

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

panorama

Monthly Issue **May 2024 #93B**



**The Huge Need
for Practical
Homelessness Support**

**A Practical Approach
to Insomnia**

Happy to Chat!

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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 Nielson

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...



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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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Contributors include...

Helen Fenner is an artist based in Maitland who is putting herself out there in the art world

Rynnette Gentle is Manager of Flourish Australia's Broken Hill Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI)

Dorothy's role as a carer has become so much easier after gaining support from Flourish Australia

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Contributions are welcome!

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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 recognise 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



With the Right Support, I Can Now Relax and Enjoy our Relationship

By Dorothy Caple



Dorothy has cared for her daughter Ebony, who has a lived experience of psychosis, for decades. After many hospitalisations, there didn't seem to be any glimmer of hope on the horizon that things were ever going to change. However, after making contact with Flourish Australia to support Ebony with her recovery journey and practical needs, things have finally turned around.

Caring for a loved one who is struggling with a mental health issue is felt by the whole family. My daughter Ebony's recovery has been a long and frequently overwhelming journey for our entire family since she began experiencing mental health issues at the age of 12. We had no idea what was happening, and thought she was just being a brat of a teenager, getting caught up in the wrong crowd and using drugs.

It became an exhausting cycle where things would tick along for a few weeks, then suddenly erupt into chaos, disrupting every aspect of our home life. My husband and I lost our once-thriving business and our other kids felt the strain of so much of our attention going to their sister. There were times I barely recognised my daughter anymore. People said I was spoiling Ebony, but the truth was just trying to cope with her behaviour consumed all my energy.

As good as mental health wards in many hospitals are, they're not necessarily recovery focused. After Ebony went through 10 years of intermittent hospital admissions, I was close to the point of breakdown. I phoned every single helpline in the book, but I was bounced around from one to another. As a mum who loves my daughter with all my heart, I was devastated to be repeatedly told that I needed to accept that I lacked the

skills to be able to help my daughter in the way she needed.

I felt like the meanest mum on the planet when I took the advice to tell Ebony could no longer come live with us, and I encouraged her to participate in rehabilitation.

The Flourish Australia difference

After decades of trying to help Ebony in every way I knew how, finding the right, recovery-focused support for her needs from Flourish Australia has freed me to relax and enjoy our relationship, instead of burning myself out trying to be her saviour. For many years we had no idea there were organisations who offered such recovery-focused support, and it's hard to believe that after a lifetime of struggling to find answers to Ebony's behaviour, she's turned her life around in just 12 months since she connected with Flourish Australia. Finding the right support for Ebony's needs has been

transformational, and the support that Flourish Australia provides has been monumentally helpful to us both. Everything they've done to help Ebony has lifted so much stress from my own life, and it's been so great watching my daughter grow from a troubled teen to managing her life as a mature adult.

As I now live in an over 55's development and it isn't possible for Ebony to stay with me, I'm so grateful for the gentle way Flourish Australia supported Ebony to gradually transition to living independently in a home of her own. It's wonderful that she has overcome her fear of being homeless and how she really values the little apartment that she feels she has earned.

Final Thoughts

I encourage anyone who is struggling to deal with a loved one experiencing a mental health issue to reach out to Flourish Australia for support. Don't try to do it all on your own, or you may actually be holding your loved one back from the help they need to thrive in life.

Knowing Ebony has the organisation walking alongside her has freed me to focus on my own wellbeing. For instance, I have joined a support group for parents whose children have been diagnosed with schizophrenia.

We've learned so much together along the way, and I'm so proud of the progress Ebony has made in her life. I look forward to our catch-ups now, and being able to talk with my girl the way we used to before she became unwell is so wonderful. She no longer lies to me or lashes out, and she now welcomes my help when it's offered, instead of throwing it against the wall. After all this time, I feel free to relax and just enjoy being her mum without trying to fix things.

It's such a relief to not feel anxious about answering the phone to bad news anymore.

Are you a family member, friend or carer of someone living with a mental health issue? Find out about supports available for you here:



ABOVE, OPPOSITE: With help from Flourish Australia, Dorothy and her daughter Ebony both have a new lease on life. PHOTOS BY GREENWOOD MEDIA.



CONNECTING Thru Aboriginal Art

How Graeme Turned Things Round

By Warren Heggarty

Graeme Yuke told us a couple of ways he has been able to touch people with his art, modestly waiting until near the end of our interview. 'From my place, I could hear a lady who was really sick and coughing all the time. It turned out she actually had cancer. So I thought I would do a painting for her and when I gave it to her she started crying. "This is just the best thing," she said.'

Graeme tells us his sense of empathy for people in challenging situations comes probably from his own background of being an Indigenous person who had a difficult time growing up. Making art has been one of the keys to his recovery from mental health issues.

'I had a doctor who was very nice,' Graeme told Panorama. 'So I thought I'd give him one of my pictures. He told me his wife loved it! He often asks me how the art is going. I got a real kick from that!'

