, 2023)

University of Sydney News quotes Professor Maree Teesson as saying 'while many want to believe we're "back to normal" in Australia, the statistics show otherwise.'

A review led by the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use in collaboration with Australian National University found that the increases in anxiety and depression was quite dramatic

among 'vulnerable populations.' Some figures quoted include STRESS 39.15, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS 44.2% AND PTSD 18.8%.

Adolescents, pregnant women, new mothers, and people who had been hospitalised due to COVID, were particularly vulnerable to increased anxiety and depression. (University of Sydney News, 2023)

So what can we do about this?

One approach is to ramp up the use of innovative technology, as shown by '**Eclipse Online Portal**' (see next page). It is also worthwhile to look at what the pandemic did to us, before we begin the work of undoing it. Firstly, it created a general climate of anxiety, with constant reminders through the media that we were in a crisis. There was a lot of emphasis on safety and aversion to even small risks. Normally, when in the midst of anxiety, we can do something about it, but in the case of the pandemic, this option was not really on the table. The 'locus of control' was with the authorities.

So the way back involves restoring normal healthy routines that were interrupted. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine Health blog (Johns Hopkins Medicine health blog, 2022), we need to re-establish our normal activities. Like waking up at wake-up time (not 2pm, unless you're a shift worker), going out during the day to work (etc), going to bed at a regular bedtime, and socialising with people in person, not electronically. It also involves

refraining from the excessive amounts of alcohol and other drugs that some of us were taking!

Sharon Lawn says that a core focus for any organisation would be that managers play a pastoral role... tapping into what their people's needs are, what their workload is, and what can be adjusted to help them -for instance if they're navigating being a family carer while juggling their work. Being accommodating will mean you're actually able to get the best out of people.' (See "**Stay Afloat**" and "**Industry Packages**" next page)

'In some cases the cultural aspects of workplaces mean some don't feel able to talk about mental health issues because of the fear it might jeopardise their ability for promotion and career prospects... [if an organisation is working to destigmatise mental health issues it works best if] people in leadership roles can be frank and open and inclusive.' Just like here at Flourish Australia.

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ABOVE: Long tailed glossy starling IMAGE BY 70154 FROM PIXABAY



Stay Afloat Fisheries Fight Stigma

Employers are starting to become more involved in supporting the mental health of employees- Flourish Australia is certainly one of those employers. But you might be interested to know that the Seafood Industry is too.

Fisheries minister, Senator Murray Watt said 'studies suggest the rate of mental [health issues] can be higher for commercial fishers compared to the general population but only around one in three are seeking help.' The seafood industry can be especially challenging for workers, who are often isolated from family and support networks for weeks at a time.'

After successful pilot programs the Stay Afloat program is being rolled out to fishing communities around Australia. Volunteers in the industry will be trained in Mental Health First Aid and mental health and wellbeing education to support communities and local health workers.

'The Stay Afloat pilot program... connected 220 people in crisis with mental health services and saved nine lives,' says Senator Watt. CEO of Seafood Industry Australia Veronica Papacosta says 'our industry thrives on the hard work and dedication of our workforce... [the rollout] reflects our commitment to not only the physical safety but also the mental health of our valued workers.' WH

Eclipse Online Portal

The eClipSE Online Portal facilitates 24 hours a day access to online mental health screening, eHealth treatments and resources for people with both mental health and substance use issues. It was recently launched by the University of Newcastle and the Hunter Medical Research Institute, and its services are provided at no cost.

You can access it via the web on eclipse.org.au or download an app. It provides a range of courses available to help people help themselves, as well as provide access to professionals. It also provides access to a moderated social network to allow people to share their experiences with both professionals and their peers.

CEO of Hunter Medical Research Institute and co-developer of eClipSE, Professor Frances Kay-Lambkin says, "our research shows that the programs in eClipSE help just as much, and in a similar way to, traditional therapy provided in traditional ways." However, "we still need to connect with humans - and specialists - to help us along our mental health journey," she added.

Other co-developers and partners include the University of Sydney, NSW Ministry of Health, the National Mental Health and Medical Research Council, Ramsay Health Foundation and Beyond Blue. WH



Industry Strategies for Mental Health

Recently, the Productivity Commission estimated that the cost to Australian society of mental unwellness could be around \$43 billion annually, or more. This is not just the cost of treatment and support, but the estimated cost of everything, from lost productivity, to the cost of leave and the impact on families.

