

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

panorama

Quarterly Issue #74. December 2019

Big Physical Health and Sports Edition!

Pages of Panor-ARTS-ma!

TheMHS conference reports

- Career Springboard
- Battling Dragons
- Hunting Unicorns
- Running for Fun...ds
- Functional Neurological Disorder

flourish[®]
AUSTRALIA

Where mental wellbeing thrives

NDIS provider since 2013



Where mental wellbeing thrives

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 64 of our services in NSW and Southern Queensland.

Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270

flourishaustralia.org.au

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.

Chair: Prof Elizabeth More AM

CEO: Mark Orr AM

Chief Development Officer, Peter Neilson

General Manager, Inclusion: Fay Jackson
Manager, Development Projects: Jasmin Moradides

Editorial Assistance: Tina Irving

Publications Office:

Grant J Everett and Warren Heggarty,

Subscriptions

Warren: (02) 9393 9021

Grant: (02) 9393 9022

Address: Publications Officer, 5 Figtree Drive,
Sydney Olympic Park, NSW 2127

panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au

Warren.Heggarty@flourishaustralia.org.au

or Grant.Everett@flourishaustralia.org.au

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.

CONTENTS

The cover is an original digital art work by Scott Gourlay. See his story on page 24

RECOVERY STORIES

- 4 John does battle with dragons
- 5 SUICIDE PREVENTION: Asking the hard question saves lives.
- 6 You've come to the right place
- 7 Donna's new forehead
- 10 Nurturing Acceptance and Inclusion for the Transgender Community
- 12 Tackling Mental Health with Sharny
- 14 Hunting Unicorns, Trying to be Normal, and Other Futile Life Goals
- 16 Peter Donovan: A lifelong love affair with fine art
- 18 Blue Fringe Exhibition
- 19 Satisfaction from Helping Others: Noeleen, StrokeSafe Ambassador
- 20 Functional Neurological Disorder: Kate Gill talks about founding a new organisation to fill a gap in services
- 23 Prestige Pets: Caregiver benefits and caregiver burdens.
- 24 Scott: My Life and Schizophrenia
- 26 Sophie's App Assisted Art
- 28 Flourish Australia's Colouring Wall!

PHYSICAL HEALTH

- 30 Setting up, Spiking and Supporting: Buck House Volleyball
- 31 Zumba: Getting Fit and Having Fun
- 32 Penny Pushes Herself to the Limit in the Tumut Fun Run
- 34 Everyone's a winner in a club for Winter swimmers!
- 35 Making a Racquet: Buck House Tennis Social Day 2019
- 36 Running for Fun...ds
- 37 "Exercise is a universal human right," says Dr Simon Rosenbaum

EVENTS

- 38 TheMHS Brisbane 2019
- 39 Could YOU present at TheMHS 2020?
- 40 TheMHS: Healing language
- 41 TheMHS: What do we really think about the people who provide our Mental Health services?
- 42 Gladesville Hospital Cemetery
- 43 Mental Health Month at Katoomba
- 44 Peer Space Workshop
- 45 Community Advisory Council
- 46 2019 Annual General Meeting
- 48 Newcastle's New Outdoor Upgrade
- 48 Home Cleaning Skills through NDIS
- 49 Making a Big Issue

EMPLOYMENT

- 50 Lucinda Brogden: Workplace Mental

Health

- 51 National Carers Week
- 52 Career Springboard at Harris Park
- 54 Working in the Clean Room, Murrumbidgee

CONTRIBUTORS

Scott Gourlay accesses Flourish Australia's Taree, NSW. He is Deputy Chair of the Community Advisory Council

John Baillie accesses Flourish Australia's YPOP (Young People's Outreach Program) at Kogarah NSW

Donna Wilkinson from Peak Hill is following up the story we previously did on her and husband Mozzie who is Chair of Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council

Noeleen accesses Flourish Australia's Nowra service and is a volunteer StrokeSafe ambassador

Sophie Stringer has lived experience of Multiple Sclerosis and formerly volunteered with MS Australia

Wendy Chin works at Flourish Australia's Olympic Park NSW service

Penny Bassett accesses Flourish Australia's Tumut NSW service

John Maraz is Flourish Australia's Senior Workforce Development Coordinator

Jade Ryall is Flourish Australia's Back on Track Health Program Manager

Bill Robertson is The Big Issue's Vendor Support in Newcastle

Peter Donovan is an artist who accesses Flourish Australia services at Lithgow

Kim Jones is Projects Officer, Inclusion, at Flourish Australia's Olympic Park Service

Michaeli Gwilliam is Manager at Flourish Australia's Newcastle service

Karen Jurss presented at TheMHS 2019, and accesses Flourish Australia services at Hervey Bay

Peter Farrugia is Flourish Australia's Peer Workforce Program Manager

Neil Fenelon Official photography

Fay Jackson is Flourish Australia's General Manager Inclusion

Jasmin Moradides is Flourish Australia's Development Projects Manager

Tina Irving editorial assistance

Grant J Everett writing, editing, designing, additional photography

Warren Heggarty writing, editing, designing, additional photography

And a host of others, if only we had the space to mention them!

Contributions welcome. We especially like to read recovery stories from people with lived experience of mental health issues!



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: <https://www.flourishaustralia.org.au/family-and-carers>

Mental Health Carers NSW
Ph: 1300 554 660

Arafmi Queensland
Ph: (07) 3254 1881

**Private Mental Health
Consumer Carer Network**
Ph: 1300 620 042

Mental Health Carers Australia
Ph: 1300 554 660

Kids Helpline
Ph: 1800 551 800

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



ABOVE: Now John is ready to take on some 'REAL' Dungeons and Dragons, in a manner of speaking. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

John does battle with dragons

Dungeons and Dragons was given a mental health spin, and John explains how it is helping him to make community connections.

By John Baillie as told to Warren Heggarty

I have been accessing Flourish Australia's YPOP (Young People's Outreach Program) at Kogarah for a few years now. It is located on the same site as the St George Community Mental Health Service. One of the clinicians there, Terry, came up with the idea of a role-playing game based on Dungeons and Dragons but with a mental health spin. She was assisted by Mary Brennan from Flourish Australia.

In Dungeons and dragons people take on a character of their own creation and set forth on a quest. For example, you might be an Elf scout looking for an Orc hideout so that a raiding party can go in and finish the Orcs off. A Dungeon Master will serve the role of lead story teller, adjudicator of rules and describer

of scenes.

This particular series of Dungeons and Dragons was played between half a dozen people all of whom have lived experience of mental health issues. Not only that, but the creatures we battled were not just Orcs or Dragons, but things related to mental health, such as PTSD and Low Self Esteem.

We met up weekly for eight weeks, battling a new creature each week. Now the first time we met up to play, I think you could say that everyone was a bit nervous; but by the end of it, everyone was feeling fine.

What made it a bit easier was that all of the people there knew what it was like to experience mental health issues. Starting something off is the hardest part, but you know what they say about momentum: once it starts, it's hard to stop.

Contrary to what some people think, the idea is not necessarily to KILL the creatures we battle. There is more than one way to skin a cat. Why destroy a creature if tying it up will serve the same purpose, and allow you to continue with your quest?

Before coming to YPOP I suppose you

might have called me a "Directionless Disaster." Now I'm very focused and goal oriented. The goals themselves are not really ends in themselves, but I see them as stepping stones through life.

In the early days one of the things I did with my support workers was transport training, that is, getting used to public transport. The idea behind this was so that I could eventually get about on my own and do things for myself. This also helped me to socialise, which is important to recovery.

Past experiences had led to me thinking of travel as more dangerous than it was. The training reinforced the idea that most things out there are OK. It helped me realise that travel was not as difficult as I was thinking. It's true that not EVERYTHING is under your own control, but many things are.

The same principle applies to socialising with other people. The thing I like about games is that after the game you get a sense of completion and success. So when you combine that with meeting and forming a connection with other people, it's a pretty good outcome. Speaking of which, very soon I will be playing REAL Dungeons and Dragons. OK not literal Dungeons and Dragons, but a regular game of D&D in a social group that meets through one of the games shops in the community. This time it will not have the mental health modifications.

Recently I was involved in a collaborative book project called OUR OWN WORDS. It is made up of stories of how people live through extreme distress and get past it. There were 52 people involved. You can find out more here <https://www.facebook.com/insideoutconversations/>

I wrote a chapter called 'A Stranger I Remain' which has the basic message 'if you're going through hell, keep going because in the end you will find what you are looking for.' In the end it's not just about overcoming things, it's about becoming better.

Thanks to Kevin Chung for his assistance with this story

**Flourish Australia, YPOP
Level 1, 15 Kensington Street
Kogarah NSW 2217
1300 779 270**

Asking the hard question saves lives

Learning and Development Course Review

Grant J Everett

The only way we will begin to reduce our society's tragically high rates of suicide is to bring this taboo topic out of the shadows. Please speak to somebody if you feel you are at risk of self-harm or suicide.

A number of Flourish Australia employees from many different services and roles met at Figtree Conference Centre on the 3rd and 4th of October to attend the ASIST Suicide Prevention workshop (ASIST stands for Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training).

The ASIST workshop was run by two qualified Trainers from the LivingWorks organisation (the leader in suicide intervention training) and two Flourish Australia staff who were learning how to provide the ASIST course in-house. The eventual aim is for everybody employed by Flourish Australia (both presently and in the future) to attend this workshop. Being able to teach this to our own staff members (who number almost 700 at this point in time) makes a lot of sense.

Preventing suicide is more straightforward than you think

The trainers were able to keep things interesting and engaging by running the workshop with a variety of activities. We filled in worksheets, had question and answer sessions, watched short films, did a number of group activities, and performed quite a few roleplays.

We were taught how to watch for red flags, as you don't need to be a psychologist to notice if somebody is acting out of character. The better you know a person, the easier it will be to spot something out of the ordinary. We were taught how to connect with people who are feeling really down, and to reassure

them that there is actually a lot of support available out there that can support them through the hardest of times. It's always a good idea to follow up to ensure they're doing okay.

When we are supporting somebody, it's important to listen rather than talk. But if we feel that somebody is at any risk of self-harm or suicide, then there is really only one question we can ask that matters: "Do you feel suicidal? Do you want to end your life?"

This is why every participant in the workshop had to take turns roleplaying in front of the class where one person played a character with suicidal urges, and the other was a support person who asks them The Question. While this sounds simple enough, especially seeing as though it was just a roleplay, many of us found it surprisingly difficult to actually ask the other person if they wanted to take their own life. After all, every human has their own long list of taboo questions that we know never to ask (e.g., are you pregnant, when are you having kids, how did such-and-such die, pretty much every single question surrounding people's sex lives or finances), and asking someone about their suicidal urges will definitely feel as though it belongs on that list.

However, the major take-home message at the end of the workshop was that talking to somebody about suicide will NOT increase their chances of making an attempt on their own life; in fact, speaking with somebody about these urges and feelings and even the specifics of their plans has been shown to REDUCE the chances they will try to commit suicide.

If somebody tells you they have a plan to kill themselves then it's great that you can be there for them to try to defuse the situation, but we also need to be

able to discern when it's time to encourage them to involve the experts. Some options can include family, their GP, a mental health team, or calling Lifeline.

What people said about the ASIST workshop

"I really enjoyed the ASIST training. I thought the facilitators presented the information in a clear and engaging way. I learnt a lot about the language that is used when speaking to someone with suicidal thoughts and the positive outcomes it can achieve! I would recommend this training to work colleagues, friends and family." *Angela Moriarty, Peer Worker*

"I found doing the role plays was very challenging but highly beneficial because it gave us an opportunity to utilise the suggested words and phrases needed to conduct those difficult conversations. Having the guidance of four ASIST trainers and being able to work in smaller groups was very supportive." *Fiona Thistlethwaite, Conference Centre Assistant Supervisor*

"I felt the ASIST training was wonderfully facilitated. The course participants were made to feel safe and comfortable. We were given plenty of opportunities to digest the course content, to share experiences and debrief. All of this was vitally important...the ASIST PAL model is an excellent way to remember the steps to take while communicating with a person who is at risk of suicide, so I'd highly recommend everyone try to do the training. Thanks to Sally, Liz, Janet and Kara." *Kim Jones, Project Officer Inclusion*

"What I found most useful in the workshop was the role play exercises where the trainers were pretending to be people having suicidal thoughts and they asked participants to respond to their manner. The videos and role play exercises throughout the workshop made it both engaging and interactive...would highly recommend it to anyone, not just people working in the mental health field." *Erin Speirs, Mental Health Worker, Marrickville HASI*

"I really enjoyed the ASIST Suicide Prevention Training. I found it really fun and engaging despite any previous ideas I had on the subject. The training enabled me to leave confident and fully qualified to assist anyone that is experiencing or engaging in suicide behaviours. I would definitely recommend it...the more people who are trained on this subject the better!" *Joshua Leviste, Mental Health Worker, Seven Hills*

Enquiries and referrals: You've come to the right place!



Above: Kathy, Patricia and Mark are all experienced in recovery-based mental health services. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

Having to tell a distressing story over and over when linking with mental health support is something that our enquiries and referrals team aims to eliminate.

By Warren Heggarty

When you contact someone about a mental health problem, you may feel fairly nervous or confused already so you don't want to experience The Runaround in reply.

Kathy and Patricia, of our Enquiries and Referrals team got an email from a young man on the Central Coast of NSW who wanted to find somewhere he could go to make new friends who would accept him and understand that he has challenges that he is managing. He also

wanted support to apply for a job. He had contacted us after finding Flourish Australia's web site.

Kathy and Patricia went searching for a service that could assist him and found a great one near his home. From what he'd said in his email, they thought he might like the look of a particular drop in centre for people over 18 years of age, where visitors, members, volunteers, staff and students all join in with activities, such as wellness workshops, sports, and other interest groups. So they emailed a brochure to him containing the details.

Flourish Australia actually didn't have a service near this young man's home, but we didn't fob him off. We found one run by another company. It is important for people with mental health issues to know that the people that are meant to assist them are actually going to do just that!

Kathy, Patricia and Mark (pictured having breakfast in the office!) know that for many of the people who contact us it will be their FIRST CONTACT with a mental health service. Kathy and Patricia

have been in that situation themselves, and Mark started managing Flourish Australia's NDIS services from the time it was rolled out in NSW in 2013, so they all know that the first contact is so important.

"We need to make people feel welcome and listened to," said Kathy

"We need to show empathy," said Patricia.

"We need to make each interaction with people a quality interaction," said Mark.

They sound like they are all on the same page!

"We capture the information and pass it on so people don't need to tell their story over and over," said Kathy.

Essential to their "no wrong door" approach, the enquiries team works to build relationships with local Flourish Australia sites, all 71 of them. Not to mention services that are run by other organisations as in our example. Kathy says "We received an enquiry from a lady who had received a

letter from a housing provider, which detailed a complaint about her, made by a neighbour. This lady was worried. She was fearful of what might happen, and was asking for support. I said to her that by end of the next day she will be getting a phone call from a Flourish Australia service near her, and I gave her the names of two people there. I said to her that with one of our support workers beside her, she could decide the best way to deal with the letter. The worker could also assist her in finding out about other local services she might want to try out as well."

Occasionally, they will get a query from a person who has been knocked back for NDIS funding. It so happens that Flourish Australia are able to help people prepare for their approach to NDIS. We have the experience to know how you can ensure that you make a full case in favour of your eligibility.

Even if you are not eligible, there may still be things we can do to assist. We can provide you with information and link you with someone in your local area.

"A number of phone-in enquiries are actually from support workers/support co-ordinators on behalf of their participants. We want to encourage phone calls from the people who are actually going to be using the services. We want them to feel confident to dial our number themselves."

Phone 1300 356 874 for NDIS enquiries (Monday to Friday, 9.00am-5.00pm)

Phone 1300 779 270 for general enquiries, OR go to Flourish Australia's website:

www.flourishaustralia.org.au/

Click "Contact Us" and complete the enquiry form and we will get back to you as soon as we can.



Donna's new forehead

Taking the initiative and seizing an opportunity led to Donna having a long delayed operation.

Above: "Maurice had been very worried about the fact that I didn't have a forehead to protect the front of my brain." PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

By Donna Wilkinson

The story so far...

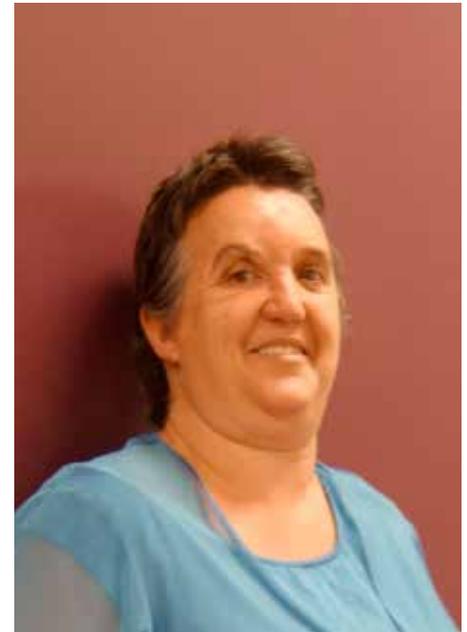
In the story 'Mozzy and Donna' in the March 2019 Quarterly issue of Panorama, we read how Donna had been involved in a freak accident in 2002. Her husband Mozzy Wilkinson (who just happens to be the Chair of the Flourish Australia Community Advisory Council) was a sprint car racer at the time. While carrying out maintenance the wheel rim blew up and struck Donna in the face. She received severe head injuries as well as brain injury and required extensive surgery. The surgery did not always turn out to be completely successful, and Donna had to endure

more operations, serious infection and even bureaucracy...at the end of that story she said 'Hopefully next year I'll get a new forehead.' Well, that is exactly what happened! - Editor

I was going to have the new forehead put in in May 2018. I went through the pre-op steps and had a mould made in preparation. But then I had an allergic reaction to the antibiotics and the operation couldn't go ahead. It was very disappointing because I had hoped to have the operation before Christmas 2018 and I had already had to wait so long.