'I want to be a peer support worker and then maybe later move on to being an art therapist. I think I have become fairly comfortable with working with other people in that way,' says Graeme who does volunteer work with NEAMI at Strathpine QLD. He has enrolled in a Certificate III Community Services at the Ashley Institute of Training, North Lakes Queensland.

Before Graeme was linked to Flourish Australia in mid 2023, Graeme had spent time in the local Community Care Unit. There he met an Indigenous Worker named Gordon. 'Gordon was a lifesaver,' says Graeme. 'At that time, I had been living in a shed, staying there on my own all day. Gordon came out to see me.

'He said, "Why don't you come and join one of my Indigenous art classes." I told him, "I can't even draw a stick man!" Gordon said, "Come on, give it a go. Some Indigenous people find a real connection through it.'

"It really blew me away"

So I did what Gordon suggested and it really blew me away! Learning how to make art as a

ABOVE: Graeme displays a dot painting and a bookmark
PHOTO COURTESY OF GRAEME YUKE



'He said "Why don't you come and join one of my indigenous art classes." I told him "I can't even draw a stick man!"'

my name out there. A restaurant in Sandgate has shown interest in my work, as well as Strathpine NEAMI.' Graeme went with Flourish Australia's Glen Birmingham to Redcliffe Hospital where he went on the radio to talk about his art. 'Glen took me up the coast to a disability expo so I could show off my art.'

Like many beginning artists, Graeme has a strong attachment to his works and finds the idea of parting with them a bit painful! Nevertheless he hopes that one day he might be able to take it to the next level because a lot of people have expressed interest in buying his work.

Whereas a lot of dot painting you might see employs a black background, Graeme likes to use various colours. He will go over the canvas initially with a spray can for a background colour before applying the dots. As is traditional, he uses sticks to apply the dots.

form of therapy was made easier at first by the use of stencils and so forth. Graeme found that as he participated, he got into "the flow." This is a state of mind so-named by the psychologist Csikszent Csikszentmihalyi where you are able to live in the moment and shut out unnecessary disturbances. 'I didn't think of anything else' while doing art,' Graeme says, 'It's like doing self-therapy.'

Graeme says he can spend up to eight hours a day working on his paintings. 'If it is five in the morning and I have insomnia, it gives me relief from that,' he says. And not just relief: making art has led to social interaction.

Rather than spending his time alone, Graeme has more interactions with people, including teaching people in his garage on weekends. With NEAMI mental health services, he has been teaching people how to make bookmarks with Indigenous designs. He even has pictures of his works on facebook.

'I have made bookmarks advertising my work and inviting people to come to my facebook page to have a look (see "Graeme Yuke Aboriginal Art" on facebook). I've handed out about eighty of these, trying to get

THIS PAGE: Learning to make art as a form of therapy was made easier at first by the use of stencils. The motto in the centre of the work below says 'Always was, always will be.'
PHOTOS BY GLEN BIRMINGHAM AND GRAEME YUKE

Continued on page 8



Connecting thru Aboriginal Art Continued from page 7

Wooden skewers and even dowels from Bunnings can be used. He sometimes sharpens them to make the point the exact size he needs.

Come a long way

The majority of the time, his work is fairly spontaneous and related to dealing with his own mental health issues of the time - although sometimes he does have a story to them. Often it is not possible for Graeme to share details of some personal experiences because of the trauma that such memories bring.

'Sometimes after I finish them,' says Graeme, 'I look back and don't even remember starting them!' Losing track of time in this way is a good sign that you are 'in the flow' as they say!

Graeme has come a long way with his social and emotional wellbeing thanks to his persistence and the support of people like Gordon,

NEAMI and Glenn and Deb Turner from Flourish Australia's Caboolture service.

Graeme's grandmother was a member of the 'Stolen Generation.' His father was Indigenous Australian and his mother is white. His father left when Graeme was very young and after that, some of the men that partnered with his mother were alcoholic and abusive. One particular friend of his mother's caused Graeme to hide under the bed whenever he visited. His mother told him not to be ridiculous, seeming not to appreciate that Graeme was fearful of abuse from him. He remembers the neighbours yelling out racist abuse, too. At school, he was abused by a staff member.

These negative experiences led eventually to suicidal ideation and a couple of attempts on his own life. However since Gordon introduced him to dot painting,

Graeme has at last begun to feel a positive cultural connection with his Aboriginal self.

'I'm here now because of Flourish Australia and the other people who have sat beside me. I have my own place now and I would like to help others.

Thank you to Glen Birmingham and Deb Turner for assistance with this story.

BELOW: Footprints, flamingoes and butterflies... At Flourish Australia's Caboolture Service, they even made a wall display of Graeme's work! PHOTO DEB TURNER.

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HELEN FENNER: From Art School to Exhibiting in Galleries

By Helen Fenner (as told to Grant J Everett)

Panorama readers have encountered Helen before when she was at art school, and just last year she had her own exhibition space at Maitland Regional Art Gallery. When I recently spoke with Helen, she'd just dropped off some pieces for the 2024 Newcastle Show Art Competition & Exhibition. Helen is busy, busy, busy!