According to a report from the Australian Industry Group (Ai Group), (McGrath, 2023) most workers' compensation schemes report increases in the number of claims for 'psychological injury.' It is not clear however what proportion of mental health problems are 'created' by work or merely 'manifesting' at work.

Over recent years, says Louise McGrath, 'there has been an increasing focus on the employer obligation to eliminate or minimise the risks associated with psychosocial hazards at work.'

'Dealing with psychosocial hazards is not as straightforward as guarding a machine, installing fixed fall protection or implementing a traffic control plan,' she quips. Ai Group offers training for its members as well as a Workplace Advice Line.

In a survey conducted by Ai Group, 86 per cent of large businesses reported that they have a strategy to manage staff mental health. The rate for small businesses- which have less resources to devote to this- is still a strong 65 per cent. WH

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New Research Facility Focusing on Complex Health Challenges

Complex Mental Health issues are often accompanied by a set of physical health problems known as 'Metabolic Syndrome', including diabetes. Promoting research into complex health issues will be of great benefit.

A new research institute in NSW will look at mental health and four other key areas. The Ingham Institute for Applied Medical Research will be located in a new building in Macarthur, near Campbelltown called the Lang Walker AO Medical Research Building. Construction began on 13 February 2024.

The five research areas are mental health, diabetes, addiction medicine, indigenous health and pediatrics & child wellbeing.

NSW Minister for Medical Research and Aboriginal Affairs, David Harris said 'Researchers in this facility will focus on complex health challenges... as well as helping close the gap in health outcomes for our Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.'

The facility is being developed in partnership with Western Sydney University, South Western Sydney Local Health District, The Ingham Institute for Applied Medical Research and the University of New South Wales with the philanthropic support of the Walker Corporation.

Professor Attila Brungs, Vice Chancellor of UNSW said 'the Lang Walker AO Medical Research Building - Macarthur will help address some of the biggest health challenges facing the region. This is a momentous milestone for all of us who are working together to improve health for the Macarthur community.' WH

ABOVE: Artists impression of the Lang Walker Building from the University of Western Sydney

Misunderstood Self Injury Awareness Day 2024

By Grant J Everett & Warren Heggarty

Self-Injury Awareness Day is the 1st of March and there is a lot of misunderstanding to dispell. Self harm is mis-understood even by some doctors and nurses. We read about this in the story 'Slice Silence' in January Panorama. Imagine being so distressed you end up harming yourself only to discover that some medical staff might treat you with disdain.

Anyone at any age has the potential to self-harm. Generally, self-inflicted injuries are a way of dealing with overwhelming emotional pain or to break feelings of extreme numbness. Indigo Daya, who is doing a PhD on the subject says that self harming is for some a way of breaking through the enforced silence that often follows abuse.

As we saw in Megan Paull's story in December 2022 Panorama, there are 'Alternatives to Self Harm' that can help a person give voice to trauma without hurting themselves. Singing is one of Megan's ways of breaking silence.

Scarlett Franks speaking at a presentation with Indigo Daya at the University of NSW last year told of a cycle of fear, disgust and shame. Those clinicians who don't understand self harm often fear it and they overcome the fear with a sense of disgust at what the patient has 'done to themselves.' This expression of disgust leads to the patient feeling shame (ie 'self disgust).

Yet behind the self injury there is often already a story of fear disgust and shame. Someone who has been raped has been harmed by the disgusting behaviour of their attacker. Yet enforced silence which often follows abuse can transform this into shame on the part of the victim.



ABOVE: An item from Indigo Daya's exhibit 'Slice Silence' in 2023 PHOTO WARREN HEGGARTY

Hospital Logjam

AMA Warns Action Required

Australian Medical Association president Professor Steve Robson described the situation as a 'logjam' for mental health patients arriving in hospital emergency departments. Some were waiting as long as 30 hours.

'These long waits... cause distress for patients and their families and place enormous pressure on hospital staff.'

Prof Robson said emergency departments were not 'designed in a way that is conducive to good mental health care' and staff are not sufficiently resourced to manage patients who can become agitated when facing long waits for care.

'Without real reform,' he said, 'we will continue to see high suicide rates.' The AMA wants more patients to be seen in primary care settings, more public hospital beds and improved access to private psychiatry.

Too often, people delay getting help for mental health issues until it gets to the point where they may need hospitalisation. It is always better if we catch problems and work on them earlier before a crisis develops.

This compounding of problems that comes with delays and lack of resources is especially acute in rural and remote areas. (see the story 'Rural health navigators on page 14) WH

Source:

AMA media release 'Health System continues to fail people with poor mental health' 22 November 2023.



