

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

panorama

Monthly Issue **October 2023 #91A**



The Hard Times Make Us Stronger: How to Maintain Independence

Green Skills for Future Employment?

The headspace Difference

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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

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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: Esther and her Mum, Jen. Esther cared for her Mum while she recovered from an accident.
PHOTO FROM ESTHER

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Contributors include...

Safwan Hleis is a University student, and is a part of the Youth Reference Group at headspace Parramatta

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Amy Edwards participates in the Flourishing Rainbow Group. She presented a TheMHS paper about the Rainbow Group with Britt Winstanley, a Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Nowra service.

Esther and **Patricia** both have experience as carers for their respective loved ones.

Contributions are welcome!

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Inspire
YOUR
Community
WITH YOUR STORY

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

Email us at: panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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

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

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



FAMILY & CARERS

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

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

Other Organisations

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



Safwan is a University student who decided to check out what his local headspace has to offer. He's gotten so much out of their holistic support that Safwan joined a youth council that helps shape the way this service supports other young people.

About a year ago, I walked through the doors of headspace at Bankstown and said, "Hi, could I be a part of your program?"

The staff were really welcoming, and they sat me down for a chat to figure out what kind of support would best suit my situation. As a University student, I told them that I was mostly interested in their work and study program. One of the interviewers was a psychologist, but as I was already seeing somebody for that, I felt I didn't need any more help on that front. In addition to my involvement with headspace's study and work program, I've also found the day trips and movie nights with the other young people good fun.

There was no need for a referral or anything like that to get involved with headspace. They do have a doctor working on site and they can provide you with referrals to other services if needed.

I'm only 21 years old, and my understanding is that I can access headspace services until I'm 25. Plenty more time!

Focus

headspace assigned me a Vocational Specialist, and I've chosen to focus on two major goals: updating my resume, and practising job interviews.

When it comes to my resume, I highlight all the skills I have that are applicable to the job in question. However, I think that I might be too honest about my capabilities in my resume, as I didn't want to lie or stretch the truth ...even though it seems like everyone else does it! I've since used this updated resume to apply for a number government jobs. Honestly, I don't know why resume building isn't taught in high school, as it's so important in life.

Thankfully, my Vocational Specialist told me I was naturally good at job interviews. So for me, the toughest

FLOURISH AUSTRALIA'S BANKSTOWN HEADSPACE DIFFERENCE:

BY YOUNG PEOPLE, FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

By Safwan (as told to Grant J Everett)

part was getting my foot in the door, in getting a response back from an employer. When I actually have a chance to attend an interview, I believe I will ace it.

Further Studies

You often hear that all you need to make it in Australia is a degree, as it shows employers that you are competent in working hard and learning. But what you study at University isn't necessarily what you're going to be doing for the rest of your life. Many people change their mind about their field down the track, sometimes multiple times. This might suggest that going straight from High School to University might not be the best way to do it.

My studies have varied over the years. I went from Business to Teaching, and now I'm doing a Bachelor of Arts specialising in Law. I'm currently a couple of years through my Bachelors, with two years to go. Now that I've come this far, I feel confident that I'll graduate. That's the mentality I'm going in with.

I'm not entirely sure what my career goals are, but I've been looking to help migrants and refugees with their legal needs in the field of Immigration, perhaps as a Migration Officer. I'd obviously need to know all the legislation and how to apply it.

My mentor at headspace has been great with encouraging my studies. She made up a bunch of flash cards, where I would read the question and the answer would be on the back. This really helped with memorising my study materials, particularly with jargon and other difficult content.

Thankfully I'm attending Uni in person. I prefer learning face to face, as it just feels more genuine. I can be easily distracted when studying remotely. It's less effort to keep my attention span going in person.

Beyond?

My experience with headspace has just been one small slice of my life. It's not even the tip of the iceberg. My advice is to simply not give up. Keep moving forward in whatever way you can. Even when you fall down, it'll be okay so long as you get back up again.