My exhibition at the Maitland Regional Art Gallery was called "Where The Seeds Grow." For many, art helps people to navigate challenging and difficult times. I am a strong advocate for the role of creativity in nurturing mental health, and my exhibition explored the idea that we are never far from

our ancestral past. My artworks were on display between the 9th of September and the 19th of November.

I applied to Maitland Gallery a couple of year ago to ask for this opportunity, and while anyone can apply, not everyone will get approved. While I was waiting I worked on my show, creating many artworks specifically for that purpose. I also sold some of the pieces I displayed.

My space at Maitland Gallery was an upstairs corridor, and I had 30 separate works on display. Many of the pieces were lino prints or screen prints, and I learned how to do these through a group called Newcastle Printmakers. I also attended a similar group at Maitland.

When I was studying at art school, I didn't expect to be presenting in galleries just a few years later!

My dream is to have an exhibition in a Sydney gallery. I'd also love to earn a residency at the Lighthouse Gallery, so I could be surrounded by art every day. Wherever I am in life, though, I know I will still be creating art.

The Newcastle Show

The 2024 Newcastle Show held an Art Competition & Exhibition that ran from the 1st of March to the 3rd of March at the Newcastle Showground's Exhibition Centre. I submitted three works consisting of screen prints and a lino print, and they were hung for me with many other works from other local artists. Works were exhibited, and all entries were for sale.

Artists could only submit entries that have been created within the last 18 months and are original, uncopied works. The award categories included sculptures, paintings, drawing, mixed media, lino prints, landscapes, jewelery, Indigenous art by Indigenous artists, and more. There were cash prizes for each category, and other awards included the People's Choice, Best Art Exhibit, and Highly Commended. The David Strachan Memorial Prize alone carried an award of \$1,500.

Flourish Australia

I wanted to thank my Mental Health Worker, Lisa Hyde-Mills, and the Flourish Australia service at Newcastle. Their support has always been the backbone of my recovery and my art career. For instance, Lisa assisted me with safely transporting my artworks to the Newcastle Show.

Flourish Australia has always encouraged me with my art, and I'd be lost without them. They've been there for every part of my life, and if it wasn't for them, I might just be sitting at home, staring at four walls.

I find life is like a ball of string; you can let it keep rolling out forever! It's up to you.

ABOVE: Helen Fenner with one of her latest works PHOTO LISA HYDE-MILLS



The Huge Need for Practical Homelessness Support

By Rynnette Gentle

The Flourish Australia service at Broken Hill meets the practical needs of many people who are homeless. Our latest exciting news is that we've successfully been given a NSW building grant to open a laundry service. Once it's open, people who are homeless will be able to wash their clothes and bedding for free.

The Lions Club donated Speed Queen industrial washing machines and dryers for the laundry, which are worth about \$8 thousand each, and Speed Queen in Queensland covered transport. The NSW government funded the building work project, which came to around \$15 thousand.

Flourish Australia is arranging a big launch day where we can thank the Lions Club and Speed Queen, and we'll also invite the local MP down to show our appreciation to NSW Parliament for funding this project.

The Freedom of a Locker

Another practical way we support people who are homeless is with our lockers. If people leave their personal belongings on the street, there's the chance someone may throw it out or take it, so providing a safe place for their possessions can be very helpful. People can access them at any time,

as the lockers are located on the street, not inside our centre.

The lockers are mostly used by people who have travelled from a long way away who just got off the train and have nowhere to sleep. They can also be a great asset while we try to source some stable accommodation. We've also found that some people don't want housing, they just want somewhere to keep their stuff. This makes it easier to access services like GPs or Centrelink.

The lockers are also a great touchpoint to direct people towards services like the St Vincent De Paul soup kitchen, which only charges \$2 a meal, or the SecondBite Food Bank, the local churches or homelessness specialist services.

I've had lots of queries from various organisations and services about

the lockers, including some from interstate.

Other kinds of support we offer include partnering with Share The Dignity to provide menstrual products free of charge to any young girl or woman who is experiencing period poverty.

Urgent Need

When someone joins our HASI program to find a home, we'll see them several times a week and support them with their living skills so we can best advocate for them as tenants. But it's really a matter of what's available and what the individual can afford. Like everywhere in Australia, we need more affordable accommodation. Rental prices are going up, housing providers only have so much stock, and investors need to make their money back. This can make it very tricky.

I've been seeing more people on the street who aren't from Broken Hill. While we have less services than somewhere like Sydney, it's also less chaotic and quieter.

Some people are happy living on the streets, and others might not even identify as homeless. Youth, for instance, will often couch surf, but don't have stable accommodation. It can be tricky finding housing for a teenager who has never rented before and doesn't have a job or a credit history.

I've seen again and again that many people are on the street through no fault of their own. You see people with beautiful homes and cars, but many of them are just a couple of hard months from losing it all. Many people sleeping rough are there because of a lived experience of a mental health issue.

This is why homelessness services are so vital: because it could happen to any one of us.