(Continued next page)

Recovery



Above: Photos of Donna, BEFORE the recent operation PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY **DURING her hospitalisation you could see the extent of the suturing against the pillow** PHOTO BY MOZZY WILKINSON **and AFTER** PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

Donna's New Forehead

(continued from previous page)

At one stage they even seem to have lost the mould of my forehead... I was beginning to think that the operation would never happen. I managed to put it out of my head.

Over a year later, in June 2019, Maurice (ie., Mozzzy) had to travel up to Sydney from Peak Hill where we live to have some dental surgery at Westmead Hospital. He said to me I should make a phone call about my forehead while I was in town. People can palm you off when it's just a phone call, but when you're actually in town, and in another part of the hospital, it might make a difference. He warned me not to go too far, though, but to keep it polite. I did my best.

Have you found my forehead yet?

So I just rang them up while Maurice was under anaesthetic getting his teeth done and I said "I'm here at the hospital. I was wondering if you had found my forehead yet."

Things moved very quickly after that. One and a half hours after Maurice was finished, I got a pre-op session. So we ended up being at Westmead the whole day, but it was worth it because things were now moving.

A couple of days later, I actually had the operation. We stayed at a friend's place in Sydney in a caravan.

Maurice had been very worried about the fact that I didn't have a forehead to protect the front of my brain. He was worried about things like leaving cupboards open, or anything at head height that I might bump into. I could see his point. As one surgeon explained to me, the brain is a bit like the yolk of an egg and you have to be careful not to break the membrane.

I was also anxious and wanted it done. So when the ball started rolling that day I thought, there is no backing out now. Something could have gone wrong, and I had to plan for that possibility. It's a good thing to let people know what to do if you are unable to do it yourself.

Weighing up

The operation was pretty intense and so I just weighed up the good versus the bad.

On the one hand I was so sick of looking like that. It was a reminder of the accident. I wanted to be able to wear make up properly and so on. Looks were probably the main thing that motivated me. But then there was the danger, because I was missing a bone, part of my brain was unprotected.

As it happens when they did the operation they had to grind the bone

away to let the plate fit, because the bone had changed shape.

As soon as I got it done I was so happy! It had been 17 years since the original accident.

I was out of the hospital on the fifth day. In on Monday night, out on Friday morning. But they said I couldn't drive for three months. That was the longest three months of my life! It was in case of a seizure...not that I drive much but it's much better for my independence to know that I CAN drive if I need to.

Maurice was worried about me going shooting and damaging my brain from the recoil. I like hunting for rabbits on Dad's farm, 200 acres at Carris Creek near Wellington. I set up targets and shoot them too. After the operation, the doctor said, shooting was OK. My new forehead ought to hold.

After the operation, I noticed some lumps in my head that weren't there before. I asked the doctor about them.

The doctor said, "those are screws."

I said, "They are painful when I put pressure on them."

So the doctor said, "Well then, don't put pressure on them!"

Anyway, I've got my life back now. I can't wait until I get all my hair back.

As told to Warren Heggarty

flourish
AUSTRALIA

Community
Businesses



We
support
the NDIS

PROFESSIONAL MAINTENANCE SERVICES

Flourish Australia's community businesses provide quality maintenance services with a smile. Including:



Grounds
Maintenance



Cleaning
Services



Prestige
Packing



Business
Services

Flourish Australia is a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider. We can provide NDIS recipients with lawn mowing, garden maintenance and domestic cleaning services.

SERVICES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Flourish Australia supports people living with a mental health issue to access employment. We provide comprehensive workplace training to all community business employees, along with the option of completing work-related TAFE qualifications onsite. This means highly professional services at a very competitive price!

Contact us for a FREE quote: Phone: 1300 939 300 Email: darren.field@flourishaustralia.org.au

[f /CommunityBusinesses](#) flourishaustralia.org.au



Nurturing acceptance and inclusion for the transgender community

Spencer McGill, a peer worker with Flourish Australia, attended the 2019 TheMHS Conference in Brisbane to make a presentation called “Gender Transition: Supporting change, naturally darlink!” This was an opportunity for Spencer to share what it’s like to be a transgender man, how the wider community can support trans people, and to dispel a few well-entrenched myths. As told to Grant J Everett.

How did you come to work with Flourish Australia, Spencer?

Following a stay in a mental health unit,

I was lucky enough to be supported by peer workers. Once I found out what peer workers do for a living and how to become one, I instantly knew this was the path for me. As fate would have it, a peer worker role came up in my town of Deniliquin. I began the job in January 2019 and the rest, as they say, is history!

How has your time been with Flourish Australia so far?

It’s been absolutely wonderful! I receive support every working day from my fantastic colleagues and Manager. It’s very refreshing to be part of such a robust and passionate organisation, and I can’t see myself changing careers anytime soon.

How do you feel about the ways Flourish Australia is supporting the cause of transgender acceptance?

As a transgender man myself, it certainly is a matter close to my heart. I feel Flourish Australia is at the forefront of supporting not only awareness, but inclusivity.

Do you believe Flourish Australia is doing enough within the scope of our Diversity policy?

Flourish Australia is exceptionally supportive of diversity and inclusion, and yes, I do think across the board that Flourish Australia are doing enough. Every step towards acceptance and inclusion is a great one.

What is a common misconception about people who are trans?

There are SO many misconceptions! I think a very common one is that all trans people are “visibly” trans, which is just incorrect. Trans people are just as diverse as the general population, and each time someone says to me “I’ve never met a trans person before!” I always ask them “Well, how do you know?” In the end, we’re just human beings trying to live our lives.

Neighbours recently had a storyline focused on Mackenzie, a trans character played by trans activist and actress Georgie Stone. How important is it for the trans community to have prominent voices like this?

I can’t quite articulate just how important having trans representation on various media is for the trans population. Although I’ve not seen Georgie Stone’s performance, I do think it’s uplifting and vital to see a trans character portrayed by a trans person. We’re surrounded by representations of diversity in media throughout our daily lives, but trans people don’t often get to see a reflection of ourselves. It’s affirming and important that trans people, especially younger trans people, get to see accurate representations of themselves in media.

Looking back over the past twenty years, do you think society used to have a lot more “casual” transphobia than we do now? For instance, the endless LGBTI jokes in Friends have not aged well, or the guys on The Footy Show dressing up as women for a laugh.

I agree wholeheartedly that a lot of the ways we used to speak were steeped in judgement and/or transphobia. But being an eternal optimist, I see this as a lack of education on the matter. As you said previously, there are more trans people in the media now, which aids in breaking down misconceptions and stigma. Now that society is becoming more aware of how language can impact on people who are gender non-conforming or trans or gender diverse,

Recovery

it seems we're starting to navigate around discriminatory language, which is promising.

What changes have you seen in the perception and the treatment of the trans community in your time?

I'm only 32, but I began my transition back when I was 18 years old. Nowadays, medical professionals are able to treat, validate and affirm trans persons much more easily than just a decade ago. I believe this is thanks to a large push in education and rights from organisations both locally and around the world. In terms of perception we still have a way to go, but I feel over the last twenty years we've seen a large improvement in the treatment and perception of trans people.

Are things getting better? How?

Things *are* getting better! Medical technology is advancing, medical professionals are taking the time to upskill their knowledge about trans people and gender diversity, we have wonderful policies (such as the Flourish Australia Diversity Policy) to galvanize rights, and we are more widely accepted and supported than ever before. For instance, I never thought I'd see the day that Hay in rural NSW would hold a Mardi Gras parade, and they'll be embarking on their 3rd one next year.

Why are pronouns so important?

Using the right pronouns (he, she, him, her) is especially important to trans people, as for a lot of our lives we've been called by the wrong ones. Some might even prefer a complete lack of pronouns (i.e., they or them) if they don't identify as either gender. This is something that is so simple, and yet it can make a lasting impact on a person's mental health. This small supportive step can affirm a trans persons' place in society.

Why should disclosing your trans status be entirely up to the discretion of the trans person?

I love this question, it is SO important. Trans people should always have ownership over their story, similarly to how a person with a medical condition can choose whether or not to disclose. Often, allies, family and friends will be so excited when somebody they love

transitions that they'll want to share that love by disclosing it to everyone, but this should be avoided. Not only can this endanger a trans person (either directly with discrimination or violence, or indirectly with threats to their sense of wellbeing or safety), but it can also disempower them. As a trans person, it's very important to me that I choose when and how I disclose my status, as well as to who. If somebody asks me if they can disclose and gives me the context, I'm generally happy for them to do so, but please always err on the side of caution and don't disclose someone's status unless you've been explicitly told otherwise.

Do all trans people know that their gender identity doesn't match their body from the very start? Or do you get people in their twenties or older who suddenly identify as trans?

No, there is no "one way" to be trans. I know of some people who have lived a large portion of their lives as one gender and then societal circumstances, or financial circumstances, have finally allowed them to transition. People can transition at any age, too. Some trans people take hormones, some do not. Some trans people have surgeries, some do not. I can only speak from my own

experience, and in my case I was aware that my body did not align with my gender identity from a very young age.

Do strangers seem to think that asking trans people highly personal questions is okay? Why do you think this is?

YES. Yes they do! I struggle with this one myself in some situations! I believe people are innately curious, and when they find someone who is willing to offer answers to little-asked questions, they tend to get excited. Something I can recommend is if you wouldn't ask a cisgender (non-trans) person a specific question, then you might want to rethink why you want to ask a trans person that question. For example, a lot of people like to casually ask about genitalia or surgeries. Would you ask anyone else you'd just met those questions? It seems a little rude to me!

Further reading

www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/28/trans-young-people-suicide-support-mental-health

Flourish Australia's Diversity Policy

chirp.flourishaustralia.org.au/node/904



ABOVE: Spencer with his wife, Judith



Talking Mental Health with Sharny

Sharny Dudley is a Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Goulburn service.

How did you come to work for Flourish Australia?

I was regularly checking jobsites like Seek and Indeed to find a position within the mental health sector. When this Peer Worker job with Flourish Australia popped up, I applied three times and pestered them with emails until I got an interview. I was eager to get myself in the door as young as possible. It's already been 11 months.

What does your role as a Peer Worker involve?

Many things! Being a Peer Worker is a lot like being a friend. I feel this role comes naturally to me, as people have always relied on me for help and advice, and I always felt my best when supporting somebody. Some of the daily things I do at work include chatting to people, supporting them in their goal planning, and just enjoying their company and stories. We also try to make the most of our time with the participants and to encourage them on their recovery journey. This can involve domestic support and community access. We often run things in groups to ensure everyone gets enough attention.

Why did you become a Peer Worker?

It started on my own personal mental health journey. I was in an acute mental health unit, and I remember that we had these "peer workers" coming through daily. Unlike the psychiatrists and psychologists and social workers, I wasn't sure what these people actually did. But I eventually gained access to a peer worker during my stay, and they really opened my eyes and made a difference in my recovery. They listened to me, cared about where I was at and, most importantly, I felt as if they were my friend, and I wasn't being judged. From that moment I knew I would end up working within the mental health sector. And now I am.

What's your work schedule like? How many hours do you do per week?

I currently am employed part-time, as I am studying full time to become a social worker. Doing a Bachelors degree is hard work! But I believe what I learn I should put into practice, since I am lucky enough to be able to do so. So I work Monday to Wednesday, sometimes weekends.

Do you support many people at the Goulburn service? How?

Yes, we manage the participants as a team. We have a key work load, and I personally support four people who keep me very busy! But we all support every participant.

Do you enjoy your work?

I love my work! It doesn't usually feel like work to me, just everyday life!

Is there something special you bring to your role as a peer worker?

I think all peer workers bring something special to the mental health sector. It isn't an easy role, though, and you are often exposed to uncommon events and conversations. I personally feel as though I was born with a huge heart, and I believe that every human being is deserving of love and should be able to live a healthy and happy life. Those who know me can vouch that I will always try my best to make someone see the positives in every situation life throws at them,. It's all we can do, really.

Have you received support from a service like Flourish Australia in the past?

Kind of. I've had exposure to the community mental health team since

Recovery

the age of 15.

How is your recovery journey going?

I won't sugarcoat it: it's still very hard and some days are daunting. But I'm living, working, studying and seeing the best in what life throws at me. I have come so far, and while still have a long way to go, working where I do is definitely good for my journey. Peer work is an empowering profession, and even on my very worst days there is always someone nearby to lift me back up. I truly believe that if all humans

**"I think all peer workers bring something special to the mental health sector."
-Sharny**

treated each other with respect and kindness a lot of our issues would vanish, and I love to preach that in my work.

How do you stay well?

By exercising, chatting, listening to music, kissing my dogs, preaching gratitude, spending time with friends and family, and remembering how far I have come. Putting what I've learnt into action plays a major role. A number of people – including my psychologist, my family, my friends and myself – also support me to stay well.

I think I've been supportive of my friends and family ever since I was born, and they love to share with me. So of course I support them when they're in

need, but not in a full time carer role or anything like that.

What's your advice to somebody who might be going through something similar to what you have survived?

Keep being yourself, and remember that time heals everything. Eventually, the painful things you're worrying about now won't matter anywhere near as much. If you need help, speak up! If you need someone to listen, tell them! There is always someone out there to care for you, whether they're friends, family, mental health professionals, mental health workers, or peer workers.

We all share a passion: to support people on their personal recovery to remember their own purpose in life! And of course there will be days where we fall back or go backwards, it's all part of the journey! Remember to keep moving forward, at your own pace.

I'm currently doing a Bachelor of Social Work at Charles Sturt University. I love studying, and I get bored if I'm not learning something. My end goal is to become a social worker, probably based within my local community to begin with. I would love to eventually end up in forensic psychology. But I am also comfortable with social work. I also think that this degree might help with my career at Flourish Australia.

Are you planning on any studies afterwards?

Probably. I always say "I am done" after each course, but then I get bored and continue in another field of study.

Do you have any other goals in mind?

To be happy, to leave a positive impact on people's lives, and to continue watching the successful stories that come out of working within the mental health field.

Besides work and study, what gives you meaning?

My family and friends, and expressing my feelings through poetry and journaling. I also live for animals, I love them all. Nature is pretty cool, too.

What do you do for fun?

I love gardening, even though my plants mostly die. I'm gradually getting better at keeping them alive, though! While I also like to sing and dance, for the life of me I can't do either of them very well. I especially like creative writing and poetry. I also go to the gym, socialise with friends, write quotes, play with my dogs, drive around, and do my nails.

**Flourish Australia Goulburn
Shop 1, 42-44 Clinton Street
Goulburn, NSW 2580
1300 779 270
Open weekdays 8am to 6pm,
8am to 4pm on weekends**

So are you a Goulburn local?

Sure am a goulburnian!

Coming soon to Panorama

2019/2020 is shaping up to be a challenging bush fire season. Panorama will bring you reports about how Flourish Australia is meeting the challenges.

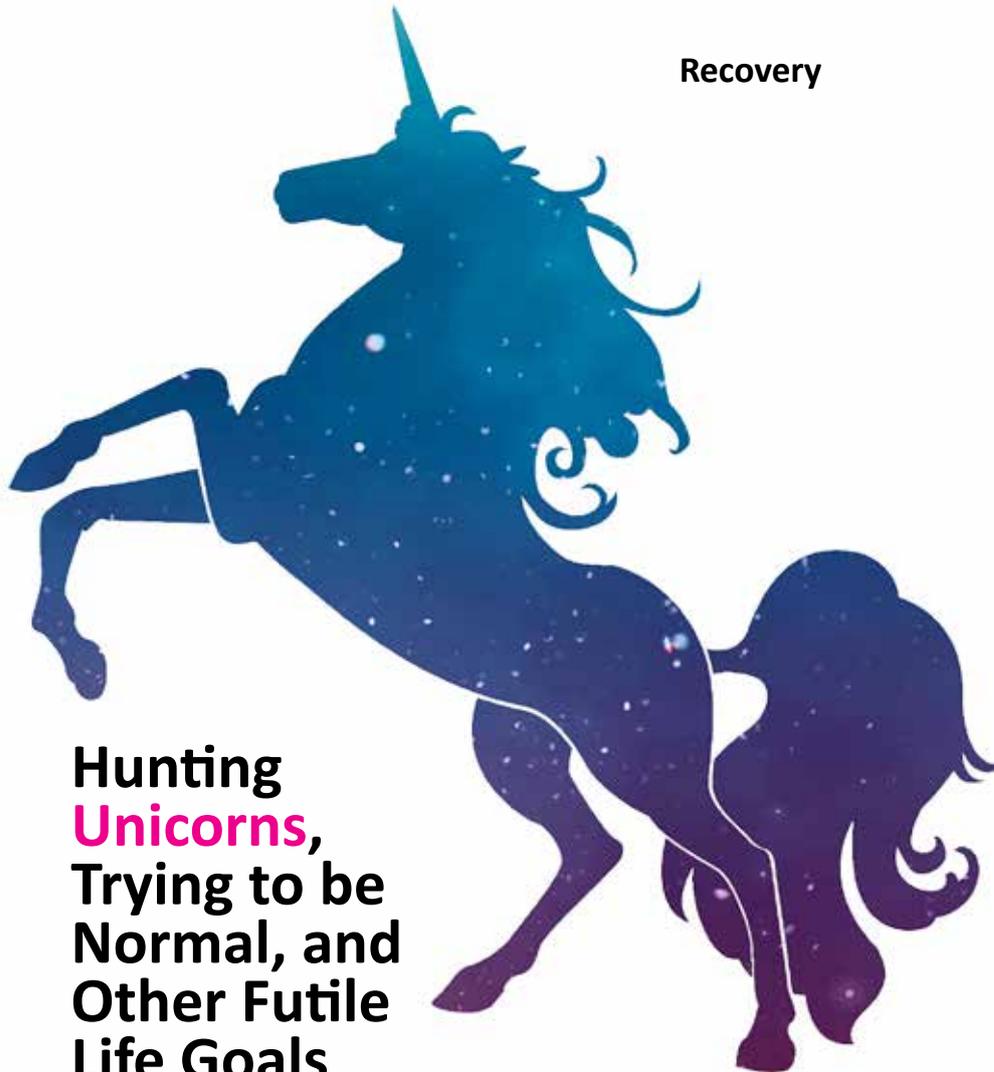
Daniel Singh talks about letting go of the burden of addiction.