Once I progressed to a certain point with my resume and my practise

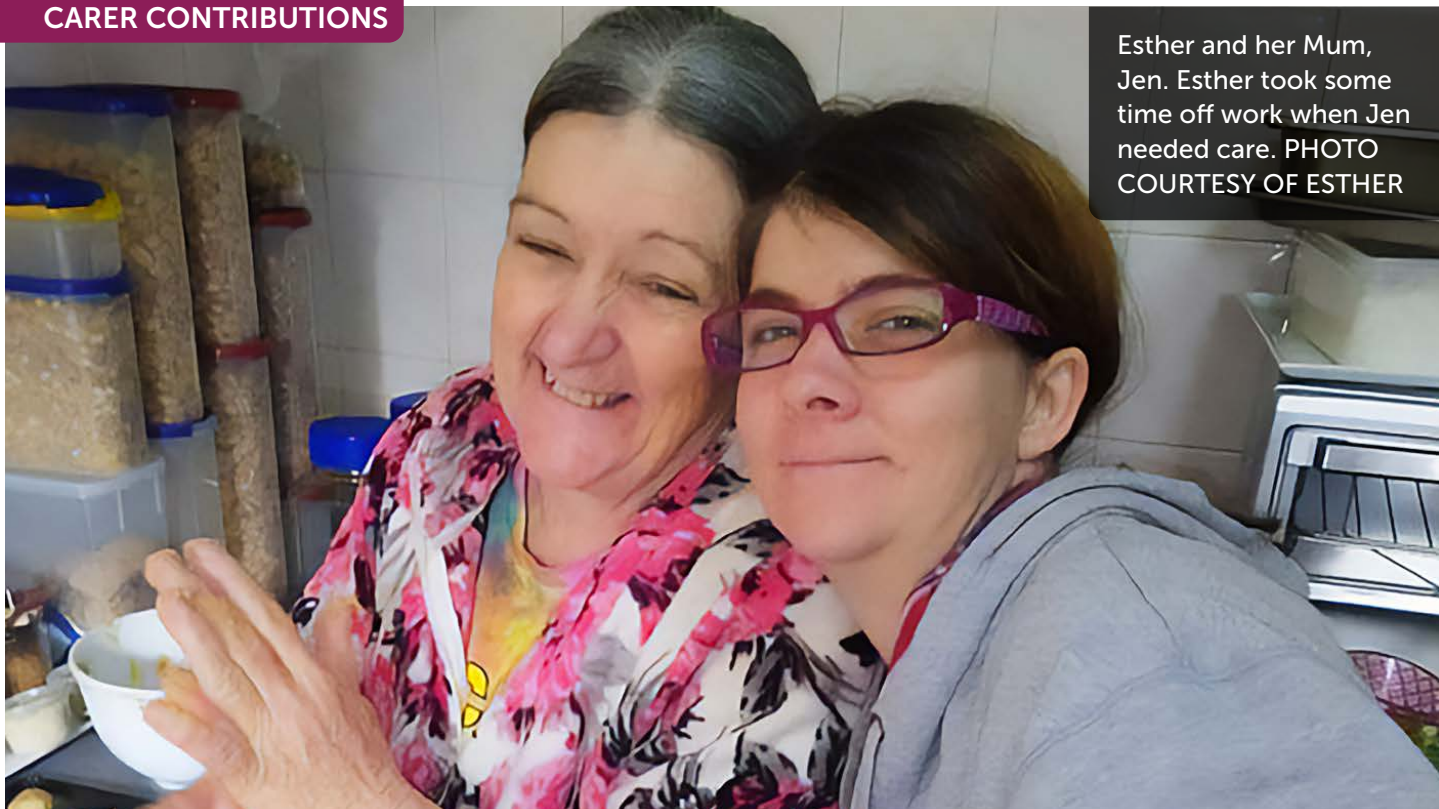
interviews and my studies, I realised that I didn't need much support from headspace anymore. But I wanted to give something back after all the help they'd given me, so I applied to join their Youth Reference Group. This is a council of young people that meets once a month and attends many functions and special events. The YRG represents and promotes headspace, and we provide feedback into many internal processes. We help with practically everything that keeps the organisation running. This includes being a part of interviewing job applicants by offering our opinion on whether an applicant seems like they will be able to work effectively with young people.

headspace are amazing at incorporating young people into how they run the organisation. I haven't seen this kind of involvement anywhere before, and I think it's amazing and should be integrated into other services everywhere.

Want to know more about how Flourish Australia supports young people? Link up with our **Connection Team** on **1300 356 874**, email them at ndis.online@flourishaustralia.org.au, or click the **Chat With Us** button on the Flourish Australia website www.flourishaustralia.org.au



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Esther and her Mum, Jen. Esther took some time off work when Jen needed care. PHOTO COURTESY OF ESTHER

National Carers Week 2023: A Call to Action for all of Australia

By Grant J Everett

National Carers Week recognises and celebrates the 2.65 million Australians who provide unpaid support to a friend or family member with a disability, a mental health issue, a chronic condition, a terminal illness, a substance issue, or who are frail aged. This is an initiative of Carers Australia, the national peak body representing Australian carers.