ABOVE: Michelle, Admin Support Officer, in front of the Broken Hill lockers. PHOTO PROVIDED BY RYNNETTE GENTLE

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THE RENTAL CRISIS

Will Higher Density Bring Lower Rents?

By Warren Heggarty



Low income earners often rely on public housing. The problem with public housing is that there are waiting lists, and even if you are allocated a house, it is not really your choice. Historically, areas of exclusively public housing have experienced problems resulting from the concentration of social problems in some areas. Mixed public and private housing can alleviate this, but in recent times, private rental has also become difficult, with rents skyrocketing in most places.

There is a lot of doom and gloom about housing in the community at the moment. In places where there are severe shortages, or steep prices (e.g. Sydney, which is one of the world's most expensive housing markets) we have heard stories of professionals (teachers, police officers) who have not been able to afford rent for a family home.

Recently the NSW Premier Chris Minns had a heated interview with radio personality Ben Fordham over the government's plans to try to alleviate the rental crisis. Some Local councils are opposed to the state government's policy of increasing housing density.

Roughly, the government's approach involves creating more housing by increasing the population density in places close major transport nodes. Increasing density can be done in several ways. For example, allowing people to subdivide a single dwelling property to build two or more dwellings; allowing people to build blocks of flats in areas restricted to single houses; building high rise housing formerly low rise areas. Some property owners might experience a windfall by selling a single dwelling which has been rezoned to allow flats.

People who oppose this policy argue that there is already enough difficulty with traffic in the areas affected by potential rezoning. Obviously if a street with twenty single dwelling blocks is converted to twenty sets of ten flats with one car park each, you are going to get a massive increase in traffic in that street. Worse, most households have more than one car, meaning that streets are going to be even more congested by parked cars.

High density high rise has, of course, been done before. In Redfern we find several famous high rise apartment buildings that were built specifically as public housing. But there are many people who would be unable to endure high rise living. For example, people who are anxious about heights or enclosed places might find it hard to adapt.

Is there an alternative to increasing population density? Yes, opening more land to single dwelling homes, contributing to even greater urban sprawl and loss of farming land and wilderness. Sprawl also makes it impossible to provide good public transport at a reasonable cost.

Overseas, the tendency has been to grow up rather than out. It is possible to manage a very high population density, such as we find in New York. However, many people in New York do not have private cars and the public transport is correspondingly much better than in Sydney.

ABOVE: A sign of things to come? These high rise flats are in Parramatta. But high rise does not necessarily mean 'low cost,' especially if there are views! Besides, not everyone can tolerate high rise living. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY



Revive a Lost Art

Hand-write a letter and post it today!

By Warren Heggarty

Whenever people gather together to speak about mental health, they talk about connection and belonging. Dale Carnegie was right when he said that people just want to feel special. But how do you make people feel special? Try hand writing a letter to them!

It seems that despite all the electronic messaging we do these days, we are aware of something missing. This is the personal touch. We have 'devices' that have predictive text to write stuff for us, and with 'Artificial Intelligence' and ChatGPT, our personal communications are becoming less and less personal as every day goes by.

There are some people in your life who are worth writing to, that is, REALLY writing to. By this, I mean getting a piece of paper and a pen, sitting down, writing a letter, putting it in an envelope and posting it. You do know their address, don't you? That's another thing: we know people's facebook account, but we often don't know what country they live in!

'Writing letters is a lost art that we need to revive,' says Shelby Abrahamsen a.k.a. 'Littlecoffeefox.com'. Shelby recommends that your GRANDPARENTS will make most appreciative recipients. Not only will it prove to them that you can write (OK, if you can't write, now is a good time to learn) but will make them very, very happy indeed.

As well as www.littlecoffeefox.com there are quite a large number of places on line where you can learn about letters, how to plan them, how to design them, who to write to, what kind of paper to use and a million other things. I looked at www.papier.com and www.readingrockets.org which is mainly aimed at children.

Not only is letter writing fun, it can help children learn to compose written text, and provide handwriting practice. A lot of grandparents think that handwriting has gone downhill lately. Prove them wrong, kids!

Remember, letters are valuable keepsakes. I have in my personal possession letters that were written to me in the 1960s. I have no idea where 99.99 per cent of my social media messages are, but I know who really cares!

This passage is from *My Child* magazine (2007) quoted on www.readingrockets.org: 'The sheer fun of sending and receiving letters appeals to every child. There is something special about putting letters in the post box and then having them delivered by the postie...seeing your name on the envelope and knowing that inside is a...letter... [that] shows someone cares and had taken the time to sit down and think about you!'

You can write letters of congratulations, life updates, letters for special occasions, letters of gratitude. You can even write letters when you don't think you can say it properly in person. There is no better way to keep in contact. And in years to come, people who engage in letter writing and have 'pen friends' will be able to go through all their old correspondence and relive it all. So give it a go and become someone's pen friend.

And while you are there, why not enclose a REAL photo of yourself taken with a REAL camera printed out on REAL photographic paper so that your correspondent can preserve it in a REAL photo album. Ah, but that's another story...