'Lived experience' comes to Taiwan.

Plus results of the 2019 Flourishing Awards! And more!

PHOTO ADAM MUIR, NOWRA





Hunting Unicorns, Trying to be Normal, and Other Futile Life Goals

By Karen Jurss (as told to Grant J Everett)

I'd just been discharged from a local mental health unit when I first came in contact with Flourish Australia. For the last two years I've enjoyed the women's group and the program they ran specifically for people with varying forms of autism. More often than not I'll just come here to hang out, chat to some people, have lunch, and maybe vent with the staff if I'm having a bad day.

The best part about the people I socialise with at Flourish Australia Hervey Bay is that I can be myself. As a woman with autism, I have spent the greater portion of my life trying to camouflage myself to appear "normal" in a futile desire to be accepted. Feeling as though I don't have to hide my true self is actually a huge deal for me. In fact, the group expect my authentic self when I visit, so I've been able to let it all out.

One of the volunteers at Flourish Australia, Kylie, thought that if I shared the realities of living with autism and feeling like I have to camouflage my real self it could prove to be very valuable to other people. She suggested

I put in a submission to present at the upcoming TheMHS Conference. Evan, the Manager of Hervey Bay, supported me with my submission. We went back and forth with the wording and the clarity. Thankfully my submission was accepted and I ended up doing a ten minute presentation at TheMHS, with all my travel and hotel costs paid for by Flourish Australia. Successfully navigating the whole process of applying to be a presenter felt like a huge personal achievement.

Hiding

I have a different sense of humour and a loud laugh, so I tend to attract attention. I like telling silly jokes that not everyone gets. Laughing at things I personally find funny is a part of my ongoing recovery. I try to ignore it when people look at me sideways but that's not always possible. One time, my parents were going down to visit my aunt and I asked if I could come. Mum made a face and said, "Sure. But can you just not be...you?" That's kind of hard to hear at 35!

When we feel that people will dislike

our true selves, camouflaging who we are can become a natural response very quickly, and it's challenging to unlearn. This is often based on the worry that people won't like you, or that showing your true self will scare them off. It can feel easier to repress a part of yourself rather than risk losing someone, especially if you aren't connected with many people in your life. If you tell someone (either implicitly or explicitly) that they need to change in some fundamental way in order to be "normal", you're teaching them that their true, authentic self is not okay. This can have a hugely negative impact on someone's self-esteem and resilience.

When I presented about how we often camouflage our true selves, my talk didn't just apply to people with autism, but to anyone with a disability or a mental health issue or who feels different in some way. I think there's a lot of pressure from society to quash whatever is perceived to be outside of "the norm", and many of us will feel compelled to pretend to be somebody we're not in order to be welcomed by humanity. This acceptance is often conditional, and it isn't guaranteed to last.

"I'm focusing on self-acceptance at the moment, but that's still a work in progress."

But there's no good reason for the world to work like this! For example, look at the way left-handed people used to be treated: for ages they were seen as the children of Satan, and people felt justified beating them and tying their "sinister" hand behind their backs to force them use the "correct" one. The practice didn't end until somebody woke up one day and wondered, "Why are we doing this, exactly? Who is it helping? What benefits does it offer?"

The long, repetitive road

I believe that in order to build a healthy and inclusive society where everyone can thrive, we need to stop rejecting those who are different. Like the recent societal acceptance of people who are LGBTI or gender non-conforming. After centuries of oppression and hardship and violence society is finally welcoming the LGBTI community with equal rights and legal protection. Sadly, establishing a

Recovery

welcome place in society for people with autism is still a work in progress.

Just as some gay men used to marry women to keep up the pretense of being straight, people with autism are still camouflaging themselves. Drawing on my own lived experience, I spoke about how people with mental health issues are often encouraged by friends, family, and health professionals to change who they are in the hope that happiness will follow, but that they often end up paying a much higher price.

It seems as though every minority group has to individually fight the same battle to be accepted. Just as one group reaches a point of equality in society, the next one in line has to walk the same road to acceptance. Why don't we just break down the wall of stigma for everyone who's outside the norm and accept that people are people and we should all live and let live? After all, nobody can define what "normal" actually is, so why do we torture people for not conforming to a theoretical mold?

Advanced camouflaging

I admit that I often act in different ways with different people. This gets tricky if I'm with somebody who knows me one way and we run into someone who knows me another way. I can be fairly quiet and sedated at times and at other times I'm screaming "Oh my God it's you! Aargh!" A person who's used to me being quiet and sedated would understandably be confused by this.

As human beings we need people in our lives. Isolation is a huge mental health red flag but having no relationships is an even more massive issue for people with autism. We tend to be portrayed as naïve or unaware of social cues or boundaries but how much of that is the result of us never having had a best friend to learn these niceties? When the opportunity to develop a lasting friendship by your mid-40s has been lacking, it's a challenge.

How I went with my talk

My TheMHS speech was entirely my own work and I felt fairly confident from the beginning that I'd be able to say what I wanted to say without outside help. There were 50 or so people in the audience, and I was one of three

speakers in that session. While I've been in Toastmasters for many years now and presented on numerous occasions in front of hundreds of people, this was the first time I'd presented a talk to an audience of strangers. Thanks to Toastmasters I've learned to harness my fear and use it to pep me up and bring vibrancy to my presenting.

Unlike other presenters, I didn't use PowerPoint slides. I find that reading a speech off a page or a screen tends to drain the affect from your voice and your face. I actually had a lady come up to me afterwards and say "Thanks for not using slides!" I also had quite a few good questions from the audience about me and my journey, as a lot of what I shared was very personal.

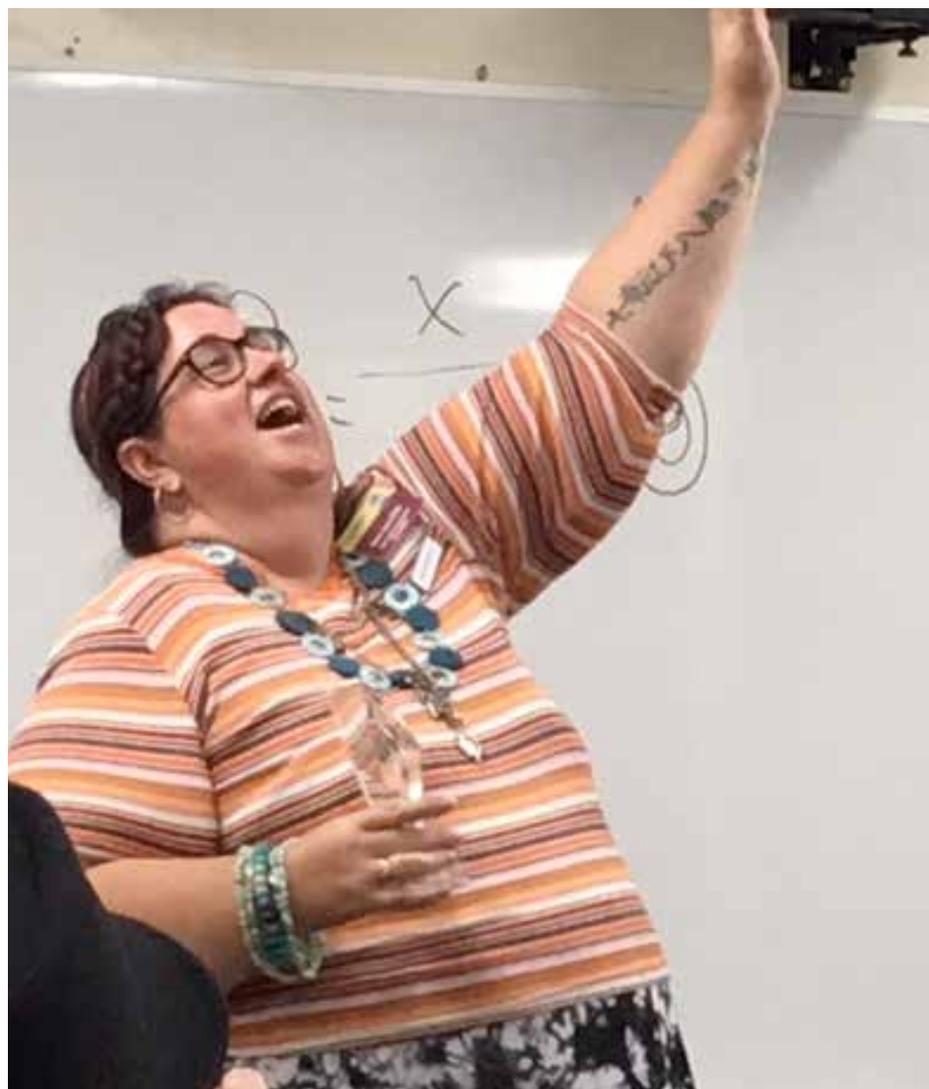
Investigating and accepting

I first researched Asperger's about 7 or 8 years ago. When I discovered

some first-hand information written by groups of women who had this form of autism, I found I ticked more and more boxes until I eventually realised, "This is me, without a doubt!" This went some way to explaining the difficulty I had experienced making and keeping friends. One year, a single person turned up to my birthday party. Now, as an adult, I look around at other people and go, "What are they doing? How does that work? They're making friends and forming relationships and...I'm not. I have no idea what's going on."

As I live in a regional area, there aren't many psychologists who have a knowledge base about autism. The ones that do are mostly focused on children rather than adults. This is why the local autistic community look after each other. We check in to make sure the others are okay and we compare notes about what works for us and helps us get through the day.

BELOW: Karen Jurss proving that she's an awesome public speaker by being awarded Toastmaster of the Year. PHOTO BY GABRIELE BARSING, TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL





Peter Donovan: A lifelong love affair with fine art

I've been an artist since I could pick up a pen. I was drawing as early as I can remember and started painting when I was six. I was always sure to make the most of what little materials I had. My five older sisters, especially the two who were artistically inclined, always encouraged my artistic expression. I've also had tilts at photography and a fair crack at sculpture and I always feel good within myself whenever I create something from nothing.

Barriers to my education

I wasn't a very academic child because I experienced dyslexia which wasn't picked up on until I reached high school. I could barely read, so at primary school I spent a lot of my time in class just filling the pages of my exercise books with drawings. Once these issues were noticed, I found it a little easier to learn the English skills I'd need to live my life.

While I may have experienced some disadvantage with my studies, thankfully I was always a naturally gifted athlete. I've always pursued the things I was good at, which was art, athletics, and football. This was kind of a weird combination as you don't usually have people who are both artistic and sporty. If you looked at my report cards, you'd see that I got A1 for Art and A1 for PE, basically the top grade.

On the subject of study, nowadays I've attained Diplomas and Associate Diplomas in Fine Art from both Sydney and Perth, and they're undoubtedly some of my biggest accomplishments.

Finding creative ways to give back

I've been living at Lithgow for 10 years and put on maybe half a dozen local art exhibitions in that time. I've had limited success with these, perhaps because Lithgow isn't a particularly arty kind of place. Some of my exhibitions were complete flops but others were moderately successful.

"When you know you're good at something, you just keep doing it, because it comes naturally."

I held my most recent art exhibition in Lithgow in November 2018. I'd completed almost 100 paintings over the previous 12 months, so the majority of what I had on display was from that period. In order to produce roughly two paintings a week I was going pretty hard at it. However, I didn't want this exhibition to be purely about me: I also wanted to use it as an opportunity to give something back to the people who have supported me through the dark times.

Lifeline's financial services supported me to come through a very sticky situation, so I wanted to show my appreciation by raising some money for them. First off, I was going to contribute 10% of what I sold at my exhibition but I also spoke with some prominent locals to offer them full-sized portraits for less than

\$300, with all money raised from those sales going directly to Lifeline.

All up, we raised a few thousand dollars for Lifeline from that exhibition, which was a really good result. It was a feel good exercise to be able to give back to those who had so generously supported me in sorting my life out. Lifeline were very encouraging through it all. Although showing my appreciation in this way didn't cure me of my depression or anxiety or any other mental health issues, by living in the "now" I was able to feel good about giving something back to society.

With the rest of what I earned from the exhibition I was able to progress from driving around in a 30-year-old car to something a little more up-to-date.

Back on the rails

Things haven't always been good but with the help of Flourish Australia I've got my life back on track. They've supported me in fighting through depression, anxiety, and the whole gamut of other mental health issues I have to deal with. No matter what mental health issues you are experiencing or what problems and addictions you're struggling with, Flourish Australia can support you through sorting things out. For instance, this year I decided that I didn't want to sit on my butt in isolation painting from the moment I wake up until the moment I go to sleep, like that huge spike in activity that happened the year before last. Now, with the encouragement of Flourish Australia, I get outside and talk to people and do fun things.

I'm very glad that the Flourish Australia people care about my wellbeing so much that they come to visit me simply to sit and listen. No matter what I'm dealing with, they'll usually know how to support me, such as by encouraging me to see things in a different way, or suggesting little changes that could support me to enjoy life more. Like the name says, they want you to flourish.

Another major factor that's helped with my ongoing wellness is that I secured public housing earlier this year, which I think is fantastic. I now have a proper, stable, safe place to live which means a hell of a lot for my mental health. If you aren't in stable accommodation or can't sustain rental increases, it makes

things challenging. So hallelujah, I've got a house where I can have my children come and visit me and even stay over.

A fair while back I took a substantial break from art, and I found it very rewarding getting back into it and being so productive with my time. I've only done half a dozen commissions this year, just small works for people who want portraits of their dogs or maybe an imitation of a real painting they saw somewhere ("I like that one, can you do me one of those?" kinda thing).

Eco-friendly creations

This year I set a goal to improve my home environment because this is a very important factor in how I feel. I'm also doing more stuff outdoors. At the moment I'm working on two projects in my backyard: a Zen garden, and a sculpture/gazebo. Basically, going back and forth between these two projects is what I've been doing this year, so if doing one of them isn't an option due to bad weather or whatever, I can always go and do the other one instead. The Zen garden is just a small corner of

"A mental health worker called Ivan encouraged me to enter art competitions. I've since had some success with this, and being rewarded for pursuing something I'd always done for free was definitely a bonus."

my backyard marked out with different colours of sandstone. I'm going to plant some citrus trees and bamboo and native plants here and there, fill it with gravel, and put down a layer of sand. I'll carefully rake the sand into different beautiful patterns so I have a nice area to contemplate. It's been a long process, but because I've already studied so many other art styles this is just another kind I'm in the process of mastering.

The sculpture/gazebo in my backyard will be a lightweight, semi-permanent structure. I'm using nothing but recycled materials wherever possible, so I'm eager for people to hand over items they no longer need, like recycled bits of steel, timber, old pallets, plastics, woods, foam, concrete, you name it.

Goals fuel wellness

Setting goals and working towards them is important. Goals help you negotiate life and if you have something to look forward to, life feels more pleasant. Whether it's a week ahead, a month ahead, or a year ahead, if you've got goals, you'll find it a lot easier day-to-day. I experience a myriad of mental health issues, so knowing what I want to accomplish or solve next helps me to cope with it all. Whether it's working on my Zen garden or doing a painting or something else, keeping productive is vital. We all need to keep our bodies and minds ticking over.

A healthy diet is very important for your mental health, too.

Connecting is for everyone

None of us live in a vacuum. We are social beings, and we all need to get out there and try and make friends. The catch is that making friends can be a challenge if you are experiencing a mental health issue but being alone can be terrible for your mental health. In my case, before I was having regular visits from Flourish Australia, there were times where I'd squirrel myself away and not speak to anyone for a week at a time. Maybe a please or a thank-you at the shops.

