

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

# panorama

Monthly Issue February 2024 #92B



**A Lifetime of Artistry:  
How it Defines and  
Sustains Me**

**Three Skills to  
Overcome Loneliness**

**Learning to Recover**

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### About us

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

### Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 or  
flourishaustralia.org.au

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

### About Panorama

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

### The faces behind Panorama...



Warren Heggarty



Grant Everett

### Subscriptions, questions, feedback, praise, curses?

You can ALWAYS email us at...

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Prefer snail mail?

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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: Peter Boyd, a talented artist, presented his works at the art exhibition held at Flourish Australia's Newcastle Centre PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

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### Contributors include...

Peter Boyd is a visual arts practitioner who accesses Flourish Australia's Newcastle service

Johnathon changed career to bus driving at 60!

Edwina Keelan accesses Flourish Australia's Marrickville Service

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### Contributions are welcome!

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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](mailto:panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au)





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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

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

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



## FAMILY & CARERS

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

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

### Other Organisations

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

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

**Carer Gateway: [carergateway.gov.au](http://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](http://copmi.net.au)





# Learning to Recover

## Knowing Your Mind Brings Rewards

By Warren Heggarty

For Ebony, changing some of her beliefs and learning how the mind works was an important step on the recovery journey.

In my near 20 years experience in the mental health system, for the most part medication was all that was offered. However I have gained important insights through learning about psychology. I'm of the understanding that from a medical perspective there is no cure for my diagnosis. However, that is not what is important. It's all about learning how to cope with things like hearing voices, seeing things, and even having tactile sensations, what a doctor would call symptoms.

The strategies I learnt in therapy continue to help me. Although I'm deemed a success story I still experience symptoms and it's coping skills learnt in therapy that really make the difference.

### Is it really 'magic'

'One of the key things I have learnt is how it is important to be honest with yourself about your diagnosis. For years I believed that my symptoms (as doctors would

say) were magical or spiritual. In my frequent interactions with others in the mental health system those beliefs are quite common.'

Ebony told a story which illustrates this. Because she formerly believed that the unusual ideas she was having were somehow magical or even spiritual, she felt very certain about them and was not inhibited about expressing them. 'It led to me engaging in on-line hate speech directed at a person with a public profile. Because of this, I lost all my friends!'

Ebony believes that if you shut the door and entirely ignore the views of people trying to support you, then you are missing an opportunity. 'You can't begin to cope if you don't come to terms with your situation which opens the door wider towards recovery.'

'I was very anti-system and anti-doctors. I did not trust them and I did not take my diagnosis seriously.

I was not open about it at all.' So Ebony was highly critical in her thinking about psychology, but not critical at all when it came to the sensory experiences like voices and hallucination. She believed the voices were right and the doctors were wrong. Ebony believes that this was not helpful to her.

'A psychologist explained the situation to me one day and invited me to 'Google' it and do my own research.' Learning about how Schizophrenia works and seeing it from another perspective took the power out of the voices. My quality of life improved a hundred-fold.'

Looking at the voices' track record, Ebony noticed that nothing they said has ever eventuated. 'So many people believe that their voices are real and I discovered that with many people the voices can be comforting. So people can become agitated when others deny the voices are real. They have a lot invested in the idea that the voices



are real which makes it very hard to see the other side of the argument. In my case, I masked my belief from others.'

I have been looking at what we know about the mind, although there is still a lot of mystery. I made myself aware of 'neuroplasticity.' In the past my habit was to believe the voices were magic or spiritual. This was my go-to position. However, now that I believe otherwise, I over-ride this old belief whenever it emerges. I have also learned about subjecting my thoughts to 'reality tests' and using diffusion techniques to try to create a new 'go-to' position that works better for me.

'When the voices get my attention these days, I remind myself that they are just 'dopamine hits' in my brain.' Clinicians might view such thoughts as 'malfunctions' but Ebony says that as she began to work harder towards recovery the voices actually advised her to keep going and make it work! That was good advice as it turned out.

In fact, Ebony was so diligent in following this course while she was hospitalised that 'I was regarded as a bit of a "leper" because I was really trying! The other patients saw me as a goody-two-shoes. I put it down to tall poppy syndrome. As a result though I had a shorter stay in rehabilitation than normal.'

### Beating addiction

'As of the 26th of October this year I am 2 years sober after experiencing addiction for nearly 30 years.'

Ebony's mental health issues were associated with instability caused by addiction, being in unstable relationships with people and having unstable and unsuitable accommodation. Addiction led her into high risk environments, and she was not so keen on taking the medication that was prescribed to her. Bringing stability to her life has been of crucial importance. 'I totally recommend sobriety!' says Ebony.

My addiction began at a very young age and there was a lot of erratic behaviour through being intoxicated, including aggressive behaviour. My mum did not really understand what was going on at first. From age 12 to 19 I think my mental illness was episodic, but it became a full time thing from then.



## Things that supported Ebony's recovery

### Reality Testing

#### Mantra

A repeated phrase that spurs you on or reminds you of what is important.

#### Coping Book

Writing skills down which are appropriate or coping with different symptoms.