ABOVE: Letters are valuable keepsakes. How many love letters will you leave behind to be discovered by future generations? IMAGES BY WARREN HEGGARTY



HAPPY TO CHAT

Why We Should Talk to Strangers

By Warren Heggarty

In April Panorama we looked at a couple of online sources where men can get tips on self care. We didn't realise at the time that one of the men behind those sources was behind the Chat Benches movement. (See 'Standards for Gentlemen with high expectations').

Detective Sergeant Ash Jones of Wales received an MBE (Member of the British Empire) for coming up with the concept of 'chat benches' which has since spread around the world. Currently he is the host of The Chap's Guide, but when he was a police officer a few years ago, he met an old lady who gave him the idea.

Sylvia had been defrauded of money by a con artist. According to a BBC report, Ash Jones said, 'Having spoken to Sylvia I realised that the underlying issue, why she got taken in by this deception, was because of chronic loneliness. She was 89, she had no living family members and was extremely isolated.' (BBC Bristol, 2019)

Con artists love to prey on such vulnerable people. That is what set Ash off on his mission to spread the idea of chat benches. The idea is to have park benches with signs

on them saying 'happy to chat.' Whoever sits there signals that they don't mind striking up a conversation with a stranger.

Many people fear talking to strangers and see it as something that would make both parties uncomfortable. However a report from two behavioural scientists (Epley & Schroeder, 2019) suggests these beliefs may be unwarranted. We often underestimate the positive impact of connecting with others for both our own and others' wellbeing.

Mind you, many of us have encountered people who were happy to talk to us, but made us feel a little irked. It is true that some people are really good at talking, but not correspondingly good at listening - or realising when the other person is being bored or even creeped out. Then there are those taxi drivers who support extreme political positions...I always cop them. Don't you?

But seriously, the researchers did an experiment on the Chicago train system, as well as buses and taxis. They found that when people were randomly assigned to talk to strangers or not talk to strangers, the talkers reported having the most pleasant commute. And although only 40% expected the other person to join in, the actual result was 100%.

The positive results seemed to spread to BOTH parties to the conversations, not just the initiator. One reason 'may be that the experience of talking with others ... makes us realise they have a rich inner life of thoughts, feelings, emotions and experiences, just like us.'

Like the British, I suspect Australians are not quite as outgoing as Americans. But in any case, 'happy to chat' benches seem a simple way to do something to battle loneliness which effects people with complex mental health issues as much as it does elderly people. The idea was taken up by a number of Australian local governments, notably the Cities of Albany WA (pic), and Port Adelaide Enfield SA right on the eve of the Pandemic. Maybe it is time to give the movement a little push along again!

ABOVE: This Happy to Chat bench is to be found in the City of Albany, western Australia. PHOTO City of Albany WA

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Learning2B

Spreading Light on 'Dark Places'

By Keshavi Jeyaseelan and the O&I team



A vital part of the support Flourish Australia provides is building social, emotional and practical life skills. Our Outcomes & Improvements (O&I) team recently completed an evaluation of a pilot group educational program designed to do just that.

The program is 'Learning2B' (L2B). It consists of high quality video and learning resources on a range of topics. It supports people to gain the knowledge and skills they need as they progress through their journey of mental health recovery. We call this 'capacity building.'

Co-designed and co-developed with mental health workers and peer workers, a pilot program ran over two years at Flourish Australia's sites at Orange and Cranebrook. L2B topics address certain barriers to recovery in an engaging manner.

"The topics we focus on in Learning2B are fundamental life skills that can help you feel confident, safe and grounded on your recovery journey," said Jessie Haley, Senior Mental Health Worker. "By equipping yourself with these skills, I hope you can lead a life of choice, support and growth."

Topics include challenges such as learning how to budget, forming friendships, asserting oneself, practising self-care and anger

management. Ultimately, the resources aim to help all individuals embrace their progress, while also encouraging healthy reflection and a growth mindset.

From the pilot program, surveys found that around 92 per cent of participants say that the L2B program increased their knowledge and 85 per cent reported an increase in confidence around their recovery.

"Mental health is a dark place. These sessions provide positive tools to discover and learn about different pathways to recovery," said one participant.

While the program was primarily aimed at the people we support, we found that there were additional positive outcomes for peer workers too. Many felt the group sessions deepened and strengthened their rapport with those they support, with group discussions allowing people to open up in ways they hadn't before.

"I got to be in a different role every day, and I was able to identify people in the group who could also take on leadership roles and speak out or express their opinions on things," said one peer worker.

"The sessions made it possible to co-facilitate with the people in the group, and everyone got a chance to contribute."

"It was especially powerful listening to people who don't normally contribute all of a sudden opening up and speaking deeply, and in a way that allowed everyone in the group to engage in the conversation more intimately," said one of the managers of the L2B program, "That was probably the most beautiful thing to see."

How to be involved

People who access Flourish Australia's services: Ask your support worker or peer worker for more details on Learning2B and how you can start today!

