

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

panorama

Monthly Issue **October 2022 #87A**



**Mental Health
Month**

**Is an Electric
Vehicle for you?**

Boundaries

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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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Contributors Include...

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Contributions are welcome!

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Inspire
YOUR
Community
WITH YOUR STORY

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

Email us at: panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au



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

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

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



FAMILY & CARERS

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

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

Other Organisations

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

Mental Health Carers NSW Ph: 1300 554 660

Arafmi Queensland Ph: (07) 3254 1881

Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network Ph: 1300 620 042

Mental Health Carers Australia Ph: 1300 554 660

Kids Helpline Ph: 1800 551 800

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

Living With OCD:

Far More Complicated Than Washing Your Hands A Lot

By Jarrod Wellman (as told to Grant J Everett)

I have a lived experience of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). At its core, OCD is an anxiety thing, a worry thing, an uncertainty thing, and these feelings lead to me performing rituals that can really make every area of my life difficult.

I spend much of my days actively resisting the rituals, and this is something that I do for my own sanity. I fight them in an attempt to appear normal, and to get some temporary relief. Going against the rituals means battling my own mind, and if I let the negative feelings build up, I can end up feeling absolutely awful. I need to let it out to keep it manageable. But this takes so much energy and effort.

Honestly, I don't WANT to have to fight my OCD rituals, but I feel as though I HAVE to in order to conform to how others expect me to act. So I feel like I'm obligated to change an integral part of who I am.

Having OCD is a lot harder and more complicated than it appears. People downplay it and dismiss it by saying, "Hey, just stop washing your hands and move on. Easy." But it can be extremely torturous to constantly battle everything you're saying and doing. That's why I often feel like nobody understands me.

Unfortunately, there is no dedicated medication for OCD, so anti-anxiety meds and anti-depressants are often prescribed. I've been slowly reducing my medication under my doctor's supervision for some time, and I seem to be feeling a lot better now.

It can be exhausting

I used to experience a very distressing kind of mindspace that I personally refer to as "fake life feelings," and they were so painful that I was always scared of getting them. Preventing this symptom is one major reason why I've spent years trying to change my OCD rituals and habits. I've been told not

to fear these fake life feelings, to just let them pass, and to accept that they are there. But they can feel outright traumatic.

Managing

The OCD symptoms I experience are so automatic that they feel like an integral part of me. They're my natural response to life, like breathing or walking, so whenever I go against the rituals, it never feels right.

One recent way I've been managing my mental health issue is wearing headphones that prompt me to keep doing what I'm trying to do rather than being interrupted by my OCD rituals. Otherwise I have to continually prompt myself out loud, and this draws a lot of attention. I've had people make fun of me on many occasions, and I'll often feel anger when people bag me out, but I try to rise above it.

I've also been seeing an OCD expert over at Penrith for years now, and I have a psychologist from

headspace. They've encouraged me to do Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and challenge my rituals.

Initial onset

I began experiencing OCD in high school. My dad suspects the bullying I endured may have originally set it off.

My OCD was much more manageable in the beginning, and while I had some rituals, they weren't all that intrusive. I remember feeling much more alive back then, and I had such a will to fight it. My symptoms are definitely much worse nowadays.

I did well in my studies in primary school, but my grades in high school totally collapsed when I started experiencing OCD. One way this illness affected my studies was my handwriting: it was extremely neat, but it was so slow that I couldn't get through my exams. The teachers allowed me extra time and a computer, but the other students complained that this was unfair. Though I DID have a legitimate condition, so it certainly wasn't a case of trying to get preferential treatment.

Working with Flourish Australia

I've worked for Flourish Australia for a decade. I did accounting in the Finance department, which I found really challenging, followed by doing some admin work at Head Office. I then did hospitality at Figtree Conference Centre, and I now work in Flourish Australia's Marrickville Community Business as a factory hand.

My illness definitely affects my work when it flares up. Every now and then I just freeze on the spot and become incapable of getting anything done, sometimes for hours. With practice, I've gotten to the stage where I can keep doing what I'm doing.

I'm happy with my current job. I like my colleagues, and the bosses have good insight into how my illness works, so they're very supportive and understanding. They are always sure to check I'm doing okay.

The (Soothing) Scream of Music

My dream is to play guitar in a band and write my own songs. That would be awesome! I've been told I'm pretty good now, but I'm certain that I'd need to get a lot better before even considering playing publicly.

I'm a guitar person, so when I listen to songs, that's always what I focus on. I enjoy anything with good guitar, from punk rock like Green Day or No FX to heavy stuff like Fear Factory or System Of A Down. Listening to the right kind of music makes me feel extremely good, and I think most people have music they can turn to that makes them feel better. That's why I want to create music that speaks to people who have mental health issues, to let them know that other people relate to what they're going through.