Rosalynn Carter
First Lady of Mental Health

Rosalynn Smith Carter, who died in November 2023 aged 96, used her public profile as First Lady of the State of Georgia, and of the United States, to work for mental health for carers, and for immunisation against childhood diseases.

Although she was born, lived her life, and died, in Plains, Georgia, her work took her round the world. She married Navy Submariner Jimmy Carter at age 19. He later became governor of Georgia and President from 1977 to 1981. The Carters founded the Carter Foundation, through which they continued to work together until Mrs Carter's death. President Carter, now 99, continues the work.

'Widely recognised as the nation's foremost advocate for mental health, she was actively devoted to building a more caring society' (Carter Centre). As first lady of Georgia, she led a 'passionate fight against the stigma of mental illnesses and worked to overhaul the state's mental health care system. As first lady of the USA, in 1977 Mrs Carter became honorary

Chair of the President's Commission on Mental Health. In this role she spearheaded the passage of the Mental Health Systems Act of 1980.

With the Carter Centre she continued 'to combat stigma and discrimination ... and promote improved mental health care in the United States and abroad. She also established the Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism to encourage accurate, in-depth reporting about mental health issues.'

Mrs Carter worked with Emory University and Georgia Southwestern State University on mental health and carer's policy. Immunising children against preventable diseases was another cause she pursued. Eleanor Rosalynn Smith was born in 1927 and 'as a child she was shaped by strong religious and family values and an early acceptance of hard work and responsibility.' Even in their nineties, the Carters did carpentry work for 'Habitat for Humanity,' providing accommodation for the poor. WH

ABOVE First Lady Rosalynn Carter in 1977 OFFICIAL PHOTO

MAKING RESEARCH REAL!

Community Research Advisory Committee

Adapted from the presentation by Emily Hielscher and Michael Wren

'Making Rights Real' was the Theme at TheMHS (The Mental Health Services) Conference 2023 in Adelaide. So Flourish Australia formed a team to tell everyone about our Community Research Advisory Committee. This is a committee that keeps the 'lived experience' in the research that we do! You could say it keeps our research real!

The presentation was made by Dr Emily Hielscher (Flourish Australia's Senior Research and Evaluation Coordinator) and Michael Wren (Community Research Advisory Committee member).

The committee was established to inform ongoing and future research directions in Flourish Australia. to ensure the research conducted is of greatest benefit to the people we support. Members of the committee are Michael Wren, Anne O'Grady, Simon Swinson, and Scott Gourlay.

The core functions of the Committee include the following:

1. Advising on strategic directions for research in Flourish Australia
2. Reviewing application requests from external organisations to conduct research that uses Flourish Australia resources.
3. Being involved from the inception through to the final report of any research conducted by the researchers at Flourish Australia.

Benefits of the Committee

The benefits are many. From the perspective of research staff, this arrangement:

1. Improves the relevance and quality of research.
2. Protects of the basic human rights of those people the research is designed to support.
3. Improves the way we communicate the research, becoming more inclusive and jargon-free.
4. Increases the likelihood that researchers who do not have lived experience will view things more from a view of humble open-mindedness: 'we don't have all the answers.'

From the perspective of members of the committee, it provides...

1. An opportunity to be a part of an amazing team of researchers.
2. The chance to learn and earn (meetings are paid) alongside other people who access Flourish Australia's services.
3. An opportunity to work with external collaborators – e.g. University of Sydney research partners.