Crucial contributions

While many people who look after friends or loved ones don't actually identify as "carers," it's no exaggeration to say that they are the foundation of Australia's aged, disability, palliative and community support systems. The amount of unpaid assistance they provided in 2022 equates to \$77.9 billion (according to the Carers Australia

website), making National Carers Week worth celebrating. Without carers, our health system would be unable to cope, which is why it's so important to support and nurture their physical health, mental health, educational outcomes, and overall wellbeing. This is especially true for younger carers.

Real stories: Patricia

Patricia and her husband have been caring for their two sons for decades, and Patricia is a powerful voice in mental health advocacy and human rights circles.

"My eldest son had just completed a fitter and turner apprenticeship at the age of 21 when he acquired a brain injury from an unprovoked coward-punch assault. This led to a severe deterioration in his mental state, a major eating disorder and recurring psychosis. A few months later, my younger son was diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 17.

"They've both remained dependent on my husband and I for support

all this time, as mental health services in South Australia are focused on crisis-driven hospital based care rather than good quality community-based care. We had to buy a house where they can live independently, as my husband and I are now in our late 70s and our support was rapidly becoming unsustainable. Thankfully, the NDIS began to support both of my sons in 2019 with 24-hour care.

"I had to work extremely hard advocating for people with severe mental health issues for more than 30 years to make this happen. This included working with government and non-government agencies and serving on advisory groups at local, state and national levels alongside other carers and consumers.

"My husband and I are extremely appreciative that we can now be their parents, rather than their full-time carers."



National Carers Week 15-21 October 2023

“Caring can cover assistance with many daily activities such as dressing, showering, arranging appointments, transport or dispensing medications, to name a few. Anyone can potentially become a carer at any time, even if they don’t identify as one.”

Real stories: Esther

Esther does process work for a living. When Esther’s Mum had an accident earlier this year, she took on a caring role.

“My Mum had been really sick in hospital, and when she got home I wanted to help her while she recovered. She needed my care for three weeks, so I took time off work to do that. I supported her in a few different ways, like helping with the cooking, doing the laundry, and helping her to shower. My Dad helped with these things sometimes too.

“Thankfully, Mum is able to look after herself a bit better now. She’s almost recovered, but it’s been a slow process.”

Where can carers find support?

If you are a carer, you can get help and support from the government and other organisations. For instance, the Carer Gateway website provides a range of services for carers all around Australia, including information and advice, peer support, free counselling, coaching and training. Each region in Australia has a Carer Gateway service provider that offers information about what supports and resources are available in your area.

Carers Australia also has a range of resources available on their website, such as information about the NDIS and how carers can look after their own general wellbeing.

If you are under the age of 25, there are a range of supports and services tailored specifically to young carers, including the Young Carer Bursary program on the Young Carer Network website.

Want to get involved?

You can help raise awareness about the diversity of carers and caring roles in Australia by attending National Carers Week event, or inviting workmates, friends and family to an event of your own. This could be a morning tea, a fundraiser, a walk, or a workshop that shows what supports and services are on offer for carers.

Here are a few ways to make the most of your event...

1. Do your research with the National Care Network or the Carer Gateway website to find out how we can all do our bit to support carers in their vital work.
2. Put up some National Carers Week posters around your workplace or community centre leading up to scheduled events.
3. Support the cause on social media. A picture paints a thousand words, so remember to post photos of your event. Better still, video your event and upload it so it can raise awareness far beyond your local community.

And while it’s important to get your message out there to involve as many people as possible, don’t forget your event needs to be COVID safe.

According to the Carers Australia website..

Carers make up nearly

11%

of Australia’s population, and many of them also have paying work.

In 2021, carers were

2.5 x
MORE LIKELY

to experience lower wellbeing than the average Australian. Young carers in particular report lower engagement, attendance and participation in schooling and employment activities, especially when they are not receiving sufficient support.

There are more than

235,000
YOUNG CARERS

in Australia looking after a parent, a sibling, their own child, another relative, or a friend.

REFERENCES: National Carer Network, Carer Gateway, Carers Week Your Stories, The Young Carer Toolkit

Panorama is always
LOOKING FOR STORIES
from people who are
supporting a loved one
on their mental health
journey. Your story
could help and inspire
other carers, so drop
us a line!

Want to know how Flourish Australia can help people in a caring role, as well as those they care for?

Go to the Flourish Australia website and search for “I am a family member, carer or friend,” and choose the option “I am a carer.”