I've seen a lot of bands live. I've gone to Soundwave twice, I saw Metallica's Death Magnetic tour, Linkin Park, Sum 41, Fallout Boy, System of a Down, Green Day and many more. I also see bands at pubs, and I'm always interested in seeing guitarists play up close. There are some really good guitarists out there, but the best ones aren't necessarily the most successful.

My guitar is a Peavey Predator. It's pretty good, but I'd prefer something that can create a heavier sound like my favourite bands, so I'd love a Fender Stratocaster or an Ibanez. They're very expensive, though, between \$4,000 to \$6,000. But I really want to produce that heavy, dirty sound!

I started off with lessons at Morgan Music Academy, and I've also learned stuff from YouTube videos, like how professionals do three-string power chords, for instance. I began by being entirely reliant on following guitar tabs, but I can improvise a bit now, and I'm developing an ear for what sounds right. Some of my best stuff happens when I'm just jamming and I'm in the moment, and I suddenly go, oh, that sounds good!

Skateboarding

I've found skateboarding good for my courage, especially when I attempt scary stuff. I've been to the skate park, but I mostly practise on flat ground like paths. When I go skateboarding I keep at it until I feel like I've done my best. I can drop into little ramps now, and I can sometimes do a double kickflip, but landing it is a different story!

Inner circle

I have an excellent support network. My parents have never given up on me, and I have several close groups of friends: I have my church friends, my work friends, my cricket friends, and I see my mates Chris and Peter on the weekends. I'm extremely lucky to have the support I have, but even this doesn't prevent OCD from being very, very hard to live with.

My support people are always happy to be there for me if I need it, and as a result some of my rituals have disappeared altogether.

Moving towards independence

I currently live in supported accommodation. The staff encourage us with our living skills, such as showing us how to cook and how to budget. I think I've come a long way with how independent I am, and some areas of my life have definitely improved.

My goal is to move into my own place and live independently, and I think something that will really help me to keep on top of things is the prompt feature on my phone, as it keeps track of everything I need to do each day so that I don't forget.

Do you have a lived experience of mental health issues? Are you seeking employment opportunities, supported independent living or just a welcoming place to hang out?

Flourish Australia can help!

Call our Enquiries Officers on (02) 9393 9627 or on (02) 9393 9626



Tune In:

How Will YOU Celebrate Mental Health Month?

By Grant J Everett

October is Mental Health Month, and this is celebrated in many ways by all kinds of services and workplaces across the country. This year, the theme is "Tune In."

Flourish Australia events

Throughout October, many Flourish Australia services and workplaces will be hosting special events for employees and the people who access these services.

As part of the organisation's brand relaunch, Flourish Australia will be hosting a Feelgood Fete, with support from PR Agency The Bravery, at Surry Hills on Saturday October 22nd. Be sure to find out what your local Flourish Australia service is doing in Mental Health Month!

Let's Do Lunch!

Every year, Flourish Australia welcomes a prominent keynote speaker to present about their connection with mental health issues. In past years we've hosted multiple World Champion surfer Lane Beachley, author Sam Bloom and Former Leader of the Opposition in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly John Brogden.

Join this year's Let's Do Lunch virtual webinar where respected Australian media identity Ellen Fanning, award-winning current affairs journalist will be talking on "Mental Health and the Media." This event will take place online on Friday October 21st, from 12:30pm to 2pm. Everyone is welcome, so be sure to get in on this Free Webinar Event!

We will be running many more events across several Australian states, so find out what your local Flourish Australia location is doing this Mental Health Month!



The Mental Health Services Conference

The annual TheMHS Conference (short for The Mental Health Services Conference) is the largest mental health conference in Australia, and this year it runs from October 11 to 14 at the Wesley Conference Centre in The City. TheMHS exists to challenge the boundaries of how we view mental health and how the mental health system is run, and presenters come from all walks of life.

Flourish Australia will be platinum sponsors at this year's TheMHS Conference, so be sure to visit our booth where we will share information about the services we have to offer, but DO NOT MISS the many presentations that will be happening throughout the conference by Flourish Australia staff, people who access services, and members of the Community Advisory Council.

We want to hear from YOU!

Be sure to let us know what you got up to during this Mental Health Month. We'd love to hear how you celebrated this important annual event!

Want to know more about Mental Health Month? Be sure to check out Flourish Australia's facebook page or Instagram page at....

www.facebook.com/FlourishAus
www.instagram.com/flourishaus/

13 TOP TRENDS IN 22

In the mental health media

By Warren Heggarty

What do you think are the most important issues in mental health at the moment? What are those issues which, if they were addressed, would have the maximum possible positive impact on people's lives? Panorama scanned the Internet and found these 13 issues for 2022.

1. Trauma informed care: About 61% of adults have experienced a significant trauma, 15% have experienced more than four. So dealing with trauma is important - which is why Flourish Australia runs training on it, including vicarious trauma. Responding to trauma requires a strengths-based approach, which relates to two of the three 'vital behaviours' practiced by all our staff: Using strengths based language and having recovery conversations. Focusing too sharply on trauma, however, comes with the risk of amplifying it.