For years and years I was happy to

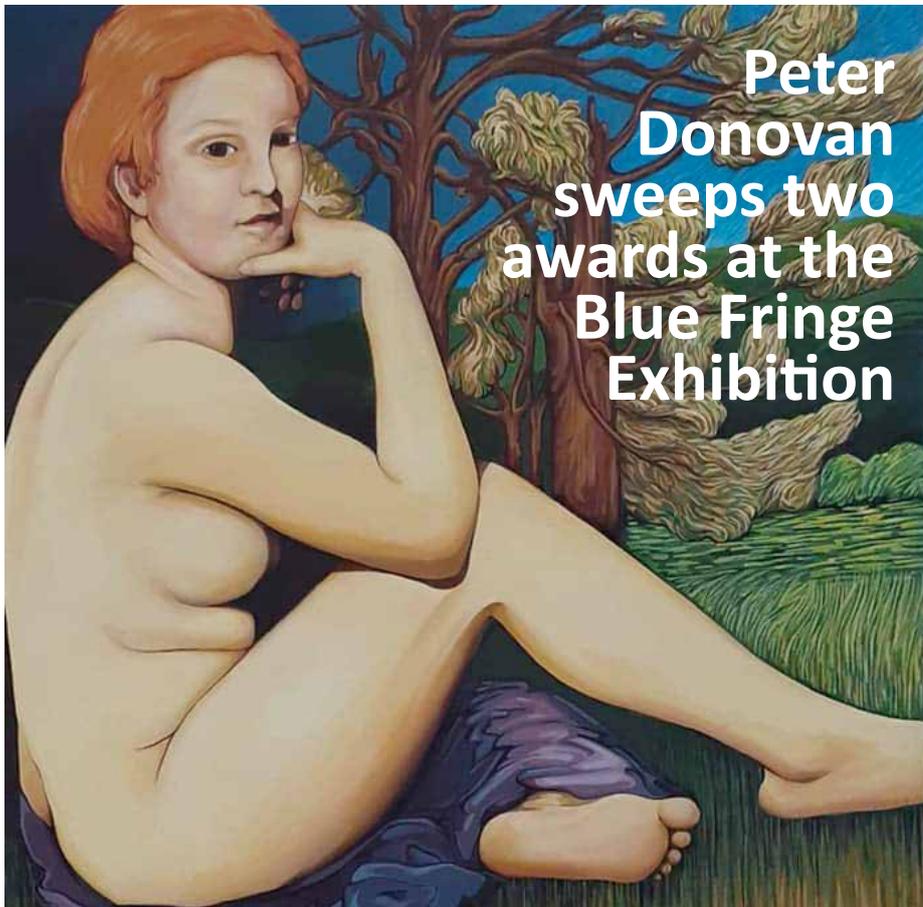
cloister myself away and just sit there and paint. But then Flourish Australia inspired me to discover that I actually needed real contact with people and opened some doors for me in that regard, like the connections I made through a local pool group. When you meet people who are experiencing similar mental health issues to your own, you instantly have a way to relate to them. If you go on to become friends, then your life will be enriched by the companionship. This is how it should be, and yet so many awesome people live in isolation because they have mental health issues.

The strangeness of mental health issues

Although I've experienced anxiety for a long time now, I still find it very puzzling. I'll describe it this way: picture walking into a room, and there's one too many people in there, so you suddenly want to leave. You've GOT to go NOW!

I know that a lot of people experience anxiety, and it can be really difficult to deal with. Many people suffer in silence with it. Now I just follow my gut instincts and go wherever I feel comfortable. There's no joy or pleasure in trying to push through the discomfort barrier if you're breaking out in a cold sweat because the fluorescent lights overhead are too intrusive, or you're feeling some sort of monotonous hum along your nerves that's making you paranoid.





ABOVE: The award-winning "You, Me, and the Girl from Luncheon on the Grass" by Peter Donovan

A couple of weeks after his interview with Panorama magazine, Peter won two first prizes in separate categories in the local Blue Fringe Exhibition, a competition for artists and writers of all strokes. Peter's award-winning painting is called "You, Me and the Girl from Luncheon on the Grass", and the sculpture that netted him the Peter Markwick Award is called "Julia". What a busy bee!

Natural talent, hard work, or both?

"The way I see it, we're all born with a certain amount of talent and strengths in specific areas, and these skills will just get better over time whether you seek professional training or just do it as a hobby," Peter said. "For people who are born with a gift and do it as a hobby, eventually over time they will perfect their skills. But when you formally study art at a TAFE or University it can help make the creative flow more natural, and lessen the naivety within your work. When you study art, over time you learn how to use perspective, tone, colour, composition, all those technical aspects of art, and you pick up these skills as you go along, you improve."

"It's possible for the average person to put in enough time and effort to improve and refine almost any skill, including art, but the greatest artists tend to be born with sharper motor skills and natural ability. It's a blessing."

"Building on artistic gifts by creating art is like flexing a muscle, where you'll only get stronger and stronger with practice."

"The expectations of what art is or isn't is purely subjective, so I find myself constantly drawing on whatever I think is beautiful or is worth creating. Whether it's a beautiful naked woman or a beautiful tree or a hill or a rock or something that's just unique in itself, I try and capture the essence of it. Not the reality of it, but the essence of it."

Humble beginnings

"Just recently I got in contact with an old girlfriend who collected a lot of my artwork. Some time ago her mother had

commissioned me to do some paintings, too. I hadn't been to art school back then, so without any formal training my painting skills in my mid-teens were still in the embryonic stage. On reflection many years later, those ancient paintings looked rather naïve and don't have any particular honed skill in them. They're interesting to look at, but they're naïve."

What is the Blue Fringe Arts and Literature Festival?

The Blue Fringe Arts and Literature Festival celebrates and acknowledges the creativity of people who have a lived experience of mental health issues. Conceived and based in the Blue Mountains, the Festival is held in October to coincide with Mental Health Month. It aims to raise the profile of mental health issues and promote a more socially inclusive community. Categories include Arts, Sculpture, Photography, Textiles, Short Stories and Poetry. A youth category is also open to people of high school age.

Over the years Blue Fringe has showcased the talents of thousands of poets, artists and storytellers. For many creative types, this will be the first time they've shared their work publicly, and the experience can be life changing. Many participants have successfully used Blue Fringe as a springboard to launch their creative careers.

Blue Fringe Arts originated as the Adrienne Brown Awards back in 1992.

www.thehazemag.com.au/arts/blue-fringe-arts-and-literature-festival

www.bluemts.com.au/news/blue-fringe-arts-festival-celebrates-mental-health-month/



ABOVE: Peter Donovan's winning "Julia" sculpture

Noeleen uses her lived experience of stroke as a StrokeSafe Ambassador

Satisfaction from helping others



ABOVE: The recovery journey sometimes takes a ‘zig-zag course’ as Noeleen reveals in her story. Here Noeleen (centre) gives a demonstration with the help of a St John Ambulance officer “Dr Phil” and a sphygmomanometer as Michelle looks on.

PHOTO BY A. MUIR

By Noeleen

I have participated in many groups at the Flourish Australia service which I access in Nowra. Recently, though, I was excited to make a presentation of my own there as a StrokeSafe Ambassador to increase stroke awareness.

I have lived with mental health issues for as long as I can remember. I have experienced stress, fights, deaths, sex, and drugs and alcohol issues. I felt the more I tried, the more the world was against me. It seemed like I was never good enough. I would drink until I was drunk to feel better about myself.

Then I started volunteering at the local Salvos store. The boss there had so much faith in me. I loved being part of something, and after all this time I felt like I belonged! I was fit, not drinking as much, had a purpose in life and even took up gardening and joined the local garden group. By volunteering I feel like I was finally giving something back!

Then the bleed hit. It brought a massive, debilitating, brain numbing, body killing stroke with it. And with it came the worst mental health I have ever known.

I was so angry the world! I was always doing things for others. I thought I was a good person. So why I was being punished?

Most of all, I was angry with myself. Being a good person doesn't only involve helping others. I believe in God and thought he was angry with me, so I needed to be taught a lesson.

Discipline

I decided that I could change the way I think and feel with positive influences. I pushed myself to get out of bed every day to do things I needed to do even if I didn't really want to do them. I figured I had to forgive people, including myself. Then the healing could begin - I don't mean my physical healing as that is not likely to ever happen, I mean my mental health healing.

I began to access Flourish Australia's Nowra service about 18 months ago. Around the same time, I got my drivers license back and gained a bit more freedom.

I became a StrokeSafe Ambassador not

long after that. I was really struggling with my “new life” and was seeking something more that I could do besides my groups at Flourish Australia.

I would read all I could about stroke and see if there was anything that would fix me. I was always hopeful for that magic pill or cure.

Then I came across a listing on the stroke foundation website asking for volunteers. I immediately applied for it. I went for training, where I learnt quite a bit about stroke and also how to do public speaking.

I had to drum up my own business because I live in a small town. I have now presented quite a few StrokeSafe talks since. I love the eager faces and the satisfaction I get from helping others.

My motto: Never give up! Never give in!

Flourish Australia
67 Bridge Road
NOWRA NSW 2541
1300 779 270

LEADERSHIP THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCE
Physical Disability
AND AUSTRALIA SUPPORT SERVICES INC.
DR. KATHERINE GILL



Functional Neurological Disorder

Lived experience leader Dr Katherine Gill started taking ownership where medical disciplines were not.

ABOVE: Dr Katherine Gill (left) and Assistant Dog Milly, receiving her MHA Award for Leadership Through Lived Experience from the NSW Minister for Mental Health, The Hon. Bronnie Taylor, MLC PHOTO COURTESY OF DR KATHERINE GILL

By Warren Heggarty

Dr Katherine Gill's own lived experience of Functional neurological disorder (FND) and the challenges she experienced finding support for its disabling symptoms led her to launch FND Australia Support Services Inc in 2017. In 2019 she received the Leadership through Lived Experience award at the annual Mental Health Matters Awards.

"Dedicated FND services are very limited across the country," says Kate. People with FND require a comprehensive collaboration between neurologists, mental health, physical rehabilitation and allied health providers. The separation of mind and body and the traditional divisions between physical

and mental health has led to people with FND slipping through sector gaps between neurology and psychiatry, with neither discipline taking ownership for the management and care of people with FND.

"The lack of specialised FND services is impacting on the recovery outcomes and wellbeing of people with FND," Kate warns.

Lived experience

She has experienced this at first hand. In 2013, Kate suddenly lost the ability to walk and the use of her left side. Although still only in her thirties, stroke was suspected.

A brain scan showed something that may have indicated a stroke, however when it was compared to earlier MRI scans, the same suspicious mark was present, ruling it out as the cause of her paralysis. Doctors suggested that it might be related to Anorexia Nervosa, with which Kate had previously been diagnosed. Otherwise, they said, they did not know the cause and so there was nothing they could do.

"The idea that it was anorexia did not make sense," says Kate. "If the weakness was caused by anorexia, how come I was only weak on ONE SIDE. I think this is a case of DIAGNOSTIC OVERSHADOWING."

This is where a person's mental health diagnosis draws attention away from the

person's physical health. We know that people with diagnoses of serious mental health issues have a life expectancy of around 20 years less than the general population. "Diagnostic overshadowing" contributes to this problem.

The effect of diagnostic overshadowing is magnified for a person with FND and illustrates their basic dilemma, especially since many people with FND do have a pre-existing mental health issue. There is also a temptation for people to suppose that FND is "all in your mind." This does not support a person who experiences paralysis, muscle weakness or sensory impairment.

Kate Gill herself, currently requires a wheelchair and has the help of Milly the Assistance Dog. At one stage she was a dancer, attending the gym every day, so sudden paralysis was very traumatic and had a dramatic effect on her lifestyle. She is an Occupational Therapist by profession and has worked in the mental health field in the past, including a time with Schizophrenia Fellowship (now One Door). There, she was responsible for the New Moves program and the Mental Health Sports Network, among other things. Readers of Panorama will have encountered stories on all of these topics in the past.

Nevertheless, upon returning to work (at a different organisation) with her acquired disability, Kate experienced misunderstandings and discrimination. It was 18 months before she found out about FND. "I found a label and at last I had a name for it. This was an occasion when having a label WAS helpful!" If Kate, who is PhD qualified and working in the health field did not know about it, how would most other people cope with the problem?

Support and connection

Kate found there was an international support group operating out of the UK. There, she encountered a number of Australians. This demonstrated to her that a support group was needed here in Australia. So she left the organisation she was working for and founded FND Australia Support Services.

"The idea is to connect people who currently have no real support at all, to share tips about recovery. Many of the people we support are bed bound and so they are quite isolated and lonely,"

Physical Disability

says Kate. "Having a catch up over coffee might not work as well for them. So we have catch ups via Zoom. We share tips with one another."

"Some people with FND receive supports through the NDIS to assist them manage daily life with disabling symptoms," says Kate. "Other people who experience equally severe symptoms are denied NDIS!"

'It has been described using a computer analogy, with FND similar to a software malfunction in the presence of undamaged hardware (the central nervous system).'

"FND, for many, can be a life-long and disabling condition; assistive technology and support for daily activities can make a significant difference to people's wellbeing and participation in the community. The NDIS criteria of proving that the condition is permanent can impact on the success of NDIS application for people with FND.

"We don't have any Australian data on prevalence, but it is known that FND is the second most common reason for a neurological consult, after headache and is more prevalent than more commonly known neurological conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis.

"Since our website went live in February 2019 our network has grown rapidly, and continues to grow on a daily basis. We currently provide peer support to over 500 families. We are also regularly contacted by clinicians treating people with FND who feel ill-equipped to manage the condition and want information and training to improve their FND knowledge base."

Research

"FND is a problem with the functioning of the nervous system and not damage to the nervous system," says Kate. "It has been described using a computer analogy, with FND similar to a software malfunction in the presence of undamaged hardware (the central nervous system)."

Questions

What is FND?

Functional Neurological Disorder was previously known as Conversion Disorder. The illness presents with disabling and distressing neurological symptoms such as...

- an inability to walk
- paralysis
- non-epileptic seizures
- tremors
- abnormal movements
- an inability to swallow and/or talk, problems with bowel and bladder control
- blindness and vision disturbances

Why "Conversion" Disorder?

FND has been historically classified as a mental illness based on Freudian concepts developed more than a hundred years ago, including concepts like "conversion" and "hysteria." With attempts to explain the nature of symptoms that were classified as medically unexplained, it was proposed that people were subconsciously "converting" stress, trauma and internal conflict into a physical response. While recent medical research has started to show the biological underpinnings of the illness, many professionals remain unaware of the recent research and this impacts patient care and recovery outcomes.

"Research shows functional changes in the connectivity of parts of the brain in people with FND compared to healthy controls. In fMRI studies it was found that in people with FND compared to healthy controls, areas of the brain involved in emotional processing such as the limbic areas are hyper-activated and areas involving motor processing are hypo-activated. Research also shows the nervous systems of people with FND are more highly aroused than that of the

(continued next page)

Physical Disability

healthy control group.’

Another facet of FND is research, and Kate’s background in the push for “consumer-led research” (research by people with lived experience) comes to the fore here. Kate’s PhD comes in handy as she puts her mind to the task of “translating” some of the journal articles on FND research into language that everyone can understand. “We also need research led by people with an inside understanding of FND presented in a way that peers can understand and make use of.” Kate received a Hocking Fellowship from SANE Australia to help with the scientific side of this work.

Nevertheless, FND’s work supporting people is unfunded. Kate works a couple of days per week as an OT and doing peer support to support the work she does with FND. “There are so many people who are in crisis. We really need philanthropy or for the Government to get on board with this. FND Australia is aiming to be a kind of information hub because very few GPs know about it.”

Recovery

What about recovery? Kate’s own symptoms have fluctuated. She improved to the point where she was

walking again, but after receiving a cochlear implant, the paralysis mysteriously returned. “It is common for symptoms to come and go,” she says, “for people to go into remission and then experience a relapse of symptoms. People often manage some symptoms that may be permanent and unrelenting, such as an inability to walk, and other symptoms such as seizures, swallowing and visual disturbances that may come and go.”

“Recovery is highly individual,” says Kate. It is commonly thought that because there is no structural damage to the nervous system that people retain the potential for the symptoms to reduce or disappear. For many people, however, a focus on wellness and symptom management is more realistic than the disappearance of symptoms.

“Looking at symptoms, we tend to see much better outcomes in young children and adolescents whose brains are still growing and changing. Research has found that at long term follow up, 90% of adults with FND remained symptomatic and disabled.”

These figures reflect the status quo, with a poor state of knowledge and a lack of proper support services. If we

take recovery as being measured by a person’s ability to lead a contributing life of their own choosing, it is still “early days.” Regardless of the status of symptoms, the important thing is that people with FND do not become isolated and lonely, do not miss out on essential support services and do not lose hope for the future.

<https://fndaus.org.au>

Works Cited

FND Australia . (n.d.). About. Retrieved September 29, 2019, from Functional Neurological Disorder Australia Support Services: <https://fndaus.org.au>
Smith, K. (2019, March 14). Conversion Disorder: Definition, Symptoms, and Treatment. Retrieved from Psycom: <https://www.psycom.net/conversion-disorder-definition-symptoms-and-treatment/>
Wayahead. (2019). Mental Health Matters Awards Order of Proceedings. (p. 6). Sydney: Mental Health Association of NSW and NSW Mental Health Commission.



BELOW: FND prepared this sheet to help people with FND communicate with their treating doctors. This is because FND is not very well known and people may experience unhelpful, prejudicial reactions, such as being told it is “all in the mind.” Reading through these sixteen points will also give you some idea of what it might be like to experience FND IMAGE COURTESY OF FND



What people with FND want you to know?