The Hard Times Make Us Stronger: How to Maintain Independence

By Mark (as told to Grant J Everett)

I first connected with Flourish Australia while I was staying at a rehab in Shellharbour. Every Tuesday and Thursday the Flourish Australia staff would come pick us up in a van and take us somewhere beautiful, and that was a great experience for me during a tough time.

Once I finished with rehab, I started attending Flourish Australia's day-to-day living centre at Wollongong, New Outlook, and I've been going there for seven years so far. I enjoy taking part in pretty much all of the activities they have on offer.

In addition to finding somewhere safe and friendly to spend my time, once I left rehab I also had to decide whether I was going to move back in with my family, or get out into the real world on my own. I decided to make my own way, and I'm still surviving years later. My NDIS plan provides me with a cleaner on Fridays, but other than that I'm fully independent.

While I've been in the community fulltime for over a decade, I did have a hospitalisation a while back for COVID reasons. On the subject of COVID, lockdown was a real test for me, particularly the first one with all the panic buying and toilet paper shortages and other unexpected side effects. But I got through the second lockdown more easily by creating some structure: I'd get up at a set time, keep busy around my home, and have a set bedtime. A routine really helped.



Constructive Outlets

I enjoy creating art, writing and music. If I had to pick one particular form of expression, it would be poetry, as I'm very precise in how I place my words, and I get straight to the point. I also love to read, though I find I get more out of it by reading it out loud, allowing my brain to soak up the words through my eyes and my ears. It's an easier way to learn.

I'm always keen to attend New Outlook's art group every Wednesday, though I also create at home. Sometimes, a piece will go in a different direction to what I expected, so I'll let it run its course and examine the end result. Regardless, my works tend to be abstract, but they always have a meaning and a background. For instance, when I first connected with Flourish Australia, I wrote about what had happened in my life so far, and I found that helpful. I've actually been working on my grandfather's life story for a while now, and it combines religion, war, and the culture of his time.

I think I inherited my creative side from my parents, as I've seen their pieces, and they're really good.

Keeping well

I'm constantly seeking to broaden my support network. I like to meet new people, to get out of my comfort zone, to let people in. This can be a challenge at times, as I'm often the kind of guy who keeps to himself and blends in. While I enjoy my privacy, I know the benefits of getting out there and engaging.

Completing a number of courses at Kiama Community College and my local TAFE has been really good for my wellbeing, too. I love learning new things!

My advice to anyone who is managing a mental health issue is to consider seeing a psychologist. I've learned how to turn negative thoughts into positive ones, so whenever I look back at the hard times, I'm sure to acknowledge that they helped make me into the person I am today.

ABOVE: Mark Anthony, enjoying his life. PHOTOS FROM MARK

"... greening of the economy will inevitably change the skills required... in many ... existing occupations."

-UNIDO

Green Skills for Future Employment?

By Warren Heggarty

If you are looking for something to give you a little leverage over other job candidates, it might be worth checking your Green Skills. According to Joseph Lam in the Australian newspaper, 25 per cent of new Linked-in job postings require them, while one in eight Australian workers are considered to have 'green' elements in their roles. (Lam, 2023) One of the central concerns of 'green skills' is, of course, climate change, though it is by no means limited to that.

Farming, forestry and mining are industries with an obvious connection to environmental care and so their recruiting of people with 'green skills' is quite advanced. However, an increasing number of companies boast of their environmental 'sustainability goals.'

Green skills are essentially any skill which can be applied to achieving these goals. Skills like soil sampling, environmental planning and sustainability consulting are obvious candidates.. However even companies that you would think have no direct impact on the environment require people who look after 'corporate social responsibility' and 'sustainability reporting.'

That includes Flourish Australia! For example, we have adopted a position statement on climate

action. We have looked at the complex challenge of economising in a range of areas including 'energy, water, motor vehicles, and procurement.' We also recognise the need to provide 'educational opportunities for everyone including people accessing our services about climate change and environmental sustainability.' (Flourish Australia, 2022) Our organisation is certified compliant with International Standard ISO 14001 in Environmental Management Systems.

Employers need people they can assign this sort of work to, and in certain industries it will be a core part of their business. In fact some companies may overdo it, according to Lam, through 'greenwashing,' which means deliberately overstating a company's investment in green issues in order to make ... er, brownie points to be popular with customers and investors.