2. Blood Test Diagnosis: There has been some preliminary research into using RNA biomarkers in the blood to diagnose some mental health issues. Sources say it would supplement, not replace, conventional approaches.

3 & 4. Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality: High tech tools have been revolutionary in physical medicine. However, do we really need AI to detect and measure how much someone twitches or bites their fingernails? VR has been spoken of as a tool in psych and pain control education.

5. Psychedelics: Also in its early stages, research into the effects of psychedelics on mental health issues would be dogged by the fact that psychedelic drugs are a) illegal and b) suspected to CAUSE mental health problems.

6. Social Media Boundaries: Setting healthy boundaries is good for you, which is why Panorama is presenting a more detailed article on this - not just for social media, but boundaries in general.

7. Telehealth: Being able to meet over a screen can be nice and convenient for some, especially those with mobility problems or who live remotely, but so many of us are so OVER having Zoom meetings (see more on page 13).

8. Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation: TMS is a noninvasive procedure that uses magnetic fields to stimulate the brain to improve mental health issues. Research is said to be 'promising' and 'safe' for depression, ADHD and OCD. It is nevertheless spoken of as a treatment of last resort.

9. Reduce stigma: We have seen a reduction in stigma over the last decade, which has helped people to seek support. A perverse side effect is that clinical terms minimises the impact of mental health issues and severe trauma. For example, "I'm so OCD about my laundry," or "our Grand Final loss was so traumatic."

10. Holistic Approach: Flourish Australia definitely looks at the whole person, not just at 'the disease.' That is why we promote physical health and social interaction!

11. Mental Health Apps: We read that after a huge period of growth, there could be between 10,000 and 20,000 of these apps on the market! Careful, though, not all are regulated.

12. Mental Health at Work: Flourish Australia has promoted this rigorously and we even developed programs that use the principles of peer work to help other workplaces deal with change.

13. Renaming schizophrenia: Some of the alternatives include 'Altered perception syndrome,' 'Psychosis spectrum syndrome,' and 'neuroemotional integration disorder.' Hmm...

So there you have 13 of the top issues in world mental health media. But what about "taking personal responsibility," or "building better relationships," or "exercise" or "employment?" All of these are associated with improving mental health. What do YOU think we should be talking about?

IMAGE: Artificial Intelligence is all very well, but what happens when your ROBOT develops mental health issues as well? IMAGE by SUJINS /PIXABAY



ELECTRIC VEHICLE DRIVE DAYS

*Find out what
it's like to
drive an EV!*

By Warren Heggarty



One of the best things you can do to help you in long term recovery and employment is to get a drivers' licence. Having done that, what sort of car is best for you? How about an 'EV' - Electric Vehicle? Will they become affordable for people on moderate incomes, and will they do the work we need them to do?

The Electric Vehicle Council (EVC) is "Australia's national body representing the electric vehicle industry" According to the NRMA, which is a member of the council's board, the EVC's task is to 'accelerate the electrification of road transport for a more sustainable and prosperous future.'

If you are burning to try out an EV for yourself, the NRMA (which is the NSW version of the RACQ or RACV motorists' clubs) is running a series of FREE electric vehicle drive days in 2022 and 2023. This is for both passengers AND drivers, so you don't have to have a licence or a membership to try it.

"That sounds like an interesting idea," says AK, who accesses one of Flourish Australia's Sydney services. "I am a member of the NRMA and was unaware of this." But the word is spreading: members can get more information from the July-August Issue of NRMA's Open Road magazine, or the website quoted below.

The NSW government is funding this project as part of its attempts to address climate change. 20 such days are planned, and you can find out more information here:

www.mynrma.com.au/cars-and-driving/electric-vehicles/our-mission/ev-drive-days

The first drive day was on 23 July and was booked out, but keep an eye out for future opportunities. Even if future drive days are booked out, you might still be able to enjoy the day out. Make sure you check the mynrma site for details first.

Now, electric vehicles have been around for a century or more. In the mid 20th Century when we had 20-foot-long 8-cylinder gas guzzlers that ran on leaded petrol, EVs were touted as a way to reduce the emission of pollutants. What actually helped the cause here was not EVs, but smaller, lighter cars, better engineering, and removing the lead. So, in a hundred years, EVs have never come even close to replacing the petrol or diesel-fuelled vehicle.

The more power you need, the more batteries you need. Batteries are very heavy, so the more power you have, the more dead weight you have to drag around! Some progress has been made in reducing weight and decreasing charge time.

Expense is another reason why people on average or low incomes are not buying up Teslas (pictured, above), Genesis, Cupras and Attos. Yet there are hopes that government policy will make things more attractive (in the same way governments have been supporting "Green Energy" in general). But, for a time to come, the electricity in those batteries is likely to come from FOSSIL FUELS! Given the vast distances vehicles have to cover in Australia, EVs do not look very promising outside of heavily urbanised areas... so far!