### Soothing & Distraction

- Make a cup of tea
- Reading
- Incense
- Shower
- Pampering
- Playing a game on smart phone
- Cooking a healthy meal
- Taking care of personal hygiene

At 21 I was diagnosed with a 'drug induced psychosis.' The rate of this diagnosis is getting really bad these days. At 28, though, I was diagnosed with Schizophrenia.

'There are many rewards in being sober. Once you get over the cravings you begin to realise it.' Ironically, the Pandemic lockdowns had some benefit for Ebony because it cut her off from her addiction and allowed her to concentrate on exercise and diet!

### Home, Family, Future

"My parents are my rock and have been there for me throughout my worst times so it's only fair that I give them their due credit. They have been very supportive and very forgiving.

"Secure housing is life-changing. From early on, I was never in the one place for very long, and did a lot of couch surfing. I first left home at 14 and lived with other people but my first stint living on my own

was when I was 27. It was not long before I moved back to Dad's.'

'When you have mental health issues, there are times when you feel that your parents 'weaponise' the relationship and you lash out at them. With addiction too, I found myself destroying a lot of relationships.

'My current tenancy has been going for twelve months and it is a record. I take the attitude that "THIS IS MY HOME NOW." Stable housing is very important. I would like to study Sociology and Mental Health at university level. I am interested in looking at how people with mental health issues are demonised, how stigma works against people. I recognise that a lot of progress has been made in this area, but there is more work to be done. I am also keen on doing some script writing.

**OPPOSITE: Ebony overcame addiction and tackled her mental health issues. ABOVE: Ebony with her Mum Dorothy PHOTOS by GREENWOOD MEDIA**



# A Lifetime of Artistry:

## How It Defines and Sustains Me

By Peter Boyd

**Creating art has been a lifelong passion of mine, all the way from the scribbles of a small child, to studying at the National Art School in Newcastle, to teaching at a Catholic School, to running my own life drawing group.**

### Formal Studies

I was always encouraged with my art. My uncle arranged that I go to a children's art group and gifted me a Walter T Foster book about anatomy, where I learned most of my drawing techniques. I left school in 1966 in fourth form to join the prestigious National Art School. This was a five-year course, and we started off with 39 students, teaching us basic skills in many mediums, including

stillifes, watercolours, oils, charcoal sketching, and drawing antique models. Halfway through the year, they changed from teaching academic art, which has remained the same since the 19th Century, to focus on Modern art. The teacher moved out all of the subject matter that we would normally paint, creating an empty room full of easels. So when the students would be in the painting studio, the teacher would simply say "Paint." Our response was of course, "Paint what?" to which our teacher unhelpfully replied, "Just paint, it's within you. Just paint!"

Could you imagine a musician at the conservatorium of music being told, "Just play" without being taught how to read sheet music, how to handle their instrument, or how to

compose music? Shouldn't teachers in creative fields be teaching technique rather than expecting artists to only have innate ability? Every other student eventually dropped out. By the end of first year, there were only 9 of us left. By the end of third year, I was the only one remaining, and I only stayed that long because I was young and naive, and didn't know any alternative places to learn how to be an artist. This led to me having a breakdown.

### Teaching

Historically, artists have always supplemented their income using teaching. For most, surviving purely on our art is almost impossible. After leaving the National Art School, I taught at a Catholic school on the strength of my three years

**ABOVE: Peter Boyd has practised art for his entire life. OPPOSITE AND FOLLOWING PAGE: Just a handful of Peter's decades of life painting. PHOTOS FROM PETER BOYD**



of training. However, the rules kept changing when it came to qualifications, them requiring more and more education, making life difficult. Art school traumatized me to the point that I was unable to do art work for many years. Art has, and continues to be, essential to me. However, I continued to practice and had to teach myself techniques, art philosophy and develop these skills on my own. I have experimented with using house paint, scrap paper, and repurposed found materials to find my own unique approach to creating art.

### Art As Therapy?

As I have made art my whole life, it's always been essential for my mental and emotional wellbeing. All forms of arts and crafts have been proven to benefit people who have experienced trauma or mental health issues, with studies going back to the first World War with soldiers who have experienced shellshock. I've also seen the rise of "art therapy" over the years. Nowadays, you need a degree to work as an art therapist, but it would have been a lot easier to get into it when I was a young man.

### My Medium

I've pursued life painting as my medium of choice since the 1960s, and I've become better at it over time. This medium is a true collaboration between artist and model, so I've found if you want to get good drawings, it takes a skilled model. I used to attend a life drawing group in Newcastle 18 years back, but that ended up falling apart, so I decided to start one of my own called The Newcastle Life Drawing Group. There are many casual art groups that are mainly for socializing and as a hobby. Life drawing is the only area that I know where professional artists come to do art together, like musicians having a jam session. This is one of the most important aspects for me in terms of art as therapy. I've found gathering professional artists together brings a creative atmosphere that's good for everyone's creative output. Life drawing involves discipline. We might start off with thirty second poses, where you might only get a few lines down, but that can still

look great. After warming up, we spend more time on our pieces. By the time I finish for the day, I may have as many as 28 completed artworks. Sometimes you start to paint almost subconsciously and it becomes "automatic"; this is when I produce my best work.. The people who attend my group have been at it a long time, and they use it for therapy just as much as I do. Getting your creativity flowing provides an emotional release, and all those things you have pent up, the things distracting you and distressing you, get flushed out. And that gets me through the rest of my week, ready for more! Our Tuesday life drawing group takes place at 23 Valencia Street, at The Star Hall. After getting there two hours early to set up, we'll start drawing at 1pm, and go right through until 4pm. We'll stop for dinner, then get drawing again between 5pm and 8pm.