Peer Workers: We encourage you to get in touch if you're interested in finding out more – we welcome your valuable feedback and input as we work to make this program stronger. There are quick and easy onboarding videos so you can train at any time to gain the confidence to jump in and start steering your own group program!

Further Information: If you have any questions about the program or the Learning2B Pilot Evaluation Report, please contact Dr Emily Hielscher (Emily.Hielscher@flourishaustralia.org.au) or Jessie Haley (Jessie.Haley@flourishaustralia.org.au).

ABOVE: Forming friendships is one of the topics of Learning2B.' PHOTO BY DIM HOU PIXABAY

A Practical Approach to a Lifetime of Insomnia



By Grant J Everett

Like many adolescents, in my teens my sleeping patterns changed quite a lot. I started going to bed much later, including school nights, and I'd sleep in on Saturdays rather than get up to watch Disney cartoons like I did when I was little.

By my mid-teens I went through times when I would be unable to sleep, tossing and turning for hours, even when I felt seriously tired. Some nights, I wouldn't get to sleep until ridiculous times like 3am or 4am, and while some people can function on five or six hours of rest a night, I am not one of them. At my worst, I wouldn't sleep at all. One time, I was awake for three straight days.

I always had a tough time waking up, and I'd feel like microwaved garbage by the time I got to school. When you're exhausted, your concentration and general brain functionality takes a real hit, and this seriously affected my schooling and, later in life, my work performance.

Taking prescription meds to sleep didn't help, as they only made it harder to wake up in the morning, which defeated the whole purpose of taking them. Relaxation exercises only bugged me, and herbal supplements did nothing. It probably didn't help that I had been forced to take a prescribed medication since

primary school that was basically a form of amphetamines.

My sleeping difficulties and my mental health issues also began around the same time, and when one worsened, so would the other.

Microsleeps

Later on I started to experience microsleeps, where I'd pass out just long enough for my chin to hit my chest. Microsleeps can strike repeatedly over hours, making my studies or work an endurance challenge where I would pass out for a moment literally hundreds of times in a row.

I'd do everything I could to stave off the microsleeps: I'd have coffee and energy drinks, go for brisk walks, talk to people, stretch, force my eyes open as wide as they could go, and...nothing. I'd be trying to write a sentence one moment, and then uncontrollably pass out.

Time for a change

I'm 40 years old now, and these issues have followed me my entire adult life, so I decided that 2024 was going to be the year I conquered my sleeping problems. Medical solutions hadn't helped, so I explored other, practical options.

For starters, six hours of sleep wasn't enough. Although it meant a fair bit of tossing and turning in

the beginning, I started turning off my video games, streaming and bedroom lights an hour earlier than usual. I also arranged to start my shift at work an hour later (I used to be one of the first people in the office). While this meant I wouldn't have as much time to myself after work, it was worth it to have enough rest to function.

I try to stay awake during the day so that I am more tired at bedtime.

I had no interest in sedatives, but I started taking a melatonin tablet about an hour before bed. These are over-the-counter pills that "promote" sleep rather than knock you out, and my GP and psychiatrist had no issue with me taking them as they are non-addictive.

I avoid all caffeine products and sugary stuff in the evening. Speaking of sugar, I have also kept on top of my diabetes, being sure to take my insulin and not to overdo it on naughty foods and drinks.

And just like that, I was getting eight hours of sleep a night! My wife has encouraged me to stick to my new routine, and although I've only been doing it for a few months, it's going great. I've hardly had any issues with microsleeps, I have been consistently getting to work on time and, best of all, I'm feeling great!

ABOVE: Sleeping can get very complicated. IMAGE BY RalfDesign FROM PIXABAY



PHOTO: Natatsha Matthews and Bridget Hatton pictured at the Kogarah Service PHOTO COURTESY OF NATATSHA AND BRIDGET

YPOP: Blending the Best of Both Worlds

By Warren Heggarty

When you need mental health support, it helps if everyone who works with you is on the 'same page' and also puts you at the centre. This is what Flourish Australia's Young People's Outreach Program at Kogarah is doing.

At the end of 2023, Bridget Hatton and Natatsha Matthews of the YPOP team at Kogarah gave a presentation demonstrating this to the entire Board of the South-Eastern Sydney Local Health District. The occasion was the inaugural South-Eastern Sydney Local Health District "Consumers and Partners' Showcase"

What is The Young People's Outreach Program (YPOP)? Natatsha explained, 'It is a goal oriented psychosocial support program for people aged between 15 and 25 years of age. As a team, we at YPOP have specialised skills and training in taking a person-centred approach. We use these skills so that the young people are empowered to create and sustain meaningful and fulfilling lives.'

'YPOP works alongside young people, recognising their strengths and capabilities,' said Bridget. 'We ensure that the young people themselves drive the steps they take toward recovery. This allows a sense of empowerment for the young people, which further supports their overall mental health recovery.'