Sometimes, entire jobs can be devoted to green issues and it can be well paid. Here is an example of such a job that might give you a clearer picture of what green skills entail. Taronga Park Zoo in Sydney recently offered a salary of up to \$142,585 for an environmental sustainability officer. According to the advertisement, the role will manage the zoo's Sustainability Strategy, make sure the zoo

minimises its environmental impact, promote the sustainable use of resources and ensure compliance with environmental laws.

According to UNIDO, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, between now and 2030, the greening of the economy will inevitably change the skills required and the tasks involved in many ...existing occupations.' UNIDO gives lists of 'hard' and 'soft' green skills on its website (Arthur, 2022).

Hard skills are related to engineering, science, operation management and monitoring (inc. legal) and will likely involve study. Soft skills such as adaptability, designing, creativity, empathy, resilience are also cited as an important accompaniment to 'green skills.'

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ABOVE: Forestry is one of the industries which have an obvious like to environmental sustainability. But green skills are being required for an increasing range of jobs. PHOTO BY RITA E/PIXABAY
Thanks also to Mohammed Alkhub for help with this article.



UPTURNS... DOWNTURNS

When the economy gets tough...

By Warren Heggarty

We often hear on news reports all manner of doom and gloom relating to 'the Economy.' At present we hear a lot about a 'cost of living crisis.' Yet what is happening 'on the news' does not necessarily determine what happens in our own households. If we are sensible, live within our means, and adjust to changing circumstances, we need not be down in the dumps about trends in the market place.

In recent months, businesses have been 'bracing for a downturn in discretionary spending' which means that people stop buying things they can most easily do without. Things like jewellery, travel, new fashion and alcohol. This has been triggered by cost of living increases related to relentless interest rate rises. According to the Australian's retail reporter, Eli

Greenblat, 'It was thought essentials in supermarket aisles would be largely immune from any consumer downturn.' However, Greenblat recently reported some data from Coles that he says suggests the situation is even worse. (Greenblat, 2023)

He says 'internal data from Coles... shows shoppers are likely under severe stress as they try to make savings on staples such as soap, body wash and kitchen surface sprays...' Other items with falling sales include sponges, wipes and bathroom disinfectants.

Do not panic, though. Are these items REALLY the 'weekly essentials?' the author makes them out to be? Remember, the change is in volume of sales, meaning that people might still be buying them, only in smaller quantities.

When times are tough it makes SENSE to stretch the lives of your

household items. For example, making those kitchen sponges last a little longer, actually using those awkwardly small bits of soap left over from a used bar; scrounging a bit on fabric softener; actually measuring out how much disinfectant you pour into the bucket when you do mopping. In fact, economising like this is a good sign. Waste is... wasteful. It might be awkward for the supermarket's profitability, but supermarkets can adapt and indeed they are adapting nicely to the current 'crisis.'

To illustrate, Coles says they are 'responding to these changes through bigger value packs, promotions through our own [home brand] broad range.' Last week, a spokesman told Greenblat 'we launched our latest Big Pack Value range with more than 80 bulk items which can save customers up to 70 per cent...'

Shoppers DO need to question our 'discretionary spending' from time to time. Commonwealth Bank CEO Matt Comyn recently said that among younger people who bought their first home during the pandemic, 'a third have reduced [their spending] by more than 30 per cent, year on year.'

The cuts are being made in areas like gyms, entertainment, eating out, and travel. Individuals on low incomes or with large financial commitments (like mortgages) can do without these services when times are tough.

People who work in the affected industries likewise can be prone to losing work during economic downturns. But remember, what goes around comes around, These same industries have simultaneously been experiencing difficulty in staffing their operations coming out of COVID cut backs! A downturn from inflation plus an upturn in labour shortage just might leave some people with... a level playing field.

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ABOVE: The kinds of things people buy in a supermarket can be affected by pressures in the economy, like rising interest rates. 'Discretionary spending' generally involves luxury items. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

You Are NOT a Label!

The needless stigma of 'borderline personality disorder'

By Warren Heggarty



'Dialectical Behavioural Therapy' but Mulder and Tyre suggest other forms of treatment, such as psychodynamic therapy may actually be more effective.

There are also many NON-CLINICAL approaches that are shown to reduce the distress experienced by people with a borderline diagnosis. In Panorama's January 2023 issue, Megan Paull wrote an article 'Alternatives to self harm' describing her use of them. Singing is one!

Unsurprisingly, in the light of the above, Ring and Lawn say there is a lack of knowledge about borderline personality disorder by the people who are actually labelled with the term.

The confusion, the stigma and the lack of knowledge disempowers all concerned and stalls their engagement with those who CAN effectively support them, like Flourish Australia's mental health workers and peer workers.