CONTINUED NEXT PAGE...





## NDIS

I've had help with applying for NDIS funding, as at the time I knew nothing about how it worked. It's so great that the NDIS gives the power to the people who are getting the funding, that they actively choose how they want to be supported. If an organisation doesn't provide a good service, they will lose those people. I believe the NDIS is working brilliantly. It can be expensive to run an art group, as you need to pay for rent, models, art supplies, nibblies and advertising, so we all contribute to the running costs. It can be tiring setting up and running the life drawing group, so I have an NDIS support worker who can assist me with some of the practical aspects. I also have NDIS support with my hoarding issues. It's been three years since my last spring clean, and my home is almost entirely non-functional. I initially did a course called "Buried Treasures," which led to me getting a support worker weekly to help me with organising, it has moved on fantastically from there.

## Support from Flourish Australia

My son helped me to get involved with some services and community organisations around Newcastle, but a support worker with another service suggested that Flourish Australia might better suit my needs. I've found that to be the case!

Some great staff work at Flourish Australia, and there are many awesome people who access services. The office has a very creative and peaceful atmosphere, and I like that very much. I've done some preparation work there, a little bit of painting for when they held their Biggest Morning Tea (it was an Alice In Wonderland theme) where I helped with the decorations. The artists I spend time with at Flourish Australia are just brilliant, and it's a wonderful, creative, friendly atmosphere. I highly recommend it!

**Newcastle Hunter St**

*Awabakal Country*

627 Hunter Street  
Newcastle NSW 2300

(02) 9393 9700

Weekdays 7am - 9pm  
Weekend: 7am - 8pm



ABOVE: Some pieces by Peter Boyd (PHOTOS FROM PETER)





# BUS DRIVER: A Role in HUGE Demand

By Johnathon

**After being a salesman for 40 years, selling \$5 million worth of products annually, at the age of 60 Johnathon started driving buses. In 11 years he's really climbed the ladder.**

It's no exaggeration to say that there's ALWAYS work for bus drivers in Sydney, and wider New South Wales. This demand has only gotten worse since COVID.

To be a bus driver, you'll need a few good years of driving under your belt, a clean record, and you must be familiar with the main roads. You'll need a Heavy Vehicles License or a Heavy Rigid Licence as certification, and a "Driver's Authority" certificate from Roads And Maritime. These all involve written, oral and practical tests.

As drivers are needed so badly, lots of bus companies are happy to spend money on training people to get their accreditation. If you have the right aptitude and attitude, they'll likely take you on. We even get young people who have just finished their HSCs signing up.

## A Major Responsibility

There is a lot of responsibility in being a bus driver, as you'll be responsible for the lives of up to 118 people of all ages. Bus driving is challenging, especially in bad weather, and an hour on

the M2 with a full vehicle is quite the experience! You must hold your driving to a high standard, as customers WILL put in complaints.

## Flexibility?

Which routes bus drivers are allocated is based on seniority, like with pilots. As I've worked my way up, I choose my own routes. Sometimes new drivers will get routes that they don't like, but that's a great opportunity for them to build their driving skills. Your shift might start at 5am, or 3pm. There are lots of school runs that need to be done twice a day on weekdays, so every driver will need to learn where these are.

## Career Perks

I started with the bus company as a casual, and within six months I was permanent. After six years, I had my own personal bus.

I do a 40 hour week with overtime on Saturday or Sunday. I divide each workday into a couple of four-hour shifts with lunch and a snooze between. If you drive full time, you can expect a weekly pay packet in the range of \$1200. You get long service leave and pro-rata after 5 years, 8 weeks long service leave at 10 years, and extra pro-rata every year. You get 4 weeks annual leave, sick pay, allowances, bereavement time, and a new uniform every 18

months. What more could you ask for from a job?

## Above and Beyond

It took time and effort to reach where I am. Like with any job, you've got to be prepared to do what it takes to advance, even if you find it difficult. You need to work hard if you want to succeed, as it won't arrive on a golden platter.

For instance, if we're short on drivers and you are offered overtime, you should always, always take it. Otherwise, the supervisor will remember, and be less likely to offer you overtime in future.

Communication, both spoken and written, is very important. Good communication skills will help you in ANY field, and how you come across will play a big role in how well you do as a bus driver. If English isn't your first language, then ESL classes can help you.

## Seeking Employment? We can help!

Flourish Australia offers Disability Employment Services (DES) to get people with a lived experience of mental health issues into open employment. Get in touch to learn more!