1 My symptoms are frightening. I can’t control them. Please remain calm, patient and understanding. Please explain the illness in a way I understand and that respects my feelings and opinions.	2 Sometimes I might need disability aids to do what I need to do. This does not mean I am weak, going to become dependent on them or not trying hard enough.	3 My symptoms fluctuate across the day, and on different days. I can have different physical abilities and symptoms in a short space of time.	4 Please listen to me. Please hear what I say, about my symptoms and possible underlying causes. Please ASK. Don’t assume. If I say I have NO underlying or subconscious trauma, I don’t.
5 Without treatment I may not recover at home. With treatment, despite my best efforts, I still might not recover.	6 Please don’t write me off. I need access to ongoing care and treatment to manage in everyday life, and to have the best chance of recovery.	7 I am more than my FND. I am a whole person, with dreams, ambitions, goals, family and friends. I need to be able to do what I need and want to do.	8 I am not attention seeking, I am seeking help to deal with frightening, disabling and distressing symptoms.
9 If I could control my symptoms, I would. No one wants to be sick and/or dealing with disability. I can’t think myself well.	10 I need access to a multi-disciplinary team that meets my specific needs. Peer support is also helpful. FND is complex. We are all on a learning curve.	11 FND is everyone’s business. A comprehensive treatment program gives people the best chance of recovery.	12 Information is important to help me understand FND. Remember, a website is not a treatment plan. www.neurosymptoms.org www.fndaus.org.au
13 Please treat me as a whole person, not a list of symptoms. I am more than my symptoms. Doing valued activities is important for my recovery and wellbeing.	14 I may not be able to verbalise and respond, but I can hear you. Please be kind in what you say.	15 I am doing the best I can. Please respect that. If I could push myself harder, I would.	16 I am the best judge of my body and what I can and cannot do. Sometimes, if I push too hard, I wear the consequences.

www.fndaus.org.au



Prestige Pets!

Aww! Who doesn't love pets? Contact Prestige Pets and share your pet story in
Panorama (02) 9393 9021, Panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au



By Warren Heggarty

You can't overestimate the important roles that pets can play in people's lives in both good times and bad times. Joy who accesses Flourish Australia's Newcastle service puts it this way: 'Many years ago, when I was very unwell and had been in John Fletcher hospital for two weeks, I actually "escaped" so I could go home and be with Darcy my black cat.'

'Darcy was a big black cat that I took for walks on a leash and Darcy was there for me when I first became unwell!' she reminisced. 'This gave me something to hold on to. And Darcy was there waiting for me when I came home after my escape! Of course, I was taken back to hospital and this time to a locked ward.'

The tables were turned when Darcy developed cancer at ten years of age. 'I was sad for a couple of years. Eventually I got another cat. I knew someone with two kittens and I was going to choose which one to keep. But how do you

choose? They got loose in the house and we agreed that the one we couldn't catch was the one I kept. That was Abigail.'

'Abigail was a tabby cat, not as big as Darcy. When she was about four years old, suddenly she turned on me and went feral. I had to get the RSPCA to come and catch her. They said that the most likely reason she had gone feral was some kind of brain tumour. So she had to be put down.'

After that second heartbreaking experience, Joy decided not to get another cat. But she still loves 'other people's' cats as we will learn in a future issue when Joy tells us about her presentation at Brisbane TheMHS conference.

It often happens that relationships, with people or pets, are at the same time our greatest strength and our greatest source of anxiety. Perhaps we could say that if we don't accept the anxiety, we will not be able to benefit from that

strength either.

The British Journal Veterinary Record published a study in 2017 in which researchers described 'caregiver burden.' (Ross, 2017) Owners of sick or dying pets reported experience a reduction in quality of life. The researchers detected problems in 'psychosocial functioning' among these people. When you think about it, this is a good thing, because it shows that most people really do care about their pets. (Jacobson, 2017) Vets can also feel this burden, according to the report.

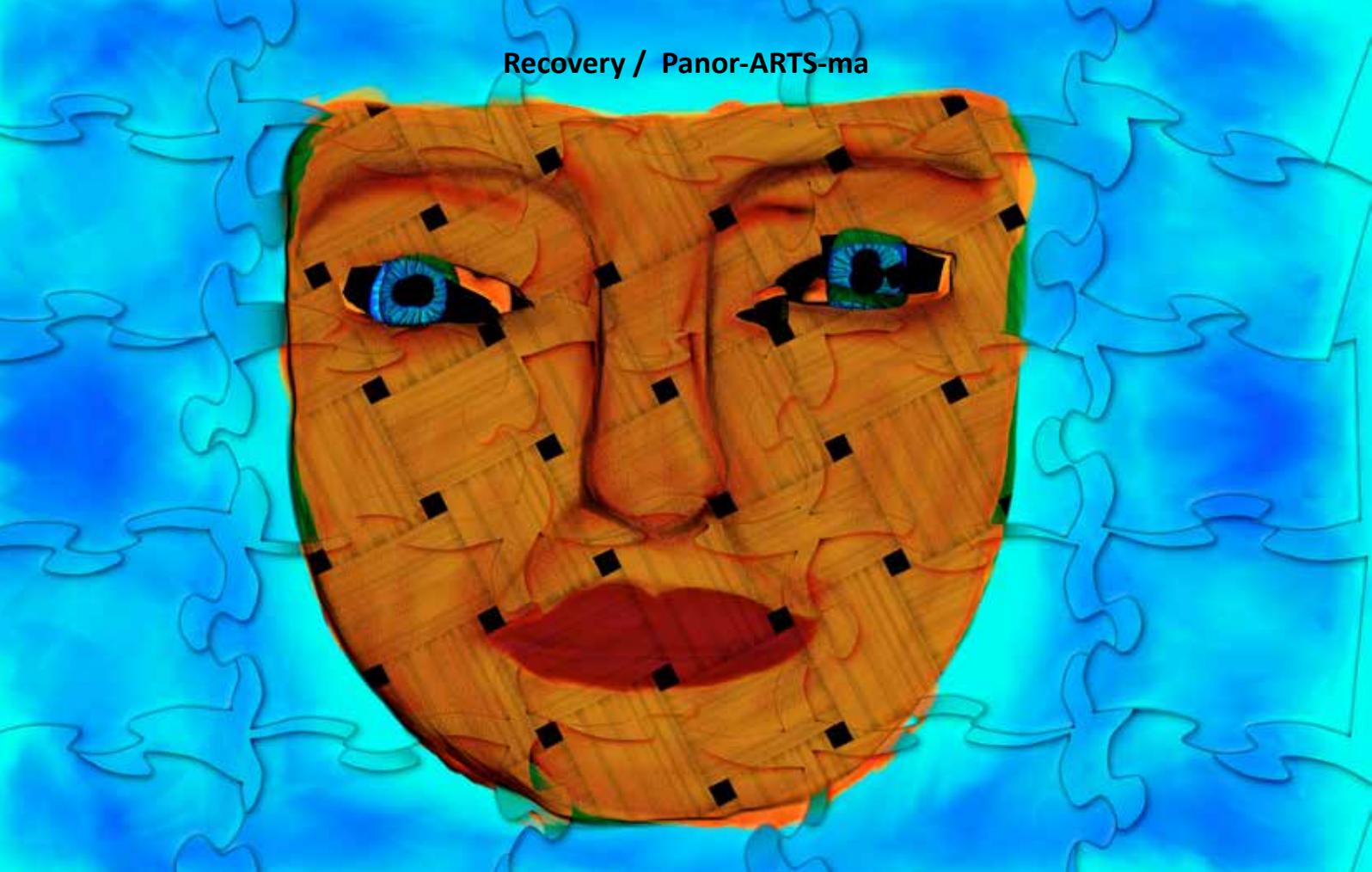
When a human loved one needs 24 hour high level nursing care, we bring in professional help. We would not consider doing it all on our own, and yet this is what many of us expect of ourselves when a four legged family member is seriously ill.

So sometimes you need to bring in help from outside! Annie Sykes wrote a little article in Panorama June 2018 (Your pet's well-being p.40) telling of her experience with PetCure mobile vet Fairfield. They demonstrated understanding about issues that affect many of us such as low income. Annie said 'My furries are my whole family and their well-being and health matter as much to me as my own.'

A story by Roni Jacobson in "The Cut" tells of a woman whose boyfriend dumped her because she spent a lot of time caring for her sick dog. "He actually ended the relationship because he said the dog took precedence over him," the woman said. "He didn't understand that it's not just a piece of property. They are living, breathing things." Maybe in the long term, her sick dog will lead her to a more understanding boyfriend!

References

- Jacobson, R. (2017, October 4). The invisible emotional burden of caring for a sick pet. Retrieved from The Cut: <https://www.thecut.com/2017/10/the-invisible-emotional-burden-of-caring-for-a-sick-pet.html>
- Ross, J. (2017, September 9). Dog Days: pets pick us up, but sick ones get us down. The Australian.



ABOVE: 'Art has become a big part of my recovery.' *Patched up Puzzle*, digital artwork by Scott Gourlay 2015, IMAGE COURTESY OF SCOTT GOURLAY

My Life

...and Schizophrenia

by Scott Gourlay

I am the Deputy Chair of Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council. I enjoy expressing myself with digital art and writing, and I've uploaded some of my best work to the Deviant Art website. One of these works, "Schizophrenia My Life", was a warts-and-all account of the paranoia and psychosis I used to experience written with heartfelt detail. This is a version of that story especially for Panorama readers. While my story contains times of severe struggle and hardship, thankfully it's a message of hope.

My life may be far from easy and is rarely symptom-free, but it's still pretty good most of the time. It's certainly better than the early years of learning to live with a mental health issue, that's for sure!

I've been working with psychologists

since my first admission, and have continued to see one ever since, especially when things start to go off track. Working with psychologists has helped me identify ways to manage my voices, my constant companions, to distract myself so I can push the whispers into the background. Something major I've learned is while some of my beliefs might feel true and self-evident to me, they might not actually be as true as I might think. This has allowed me to accept the possibility that my thoughts and perceptions may be untrue at any given time, and in this way I manage the effect paranoia has on me.

Recovery is about more than medicine

For most people, medication can greatly relieve the voices, paranoia and delusions. For others, the relief will be minor: maybe the voices will happen a little less often, or the delusions or paranoia may not have the same urgency or level of fear attached. For a very small minority, the meds don't seem to work at all, and this is the category where I fit in.

I've been trailed on lots of different types over the years, and while a

number have initially shown promise, sooner or later my symptoms would flare up and I'd experience yet another stay in hospital.

The coping strategies and self-examination skills I've learnt from psychologists over the years have supported me. While I still have some voices, delusions and paranoia, the important thing is I don't allow them to rule my life anymore. Something else I've discovered during my journey is that I can draw. Art has become a big part of my recovery, and I use it to express what's going on in my head, to distract myself from voices and other symptoms.

Despite not being on any regular medication, at this point I have managed to stay out of hospital for 6 years straight. As my best previous record was 18 months, this is a source of great pride for me.

The hard times

Twenty years ago, my first major episode led to my first hospitalisation. I can remember the incessant whispering, the murmuring half-heard insults, always room was necessary. For me, it all made perfect sense, and all the racing, spiraling, cascading thoughts agreed.

coming from behind me, yet when I turned to see who it was, no one was there. The other voice, the one who narrated my life, pointed out my failures and shortcomings and enjoyed saying that I'm too slow, too stupid, too useless to be able to catch the whisperer. The voice continued, providing a background stream of insults and derogatory observations, really pushing me to believe I was hopeless and useless.

“While I still have some voices, delusions and paranoia, the important thing is I don't allow them to rule my life anymore”

Day after day, week after week, the whispers continued with little respite. Sleep was no longer needed every day, just short naps, because I felt I had to observe and watch everyone else, believing they wanted to hurt me. I thought that I was fundamentally evil regardless of the good I tried to do every day. I felt as though my mere presence brought harm and bad things to those who are close to me, who I care about. I believed that if I didn't exist, then this harm would cease.

Finding the whisperer

After some time, I thought I'd figured out where the whispers were coming from: my flatmates. I was sure they'd hidden little speakers, and I felt driven to find the proof because I wanted the whispers to stop. I began the search in the lounge room by looking under the sofa and chairs, then checking inside the cushions by ripping them open. I cut open the back of the sofa, and used a broom to poke holes in the ceiling. I planned to fix the damage later, but at that moment it was unimportant, as finding the whisperer was my priority. Next I destroyed the wall unit, putting my fist through four glass panels in my frustration, and I badly injured my hand in the process. While I didn't find the whisperer, as soon as my flatmates came home to the awful mess they locked me in the house to wait for the police and ambulance to arrive. While all this took place it all seemed like perfectly acceptable behaviour. After all, I believed destroying the lounge

Recovery / Panor-ARTS-ma

room was necessary. For me, it all made perfect sense, and all the racing, spiraling, cascading thoughts agreed.

While demolishing the lounge room to find hidden speakers raised obvious flags with all the doctors I spoke to, there had been indications I had a mental health issue for some time. Two of the voices I heard had been popping up fairly regularly for years, slowly becoming more and more persistent. This was the beginning of many challenging years.

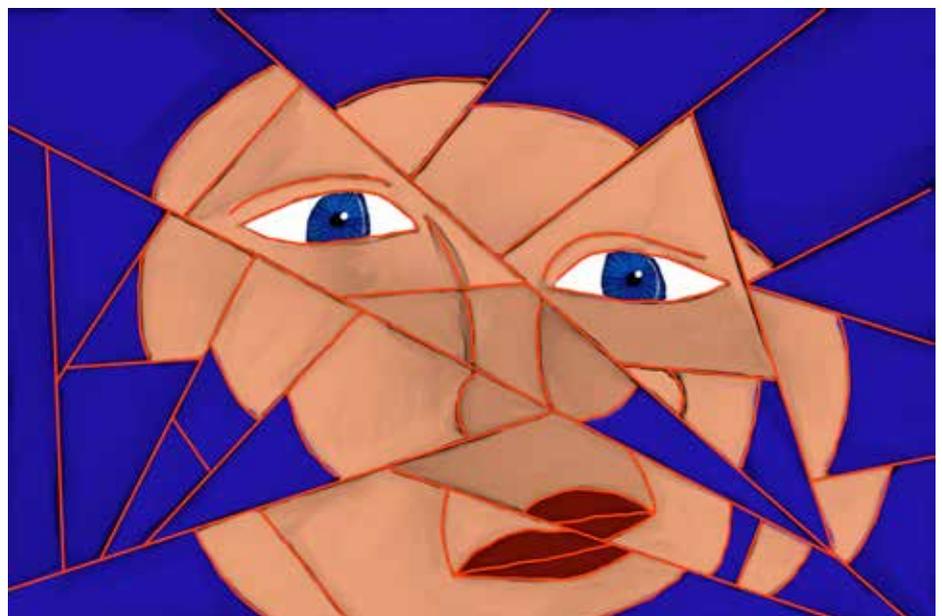
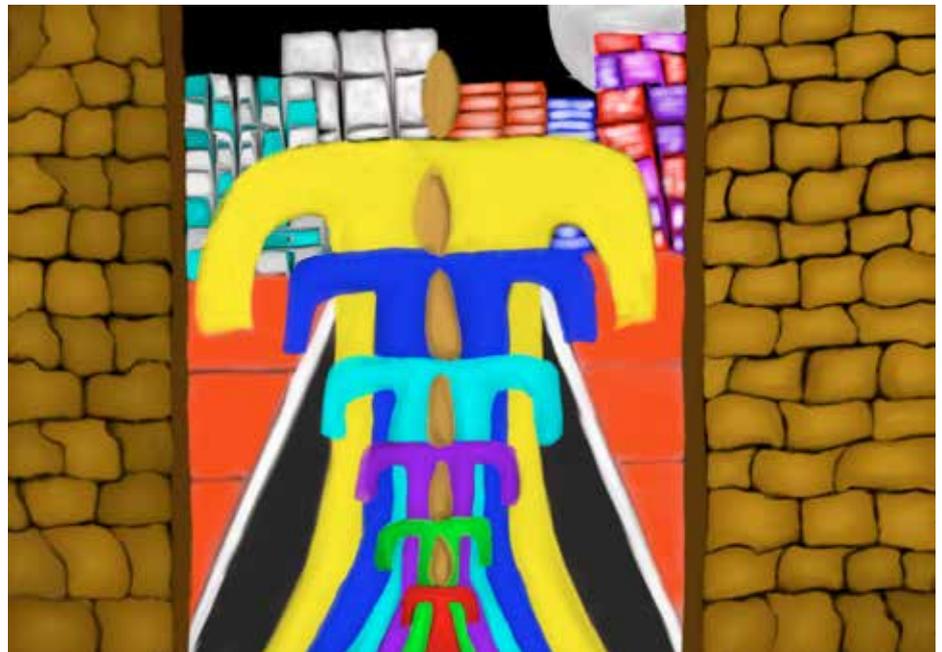
There is hope

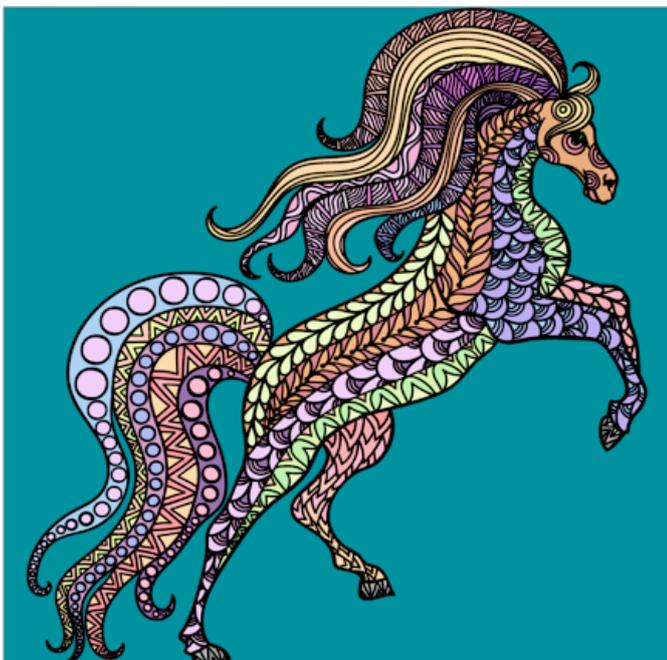
While my exact experiences are unique to me, the pattern I've experienced is very similar to that of a lot of people. Only the exact details differ. The fear, confusion, loneliness, frustration,

anger and the racing thoughts are a common experience that people with this mental health issue seem to share. Even though I've experienced multiple hospital admissions, been on all kinds of medications and gone through courses of ECT, I've found that recovery is possible. In my case, I maintain my wellness by seeing a psychologist and keeping an open mind about how likely the things are that I perceive and believe. The key is to be an active participant in your own wellness and finding what works best for you.