Mulder and Tryer propose that different forms of care be applied to different individuals with the diagnosis of borderline personality. This would be stating the obvious if, like Flourish Australia, you took a person-centred approach. 'Offering distinct treatment options,' says Ingle, 'would enable tailoring clinical assistance to each individual rather than continuing to categorise all individuals under one label.' This person-centred approach is applied by Flourish Australia regardless of diagnosis. We seem to be ahead of the game here!

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ABOVE: You are not your label. Nor are your care instructions set in concrete!
PHOTO by GRANT J EVERETT

If you've received a mental health diagnosis, it helps to remember that that diagnosis is not YOU. This is true of ANY diagnosis, but it is specially true of 'borderline personality disorder.' Using 'borderline' as an example, this article explores how labels can be more unhelpful than helpful.

The idea of a doctor making a diagnosis is to help to make an unwell person better. A number of researchers say that the diagnostic label 'borderline personality disorder' can actually do the opposite.

Researchers Daniel Ring and Sharon Lawn say: 'People with borderline personality disorder experience significant stigma, particularly at the interface of care delivery.' (Ring & Lawn, 2019) This stigma can be related to the diagnosis itself, to telling other people about it, or to the fact that a lot of clinicians [falsely] consider it 'untreatable.'

Responses to Trauma

Michah Ingle, writing in Mad in America, says research suggests that borderline personality disorder is 'really a response to trauma.' Bessel van der Kolk describes how he and other researchers in the 1980s

discovered that 'borderline' was usually associated with long term childhood abuse. (Kolk, 2014 pp165-169) Ingle, says a chief drawback of the diagnosis is 'the way it pathologises responses to trauma.' Put bluntly, it makes out that the VICTIM of abuse has something 'wrong' with them.

How is it that there seems to be more stigma attached to borderline personality disorder than other diagnoses? Ring and Lawn concluded that the stigma is kept alive by a lack of knowledge by mental health providers. Some researchers, like Mulder and Tyrer, argue that it is not, strictly speaking, a personality disorder at all!

Ingle says that 'no medications have consistently proven helpful in treating borderline personality disorder.' Mulder and Tyrer say that those things that DO reduce the distress of people with a diagnosis of 'borderline' are 'transdiagnostic.' This means they will also work for people with OTHER diagnoses!

Person Centred Approaches

So if a diagnosis is meant to help doctors choose a treatment, what is the effective treatment for borderline personality disorder? From a clinicians perspective, the current 'golden treatment' is

Is More Education Really What **YOU** Need to Get a Job Now?

By Warren Heggarty

Having a paid job frees you from dependence on benefits, but many of us are daunted by the feeling that we are somehow 'unqualified' to work. We need to question whether higher education is what we need. For many of us, the prospect of going back to school really dampens our enthusiasm for work. For others, going back to school may divert us from facing and overcoming our fears about being at work with a mental health diagnosis!

There ARE some jobs that you could have a shot at right now, even without qualifications or with incomplete education. If you see this as getting a foot in the door and establishing yourself in paid work, you can worry about qualifications and career progression later.

Sometimes, employers are not interested in formal qualifications at all. Retail and sales jobs are often like this as is the case for pickers, packers and administration and office assistants. There are often opportunities for 'Factory General Hands' or process workers and assembly workers, cleaners, garden maintenance workers and so on. Some of our readers may have gained experience in such work through Flourish Australia's community businesses.

Some jobs that seem to require no qualifications actually might require you to have 'tickets.' These are usually the result of a short TAFE course. Security guards and fork lift operators and traffic controllers may be in this 'ticket category.'

Beyond the world of 'tickets' are jobs which are technically traineeships or apprenticeships. You don't have to have a qualification now, but you will be expected to study towards

one when you begin employment. Community Care Workers and Child Care Workers are like this.

As you can see there is quite a range of jobs that do not require a lengthy post secondary education. But what about jobs that DO require diplomas or degrees?

It's about the skills

In an article for the Wall Street Journal, Jeffrey Selingo and Matt Sigelman say that assumptions about the power of further education have changed, at least in the USA. Previously there was 'degree inflation.' Employers insisted on degrees for jobs that did not necessarily require them. The prestige of the university you went to was also a big help!

Lately, they say, employers have begun to look more closely at the actual skills required to do the job, rather than the prestige of the degree and institution. This makes sense,

doesn't it? It shows you that maybe employers are not always making rational choices!