**1300 779 270**

ABOVE: PHOTO PROVIDED BY GERALT FROM PIXABAY

# Music and MUSIC THERAPY in Recovery

By Warren Heggarty



service? Jessica says 'my suggestion would be to get in touch with their local conservatorium if they have one. If they don't, music shops or schools may have an idea of who provides music lessons locally'.

Music is a part of so many of Flourish Australia's services. You may have read about the musical endeavours of people at the New Outlook service at Wollongong. See the story 'A Dream Comes True' (Spring 2023 p6). Some sites that have bands include Newcastle and Broken Hill.

Jackson Perrett facilitates a singing group at Buckingham House, Surry Hills, NSW. The group has used instruments in the past but recently they have decided to concentrate on singing. The great thing about singing is that you can do it anywhere you are at any time, without the need for equipment.

Singing also provides a bit of a workout too! When Panorama joined in on one of the groups (with permission of the group members) Jackson started us all off with 'Activating the Diaphragm.' Singing is about breathing among other things, so being conscious of this is a good thing.

Some of the exercises include Short Ha's, which involve projecting the syllable 'Ha! Ha! Ha!', and Long Ha's where you project the syllable Haa! Haa! Haa! Then we did 'Masks' (in which we discover that making certain sounds makes our faces change shape). We also sang Scales and Arpeggios, including sliding up whole octaves. You don't need to know the technical terms, most people can recognise and imitate all of this very easily! The most fun part was singing Falsetto which basically means like The Bee Gees!

Rachel is really keen on the singing group now, though she was a bit shy when she first started, Once you get used to it, it is fun. After we finished the exercises we started singing 'The Chattanooga Choo Choo!' What a pity the session ended before we could complete learning the song. Fortunately, for members of the group, they can continue next week.

**ABOVE: AT Flourish Australia's Buckingham House service in Surry Hills NSW, the group warms up with some vocal exercises, with participant Christina on the left and facilitated by Jackson Perrett at right. PHOTO by WARREN HEGGARTY**

**Music is not just for people who have musical talent. It is for everybody. Did you read the story by Gloria Wulf (Panorama, December 2023 p8)? She said 'The music group [at Hervey Bay] was another favourite, and I enjoyed playing the bongos and the tambourine. I've never been musical, so it's funny I'm jamming in the park nowadays!' So just because you don't see yourself as 'musical' does not mean you should rule out music in your personal recovery program!**

Music isn't just about drums and other instruments. Participants at one service have opted for the human voice, the instrument which comes as standard equipment with most people! Jackson Perrett facilitates the singing group at Flourish Australia's Buckingham House service in Surry Hills, near Sydney NSW.

At Flowerdale service near Liverpool, NSW, we understand that they recently came across some Karaoke equipment. After a test run they are planning on putting it to good use in future.

Jessica Donnelly of The Marius Street service in Tamworth, NSW, says 'we

also have a musical group going at our activity centre every Thursday. It's facilitated by the Tamworth Regional Music Conservatorium known as "The Con" (<https://thecon.com.au>). The teacher, Brookie, is assisted by Flourish Australia staff. This group goes beyond Music Therapy because participants can also learn music skills.

'At the moment' says Jessica, 'The group is learning to play the djembe (a type of African Drum). They have previously learnt the ukulele and percussion. The Con provides the instruments.'

The people who participate say they thoroughly enjoy the group. Indeed, 'most have wanted to learn musical instruments for many years but things such as the cost of the instruments and lessons have been a barrier for them,' says Jessica.

However, supporting people to overcome barriers is why we are here! And that includes acquiring skills if they want to. 'As part of the group,' Jessica says, 'people not only learn to play the instrument, but also the basics of reading music.'

How would people go about starting up a music group in their local



# BACK TO THE PRESENT

## Mindfulness Group at Buck House



**Mindfulness, says group participant Peter, brings you back to the present and to state of acceptance. Nicole says it is relaxing and helps you concentrate. Panorama decided to give it a try.**

Jodie, the group facilitator, suggests we do a meditation on Gratitude today, but first we tune our senses in to what is happening in the room.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, this tuning-in exercise might help you by bringing you back down to earth. The idea is to go through all five of your senses.

Jodie asks us all to concentrate on our sense of sight. What things do we see in the room? Everyone, of

course, comes up with their own answer. Jodie, for example, notices the Axolotl in the fish tank. Peter noticed the books, the clock and the TV. Nicole saw the purple mat and the whiteboard...

Next came smell, taste and hearing, which were a little harder in this very quiet room. For hearing, Warren mentioned the very soft electric humming noise. THAT was interrupted by the doorbell loudly ringing! The sense of touch made Nicole think of the nice, soft cushions on the lounge chairs.

One of us said they could even hear the ocean. But how? Readers, try cupping your hands round your ears right now! Can you hear it too?

So those exercises were focused on our perception of the outer world. Then it was time to focus on the inner world.

Jodie started a video which led us on a guided meditation upon gratitude. The idea is to 'deliberately identify the gratitude you feel within you as if it had been there all along.'

Guided meditations are those which often have calm sounds - like the ocean or rain- and a calm voice that invites you to concentrate on particular things.