It sounds like a 'virtuous cycle,' or a positive snowball effect! Panorama understands that the Kogarah Young People's Outreach Program team presentation was the top pick to present to the District Board. The Board provided great feedback to Natatsha and Bridget on the wonderful work the team are doing, and really appreciated the blended model of service in which the Local Health District works with Flourish Australia.

YPOP is 'Unique'

Natatsha said, 'The Board highlighted the great work YPOP are doing in the community. They told us that a psychosocial program like YPOP, supporting young people in such close collaboration with their clinical team, is a unique model of care, one that not all psychosocial support programs offer.'

Bridget said, 'The Board highlighted the connection the YPOP team has with the young people we support as we demonstrated in our presentation. We had shared a case study (which kept people's identities private) which showed them just how fundamental this connectedness is in effectively empowering young people in their recovery journey.'

Blended Model

Often there are two different teams working to support a person, the

clinical team (e.g., a Health Service) which includes medical and psychological services, and the non-clinical team (like Flourish Australia) which provides psychosocial and social services.

We asked Natatsha and Bridget to explain how YPOP's 'blended model of service' works. Natatsha said, 'It means collaboration between Flourish Australia and the Local Health District. This allows YPOP, which is non-clinical, to work collaboratively with the young person's clinical team. It means that we participate in clinical care planning meetings, team activities, in-services, and education sessions.'

'This unique service delivery model allows improved connections between the two teams,' said Bridget. 'It means better understanding and knowledge of each other's roles and responsibilities, and increased efficiency in making referrals leading to reduced wait times.'

Flourish Australia YPOP service

St George Community
Health Centre
L3, 15 Kensington St
Kogarah, NSW, 2217
1300 779 270

Menopause and Mental Health

Menopause is a natural process and we know anecdotally that it can be a difficult process for some women. Hot flushes and night sweats are often associated with menopause. The ABC recently reported on the severe challenges faced by one woman, Lesley Powell, around menopause.

Despite no history of depression, Lesley Powell suddenly found herself unable to cope with simple life activities, had suicidal thoughts and needed hospitalisation. Her psychiatrist believed it was associated with menopause. Hormone, anti-depressant and ART therapy brought improvement.

There are different views about whether menopause can cause mental health issues or whether it is merely coincidental. According to The Royal Women's Hospital in Victoria website there is no clear evidence that menopause causes mental health issues. This is supported by a 2016 long term study in Zurich led by Wulf Rossler and colleagues. In the more recent ABC story, Psychiatrist Jayashri Kulkarni, said about that half of women around menopause might develop some mental health issues ranging from 'brain fog' to depression, anxiety and memory problems.

If you develop severe depression with suicidal ideation at ANY age, you need support. If you develop such problems around menopause, it should not be dismissed as 'just part of the menopause.' Ultimately you need support.

(WH, Reviewed by Jade Ryall BOTH Program)

Source: Andrea Mayes, 'Menopause can lead to a steep decline in mental health.' ABC News 10 March 2024



Body Image and Social Media There's No Real Comparison

By Warren Heggarty

Perhaps you have noticed that nowadays everyone's face looks the same. Well, apparently they do on Instagram. Photo filters on social media are a lot cheaper than cosmetic surgery, but it seems that more and more of us ARE sufficiently dissatisfied with our appearance to go for surgery.

On December 14 2023 the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care brought into effect a new set of standards for cosmetic surgery. This was timely indeed. As the Commission says, 'cosmetic surgery is a billion dollar industry in Australia with thousands of procedures performed each year. Sector revenue has grown over the past five years to reach an estimated \$1.4 billion.'

Is this a good thing or a bad thing? This growth in cosmetic procedures might suggest a growth in people's dissatisfaction with their own bodies. There is a correlation between having a negative body image and having disordered eating. Psychologist Elena Tourni says

'Poor body image increases the risk for depression, anxiety and eating disorders as well as causing feelings of shame'

The types of 'modifications' we see on social media are of a different quality to years gone by. Once, beauty ideals were more about what was average. Nowadays, the lips are getting bigger and the noses are getting smaller...it is an age of extremes.

If negative body image brought about by social media is behind this, what can we do about it? We need to be careful about comparisons. Comparing ourselves (in body, mind or status) to OTHERS is not really helpful. It seems more productive to compare ourselves today to ourselves yesterday. That way, we can be more likely to make small, sustained, incremental improvements in any direction we desire.

The American Psychological Society says, too, that reducing social media usage significantly improves body image. Just saying!

ABOVE: Is it wise to copy images that are themselves distortions? IMAGE BY FILMBETRACHTER FROM PIXABAY



Tailoring to Individual Recovery Needs

By Dean Sheridan

Tailored care

Every person who accesses NDIS services at Caboolture is different, so that means we tailor what we offer. For instance...

CADEN has complex physical health issues that restrict his movement and his ability to do what he needs to do in the community. We've been supporting his self-sufficiency for a while now, and he's now started travelling to and from TAFE independently by train twice a week. This is something that he wouldn't even have considered doing just a couple of years ago.