A version of this story originally appeared on the DeviantArt community web site. Panorama ran a story about Scott's involvement with the CAC in our June #68 2018 issue.

BELOW: *Growth (TOP) and Fractured Features*, digital artwork by Scott Gourlay, IMAGES COURTESY OF SCOTT GOURLAY





ABOVE: Just imagine what Vincent van Gogh might have done if he had had this app? Sophie's take on 'Starry Night' (top left) might give us some idea! 'The beautiful images I create, I do using my fingers. When one gets tired, I use another. PICTURES PROVIDED BY SOPHIE STRINGER

Sophie's App Assisted Art

By Sophie Stringer

Doing art helps Sophie Stringer to deal with mental health issues. Here she tells how she found a way to keep it up despite the progress of multiple sclerosis, thanks to an adult colouring app.

I have continued to do art work since leaving school but as my Multiple Sclerosis has progressed, things like painting and drawing have become

almost impossible for me. I'm not able to steady my hand enough to be accurate and I experience a great deal of what's called 'muscle fatigue'.

Basically my brain finds it difficult to recharge my muscles to keep moving. So holding a pencil gets too heavy. I started using adult colouring books and pencils/pens but the accuracy required meant I expended a great deal of energy to not make a mistake. When I did, I could not fix it. So I looked for another way to be

creative.

I stopped doing any forms of arts and crafts over the last few years as I was busy doing Volunteer Work with MS Australia. I stopped my volunteer work a couple of years ago when my health deteriorated.

Towards the end of last year, feeling heavily burdened by health issues, I experienced major depression and was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive

Panor-ARTS-ma

Disorder as well.

I found it challenging to find enjoyment in life. Through medical support and medications I started to feel a little more like myself and began colouring in.

Again, I found it almost impossible to finish a drawing due to the symptoms of my MS. So, my husband started to look for ways that might support me to start up again with my Art Work. He came across a colouring in app. As soon as I saw it, I had to try!

I found that with this particular app AdultColoring Book you have an infinite choice of colours and a huge selection of pre-drawn images for you to choose from. The images or pictures cannot be changed in any form and it is not a colour by numbers type app either. You have to choose all your own colours.

The app costs \$35.99 per year as a subscription. It seems like a lot but when you count the cost of colouring books \$10-15 and a packet of gel pens which don't last long, I think you are ahead. If you have NDIS money it may be possible to pay for it with that.

The beautiful images I create, I do using my fingers. When one gets tired, I use another. I use it on my iPad so it's light and easy to do anywhere. Even in bed when I'm having a bad day.

The other great feature and probably the most important is the UNDO button. So when you make a mistake, it's easily rectified. Once you finish a picture, you can share it with friends and family and on Instagram.

“The best part is how it's supported me to heal myself from mental health issues. When I'm creating, I'm not thinking about anything except for colours and which one to choose.”

You can even follow the app on Instagram as they post the best drawn 'Daily Design' of the day. Also, when you share your picture with family and friends, it automatically makes it to the app's Gallery Wall where everyone can see what you have created. You can also see how others have created their own version. It's amazing.

The colours come from a wide variety of "colour palletes." The appearance of different textures is created by simply using different shades of colour! It's a trick of the trade and something one is taught when studying Art. I studied art for 4 years when in high school and I guess a lot of those things I was taught have remained in my memory.

Using different shades helps to create a two dimensional picture into a three dimensional image. Again, it's all about choosing the right colours and shades and then the human eye does the rest. But it is something that has to be learned and takes skill to do, as the rules about how to do it change according to different images, such as whether it is close up or far away.

The images come in 'Books' for you to choose. The only thing for you to do is pick your colours, tap the area of picture you want to fill in and like magic, the colour is dropped into that space. You keep choosing and tapping and before you know it, you have created a work of Art.

These days I don't do any other kind of art, and it's amazing. I've created and finished 54 different works, all shared and hopefully enjoyed by friends and family.

The best part is how it's supported me to heal myself from mental health issues. When I'm creating, I'm not thinking about anything except for colours and which one to choose. It's been a life saver for me and I can't stop, even when I'm tired and probably should stop!

Thanks to Mario Fioretti for his assistance with this article

BELOW: Here are some more pictures in their frames. Notice how the cat image below uses the same outline as the one on the previous page, but here Sophie has chosen a slightly different colour scheme. In the middle, Edgar Degas, famous for his Ballerina' paintings, gets a makeover from Sophie. PICTURES PROVIDED BY SOPHIE STRINGER





This colouring wall was designed by people accessing Flourish Australia's art groups at our Black



After reading Sophie's story on the preceding pages, we bet you have developed the urge to do a bit of colouring yourself.

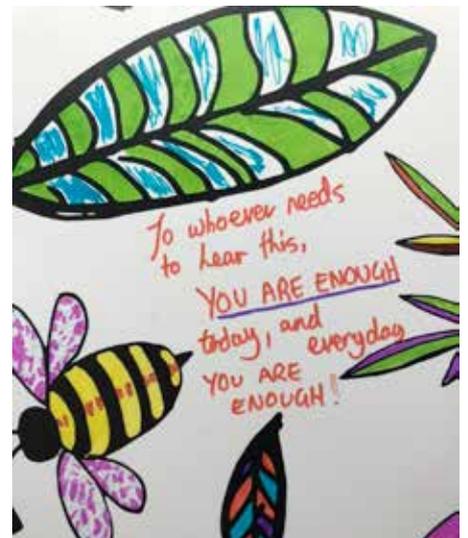
Get out your TEXTAS, it's

Flourish Australia's Colouring Wall

This year as always, Flourish Australia sent a team of participants to Brisbane for TheMHS (The Mental Health Services) 2019 conference. With us we brought a COLOURING WALL, as one does on such occasions.

It was designed by people accessing our services (see bottom). Then we invited people to colour away, and so they did, for a whole week. Sadly, we don't have enough space to show you all of the FABULOMENDOUS colourings that people did. But as a consolation prize, we have printed this on the MIDDLE PAGES so you can tear it out and colour it in yourself at home!

Speaking of TheMHS, our presentations this year were so good that we are going to publish reviews of as many as possible right here in Panorama during September (last issue) October, November and December!



town, Liverpool, Penrith, Hawkesbury and Emu Heights programs.



Setting up, spiking, and supporting: Buck House plays in Volleyball semi-finals

by Grant J Everett

Above: The team members representing Buckingham House are ready to play! Below: Wade on court. PHOTOS BY GRANT J EVERETT

Since 2014 a team of members from Buckingham House at Surry Hills have competed in a multi-stage volleyball competition held at the KGV Sports Centre at The Rocks. This competition is open to teams from all walks of life, so the Buck House team have played against people from a variety of businesses, offices, charities and other organisation.

Five of the six people on the team are members at Buck House, with the sixth being Cheddar (Cedomir, a Mental Health Worker).

While the Buck House team made the semi-finals again, after three hard-fought sets the competition was over for another year. But winning is far from being the only reason they compete: these guys are a team, and that offers a whole host of benefits to anyone.

According to an article in Forbes, being part of a team is good for your overall health and well-being, and it offers a number of psychological and social benefits. It makes you a part of a larger community, for starters, helps you avoid chronic diseases such as diabetes, arthritis and heart disease, boosts your self-esteem, helps combat depressive symptoms while increasing long-term happiness and life satisfaction, improves your physical endurance and muscle mass, provides a sense of belonging, and even makes you smarter. On top of that, the skills you need to play a team sport are the same kind needed to drive a car or do other complex activities (“Six Reasons Why Team Sports Are Good For Your Health”, Forbes.com, March 21th 2018).

We discussed what it’s like to be a part of the Buck House volleyball team (and

the other sport and health activities on offer at this day-to-day living centre) with Wade, who has been involved with the team for some time.

WADE

“I’ve been attending Buck House for two years now, and I first heard about it from a girlfriend who used to come here,” Wade told us. “She doesn’t attend Buck House anymore, but I still do. The big things that have kept me coming back are the exercise groups and sports groups, including the volleyball, tennis, basketball, and gym program. I’ve actually got a yoga class on today, and I attend that regularly. Like with most of the health and exercise groups, Cheddar runs that. I really enjoy all of these, as I like to be active.”

“After doing all this sport for two years, nowadays I feel really physically fit and in good condition. Buck House also promotes healthy eating choices, so nowadays I have salad here and at home almost every day. I actually had salad just last night and again for lunch. If I buy one, I usually get it from Subway, or sometimes Oportos.”

“This year is the second time I’ve competed with our volleyball team. I joined the team after watching them play one time. It looked like lots of fun, so I got involved, and I’ve enjoyed playing ever since. I like volleyball because it’s a team sport, and we’ve all really bonded as a team. I like to be a part of a group, you know? I’m a social person.”

Source: www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2018/03/21/six-reasons-why-team-sports-are-good-for-your-health/#7bc723df6e25





Above: The original Head Office Zumba class after the end of their first session
PHOTO PROVIDED BY WENDY CHIN

Dance like nobody is watching: getting fit and having fun with Zumba

By Wendy Chin

We all have to find the time to do some exercise, as going without regular physical activity will affect your health, both mental and physical. I stopped exercising about 5 years ago after I had my boy, because between work and family and other obligations it felt like I just didn't have time to spare. And while it's good to focus on family and work, I felt that I needed to prioritise my health more.

I decided it was time to get serious about being active again, so I helped start up a Zumba dance club at Head Office. If you are wondering what Zumba is, it's a fitness program that combines Latin dancing and international music, and it's the perfect way to have fun while you exercise. Unlike yoga or pilates or weights, you don't need to be flexible or strong to do it. I find Zumba relaxing, as it doesn't actually feel like you're exercising. Zumba is for people at all stages of fitness, as you're free to dance at your own pace. There's no pressure to go more intense than you want to go. No pressure!

Personally, I don't feel motivated to go to the gym. Knowing on the first set that I still have three more sets to go makes it difficult for me, and I feel sure I'll give up long before the end and just go home. It feels stressful doing the same routine every time, and it's no fun at all. I don't have these problems with Zumba. The first two or three times were hard, and I just felt like "Oh my gosh, end this now...I'm so drained!", but as I continued with it, I found that I was enjoying it. Zumba quickly became a set part of my

routine, and I look forward to doing it. We run the Zumba class every Thursday evening from 5:30pm to 6:30pm at Figtree Conference Centre. Our participants work full time, so meeting late like this allows them to finish at the office first.

I would recommend Zumba to everyone. It's so much fun that it's like having a party every time you go to a lesson. That's how I look at it. It doesn't feel like a chore like other kinds of exercise.

The minimum number of people we need to hold the class is six, and we need them to be able to commit to four lessons. Thankfully, we've maintained the required numbers, and successfully started Term 2 on the 17th of October. A number of women from Head Office attend regularly, mostly from HR and

Marketing, but no men...yet!

We've kept things fun and interesting with some themed sessions. For instance, we had a Movember Zumba session where we all wore black-and-white clothing and fake moustaches to raise funds for men's health. The Halloween Trick-or-Treat Night was another dress up opportunity, and I appeared as a bottle of ketchup. Everyone had a good laugh at my costume, especially when I danced in it!

You don't need much in the way of equipment to run a Zumba class. Music is the most important thing, and it will motivate you to do the full hour that you need to burn the calories off. Comfortable clothing and a comfortable pair of sports shoes are essential, because you want to be able to move around easily. I'm really grateful that our instructor, Jackson, comes onsite to teach us Zumba. Jackson is very nice and keen!

Something I think everyone needs to know before starting Zumba is that nobody is judging you, so there's no need to feel shy or self-conscious about your dancing. Everybody just wants to work out and have a good time, so sweat it out and be yourself. If you like, you can even see Zumba as practise for hitting the clubs!

Flourish Australia staff are welcome to join the Zumba class. All that's required is a little WHS paperwork and a small fee each time. If you're interested, please email me. I'm always happy to answer any questions and queries. I've been keeping everyone up to date with the Zumba group via Yammer, too.

A big thank you to our CEO Mark Orr, my Manager Julie Fraser, Mohammed Alkhub, Tim Fong, Sue, Fiona, Rochelle, Rachel, Priya, June and Jelena. You guys made all this possible.

wendy.chin@flourishaustralia.org.au



Penny pushes herself to the limit in the Tumut Fun Run



ABOVE: Penny takes a short rest during the hectic pace of the Tumut Fun Run PHOTO FROM FLOURISH AUSTRALIA, TUMUT

By Penny Bassett (As told to Grant J Everett)

I've been a part of Flourish Australia over at Tumut for the last four years. I wrestle with a lived experience of mental health issues, mostly depression, but for the last three years I've also had to manage some very serious physical health problems. After nearly dying from a combination of pneumonia, the flu, and a collapsed kidney, it took me a long time to recover to the point where I could simply eat, talk, and walk. I was told I only had a 4% chance of survival at one point, so I feel lucky just to be here to talk about it!

On the upside, this near-death experience gave me a whole new perspective on life. Once I was able to get back on track with physical rehabilitation, I decided that I'd love to do something that really pushed me physically, like a race of some kind.

THE TUMUT FUN RUN

A while back I heard about an upcoming five-kilometre Fun Run being held in Tumut that would support the mental health of struggling farmers. Even though I haven't done any long-distance walking or running since I was about 20 years old, I knew that I wanted to give it a go. Plus, as I often experience feeling that I am in the worst possible place I could be with my depression, I think I know how those farmers are feeling. So I made it my goal, and my challenge, to take part.

The Fun Run was held on the 20th of October, and I didn't actually do any preparation: I simply jumped in on the day. The weather was just right, not too hot or too cold, just pleasant. A Mental Health Worker from the Tumut service of Flourish Australia, Hanneke Sweeney, accompanied me as a support person. She literally walked beside me

on this journey. Hanneke pushed me to keep going and reminded me why we were taking part in this event. Her support gave me the confidence boost I needed. Something that kept me going was remembering what I've survived, thinking about what those poor drought-stricken farmers have to go through each and every day, and just how desperate things are seeming for people who work the land.

I'm not running myself down, but I'm quite a large person who experiences a number of serious health issues, so just taking part in the Fun Run was incredible. For instance, I have problems with my back, so I had to walk with a pusher, a trolley sort of thing. I ended up doing the better part of two kilometres by the time I hit my limit and I think I made pretty good time, too. Once I'd gone as far as I could, I was given a lift back to the starting point. I wish that I could have finished the entire five kilometres. I wanted to keep going until

Physical Health

I reached the end, so I felt disappointed when that didn't happen. There's always next year, and I hope to go twice as far!

In 2020, I'm going to be more prepared: leading up to the Fun Run I'm going to hit the gym, get a professional trainer to help me, and I'll have Flourish Australia walk by my side again. I'm really hoping to beat my best time.

A THOUSAND THANKS

I'm very grateful to Hanneke and to Flourish Australia for everything they did to help me participate. I'm blessed and thankful to them, and I'm very glad that I joined their Tumut service. It's been so good for my mental health and my physical health. All the staff here are fabulous, and they're all just a top lot of people. If it wasn't for Flourish, I don't know where I'd be!

Peer Worker Kerrie Gentle coordinated this entire Fun Run, including getting in touch with McDonalds to get them to donate water dispensers and ice for the thirsty runners. Kerrie also organised all the donations to go to Active Farmers, sorted out the food and cooking facilities, and marked out the five kilometre track in her own time. What a lady! I think Kerrie deserves a medal for making these things happen.

Many other Mental Health Workers and Peer Workers from Flourish Australia put in a lot of effort on the day. They all need a round of applause. I'd particularly like to thank Tim, the Manager at Flourish Australia Tumut, for arranging for all the staff and participants who attend this service to take part in the event.

WORTHWHILE THINGS

I'm receiving support for so many things from Flourish Australia through NDIS funding at the moment. I'm so busy with so many worthwhile pastimes that I barely have a spare moment to spend with my dog! For instance, Flourish Australia take me on trips, and I'm actually visiting Wagga tomorrow with Nancy, one of the workers. She's fabulous, and I'm really looking forward to some one-on-one time with her.

With a little help from Flourish Australia I'm in the process of starting a Certificate IV in Business. There are a lot of units and you also have to do some hands-on

work experience to graduate, though most of the modules can be done online. There's a TAFE at Tumut, but it's a fair run to get there from where I live at present, so doing the course online is much more practical. I'm hoping to do a degree after that. If I decide I want to do something, I'll generally be able to do it.

"Hanneke accompanied me as a support person. She literally walked beside me on this journey. Hanneke pushed me to keep going and reminded me why we were taking part in this event."

- Penny

One of my pastimes is selling things on Facebook. It's not difficult to do, and it's a good way to get some extra money. I buy things for myself, and I also buy specifically to resell. If you put the yards in, you get the goods. It's step by step, but you eventually get there. I suggest anyone who wants to have a go at it should try it, because you do make something from it. It's a good extra income on the side. I'm hoping that it will turn into a business one day.

I have a dream for the future: I would love to be able to provide a safe place for people who are wrestling with mental health issues or homelessness. We definitely need more dedicated services around here. You need to travel a good hour to get to Wagga to access a dedicated mental health unit and it's usually only short term unless you have a very serious underlying issue. It's a definite downside to living remotely. There is a great need in remote areas like here, and I'd love to be able to give back in this way.