**ABOVE: Buckingham House is starting to look rather leafy- which is conducive of Mindfulness. PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY**



## Keeping physically strong & healthy will help you reach your recovery goals

Talk with your local Flourish Australia team today about keeping your physical health and recovery on track.



**Back On Track Health Program**





# Sunshine Coast High Tea

## Things You Learn When You Travel

By Edwina Keelan

**Travel really does broaden the mind! Edwina Keelan, our occasional travel writer recently made a trip from Sydney to the Sunshine Coast of Queensland. The trip got her thinking about quite a number of things as she reports here!**

I composed this piece of writing out of respect for the environment we live in and what is left for future generations to inherit. What are we leaving behind for our children? It contains small lessons I learned along the way on my trips.

### **Drought and the overstocked butcher**

My first trip to the Sunshine Coast was in April 2023. I visited Caloundra, a slow relaxed town 30 minutes by car from Pelican Waters Resort. My accommodation at the time was with Janet who was a happy mother because her boy was getting married.

Something shocking happened when my carer Janet and I dropped into a few shops. I managed to buy some small things like souvenirs, then we walked into a local butcher shop for a look. There was a short small slim, mature-aged Caucasian woman with wavy pepper-grey hair, having a conversation with the butcher about drought-affected farmers. The farmers are having to kill off their livestock as there is no feed for livestock. When I heard that, I could not help but notice that this local butcher shop was packed from wall-to-wall with meat and it looked like it was not going anywhere! I was a little taken back as I realised the realness of the situation. They could not sell it because of the oversupply. This was a crisis. It was very sad, emotional and heartbreaking. The walls looked like they were painted red.

I really have not got over that experience, it is freshly etched in my mind and even skin.

### **Flora And Fauna**

In July 2023 I escaped the cold Sydney climate. As soon as Joshua my carer met me at Maroochydore Airport we headed to a café for a feed, then checked into Pelican Waters Resort. My accommodation is famous for its golf circuit. Australian Icon Greg Norman, the famous golfer, has played there.

Just before lunch, we visited a Sunshine Coast rainforest, the Daintree Rainforest. The flora in this part of the world included Banksias, Acacias, Melaleucas, Sheoaks and ferns. It was very picturesque and beautiful, all green and relaxing to the eye and senses. (In March Panorama you will be able to read more about the effect of green spaces on the senses! We're doing an article on Shinrin Yoku: Forest Bathing!)

We need to protect the beauty we have on this earth. Seeing the clouds clear enabled us to peer through and see the spectacular sky above!



At the entrance to Australia Zoo, There is a memorial to Daniel Morcombe, a boy who was abducted. A hibiscus flower is dedicated to him- you can't miss it at the entrance. (see inset to picture below opposite). So I paid my respects to him, he was only a little fella when he disappeared.

Sumatran Tiger, the lizard, dingo they were some of the pretty impressive examples of fauna at the zoo. I had my photo taken by the bronze sculpture of the famous Irwin Family.

Buderim Forest walk passes through land which the Sunshine Coast Council bought from another famous Australian family, the Lindsays.

The traditional owners are the Kabi Kabi and Jinibara indigenous people were the rightful owners originally.

Jacob, my carer and guide, told me much of the forest was cleared to build homes back in the olden days.

Much of the Buderim Forest floor is dead wood. Flora only appears when sunlight can shine through the trees to the forest floor.

Walking through this forest, you can hear frogs and a chorus of birds singing

### High Tea

This was a first time I had ever gone to a High Tea. The tea shop, Aimee Provence, was 35-45 minutes drive from Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast. See picture top right.

You work from the outside in when using silver cutlery. It was real silver with plates intricately, finely painted and decorated almost carved like sculpture.

It was a great experience where my carer and I were high above sea level and treated to a view of the ocean.

Some people think it is for snobby types but really it is not. The staff were all friendly and nice and obviously loved their job at Aimee Provence.

**OPPOSITE:** Edwina encountered the likenesses of a famous Aussie Family.  
**TOP:** Practicing the fine art of High Tea.  
**RIGHT:** Buderim forest walk and (inset) the memorial to Daniel Morecombe.  
**PHOTOS PROVIDED BY EDWINA KEELAN**





# PLAN YOUR DAYS OFF

## For Better Mental Health

By Warren Heggarty



**Panorama has previously been a little sceptical of the supposed benefits of work 'mental health days.' Yet a growing number of employers are offering explicitly labelled 'mental health days.' And in public schools in Illinois USA, students are entitled to five mental health days each year. It looks like we might need to learn to live with them!** (Gerlach & Ma, 2023)

The two main drawbacks with mental health days is, firstly, that they tempt you to avoid doing things at work that you don't like or that make you anxious. Secondly, they tempt you to waste a whole day doing nothing.

The first problem is obviously a case of unhealthy avoidance. It is likely that whatever it is at work that worries you will still be there AFTER your mental health day. It will also be bigger and more worrying. If you are part of a team, your colleagues might even notice that when something big happens you are not there to help out. Finally, if you take

a day off to avoid unpleasantness at work, you are likely to use that day to do nothing constructive.

