

# Mental health 'lived experience' is key

For 20 years, Judi struggled to support her adult son through crisis after crisis. Brendan, now 40, was frequently in distress and often in hospital.

Judi's life became a constant pattern of emergency response, doubt and searching for reliable support for her son while she shut herself off from her own needs.

"I had no idea what to do to help him or where to seek help," Judi says. "The hardest thing for me was not being heard by mental health and medical professionals."

With standard care and medical treatment failing Brendan, Judi turned to Flourish Australia, a not-for-profit organisation which for more than 60 years has supported people with their mental health recovery.

Operating in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and the ACT, the organisation has many peer workers who have a 'lived experience' of a mental health issue.

Flourish Australia's support changed everything for Brendan and Judi. Staff listened to Brendan's concerns and helped Judi to understand what was going on.

"The moment Flourish Australia became involved everything changed for the better," says Judi. "Brendan feels safe now and I have the peace of mind that comes with knowing he is surrounded by supportive people."

Almost half the people employed by Flourish Australia have had their own experience of a mental health issue, which makes them well placed to support with

genuine understanding and insight more than 7000 people a year.

Flourish Australia is also a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) service provider specialising in supporting people with a psychosocial disability.

More than 1500 people currently access supports. It is estimated that eventually about 12 per cent of those receiving support through the NDIS will have a psychosocial disability.

**'The right amount of support at the right time can make all the difference.'**

**Mark Orr**

The support provided is personal rather than clinical and takes many forms, says Flourish Australia CEO Mark Orr. People are supported to learn new skills, return to education or find a job they love. Support can include helping people find a home and encouraging them to be an active part of their local community, getting out and about, exercising, eating well and making friends.

"A psychosocial disability can make everyday life challenging," says Orr. "Some people can find social situations, communicating effectively with others and getting and holding down a job difficult."

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Staff aim to walk alongside a person



Judi is confident of her son Brendan's future, with the support of Flourish Australia.

rather than do things for them. "We really believe in people and their ability to take on challenges and succeed," says Orr. "And this is where the lived experience of our peer workers is so crucial, because they have often already been there and have an understanding of what those journeys look like."

Flourish Australia works with people to help them establish their own goals. "Our support is different for everybody," says Orr. "We work with the person to identify where

they want to head and how to get there. They're in the driver's seat."

Doing new things and taking risks is easier when you have a network of empathetic supporters. This peer understanding and support helped Brendan, and his mum, move forward.

"A lot of people like Brendan have lost confidence," says Orr. "We support the person to identify their dreams and build their confidence so that they can live their best life, just like their friends."

*Flourish*  
like Judi

...for us, flourishing is when my son Brendan's mental health and my wellbeing are taken care of.

-Judi, carer and mum

To learn about our recovery-focused mental health support, including NDIS services, call 1300 356 874 now.

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