Queensland and Victoria

Queensland and Victoria do not currently have EV driver experience programs like the NRMA in NSW. However, if you come from those states, you can get information and articles about EVs from your state's Auto Club's website.

Royal Auto Club of Queensland's EV page is here: <https://www.racq.com.au/car/electric-vehicles#overview>

Royal Auto Club of Victoria advice on buying an ev is here: <https://www.racv.com.au/on-the-road/buying-a-car/electric-vehicles.html>

ABOVE: A Tesla recharges at a recharging station outside the NRMA office in Sydney Olympic Park. At least the hoses are longer than the ones on the petrol bowser! PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

CAN A WEEKLY “NO MEAT DAY” SAVE THE PLANET?

By Grant J Everett

What kind of difference could it make if everyone all over the globe skipped meat for one day per week, replacing the animal proteins they’d usually eat with plant-based proteins instead? Not only to our personal health, but to the health of the planet?

For many of us, it may be hard to picture a tasty dinner that doesn’t star the steaks, burgers, or snags you’re used to, but skipping meat one day a week is a great way to introduce yourself to the many plant-based ways you can hit your daily protein intake.

While most of us tend to build our meals around animal proteins, incorporating plant-based proteins such as vegetables, beans, chickpeas, edamame, tofu, tempeh, quinoa, lentils, peanuts, almonds and soy into our diets will offer all the protein we need, as well as fibre, vitamins, and other essential nutrients. Going plant based doesn’t mean “missing out” on the fuel, or the taste, that your body requires.

Plant-based diets provide many significant health benefits, such as improving heart health, reducing the risk of heart disease, decreasing your chances of Type 2 diabetes, promote kidney health, and also helps with maintaining a safe body weight. Be aware that plant-based meat substitutes aren’t always a

healthy option. Eating a margarita pizza and a big bowl of ice cream kind of misses the point! On that subject, while modern mock meats are convenient and tasty, they can be highly processed and contain large amounts of salt and fat. Health-wise, they’re more of a treat than a staple food.

Eating less meat reduces our carbon footprint, greatly lowering the production of greenhouse gases that impact climate change.

It’s also good for your wallet, as meat is often the most expensive ingredient in a typical meal.

Obligatory scary numbers

- If we all avoided meat one day a week, it would have a huge impact. According to the Meatless Monday website (link at the end of article in Further Reading)...
- Producing ONE quarter-pound beef burger requires 1,929 litres of water, enough to fill 10 bathtubs, and enough energy to power an iPhone for 6 months.
- Skipping one serve of beef one day a week for a year will save the equivalent emissions of driving 556 kilometres in a car.
- Livestock produce more greenhouse gases than all the cars, trucks, planes, and trains in the world combined, and use up to 75% of the Earth’s agricultural land.

A Gateway diet?

The Mediterranean diet consists of very little red meat and more in the way of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and plant proteins. The Mediterranean diet has been credited with lowering the risk of heart disease, heart attack, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and blood sugar. It’s also thought to promote better brain health, potentially decreasing the risks of cognitive decline and Alzheimer’s disease.

Further Reading

www.mondaycampaigns.org/meatless-monday/benefits

Cancer Council website “Meat and cancer risk”

www.cancer.org.au/cancer-information/causes-and-prevention/diet-and-exercise/meat-and-cancer-risk

Lettuce Veg Out website, “Benefits of plant-based protein vs animal protein”

lettucevegout.com/nutrition/benefits-plant-based-protein/

**IMAGE: Can you really get the protein you need without meat?
PHOTO FROM PIXABAY**



Making the Most of Lockdown

by Doing Something Fulfilling

By Michael Dumbrell
(as told to Grant J Everett)

Michael Dumbrell studied psychology at University in Australia, and he's currently living abroad in Spain. Here he tells his story of lockdown in Barcelona.

Growing up, I would sometimes write poems. I loved the feeling of coming up with a clever rhyme or a witty punchline, and I'd imagine sold-out shows with adoring fans shouting my best lines back at me, just like when my favourite lyricists performed.

While I'd really get into poetry for a day or two, after that I'd often leave it for weeks, months, or sometimes years. Without practicing the discipline of these famous lyricists, not only did I never get around to selling out a concert, the quality of my poetry never really improved.

Nothing But Time

When the global pandemic hit in March 2020, Spain was one of the first European countries to begin nationwide lockdowns. The best way to describe that time is "confusion," as no one knew what COVID-19 was, how serious it was going to be, or how long it would be around.

Although I found it extremely challenging to live in a cramped apartment for weeks on end, I was one of the lucky ones, as I had a government subsidy and no

dependents. It became really draining just getting through the city closures, curfews, quarantines, indefinite border closures and constant law changes, while worrying about the mental health of my family and friends who were going through similar back home in Australia.