The second problem is simply cutting straight to the wasted day off! If you have had some extra stressful or exhausting period at work and you want to take a day off to recuperate, that may well be a good thing. However mental health days are not usually planned in this way. They are often a little more 'ad hoc' than that and so the day off is just a day off with no actual benefit to your mental health.

Speaking of planning, did you know that proper prior planning prevents people from needing mental health days. Rather than being in a crazy rush, necessitating a day off, perhaps you can plan things better to even the workload, or get an earlier start on a project, or get help from others.

If you still need a mental health day, don't waste it. Make a plan for what you are going to do that day. Do things that are good for your

health. A day off with no plans can lead to boredom and anxiety, not to mention guilt!

Jennifer Gerlach says in Psychology Today "this may be a good time to reach out to your support system. You could get a coffee with a friend or call family. A mental health day might also be an ideal space for a therapy session."

Plan to DO something on this day off that will enhance your mental health. For example go swimming or even 'forest bathing' (see our article in Panorama on Shinrin Yoku) or cycle round the park. Hiding under the doona is unlikely to improve your mental health. Making plans is the way to go.

### Works Cited

Gerlach, J., & Ma, L. (2023, November 25). Optimise your mental health days; five ways to utilize leave from work. Retrieved from Psychology Today Australia: [www.psychologytoday.com/au](http://www.psychologytoday.com/au)

**ABOVE: She is dreaming up a plan for her mental health day no doubt. Otherwise she might end up bored, and that could lead to anxiety and that could spoil her day off. PHOTO BY MARXCELO FROM PIXABAY**



# 3

## SKILLS

### TO OVERCOME LONELINESS

*Some Effort and Bravery Required*

By Warren Heggarty



**Overcoming loneliness is easier said than done. That's why you need to stop talking about it and start doing it. We will look at three skills you can start developing now.**

'Loneliness can skew our thinking towards [oversensitivity] and self doubt' says Benji Kaveladze writing in Psychology Today. This makes us 'believe that our efforts in reaching out for connection are doomed to fail' (Kaveladze, 2023) What we need to do, then, is to take ACTION. Action speaks louder than words, so it can certainly drown out any unreasonably negative thoughts you may have.

#### 1. Make it a habit to challenge your negative thoughts about what others think

'I am not likeable.' 'People think I'm weird.' 'People don't want to talk to me.' These are some pretty common negative thoughts that run through our heads when we are socially isolated. If you don't challenge these thoughts, you will end up believing them, which would be bad, because they are not true. If you say 'I am not likeable,' even if there appears to be some evidence for this, you can find ways

to become more likeable and start practicing them. If you think you're weird, great. Weird people are often very popular! But maybe you are not as weird as you think you are. You need to make a habit of challenging these self destructive thoughts about yourself.

#### 2. Keep doing it, even though you have doubts and feel fear about socialising

You have probably had this experience. You are loathing some social event, you are trying to get out of it, but you end up going. You are very anxious. After a while you begin to enjoy yourself. When it is over you are thoroughly glad that you went.

Social situations often go better than you think they will. At worst, pushing yourself to socialise will allow you to learn lessons. The first lesson is being a bit of a 'wallflower' is not the same as rejection. Often, there are people at social occasion who LIKE finding shy awkward people and making them feel at ease. Keep trying and learning.

#### 3. Practice social skills again and again

When you do things over and over you become better at them.

Practice social skills when you can. Here are some you can work on: Active listening; Eye Contact; Reactions' & Appreciations; Open ended questions (ones that invite a person to say more than yes or no); and Assertiveness.

There are a number of books that can help you. Dale Carnegie's 100 year old classic 'How to win friends and influence people' has stood the test of time. 'How to talk to Anyone' by Leil Lowndes has a whole chapter on smiling (Lowndes, 2017, pp. 5-9) and two whole chapters on eye contact! (pp. 9-16) Fascinating! With practice, effort and a little bravery, you will start to overcome isolation and loneliness.

#### Works Cited

- Kaveladze, B. (2023, September 18). Confronting Loneliness with tools from psychological science. Retrieved from Psychology today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-health-in-the-internet-age/202309/confronting-loneliness-with-tools-from-psychological>
- Lowndes, L. (2017). Sticky eyes and Epoxy eyes. In L. Lowndes, How to talk to anyone (pp. 9-16). London: Thorsons.
- Lowndes, L. (2017). The flooding smile. In L. Lowndes, How to Talk to Anyone (pp. 5-9). London: Thorsons.

**ABOVE: Shoulder to shoulder or face to face, you can learn how to deal with social situations. IMAGE BY FREEPIK**

## Looking Forward to *Cutting the Rug* Every Week!

By Trish

**Ballroom dancing on Wednesday nights has been the highlight of my week for the last four years. Except for COVID, I haven't missed a single lesson. I always look forward to getting dressed up and hitting the dance floor!**

I dance in both the beginner's class and the intermediate class, starting at 6:45pm and going until 9:15pm. Even after dancing for the better part of two hours, instead of getting tired, I find I only get more energised. At the end of the night I want to do another three hours!

Dancing is also a great form of exercise, as I don't like going to the gym. I get the rest of my physical activity from working at Flourish Australia's warehouse at Marrickville. Even if I feel tired from work, I can always find the energy to dance.