Certain industries will require degree-level skills Especially when it IS rocket science. For example, the aerospace industry will tend to look for graduate employees. Like Australian company, Southern Launch of Adelaide, which is setting up a spaceport on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. At the same time, however Australian PhD candidates in that field are leaving our shores to join the Jet Propulsion Lab at NASA in the USA. (Dodd, 2023) (Tauriello, 2023)

It is not unlikely that such academically gifted job seekers have flipped burgers, done data entry or picked apples along the way to their PhDs. The moral of the story is to tailor your education to fit your own LONG TERM aspirations. You do not have to wait until finishing a degree to start looking at the sort of employment you can take on right now!

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PHOTO: You can make a living without higher education PHOTO BY HUTCH ROCK/ PIXABAY





"You can always, always give something, even if it is only kindness!"

Anne Frank

"Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible."

Dalai Lama

"Kindness: It costs nothing, but means everything."

Maya Angelou

"If you have good thoughts, they will shine out of your face like sunbeams and you will always look lovely."

Roald Dahl

It's Nice to be Important

But It's More Important to be Nice

By Grant J Everett

Support your fellow humans during Social Inclusion Week and World Kindness Day

The aim of Social Inclusion Week is for all Australians to feel included and valued by connecting people of all cultures, age groups, nationalities and abilities. It's about bringing people together, to think less about "me" and more about "we."

Social Inclusion Week runs from the 18th of November to the 26th, and this year's theme is CONNECT, COLLABORATE and CELEBRATE!

According to the Social Inclusion Week website, social groups who can often feel excluded include young people between the ages of 12 and 25, unemployed families with children, people with a lived experience of mental health issues or other disabilities, people who are homeless, the elderly, and First Nations people.

Created by Jonathon Welch AM, founder of the award winning Choir of Hard Knocks, Social Inclusion Week seeks to build and strengthen all of our relationships and social networks, and to address the isolation and exclusion of those who are marginalised. At present,

Australia is the only country to have a national celebration of Social Inclusion.

There are lots of way to promote inclusion. The simplest way is to reach out to those around us and build friendships. Better still, host your own Social Inclusion Week event! This could be a discussion group or forum, a community BBQ, a sporting match, a movie night, or a morning tea. It's a great opportunity to raise money for organisations that help people who are struggling... such as Flourish Australia!

You can get helpful resources such as flyers, host event guides, templates and more from the Social Inclusion Week website.

World Kindness Day

Random acts of kindness are one of the best ways we can spread some cheer and happiness. The chaos of modern living can fill our headspace with negatives, but encountering a moment of genuine kindness can make all the difference in our day.

World Kindness Day is held on the 13th of November, and it's theme is "Make Kindness the Norm, Not The Exception." It celebrates kindness in

all its forms and its many benefits, and is a fantastic opportunity to promote acceptance, diversity and love.

Kindness doesn't need to cost anything. It could be a compliment, a favour, or just listening. You could send an uplifting text message to a friend, or offer your seat on the train to a stranger. Supporting those who are less fortunate is a fantastic way to spend World Kindness Day.

We also need to be kind to ourselves for the sake of developing healthy self-esteem, and let's not forget about the planet! Our environment needs kindness, too, so think about planting some flowers or a tree or collecting some litter.

The first World Kindness Day was launched in 1998 by the non-profit organisation World Kindness Movement in the hopes of creating a better world, and now it's celebrated across 27 different countries, regardless of culture, religion, or nationality.

However you celebrate World Kindness Day, the important thing is to care for one another, so spread some sunshine by making someone smile!



TheMHS Paper: **“The Flourishing Rainbow’s Group, Wellness and Recovery”**

By Amy Edwards (as told to Grant J Everett)

Amy participates in the Flourishing Rainbow Group. In August she presented a paper at TheMHS Conference with Britt Winstanley (Peer Worker at our Nowra service) about what she’s experienced and learned about herself in her time with this support network of likeminded people...

Our TheMHS paper, “The Flourishing Rainbow’s Group, Wellness and Recovery,” is about the value of being able to share our experiences and feeling like we belong.

I have a connection to this topic as it’s a core part of who I am. Even then, it can still be hard learning to accept ourselves and our unique situations. Both Britt and I know that there are a lot of people who are experiencing something similar.

Our target audience at TheMHS was people with a lived experience of mental health issues, organisations that support the LGBTIAQ community, and mental health professionals. My hope was to provide courage to those who are trying to find their footing in life, whether they’re in a complicated family situation or still can’t figure out their gender identity or sexuality, whatever that may be. I just want people to know that there is support out there.