To make matters worse, across the first half of 2020 I started to get severe stomach pain after most meals, so I spent a lot of time just lying down and not eating. It was very difficult to navigate an already-foreign health system and its forever-updating COVID-19 measures to investigate this problem. After months of looking into it, I found out that my problems were related to Coeliac's Disease, and I've felt a lot better since changing my diet.

What Went Wrong?

Looking back, I feel I made a mistake with how I occupied myself during the first lockdown. Despite having more than enough time to do whatever I wanted around the house, I didn't really try to work on developing any of my skills, and that includes my poetry.

Another mistake was not contacting my support people enough when I was struggling. I found it really hard to reach out to them, as I didn't want to "burden" those I cared about, no matter how untrue that entire concept is. It was really easy to come up with excuses for why I didn't want to reach out to them: maybe they're super busy, or they've got lots of other things to worry about, or I don't want to concern them, or I just feel embarrassed that others may see me as a grown man who is unable to take care of himself.

Ironically, keeping my struggles to myself inevitably only made me feel worse, thereby worrying my support people more and, in turn, making things harder for them. Talk about a self-fulfilling prophecy!

Grounded

In November 2020, Barcelona began a second round of strict curfews and city closures (these would eventually last six months). By this stage many of my friends had already moved back home, and it was a very trying time to socialise and meet new people. I suddenly

had plenty of time in isolation on my hands again, but I really wanted to make the most of it this time. If only there was some gratifying activity I could work on...

One day, bored at home, I decided to try writing some poetry again. But I encountered the same problem as always: I felt like I wasn't any good at it, and that would put me off. Every time I tried to write, I'd get frustrated that I couldn't come up with anything profound or creative, conveniently ignoring the fact that this was probably due to a lack of practice.

I decided to apply some of the goal setting principles I'd studied at Uni to my writing to see if they'd make a difference to the quality of my prose because...well, why not? I'd learned that two mistakes many people make with setting goals is not defining them clearly enough, and not making them measurable. This is often a sort of protective action, because it's less bruising to your ego if you don't achieve your goals when they're all a bit fuzzy. Conversely, this also makes it easier to lose track of your progress, and identifying how you've improved tends to play an important role in boosting positivity, motivation and focus.

I set the goal of writing one poem per month for a year. Each poem had to be completely finished on

time, not a draft. At first, it was fairly easy, but after a few months I found myself abandoning my writing for weeks, only to spend hours and hours on the last couple of days of the month to get it finished. Luckily, I stuck to my goal condition, and by around the 8th month I'd finally gotten into the habit of regular writing. In some months I finished more than one. At the end of those 12 months, I'd written 16 full poems!

My style had certainly progressed and improved, but I felt it was time to deepen my theoretical knowledge, so I did two free poetry courses online to broaden my ability.

Results

Apart from just creating poetry for the enjoyment of it, I'd learned in my degree that writing can serve as an effective therapy adjunct for many people who experience a mental health issue. When you look at a list of symptoms in the DSM-V (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition), you'll find that many of them are relatively normal to experience. For instance, everyone feels anxious or sad at times, but for some this can become a debilitating level of depression and anxiety that makes life feel almost impossible.

I thought, "Could writing help me to manage my own negative feelings?"