SARAH has been organising a weekend trip to the Gold Coast so she can visit the theme parks there. One of our staff members will be assisting her to overcome her challenges, such as her feelings of anxiety, while she's away from home.

JOSH loves going out for a scenic drive, and we've been supporting him with this for years. He has identified this as a form of self-care that helps him to keep well.

Holistic support

Before the NDIS was rolled out in Caboolture, people who access services were supported under Flourish Australia's Transitional Recovery Program. Many of the people who currently access services at our location have also been in the care of services such as Queensland Health Community Mental Health and other mental health and wellness organisations. We support people in continuing with whatever other services that assist with maintaining their physical health and mental health. This may include attending appointments as moral support, or helping with paperwork and research.

PHOTO BY 5688709 PIXABAY

At the most recent Flourishing Awards, Flourish Australia's Caboolture NDIS staff took home the Team Of The Year gong. Dean Sheridan, Peer Worker at Caboolture, told us a bit about what this branch has to offer...

At the Caboolture office, we largely provide community access support, social opportunities and a sense of belonging for people with mental health issues in the Moreton Bay area of Brisbane, Queensland, through the NDIS.

We offer a range of fun, social activities (weather permitting) including movies, bowling, golfing at the driving range, BBQs, scenic drives to local landmarks, and

much more. For instance, every Friday the Caboolture office hosts a popular Scrabble battle between the regulars. This has become a great opportunity for social connection between the people who access services. There are two NDIS participants in particular who do battle every week, and they've even developed their own customised version of the rules.

We also offer a Women's Group that meets every Thursday where women can participate in activities like art, movies, self-care, recovery conversations, cooking and crafts.

As the people who access services meet regularly for all kinds of fun and fulfilling activities, they encourage one another to keep coming back.

Flourish Australia Caboolture Gubbi Gubbi Country

Office 1, Ground Floor, 33 King
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8:30am - 4:30pm weekdays
9:30am - 5:30pm weekends



WHEN BLAME BECOMES AVOIDANCE

Why Blame is a Recovery 'Dead End'

By Warren Heggarty

ABOVE: Blaming the one who broke your ankle will not heal it. Not even if it was your fault!
PHOTO BY VIKA GLITTER
FROM PIXABAY

Think of what would happen if the first thing everybody did whenever there was a problem was simply to blame someone. Firstly, there would be no incentive for anyone to take accountability for mistakes. Secondly, there would be no actual solutions. Things would fall apart pretty quickly. So, too, our ability to manage our mental health will decrease unless we take accountability for our own recovery. Blame becomes a dead end.

Psychotherapist Nicholas Balais says, 'one concerning trend I have noticed...is the inappropriate use of "mental health" as a catch-all excuse for our behaviours or moods... Sometimes [this] can cover up or shield an individual from taking responsibility for actions, behaviours, or mood, or excuse them from the work' that recovery requires. (Balais, 2023)

He gives three examples:

1. I can't go to work because it is bad for my mental health
2. I can't talk about this issue because it negatively affects my mental health
3. I was a jerk because I am suffering from mental health issues that are beyond my control.

In each of these cases, the person is bypassing the need to face up to something. What is it about work that makes it so hazardous and

how can the situation be helped? How can you overcome this issue if you will not even discuss it - like a 'Catch 22' situation? The third case, says Balais, is the most dangerous because it shows a lack of responsibility for your own mental health.

Two things may be true at once. You may well have been 'provoked' into being a jerk by some injustice. But it can also be simultaneously true that you are not helping the situation by behaving that way. Indeed, you may be undermining yourself. If you are in the right, behaving like a jerk will make you look as though you are in the wrong.

Psychoanalyst Wolfgang Giegerich explained that when we externalise a problem (it's because of work, it's because bad things happen to me all the time, it's because the police hate me) we make it impossible actually to DO anything about it ourselves.

An article by counsellor Tim Hoffman describes how psychiatry seemed to take responsibility away from us, blaming chemical imbalances and such like for our behaviour. The catch here is that the more you subscribe to this explanation of your behaviour, the more power you hand over to other people, the less in control of your own life you become. You stop looking for solutions. You stop learning. (Hoffman, 2017)

Hoffman says that although it may well be true that sometimes external forces and things beyond our control might be responsible for our mental health issues, it is still our own responsibility to get better. No one can recover for us, and the more we blame 'mental illness' or the actions of others, the more we delay our recovery journeys.

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Employment Support

Opportunities to work, learn, and pursue your employment goals.

Available roles

We will work with you to find a job that fits your needs. Examples of supported employment roles that we have helped people find include the following:



Commercial and Home Cleaning



Packaging Solutions



Mail Delivery Solutions



Ground and Garden Maintenance



Digital Scanning and Secure Document Management



Fleet Vehicle Cleaning

“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
- Encourage people to achieve their employment goals
- Provide on-the-job training and support

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.

Come talk to us:

We will help you achieve your employment goals.

📞 1300 779 270 ✉️ hello@flourishaustralia.org.au

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AUSTRALIA

Where mental wellbeing thrives