This paper was a team effort between Britt and myself. We each had our own tasks, but we met and cross-referenced often to ensure we weren’t repeating anything.

While Britt has presented papers and spoken at conferences before, I hadn’t done anything like this

since primary school. Thankfully, help was offered by a number of people at Flourish Australia, particularly with proofreading. I wanted to make sure I wasn’t going to unintentionally insult or provoke people.

I felt excited and nervous about the details leading up to this big event: the air travel, meeting people, presenting, all that. I’ll admit, I’m not fond of crowds or flying, but this was definitely an interesting adventure, to say the least.

My advice to anyone reading this is to never give up hope, and don’t be afraid to ask for help. Good people will listen, and they’ll treat you with respect.

ABOVE: Britt and Amy are passionate about their work with the Rainbow Group at Nowra. PHOTO PROVIDED BY GREENWOOD MEDIA

GETTING TO KNOW YOU Conversation Cards

By Warren Heggarty



each one takes a question. These questions may include topics like 'your favourite memories,' 'tell us about a game you played as a child,' or 'tell us about your ideal holiday location.'

We have found that these types of questions often result in members sharing similar memories about their childhood – especially if it is to do with particular toys (or even their marketing and advertising)!

This could lead down a rabbit hole of reminiscences. 'Complete this TV Commercial: BOY OH BOY: (IT'S A LINCOLN TOY). Only older people would remember that, or the flavours of Mister Merlin's Magic Purple Potion or the difference between Lollygobbleblissbombs and popcorn... but I am getting carried away....'

Sarah confesses 'we have had some groups that included watching YouTube videos of old advertisements and how effective jingles can be at sticking in your mind – even years later!'

It's not all a game about TV or Netflix, there are plenty of other things to talk about. We have also utilised playing Scategories as conversation starters,' says Sarah, 'and we find that members can be very encouraging towards others who have different responses to their own. We have found that this game can be great for starting conversations as some members would share why they chose that particular word for the category.'

'We have been asked to start including Trivial Pursuit type questions as conversation starters because members have shared that they enjoy learning from each other.'

So THAT'S why they invented games. It's not just a competitive, money making exercise, it's about socialising and communication as well.

Conversation Cards are \$11.95 From Officeworks. At time of writing, Scategories sells for \$25 and can also be played online.

ABOVE: Cards can be used to spark off a conversation. It might be interesting to go through a whole deck to see what happens, but ideally, after a while the conversation would take on a life of its own! PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

Do you ever have trouble starting off a conversation? It can be very awkward when people come together and can't start or continue a conversation. One possible solution is to have a packet of 'Conversation Cards' at the ready.

Panorama picked up a set of 40 cards from Officeworks to give them a road test and we found that they really do get you thinking- and speaking! The cards are thick and durable, like playing cards so that you can shuffle them and use them repeatedly.

'Simply take turns asking a question on each unique card,' the instructions state, 'and you may be surprised by what you learn.' Fortunately, these particular cards steer clear of any controversy. You CAN get 'truth or dare' cards but

these are NOT recommended for polite conversations. The idea here is to get into a conversation, not an argument or a predicament!

Flourish Australia services often run groups dedicated to conversation and socialising. The exact nature of the group is usually determined by the needs and desires of the people in each service. We decided to ask Sarah Mitchell, Team Coordinator, Peer specialist, at Flourish Australia's Penrith service. She facilitates a very promisingly titled group called Social Empowerment, on Monday mornings. (Note details current at time of writing. Always check availability yourself by ringing first!). Panorama showed the Conversation Cards to Sarah:

'We use a similar resource in the Social Empowerment group' she said. 'We also have made our own "Conversation starters" where members pass around the box and

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"Having work to go to gets me out of the house every day and motivates me to take better care of myself.
Julie-Ann, Tamworth

WE ARE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU

Flourish Australia walks alongside people with complex mental health issues to get back on track and reconnect with the community to live contributing, flourishing lives.

If finding work is one of your recovery goals, we will support you in finding a job that is fair and rewarding. As an Australian Disability Enterprise, we:

- Help people find work
- Meet strict service standards
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We have a range of training and employment opportunities through several programs including:

- DES (Disability Employment Services)
- Supported employment through the NDIS, DECoS, and other government funding
- DECoS (Disability Employment Continuity of Support)
- Support through mental health contracts, including CLS, CPS, and HASI

We have an extensive history of helping people meet their employment aspirations, including transitioning to open employment, receiving support in the workplace, connecting with their community, and more.

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Where mental wellbeing thrives