### Different movements, different styles

In the last few years I've learned all sorts of different dances, including the jive, salsa, rumba, cha-cha,

Spanish tango, and the waltz. Our class will practice each dance for a month before moving onto the next. We'll memorise the steps and movements first, then practise in time to the music.

It's taken me four years to really get it, as each dance is different, even the ones that are related. Different movements, different styles. For instance, Tracie Leigh Waltz is a pretty new style of dancing and is different to the Emmerdale Waltz.

The dance I love the most is the cha-cha, then the salsa. Those are fast, and are good for your cardio. I also like the rumba, as it's very sexy, and it's not very fast.

### The Class

This class has been beautiful for my social life. I've met so many new friends, including some who are from Malaysia like I am.

I connected with this dance class by searching online. I'd always wanted to dance, and I could see that this class seemed to be the right fit, as well as the right price for me. We

each pay a nominal fee of \$8 per week, but it's worth it. If I went to an actual dance school, it would cost thousands of dollars.

The people who run this program have been hosting it at Dooleys Catholic Club for over ten years now. The class has about forty regulars, and most of them have been doing this for a long time. I must thank the generosity of the instructors, as they are always so patient and happy to teach. I always give them a Christmas gift as well as an Easter gift to say thanks!

With ballroom dancing you need a partner, and I usually pair up with the instructor. Sometimes other guys ask me to dance, but that can be difficult if one person isn't as skilled as the other! I prefer to dance with somebody who can lead me, and the instructor is good at that. There's another guy in the class who's been doing this for many years. One time his partner didn't show up, so I had a chance to dance with him.

### Encouragement

I'm not aiming to go in any competitions or anything but I would like to keep getting better and to learn more styles of dance. On the subject of getting better, I was recently awarded a trophy for being the most improved dancer of the year, and they also gave me a \$50 dining voucher for Dooleys. I was very surprised by that!

**ABOVE LEFT: all dolled up, and her award (below). PHOTOS FROM TRISH**





## ACMS Child Maltreatment

### *Strong Association with Later MH Issues*

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study 2023 concluded that 48 per cent of those who experience maltreatment as a child (e.g. physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and exposure to domestic violence) go on to develop mental health issues.

By comparison, the percentage of people who develop mental health issues who have NOT experienced maltreatment is to 21.6%.

People who have experience of childhood maltreatment have a 7.8 per cent chance of having a diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) compared to 1.3 per cent for those who do not have a history of childhood maltreatment.

Similar increased rates are also found when we look at figures for generalised anxiety, alcohol overuse and major depression.

### Stop DV 2023 in Hobart

The long term solution, of course, is to eliminate the causes of child maltreatment, one of which is exposure to Domestic Violence.

Hobart's Hotel Grand Chancellor hosted a STOP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE 2023 conference across three days from November 27.

Sponsored by the Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Association, the slogan of the conference was 'United we will tirelessly work to end domestic violence in a generation.' WH

#### Reference:

Scott, J.G. et al (2023) 'The association between child maltreatment and mental disorders in the Australian Child Maltreatment Study' Med J. Aust 218 (c) [www.acms.au](http://www.acms.au)



## GO JULIE!

### *TheMHS Award for Service to Mental Health*

**In the November issue we looked at the ACDC project and heard from Julie Millard, Consultant/Trainer, about the revolutionary mental health outreach program. By the sheerest coincidence (?), in August 2023, Julie was presented with an award in recognition of her 'Exceptional contribution to mental health Services in Australia.'**

Receiving the Award, Julie who identifies as a clinician but has lived experience and is a carer, turned the audience's attention to an important football match set to take place that very night. 'Go the Matilda's' she said to the amusement of those gathered

at TheMHS (The Mental Health Services) conference in Adelaide, far from the venue of the Matildas versus Lionesses in Sydney. Well, Panorama says Go Julie!

Julie Millard has worked as a consultant with Flourish Australia in the past. She is an advocate, in mental health, an educator, an Australian Credentialed Mental Health Nurse, Board Director and Regional Vice President Oceania for the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH). Julie is the Co-Chair of the Women's Mental Health Section WFMH and facilitator of the Oceania Mental Health Advisory Committee. WH

**ABOVE: 'Go the Matildas!' said Julie as she received her award. PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIE MILLARD.**



# MOVEMENT FOR RECOVERY

By Warren Heggarty

## LUNCH WITH SIMON ROSENBAUM

**To finish off 2023 Mental Health Month, some of us were lucky enough to have Lunch via ZOOM with Associate Professor Simon Rosenbaum in Colombia. Simon is not only an Ambassador of the Flourish Foundation Australia, but he travels the world teaching and learning about the role of physical health in mental health recovery.**

Simon said that there was an element of class privilege with leisure time. He claimed that full access to the benefits of physical activity is often limited to people who 'have the right gear' or the leisure time or the connections. The most disadvantaged, on the other hand, are the very ones who would benefit the most from physical activity.