PENNY'S GOLDEN ADVICE

If you're struggling with something, don't sit on it. Don't let it accumulate. Deal with it, talk to people, to friends and family. Let it out, don't keep it in. This is how you get better. People care a lot more than you might think. Mental health is a terrible thing to struggle with, and we need more support people to come onboard for people who experience it like I do.

Flourish Australia
7A & 8/123-129
Wynyard Street, Tumut,
NSW 2720
(02) 9393 9527

BELOW: Penny shows off some amazing cooking skills PHOTO FROM FACEBOOK



What is it like being in a Winter Swimming Club? A warm welcome awaits according to John!



Everyone's a winner in a club for Winter swimmers!

ABOVE: John about to get wet at the Mahon pool, Maroubra Beach. PHOTO BY BRIAN ALLAN

By John Maraz (as told to Jade Ryall)

Winter swimming starts in May and finishes around mid-September, so it's the tail end of summer but warm until the end of June. People attend less frequently towards the end.

There are many winter swimming clubs up and down the coast of NSW and QLD and many around Sydney where I live, each with their own way of running and different rules!

One of the most famous and well known is Icebergs in Bondi. But there's the Coogee Penguins, Bronte Seals, Newport Frigid Frogs, Cronulla Sharks. All aquatic themed names!

I swim at Maroubra. It's a nice club in a beautiful sunny spot- unlike the picture!. Some people who go can barely swim a lap! Others can swim okay. I started about 15 years ago. Back then it was men only. I was a supporter of both men and women's, and for the last 8 years it has been inclusive of everyone.

I go to the pool on Sunday morning at 9am. As well as your swimming costume and goggles you need a thick towel and a very good swimming cap. Now, the good thing about the swimming cap is it keeps your body heat in as in our club no

wetsuit is allowed!

The first race you do is called the 'closest to time'. It doesn't matter how fast or slow you are, because it is all organised so that everyone finishes at the same or close to the same time. Good swimmers start later and slower swimmers are supported and go early.

Most ocean pools are in yards because they were built during the depression in the 1930's. Men who were out of work were sponsored or paid to build these pools as a way to get more work happening during the depression.

We do four main types of races. You need a dressing gown to keep warm between races. One lap is 30 metres, so we have a 90 metre, a 60 metre, and a 30 metre. You try to guess your own time and try to better that if you can. For others, there are races such as the 10 person relay, for both men and women and also divided into age groups. I'm in the 55 – 60 age group.

Finally there is the relay race. The relays are a lot of fun. Then it's straight up to the hot showers because we are cold. Followed by soup! Someone is nominated to make a big, hearty soup each week, serving it with fresh bread rolls.

Some days if there is choppy water and the tide is high with big waves it's impossible to swim! So everyone just has a MASS JUMP IN and a quick splash around to experience the camaraderie.

We have a raffle so you can win a few things. Then there's a main meal, there's various things like chicken, fish, mushrooms. In a nice bun. And drinks. Then the results are announced. But if you attend all throughout Winter you receive a special award,

At the end of the season, those who are interested can travel to the Australian Winter Swimming titles. This is an opportunity to go away, usually over a weekend. I usually take one of my children.

Whilst I don't hang out with all the people in the club all the time, I have developed great friendships, because I've known them for such a long time. The great thing is you get to know a lot of people in your local community. You can't walk down the street without seeing someone from swimming and saying hello.

It's like any group you are involved with, you see each other and feel a part of the community. Plus you get some exercise. Swimming fast or slow, no one really cares. I wouldn't care if I came first or last. I don't really pay attention. It's not about that for most. Some of them are Olympians, others have a disability. One we assist into and out of the pool because he has one leg.

It's A good opportunity to form connections. Fitness, food, friendship, fun. It's got something for everyone! If you're interested, check with your local council/ library/ pool. You just turn up, bring a friend with you. They don't have to swim, they could just come along to watch and support you.

Ask someone "what's the process?" and they will jump to attention to help you. Once you join, the membership cost is usually \$20. Just ask, and someone will look after you.

Making A Racquet: The Buck House Tennis Social Day for 2019

By Grant J Everett

The Buckingham House Annual Tennis Event was held on the 29th of November from 11am to 1pm, and included a free lunch. They ran this tennis social day over at the City Community Tennis Courts at Prince Alfred Park, Surry Hills, as it's only a short walk from the day centre on Buckingham Street. It was attended by 72 people from services and 10 staff from different services. People came from as far as Liverpool's Flowerdale day centre.

Once everyone was slathered in sunscreen, the players took turns playing each other or getting coaching from CCT local indigenous coach Alfred, and everyone who got out on the court had a blast. As arranged, a number of people from William Booth Recovery Services (also located at Surry Hills) turned up to compete organisation-versus-organisation, adding another dimension to the event. There was also table tennis running inside the nearby pro centre, and the ping-pongers were keeping up a truly breakneck pace.

Donna Shrubsole, Manager of Buck House, brought 80 freshly-made sandwiches to the park to feed everyone, as well as some healthy gluten-free cake and lots of fruit. Just to highlight what a huge turnout they had this year, every last sandwich disappeared without a trace. As always, the food was healthy and tasty at the same time.

Thanks to the singing group from ASL Music for entertaining the crowd (from the shade, of course: it was a hot day!). They've been kind enough to come to a lot of Buck House festivals and open days to perform.

Making physical health a part of our everyday routine

In addition to this once-a-year comp, the members from Buck House have

Physical Health

been coming to practice and play at City Community Tennis Courts three times a week for the last five years. This has fostered a close bond between the members and staff of Buckingham House with the staff at City Community Tennis, and it's greatly benefited everyone's physical health and overall wellbeing. If you like the sound of improving your tennis game, then it can be as easy as becoming a Member at Buck House (which is free) and coming along on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

On the subject of health, Jade Ryall, Flourish Australia's Program Manager of Back On Track Health, made an appearance on the day to provide personalised wellness plans and health brochures to anybody who wanted them. A number of people dropped by her stall to ask a few questions and take leaflets. Jade is passionate about making physical health a part of daily life.

About City Community Tennis Courts

The City Community Tennis Courts at Surry Hills are open long hours most days of the year. In addition to court hire and equipment hire, you can also arrange coaches for private lessons or for group classes. There are numerous competitions held there throughout the year.

If you play tennis regularly, like the Buck House participants, then a Membership can be a good option. This reduces the overall cost of court hire, classes, the prices of products at the pro shops, and more. Concession rates may be available for some goods and services.



ABOVE, LEFT: Rob D dives for a shot. ABOVE, RIGHT: Michelle from NDIS Outreach and Shaz taking a quick break from table tennis PHOTOS BY GRANT J EVERETT



Above: Cedomir, Marita and Donna PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT



ABOVE: Jade (right) provided wellness plans to anyone who was interested. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT



Running For Fun...ds

By Grant J Everett

The Tumut Fun Run was held on the 20th of October as a part of Flourish Australia's Mental Health Month celebrations in that area. The Fun Run was a team effort put together by a number of Flourish Australia staff, but the main organiser was Peer Worker Kerrie Gentle.

Many staff members and participants from Flourish Australia's Tumut service met at the starting line at Billa Park on the day of the Fun Run to encourage and support one another along the five kilometre track. There were also quite a few locals who turned up to take part on the day, including families with small children in prams, people on bikes, and even dogs (provided they were leashed). Registration was at 8am, with 9am serving as the official start of the event.

Everyone was allowed to run or walk the track at their own pace, and cold, icy beverages were available along the route. Once the fun runners completed the whole five kilometres, they were provided with bacon and egg rolls at the finishing line. The first ten participants to cross the finish line were timed.

Adults paid a \$10 entry fee and children paid \$5. All proceeds went to Active Farmers, an organisation that focuses on the mental health issues experienced by Australian farmers who are doing it tough.

Kerrie has also participated in a charity bike ride through rural NSW for Active Farmers.

Thanks to Hanneke Sweeney, Mental Health Worker, and Kerrie Gentle, Peer Worker, from Flourish Australia's Tumut service, for sharing this story with us.

www.activefarmers.com.au

Flourish Australia
7A & 8/123-129 Wynyard
Street, Tumut, NSW 2720
(02) 9393 9527





Above: Dr Simon Rosenbaum presents the keynote speech at the Annual General Meeting 2019 PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

Exercise is a universal human right: how we can raise the life expectancy of people with mental health issues

by Grant J Everett

Associate Professor Simon Rosenbaum was the keynote speaker for Flourish Australia's Annual General Meeting. Simon is an exercise scientist whose work primarily focusses on people with a lived experience of mental health issues. Simon discussed how the life expectancy of people with mental health issues is on par with the life expectancy of the Indigenous community, which is several decades less than the mainstream.

Due to the strong connection between our physical health and mental health, Simon recommended that we need to redefine mental health care to include more health specialists, and to chip away at very common risk factors like smoking, bad diet, and a sedentary lifestyle. If people with a lived experience want to live to their full life expectancy, then Simon stressed that support is vital. Unfortunately, those

who need intervention the most are often the very ones who miss out.

Simon stressed that predicting negative health factors and implementing immediate intervention is vital. For instance, if someone starts a new medication that is known to cause inevitable weight gain, it's easier to prevent the weight gain by addressing factors such as reigning in your diet and introducing regular exercise to your routine rather than trying to burn off twenty kilograms of fat a year later. As is usually the case, the earlier the intervention, the better the result.

In regards to helping people with a mental health issue exercise, Dr Rosenbaum has been working with gyms, training the trainers about how they can best work with people who have a lived experience. He made it clear that having access to exercise is a universal right for us all, and that people

with a lived experience can and should be able to get just as much out of a gym session as anybody else.

Simon recommended the Equallywell website, which provides resources to help improve the physical health of people living with mental health issues. Their "Keeping Body And Mind Together" fact sheet, for instance, is about how The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists have been working to improve the physical health and life expectancy of people with mental health issues. Simon also mentioned a recent Lancet Commission article called "A blue print for protecting physical health in people with mental illness".

www.equallywell.org.au

www.thelancet.com/commissions/physical-health-in-mental-illness



Above: Some of the team from Flourish Australia at the 2019 TheMHS conference photographed with former Governor General Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO. From left to right. Peter White (Newcastle), Joy Laloli (Newcastle), Dr Grenville Rose (Olympic Park) Peter Farrugia (Olympic Park) Kim Jones (Olympic Park) Christopher Grumley (Mount Druitts) Alison Perizi (Wollongong) Mark Cliff (Newcastle) Dame Quentin, Mozy Wilkinson (Parkes), Spencer McGill (Griffith), Donna Wilkinson, Natasha Jones (Newcastle), Grant Macphail (Olympic Park) PHOTO SUPPLIED BY KIM JONES FROM FB.

TheMHS (The Mental Health Services Conference) happens every August at a venue somewhere in Australia and New Zealand. People involved in mental health services gather to share their innovations and discoveries with others.

In our September issue, we read about Matthew Cheyne's presentation at Brisbane 2019 TheMHS. He was one of many people from Flourish Australia who presented. Over the next few issues we will be covering more!

In this issue we have two presentations which seem to converge on a common theme of how important it is that we listen to one another.

But before that, Peter Farrugia will suggest that YOU might have something important to say too!

And here are a couple more pics from our colouring wall (see middle pages) on which visitors wrote messages about recovery.



Could YOU present at TheMHS 2020?



by Peter Farrugia

Do you access or work for a Flourish Australia service? Are you interested in presenting at the next TheMHS Conference on behalf of Flourish Australia?

The Mental Health Services Conference (usually shortened to TheMHS Conference) is a major yearly event open to anybody who is interested in the mental health field. Everyone is welcome to submit an abstract to speak at TheMHS, especially if they have some kind of connection to mental health issues, whether personal or professional. Not only are people with a lived experience welcome to apply, but they often give the best, most touching presentations of all.

Why would I want to present at TheMHS?

Whether the individual people in the audience at TheMHS are on a recovery journey or not, sharing your recovery story with them can be a truly uplifting experience for everyone. Hearing about the positives and challenges of your recovery can change lives, as learning how somebody overcame adversity on their way to wellness can be helpful. Whatever the content of your talk, people can take away the elements that personally resonate with them.

Presenting at TheMHS as an everyday person with a lived experience can encourage the audience to think about their hopes and recovery aims, and even lead them to make positive changes in their own lives.

Flourish Australia's staff members are

welcome to put in an abstract, too. The organisation has so many staff members in many different areas doing amazing things for the people who access our services, and we want them to know that what they're doing is important. There are magical moments happening every day as people break moulds and create new pathways forward, and you'll never know who you will inspire or how your words will shift the way people see things.

“In my opinion, the best presentations are the ones given by the people with a lived experience, so I'd like to encourage everyone who accesses Flourish Australia services to consider putting together an abstract for TheMHS. We want to hear your voice!”

-Peter Farrugia

Each year, TheMHS and Flourish Australia offer a variety of supports and financial assistance to help cover the costs of participating. TheMHS 2020 is being held in Perth, though its location varies from year to year.

How does somebody present at TheMHS?

If you want to present at TheMHS, then your first step is to write a 200 word abstract covering what you want to talk about. That's only a couple of paragraphs. Your topic could be something you've done in your professional capacity as a peer worker for Flourish Australia or about some

kind of personal recovery milestone (for instance), but it should preferably be something that's happened within the last twelve months. TheMHS presentations have to be current, relevant, and interesting, and coming up with a concept that ticks all three boxes will increase your odds of success. If your brief is accepted by Flourish Australia and TheMHS, then you'll need to put your actual presentation together.

Please note that not every submission will get through the approval process, and that there are strict closing dates for submissions listed on the TheMHS website (the link is at the bottom of this article). There are only a few spots for Flourish Australia to fill...but if you don't make it, there's always next year! People can also apply directly to TheMHS independently.

Ten years well spent

“Often, the most basic ideas are the best ideas. I've been attending TheMHS for close to a decade, and the one presentation I can still remember was a ten-minute snapshot about kindness. Simple, but amazingly effective. It's stayed with me all this time.

I love TheMHS. It's motivating, and it's uplifting. The people you meet are all there for the same reason: to inspire, to share, to learn, to grow. You meet the most genuine, goodhearted people from all facets of life, and it's one of the few opportunities for all those people to come together and move forward.

While not every conversation I have at TheMHS will lead to everyone being in agreement, these conversations will challenge us and motivate us to explore ways of thinking, put different ideas in the same room, and allow us to consider the opportunities within these new concepts. I've made some great friends on a personal level through the TheMHS Conference who I'm still in contact with today, and I can't recommend it enough.”

- Peter Farrugia

Interested in presenting at TheMHS 2020 at Perth? Go to their website and follow the links to find out more!
www.themhs.org

Healing language that builds connection, trust and collaboration

By Warren Heggarty

Shock! Laughter! Passion! Annoyance! ... as TheMHS goes Intergalactic on Healing Language

What would happen if you were developing a POLICY DOCUMENT and it contained serious references to ALIENS from another GALAXY? Wonder no more! The Healing Language Workshop at 2019 TheMHS was full of Alien Encounters of a Raw kind.

Using clinical language can lead to stigma and repel people from seeking help, according to one group from Flourish Australia who presented a workshop at the Brisbane TheMHS in August. It makes sense, then to use language that is co-designed, that is, language that is approved by the people who are accessing the services.

More and more people are recognising this nowadays for “everyday interactions.” But how far should organisations and clinicians take it? To what degree should policies and procedures be written in co-designed language?

The abstract to the workshop promised that a quarter of the time would be dedicated to discussion about a phrase that could be considered controversial. This phrase seeks to provide a brave, respectful, real life example of why language is so important...it shows what TRULY inclusive, empowering and person-led language might look like. The phrase comes from Flourish Australia’s Co-Design Guidelines, Accountability number 8:

“Co-design processes and outcomes must have a local focus but be aware and respecting of regional,

national, global, intergalactic, all other dimensions, unique views, beliefs and realities.”

The workshop “Healing Language that Builds Connection, Trust and Collaboration” was presented by Scott Gourlay (CAC Deputy Chair, accesses Flourish Australia’s Taree service) Fay Jackson (General Manager, Inclusion), Kim Jones (Project officer, Inclusion) Grant McPhail (Senior Policy and Planning Coordinator), Simon Swinson (lived experience expert), Maurice “Mozy” Wilkinson (CAC Chair, accesses Flourish Australia’s Parkes service).

Mozy told Panorama that, “language level is very important. I like down-to-Earth language. To me it was about using language that included everybody.”

Concerns

Mozy noted, “Some workshop participants had concerns about our workshop at the beginning, but in fact, we the presenters had our own concerns and we managed to work through them! Something similar happened with the workshop itself.”

“There was a strong reaction by some to the intergalactic aspect, but no one said ‘take it out.’ The majority of people were surprised by it, but by the end of it all, the feedback indicated that they were inspired and they congratulated us.”

One person, whom we shall call Ms T, was particularly concerned because when she had been unwell, she had seen aliens. She asked whether it was wise to be so accepting of this sort of experience that it appears in a policy document.

Mozy explained: “You were there with the aliens once, and you’ve since decided to move on from that. But some people are there now, with the aliens, so to speak. I think by the end of it her concerns were allayed, and Scott Gourlay spoke with her individually as well.”

The more formal language that clinicians use and that we in turn are expected to adopt, can rob what we are saying of some of its meaning and intensity.

Simon Swinson said, “we need to talk about ‘raw language.’ People don’t use language that is sharp enough. We need to explore raw language more.”

Far better than expected

Mozy said, “One couple told us it was the best workshop they’d been to at the conference.”

For Scott Gourlay it was all amazing on a number of levels.