Lessons

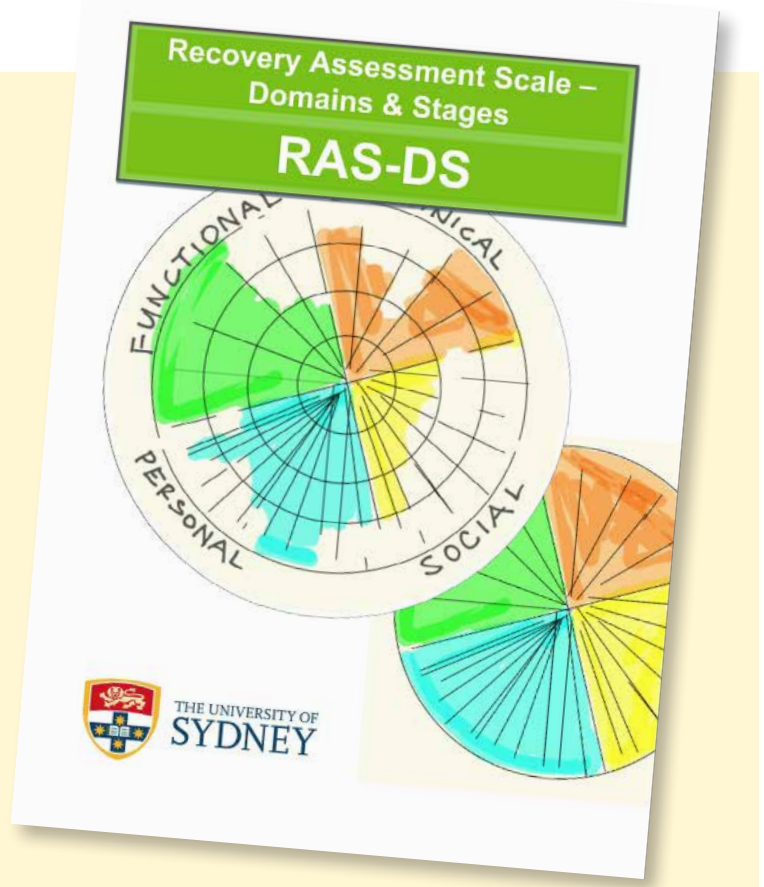
Research is about learning, so what

lessons have we learned since the Advisory Committee was brought into existence?

Firstly, we learned that we need to provide support to build up the capacity of people with lived experience so that they can advise on research. Without the pre-existing Community Advisory Council to provide some of this support, it would have been difficult to set up a research advisory committee. Staff of Flourish Australia and readers of Panorama can help us by identifying potential committee members. Though it does not require any background in research, it does require an interest and strong commitment -within a friendly, supportive environment.

Secondly, we learned that being committed to co-design principles means this must be embedded in all stages of research. We had some challenges with external organisations in the design phase. If you are interested in potentially joining the Community Research Advisory Committee, please contact Emily Hielscher: Emily.Hielscher@flourishaustralia.org.au

ABOVE: A frame from Emily and Michael's presentation shows a collaboration with the University of Sydney





Have You Considered Presenting at TheMHS Conference?

By Grant J Everett

TheMHS Conference 2024 runs between August 27th to the 30th, and this year it's being held at the National Convention Centre (NCCC) Canberra. The theme is "Finding Common Ground – Celebrating Difference and Looking Beyond to Find the Common Ground."

What is TheMHS?

TheMHS Conference is held in a different city in Australia or New Zealand each year, attracting approximately 1,000 delegates, and it's definitely the place to be for upskilling yourself and expanding your professional and social networks in the mental health sector.

TheMHS seeks to improve mental health services in Australia and abroad by bringing together delegates who work in the sector, including clinicians, people with lived experience, managers, carers, researchers, educators and policy makers, providing a forum to share all the latest insights into treating mental health. The empowering and inclusive approach taken at

the conference elevated the voices of carers and individuals with lived experiences, recognising their significance on par with the insights shared by researchers and clinicians. The conference program was thoughtfully designed to mirror the rich diversity inherent in the mental health sector.

TheMHS serves to advance our mental health services through learning, education and training at all levels, as well as actively engaging with people with lived experience.

Scan this QR code to visit TheMHS 2024 Conference page...



Do you have something you'd like to give a talk on?

Flourish Australia has been a proud partner of TheMHS for many years. If you access Flourish Australia services and you are interested in submitting an abstract about a certain relevant subject, or if you have any other questions about TheMHS Conference, talk to your support worker for more information.

\$5m for Indigenous Cancer Screening

We know that people with mental health issues often have worse outcomes for physical problems like cancer, and the same is true of Indigenous people. One of the best ways of evening things up is to promote cancer screening.

Cancer is a leading cause of death among Indigenous Australians and the mortality gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians has been widening. Improvements in screening programs for Indigenous people are therefore needed.

Indigenous health minister Senator Malarndirri McCarthy announced in November 2023 that the Australian government is investing in enhanced cancer screening and research into cancer in Indigenous Australians through the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Synergy Grant Schemes.

'Increasing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in cancer screening processes that are culturally relevant will help reduce the significant health burden and save lives,' Senator McCarthy said.

Kamilaroi woman Professor Gail Garvey and her team from the University of Queensland will receive an NHMRC Synergy Grant of \$5 million over five years to address the disparity in outcomes. 'Our aim is to co-design co-implement and evaluate strategies... with First Nations Peoples, rather than implementing a one-size-fits-all approach.' WH

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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