Making Sense of It All

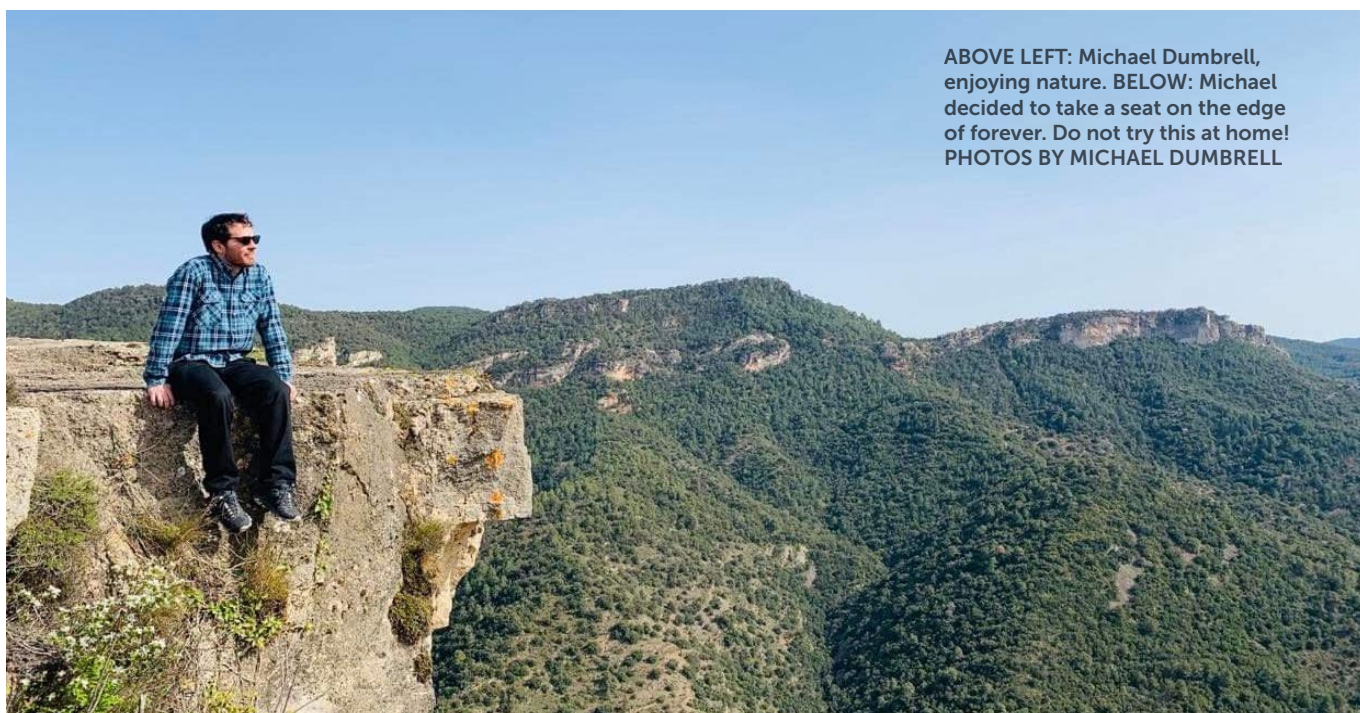
I've found that writing is a bit like having a conversation: for a successful chat, you have to meticulously gather your thoughts and clearly communicate them to the other person in a way they understand. Through the process of writing, I was able to clarify in my own head what I was doing well in life, and what things I could act on. What initially seemed like a bunch of unrelated or nonsense thoughts would often make a lot more sense after I wrote them down as coherent poems.

Additionally, by the time I perfect a metaphor or laboriously sift through synonyms to find one with just the right word stress, I often find some of the more intense negative feelings that inspired writing the poem in the first place have significantly subsided.

Even though I still don't write as well as my favourite lyricists, I'm sure I'll keep on composing poetry long after this is all over.

Continuing To Hold Strong

While it's not as harmful as the early days, COVID-19 still has a tendency to rear its ugly head to affect those around me. I will continue to keep the power of real conversations in mind, and I will battle my pride to put my hand up for help when I need it.



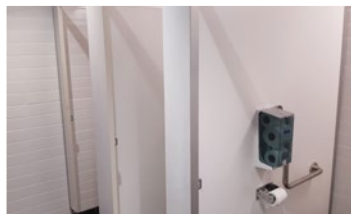
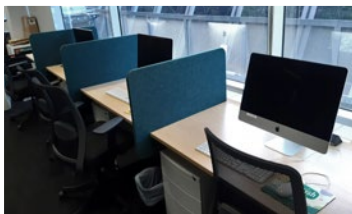
ABOVE LEFT: Michael Dumbrell, enjoying nature. BELOW: Michael decided to take a seat on the edge of forever. Do not try this at home!
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL DUMBRELL

DO WE NEED BOUNDARIES?

PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL

By Warren Heggarty

BELOW: Think what would happen if we got rid of boundaries altogether? Sooner or later you would encounter conflict. STUDY. LOCKERS. PARKING. W/Cs PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY



The 'boundaries' we are talking about here are a figure of speech. They are not the same as the 1.5 metre boundaries for COVID we began practicing in 2020. These boundaries are important for your mental, social and vocational health.

In the next installation of this series we will discuss PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES with Janet Ford, Flourish Australia's Manager, Quality and Practice. To start off, though, we will look at boundaries more generally, what they are, how they work and what might befall us if they are breached!

Poor boundaries are a very common problem not only among people living with mental health issues, but among the people who support them. Campbell and Juby from Psych Central say in 'Why personal boundaries are important' that boundaries are the lines or limits we draw for ourselves in connection with our level of comfort around others. This includes our comfort in terms of our feelings, our bodies, our space our actions and our time. It applies everywhere, home, work, in public and at social events.

Customs

Different rules will apply with different people on different occasions and in different places. A lot of the knowledge of boundaries come from the customs of our own culture. Yet even as cultures differ, so do people within the same culture. Ultimately, it can be unpredictable. That is why it is polite to let a person know in a reasonable manner if they have inadvertently crossed a boundary with you.

You don't HAVE to communicate a boundary for it to exist (hence custom), but if you don't let people know of a boundary, it is more likely to be violated.

When I was growing up, I discovered to my horror that there were households where hugging and kissing strangers on first greeting them was OK. Some people do not like to hug a person they hardly know. This is why it is a good idea to avoid hugging people you hardly know without first checking whether they are comfortable with it. Most huggers can tell by your body language that you are not up for it. If you see a stranger with their arms open and you don't like it, you could fold your arms!

So boundaries have a lot to do with manners and etiquette, too broad a subject for this little article but one we all need to study well.