Simon has a point in this: that when Health Authorities send out messages for better health practices,

it tends to affect only high income earners and seems to have little effect on the socially disadvantaged. This is what happened with Anti tobacco campaigns. It succeeded from the top down, I am led to believe.

Simon noted that in some parts of the world, participation in social physical activity may be limited to boys only, or youngsters only, excluding women and the disabled. Even old people need exercise!

There is too much emphasis on the aesthetics of exercise. 'Getting jacked' is not a legit health goal.

Evidence shows that physical activity does not replace other aspects of mental health care.

But when we look at risk factors of modifiable causes of cardiovascular disease, we could relabel it 'factors associated with mental health problems' using the same data!

We need to be prevention focused for both physical and mental health disorders.

This diagram shows the difference between physical activity, exercise and sport.

What type of physical exercise should we employ? Simon says that the main thing is that you ENJOY it. Cardio or strength training? Either. There is more data on cardio, but EITHER is acceptable as long as the person enjoys it because then they will keep doing it.

Simply telling people to exercise is not enough. We need to provide the infrastructure, the structure and the support and safety.

Can sport cause harm? Simon gave the example of a program in Uganda. The boys were former child soldiers. All traumatised. They got them to play football. The coaches were local men. Naturally, they ran up and down the sidelines yelling at the players, and this led to a decline in overall mental health. Simon says the coaching approach should have been knowledgeable about the trauma and mental health status of the boys.



## Integration

Simon spoke about the need to integrate allied health work, mental health work and physical activity.

A person engaged in mental health work ought to ask themselves "Am I a physical-health-informed mental health professional? There are a number of aspects to this:

1. They should know the World Health Organisation's Physical Activity guidelines
2. They should know nutrition guidelines
3. They should ask themselves "Is my messaging safe" (see about the Ugandan boys above) and is my messaging "not based on 'aesthetics.' "
4. They should know how to access additional physical health support for people they support
5. They should ask themselves 'Do I practice what I preach?'

Likewise, a person engaged in allied health (eg. OT, Physiotherapist) should ask themselves, "Am I a mental-health-informed physical activity professional. Again, there are a number of aspects to this:

1. They could ask 'Have I done a mental health first aid course?'
2. They need to be aware of the social determinants of mental health, of the unique barriers people face, of medication side effects.
3. They should ensure their physical health messaging is psychologically safe
4. They should know how to access additional mental health support for the people they work with.

## How to find motivation

A common barrier we encounter with physical activity in the context of mental health is the difficulty of finding motivation to get going. The meeting asked Simon if he had any Strategies for Motivation he could share. These are some of the things he came up with for mental health workers. We all might profit from asking ourselves these questions:

- Ask the person "What was your (bad) experience of sport or PE as a kid?" So many of us have

memories of being picked on or bullied. This can put us off sport and PE for life, because we associate physical activity with bullying. But there is not necessarily a connection. In a supportive environment, we may come to enjoy what we once hated. Indeed, humans are built to enjoy movement,

- Bearing the above in mind, if a person does not like physical activity perhaps they just haven't found the right environment that they enjoy. There are big differences between individuals but these are matched by big differences between activities. Compare squash with golf, compare rugby with swimming.
- Provide the person with proper support and resources (see Simons comments about 'class privilege' above)
- Something is better than nothing, so start with walking, cleaning the house, doing stretches... Do something, anything!
- Carers need to be involved. There is no good teaching someone how to cook if mum cooks when they go home. There might not be any point teaching someone to play footy if they are on their own or the rest of their family like bike riding.

## 'Non Clinical Populations'

Panorama is looking forward to Associate Professor Rosenbaum's next webinar, but in the meantime, let's take a quick peek at 'Non-clinical' populations.

Physical Activity is not something sent to torment people with mental health issues. It is ideal even for people who DO NOT have mental health issues (why should THEY miss out). It can even be preventive!

A team at Adelaide University checked the effect of physical activity on depression and anxiety among people who do not have a mental health diagnosis ("non-clinical populations"). They looked at 398 studies involving 15,065 participants. They found 'high-quality' evidence that physical activity does reduce depression and anxiety for non-clinical populations. (Standardised Mean Difference was -0.5 for Depression and -0.38 for Anxiety)

That means that if you are NOT particularly anxious or depressed, physical activity will make you feel even better! We hope this convinces you to start moving and keep going!

### SOURCE

Amanda L. Rebar, Robert Stanton, David Geard, Camille Short, Mitch J. Duncan & Corneel Vandelanotte (2015) A meta-meta-analysis of the effect of physical activity on depression and anxiety in non-clinical adult populations, *Health Psychology Review*, 9:3, 366-378, DOI: 10.1080/17437199.2015.1022901

**ABOVE Left: This Venn diagram shows how the different types of activity fit together. Exercise could be seen as a particular type of physical activity and sport as a particular type of exercise. Below: Do you have bad memories of PE class? You can overcome them! These ladies are in a 1934 BJP Physical Culture class public domain. STATE LIBRARY OF NSW**



# YOUR JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT




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

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

**Flourish Australia DES locations:**

Bankstown • Broken Hill • Caringbah • Cessnock • Harris Park  
Hornsby • Liverpool • Maitland • Penrith • Seven Hills

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