Violations

Manners and comfort are well and good, but there are more serious boundary violations that can be improper, unhealthy or illegal.

A tragic example is the match between a self-centred person who does not recognise other people's boundaries, and a self-sacrificing person who does not recognise their own boundaries. Having such a relationship with somebody who does not care about other people's boundaries can turn into outright exploitation. Both people have issues individually, but together they seem to magnify one another's shortcomings. Relationships work when there is mutual respect, meaning that both partners express their own boundaries and respect those of the other.

From that extreme example of marriage involving a self-centred person we can see that all healthy relationships need boundaries, because they all require mutual respect to work.

Telehealth: is it the return of house calls in digital form? Or another barrier between doctor and patient?



Telehealth

BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS

By Warren Heggarty

Telehealth means being able to consult a healthcare provider by phone or a video call. The availability of Telehealth was expanded in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It allowed people to consult doctors without leaving home, thus reducing the risk of germs spreading. Many of these services have now been retained permanently.

Nadia Levin of Australian Digital Health Agency ([digitalhealth.gov.au](https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au)) explains in an information video that the removing of 'equity of access barriers for people in remote areas' is one of the 'silver linings' that came with the pandemic cloud that came in March 2020 and still hasn't really left us! The pandemic dramatically accelerated the adoption of Telehealth services. During the first three months of the pandemic 120,000,000 Telehealth services were conducted! Learn more here:

<https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/telehealth>

The expanded Telehealth is now an ongoing part of Medicare. Many GPs, (nurses, surgeons,

psychologists and other types of healthcare provider) now offer a Telehealth consultation when a physical examination isn't necessary. It's not intended to replace essential visits to the doctor, but rather be a convenient solution when you can't see a doctor face-to-face.

Australians living in rural and remote areas may need to travel long distances to see their healthcare provider. Telehealth improves their health care by improving access to timely services.

Like many innovations, Telehealth comes with a trade-off that might not suit us all of the time. Luke Wrightson, who Chairs Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council says generally speaking, 'I don't like Telehealth. I would rather go into the doctor's surgery and do a face-to-face consultation. I feel that it is more helpful in person.'

Telehealth via Zoom has obvious advantages because for most

people so much information is conveyed visually. My (Warren's) own first two Telehealth sessions were by telephone and I found them quite disconcerting. I felt like I was being 'hurried up' by an impatient doctor who was on 'phone duty' for the day. I also discovered that the doctor sent scripts by Fax only, whereas my pharmacist received them by Email only. I ended up having to go in and pick the prescription up in person!

However, it is different when we factor in the ability to overcome isolation or to have a wider choice of practitioners. Luke, who accesses Flourish Australia's Leeton, NSW service, says, 'I suppose it would be good to see a specialist on Telehealth instead of traveling for hours - Like going all the way into Sydney.'

"AK" who accesses a Flourish Australia service near Sydney, agrees on this point.

'I think it is fantastic for people to be able to access a wider pool of support. For example, I have a friend who lives remotely and there are no face-to-face mental health supports for her to access locally. Since Telehealth has been available, she has been able to access counselling in another state!'

'I am glad that Telehealth is around' says "AK" 'because it allows me to also access two mental health professionals from interstate!'

'I am glad that Telehealth is around because it allows me to access two mental health professionals from interstate!'

"AK", Sydney

Flourish Australia's Resolve Program:

I've Never had a Service Like it!

By Louise Sense (as told to Grant J Everett)

I've been accessing Flourish Australia's Resolve program at Orange for over a year now, and I finish up with them soon.

I set some goals when I started the Resolve program, and I'm happy to say I've achieved all of them. One big one was losing weight, and I've shed 30 kilograms. Regular walking has really helped with that. Before, I'd never be interested in leaving the house to go for a walk, even if my friends invited me. Now, the answer to that question is always yes!

I go for a twenty minute walk every day, and I'll often go to my friend's house to help her with her weeding and cleaning. Sometimes I'll walk back home afterwards, but sometimes she might give me a lift. Just getting out of the house has been a big thing for me, as I never liked going out.

Breaking the cycle

Participating in the Resolve program has had an excellent effect on my mental health.

My first admission to Bloomfield hospital was in 1992 when I was 17. At times I was constantly in and out. A year ago I spent four weeks there, and I was only in the community for a week before returning for another month. I really wasn't well, and I didn't find these two stays very helpful, as I felt the staff weren't listening to me and they were changing my medication, which I didn't want them to do.

Thankfully, I made contact with the Resolve program, as Flourish Australia staff visit the wards to meet people who may benefit from their support in staying out of hospital. I'm proud to say I've been in the community for over a year now, and I'm doing better now...a LOT better! My mental health has improved, and I'm happy with where I am in life.



Louise's furry friend, Toby. PHOTO BY LOUISE SENSE

The Resolve program is really, really good. I've never had a service like it, and I just wish that I'd had it back in the 90s.

The Resolve program office at Orange has bedrooms where people can stay as respite care. I've slept over a few times, and that's been a great way to get out of my house. I'd like to stay there more regularly before I finish my time with Resolve.

The Flourish Australia staff supported me in buying a fridge and some other essential items for my home, such as a vacuum cleaner, a toaster and a kettle. That's made my life so much easier.

In addition to the Resolve program, I'm supported by the Flourish Australia service over at Parkes. The Parkes team support me with getting to my appointments, such as blood tests and seeing my doctor. They visit my house, and I'll go out with them every fortnight. They

also give me a phone call a couple of times a week to see how I'm traveling. I'll still be getting support from the Parkes service once my time with Resolve finishes up.

Holistic support

I am supported by my good friends and family, and I now have NDIS funding. I just got a special cushion for my back because I get bad pain from my tailbone whenever I sit down, and I have special socks that help with the numbness I get in my feet as a side effect of diabetes.

Whenever I need NDIS funding, I can call my case manager, Emily. "I'm only a phone call away," she says. Emily is lovely!

I live in a Department of Housing property, and I'm the youngest resident in that whole neighbourhood, as the other residents are in their 70s. It isn't hard to reach the shops by bus, but my friend will often drive me to the grocery store and back.

My furry friend

I used to have a puppy dog called Lucky, but he passed away 4 years ago at the age of 16. Nowadays, my friend has a beautiful little Maltese Terrier cross Shi Tzu called Toby, and I babysit Toby when his owners go away. Sometimes he comes to mine for a sleepover, and I love his company. I look forward to having him stay over.



DO
NOT
PANIC!!

Multiple 'Catastrophes' Need Not Lead to Chaos

by Warren Heggarty

I had written 'DO NOT PANIC' at the top of my list of things to do. Following that was: 'UNBLOCK THE DRAIN' and 'SEE DENTIST'.

How could I face the day?

Do you 'catastrophise'? I know I do, and it gets easier the more things go wrong. Today's emergency is often the result of yesterday's avoidance. A gurgling shower drain becomes a flooded bathroom. A toothache becomes an agonising abscess. Sooner or later we need to take control!

My dentist would not be available until tomorrow, so in the meantime, it was time to unblock the drain. From the internet I developed FOUR plans: **Plan D** was to call a plumber. **Plan A** was to use a modified coat-hanger to shift the blockage. This failed because the drain well was more than a metre deep!

Plan B was to get a bottle of Drain Cleaner). Alas, the bottle carried a warning not to use when there was so much water backed-up. **Plan C**



was to use a plunger to mechanically shift the blockage. I would need to buy one from Bunnings.

At first I picked up a little plunger, nothing too fancy. But then I thought, no, this is a MAJOR blockage requiring a MAJOR plunger. So I got a big concertina plunger, as used by plumbers, for \$27.

But then disaster struck! At the checkout I discovered my debit card had expired the previous day. Then I realised that I had not told the bank my new address... and they had sent the card to my old address which had been demolished. I began to panic. How will I live without money? How will I survive? Then I remembered the words DO NOT PANIC.

Plan E was to use the cash I always keep on me for emergencies, so I paid that way. Once at home, I implemented **Plan F**, to cancel the lost replacement card **Plan G** was to change my bank account home address to the correct one. Then **Plan H** was to order a replacement which would come within ten days. **Plan E to Plan H** were easy because Banks experience this ALL THE TIME and so their system is set up for it.

Now I was ready to go back to **Plan C** and attack the blockage. I scooped the floodwaters out into a bucket, exposing the top of the drain and let rip. A few solid pumps and I'd noticed the water had gone down a centimetre. I did about 50 pumps all up and at last I heard sloshing and gurgling deep in the bowels of my building. With the water out of the way, I then I dumped 500mls of the drain cleaner down the hole. After half an hour I tried the shower and heard the water running clear through. No need for **Plan D**!

I was quite pleased with my new home handyman skills. "Now when I visit the dentist I won't have to worry about the blocked drain," I said to myself. But "Uh oh! How am I going to pay the dentist without a debit card?" Don't Panic, just go back to **Plan E**.

Some lessons

Regular small scale cleaning and maintenance BEFORE things clag up and malfunction will prevent emergencies.

Always ask for help or at the very least consult the net or a book.

If you live in rental premises, make sure you alert the Landlord. They may insist on a professional (and insured) trades person.

Other people have this problem too, you are not alone.

Avoid your own disasters. I should have advised the bank of my new address two years ago!

Always keep a little cash on hand just in case.

When you have several emergencies at once, pick one and finish solving it first.

Do not panic!

ABOVE: A major blockage requires a major plunger PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

YOUR JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT

Every year 1 in 5 Australians will experience some form of mental health issue.

Flourish Australia provides mental health specialised disability employment services (DES) supporting people living with a mental health issue to access sustainable employment.

Flourish Australia DES locations:

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

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