“It was an amazing turnout. Everybody was so engaged. It went far better than we had expected. It really was the cherry on the sundae. From a personal perspective, I found presenting to crowds of people a totally terrifying experience. But it was a challenge to stretch my boundaries and it was well worth the effort because I ended up achieving more than I had expected of myself.”

Simon noted that there were a lot of New Zealanders speaking Maori. The Keynote speakers were very good. “The Speaker from Trieste who discussed getting people out of hospital was very interesting.”

“...you were there with the aliens once, and you’ve since decided to move on from that. But some people are there now, with the aliens so to speak.”

What do we really think about the professions that provide mental health services?

Britton. Simon and Michael are people who access Flourish Australia's services.

Previous research in this area has mainly been quantitative. For example the MHCoPES surveys and the YES surveys which involve people being asked to evaluate mental health services after they have used them.

Other research has concentrated on the perceptions of the health care professionals themselves rather than the people who access their services.

Grenville's team engaged a person from the University of New South Wales to conduct interviews at four Flourish Australia locations. Buckingham House, in Surry Hills NSW; Newcastle; Bega and Ulladulla. The research was supported by sponsorship from the Community Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Research Network.

"...it is a forum where sometimes people will question you very strongly about your presentation. That is one of the things I really like about TheMHS."

What the research showed is a tendency to view non clinical support workers more positively than, say, psychiatrists. This was because support workers made more time, listened and related more. There were trust issues with psychiatrists. This is perhaps understandable given that their interactions with patients are often focused on medication, and sometimes also include coercive aspects like compulsory treatment (eg., 'scheduling' and 'Community Treatment Orders').

Here is a quote which compares psychologists favourably to psychiatrists.

"The psychiatrist is more stern and medication orientated, more based on how the medication affects you and the psychologist is talking about your week and talking about how you feel."

Survey respondents made many comments along these lines, comparing clinical approaches unfavourably with more personal, non-clinical approaches. For example, here are a couple of quotes

Second in our series on the 2019 TheMHS Brisbane Conference

ABOVE: Brisbane River by night. Brisbane was host to the 2019 TheMHS conference in which people come from all over Australia, New Zealand and the world to present their ideas about improving services. PHOTO BY KIM JONES

"Quality Mental Health Support: Perceptions of health professionals by people who access their services"

A doctor was asked about a patient who was 'not compliant.' "No, I did not ask about any personal details, what is the use of that? She never follows any instructions. I focused only on her medical condition and that is it." (Franklin, et al., 2018)

This comes from research into doctor-patient relations carried out by Marika Franklin and team and it illustrates the way rigidly following the medical

model can get in the way of health professionals developing a good, LISTENING relationship with patients.

There is surprisingly little in depth research based on interviews with the people who access mental health services (Qualitative research). Dr Grenville Rose, Flourish Australia's Senior Research and Evaluation Officer, and his team set out to try to fill this gap and then to present the findings at the 2019 TheMHS conference.

The research also looked at how attitudes differ depending on the particular profession, Psychiatrist, General Practitioner, Psychologist, Mental Health Worker and so forth.

The team included presenters Grenville and Simon Swinson, and contributors Michael Wren, Dr Kate Ball and Seamus

about Flourish Australia mental health workers.

“Well they’ve helped me with the NDIS, which I don’t think I would be able to do.”

“They were awesome, really good. Just out of hospital, they helped me with things like travel training, relearning how to do things like budgeting and grocery shopping and they really helped me quite a lot”

General practitioners were viewed rather more favourably than some of us might expect. Although they are clinicians, they are in a better position it seems to develop personal rapport with patients.

How did the team’s presentation go down with the audience at Brisbane?

‘TheMHS Conference is attended by many people who access mental health services,’ Grenville told Panorama, ‘So it is a forum where sometimes people will question you very strongly about your presentation. That is one of the things I really like about TheMHS. It’s a good thing to happen, being strongly questioned, because it makes you better prepared for next time!’

“With this presentation, we got questions which showed that people in the audience were interested in the material, and they were not all angry questions, which is good!”

‘One thing that would help is if health professionals went outside the biomedical model when working with patients to set goals.’

What does it mean to go outside the medial model? Here is an example. Say a person has chronic back pain. A biomedical goal such as removing the pain provides no real answer. Drugs can lose their effectiveness and lead to addiction. Suppose however that the doctor asks this: My patient likes hiking and tells me she hasn’t done any since this pain started. How can I support her to go hiking again? This question might have a practical answer. The pain might still be present, but the feeling of being excluded from a favourite activity can be managed.

Next issue: More TheMHS presentations reviewed!

Gladesville Hospital Cemetery Memorial

By Warren Heggarty

The NSW Mental Health Commissioner, Catherine Lourey has announced a Memorial Ceremony at Gladesville Hospital to acknowledge and remember the lives of former residents of the Gladesville Psychiatric Hospital on Victoria Road, Gladesville.

As reported in our Panorama story of March 2018 Panorama, the old Gladesville campus is the final resting place of about 1,229 former patients and several staff of the old hospital. Yet at that time, only five of those graves were actually marked.

The memorial ceremony which will take place on 12 December 2019 will be the first time that there has been formal acknowledgement that this is a cemetery.

Initially known as the Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum (1838-1868), the hospital was renamed Gladesville Hospital for the Insane (1868-1914) and finally known as Gladesville Hospital (1915-1993).

In her open invitation to the ceremony, Commissioner Lourey said the fact that almost all the graves are unmarked is ‘an indication of the high level of ignorance

and shame that pervaded attitudes towards those who experienced mental health issues in the past.’

‘The cemetery is a poignant reminder that we must never again allow vulnerable people to be abandoned, devalued, and hidden away. Instead we must focus on hope, recovery, support, and inclusion,’ she said on behalf of the Commission.

The ceremony is not just for former residents of Gladesville hospital. ‘In holding this historic memorial ceremony,’ Ms Lourey said, ‘we offer respect to those whose remains are here in unmarked graves, as well as former residents buried elsewhere. We also pay respects to people buried at other hospitals and institutions. Our community acknowledges their journeys of suffering, distress and abandonment. This memorial is part of a journey to honour their memory.’

The ceremony will include Aboriginal cultural elements, lived experience acknowledgements, speeches and shared stories.

Representatives of Flourish Australia will be there and so will Panorama. Panorama will give a full report on the memorial in our first issue of 2020

Below: The buildings of the former Gladesville Hospital are now used for other purposes. These buildings are just downhill from the burial area. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY



Mental Health Month 2019 Sharing the journey (again) at Katoomba



Mental Health Month is marked each October with events all around the country, including the more than 60 Flourish Australia services in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. This year, the WayAhead organisation which coordinates Mental Health Month decided that last year's theme 'Share the Journey' was so good, that we needed to do it all again in 2019. And so we did!

The Katoomba service of Flourish Australia ran their Mental Health Month Celebration at a church hall in the main street of this quiet mountain town.

Starting at 10am, our MC for the day was Gerard Oomen, the Team Leader of the Katoomba Community Mental Health Team, and Welcome to Country was performed by Auntie Carol. Outside the church, there were art groups for the creatively inclined, sausages were sizzled, and prizes were handed out for the winners of a little scavenger hunt. Bunnings made an appearance, handing out free seedling kits to anyone who was interested in a spot of gardening. As it's Spring, it's the perfect time to get your hands dirty!

Many local services made an appearance on the day, handing out information about the support they have to offer and literally sweetening the deal with lollies, pens, and other little goodies. Gateway Family Services, Thrive Housing Support, Wentworth Community Housing and Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District all had dedicated tables inside of the church, keeping their flyers safe from the vicious mountain wind.

There was live music throughout the day, including Aunty Jacinta, who played the guitar beautifully and sang her own "hard and easy" songs about the loss, scars and hope of the Indigenous community. The Vocal Local choir was up next, singing some golden oldies. Entertainment wise, we also had dancers was from a belly-dancing troupe called Ghawazi Caravan, and later in the day two local Indigenous performers displayed some of the traditional dances and songs their people have been doing for tens of thousands of years. They also shared some interesting information about their tribe, and what life was like for them far to the west of the Blue Mountains. PHOTOS BY GRANT J EVERETT

Peter Donovan, a local Blue Mountains artist from Lithgow, had some exquisite pieces of art for sale. Be sure to read about Peter's journey to recovery and wellbeing in our next issue!



Flourish Australia's Peer Space Workshop earns a gong at TheMHS 2019

By Peter Farrugia (pictured in Chicago IL, as told to Grant J Everett)

At the TheMHS 2019 awards Flourish Australia was recognised for our efforts in peer work, specifically in how we are using the power of lived experience in our Peer Space Workshop. As the creator of the Peer Space Workshop, I wrote it with a very Flourish Australia focus and it is continuing to provide peer workers with the opportunity to practice using their lived experience in their role in an effective way. What makes this Workshop really important is that it builds on the national Certificate IV in Peer Work which is a great qualification that all peer workers need to complete to work in this field.

The Workshop shares some simple takeaway messages, such as how to use active listening, so you can be ready to catch opportunities, and asking open-ended questions that will actively prompt people to identify what's possible in their recovery journey. That's what this training day is all about. We also do a lot of roleplays and interactive sessions in the Workshop, so we're all up and

out of our chairs, moving around and learning to use our lived experiences to strengthen the recovery conversations that we are expected to have as peer workers. There's a lot of theory to learn in this course but the feedback from people who completed this Cert IV is "How do I use my lived experience at work to help others?"

Sending the right message

We want to encourage people to aim for their dream careers, and not limit their thinking about what possibilities are open to them. While peer work is a really effective and strengths-based way to apply the kinds of experiences and life skills you acquire through a recovery journey, it's just one of the many options available. I would even encourage peo-

ple who are considering a new career to broaden their thinking beyond the mental health sector, as there are so many, many job roles where you can give back to the community. With the right confidence, training, skill development and support, I believe people can do whatever they want to do in life.

As the Peer Workforce Manager, I love seeing peer workers progress in their practice and it's even more satisfying when you see peer workers progress to senior peer work roles or management roles, or even go beyond mental health to pursue something that aligns more closely with their hobbies and interests.

Earning an income, and being self-sustaining from that income, can serve as a launch pad.

Mental Health Matters Awards

In addition to earning an award at TheMHS 2019, at the Mental Health Matters Awards we were commended for our transgender transitioning policy. This was a part of the LGBTI category, which is sponsored by ACON.

The Award was won by Rainbow Waves Youth Festival in Bega and I'm really happy to say that I actually spoke to the organisers of Rainbow Waves before they put that festival together.

They sought some advice from me in my professional capacity here at Flourish Australia and to see them take that award ahead of us is really great to see, but we're going to nip at their heels next year!

Below: People from the Rainbow Waves Festival receive their Mental Health Matters Award from the Minister for Mental Health, The Hon Bronnie Taylor MLC in September PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY





ABOVE: The exiting representatives shares their highlights of serving in the Community Advisory Council with the NEW members of the CAC. **FROM LEFT:** Phil O'Loughlin of Moree, Scott Gourlay (Deputy Chair) of Taree, Mozzzy Wilkinson (Chair) of Parkes, Heidi Chan of Harris Park Community Business and Matthew Franks of Tamworth. PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

by Kim Jones

The latest Community Advisory Council meeting was held at Figtree Conference Centre on the 13th and 14th of November.

In addition to addressing and resolving all the issues that had been raised by the people they represent at quite a few Flourish Australia locations, this CAC saw several of its reps retiring after the completion of their two years of service. We'd like to bid a warm farewell to the CAC members who retired from their posts on the day: Phil O'Loughlin, Deputy Chair Scott Gourlay, Chair Mozzzy Wilkinson, Heidi Chan, and Matthew Franks (all in the photo above). A few of the exiting CAC reps were absent, such as Nathan Davis from Tumut and Shane Bentley from Nowra, who were unable to attend their final meeting due to complications caused by the bushfires.

This was an opportunity for all the new members to have a hands-on experience of how CAC meetings work, and will be back regularly throughout their terms.

There are so many people to thank for so many reasons!

I would like to thank you all for participating in the CAC meeting. Feedback from the group was very positive as they appreciate meeting members of the SLT, staff and being able to ask questions and have their concerns addressed face to face. Thank you to Grant for the promotion of Panorama and to Jasmin Moradides for organising Neil to take photos. The new CAC are all excited to see themselves in future publications!

The new CAC learned all about Annie Sykes, our Independent Advocate, including her job role, her contact details, and how to begin a complaints process if they feel their concerns are not being met elsewhere.

The whole CAC thanked Fay Jackson for the kind email she wrote to them, and for the support she's provided over the past two years. Thanks to Mark Orr for attending the farewell ceremony, and presenting the exiting representatives

with their letters of appreciation and certificates. The reps are so grateful that you attended and personally thanked them for their contribution to Flourish Australia.

Thanks once again to Sue O'Rourke and the Figtree staff for their attention to detail in looking after all our conference needs. The CAC representatives are always impressed with the venue and catering.

Finally, thanks to Wendy Chin and June Harrison for organising all the travel and accommodation needs, as well as all the ad hoc issues that can pop up along the way. It's very much appreciated.

Part of a Flourish Australia service or business? Got an issue? Think something needs to be done better? Feeling unheard? Ask a staff member who your Community Advisory Council representative is. The CAC is here to represent YOU.



Flourish Australia's

Annual General Meeting 2019

A time to reflect on how far we've come...

by Grant J Everett

Flourish Australia's Annual General Meeting is a fantastic opportunity to take pride in the achievements of the organisation and to celebrate the progress of all the people we support.

It's been an incredibly busy year for Flourish Australia. The organisation has expanded further across the country, opening up new branches in the ACT and Melbourne, and we've been hiring new staff members, particularly those with an experience of mental health issues, to be able to support more people than ever before (at last count, over 8,000 people now access our services). We're operating 71 different locations that include day-to-day living centres, community businesses, housing services and places where you can get NDIS support, and there are plans to grow even further. For instance, we're opening headspace offices at Parramatta and Castle Hill.

The AGM also marks the release of our Annual Report, a publication that goes into great depth about the great work everybody has been doing over the last year. The Annual Report shows how we are performing financially, shares the latest news about our programs, and always features inspiring recovery

stories starring the people we support. Thanks to Garry, Sahr, Ann, Raylene and Nancy, Heidi, Jon and Linda for starring in the Annual Report's pages and sharing your stories. It was great to see all of you up on stage to accept your framed certificates of appreciation.

Formalities

Once the minutes from 2018's AGM were confirmed, Jeremy Thorpe presented his final annual financial report as our treasurer. All up, Flourish Australia brought in \$72.3 million dollars from a variety of sources, a 14% increase over the previous year. The government, particularly NDIS funds, is still our biggest source of income, but our community businesses and other interests – such as the remaining Guildford apartments that are up for sale (hint hint) – help pay the bills and keep the lights on, so to speak.

Speaking of funding, we are constantly

providing more and more support and services bankrolled through the NDIS as time goes on, and we've overcome a number of challenges along the way. NDIS resources allow us to provide many forms of tailored support, such as helping people find open employment. In order to make sure that the average person is able to navigate the potential complexities of the NDIS we have hired a team of dedicated staff members to answer queries and questions via email and over the phone. Got an NDIS issue? Give Patricia or Kathy a call!

Dr Phil Wing and Andrew Pryor were appointed by the Board earlier this year to temporarily fill vacancies, but during the AGM they were both elected as new Board Directors for the next three years.

After a lifetime of hard work and achievement we farewelled Sacha Maller and Bruce Alcorn, two men who made huge contributions to the organisation and who won't be forgotten.

Sadly, many people could not attend the AGM due to the fire crisis, including quite a few members of the Board. Our thoughts were with all the victims of these awful bushfires, and we hoped that there wouldn't be any more casualties. We were particularly concerned for the people with a lived experience who were unable to attend the AGM due to being evacuated from their homes or for other emergency



Events

reasons. We were glad that some members of the Community Advisory Council - including Scott, Mozy and Heidi - were here on the day.

Thanks to Sue O'Rourke and the Figtree Conference Centre team for spoiling everyone with an amazing breakfast and lunch.

The AGM was streamed on our Facebook page, thanks to Jas Moradides. You can watch the whole hour and a half here:

<https://www.facebook.com/FlourishAus/videos/2792201584171834/>

The Annual Report can be accessed at:

www.annualreport.flourishaustralia.org.au

Ann McLachlan: saved by the WarmLine

Ann McLachlan is a Librarian who accesses Flourish Australia services out at Dubbo, and she shared some of her recovery journey on stage at the AGM.

“I was a carer for my very sick mum. This involved extensive rehab as well as lots of other kinds of physically demanding support, such as assisted showering. Eventually, this pressure put me into a tailspin and I began to get unwell. On the 5th of February 2015, I had an episode and needed to be hospitalised.”

“Something that helped me get through these hard times was being able to call the WarmLine for support. Despite technological advances, it's still hard to access support in a regional or remote place, so something like the WarmLine may often be the only immediate help on offer during darker times. What I found especially wonderful was that the people who answered my calls on the WarmLine were welcoming and offered a personalised touch to their conversation. Callers and WarmLine staff form a relationship of sorts over time, rather than just total strangers having a conversation.”

Ann's story of her association with the WarmLine and Flourish Australia is featured in the Annual Report. Lots of thanks to Ann for getting up the front of the entire Annual General Meeting and sharing your tale.



From top left, clockwise: CEO Mark Orr opens the AGM; Christine Miniawy, Donna Mozy and Kim Jones; Tim Fong, Aidan Conway and Pam Rutledge; Prof Elizabeth Moore presents all the people who starred in the Annual Report with their framed certificates of appreciation. PHOTOS BY NEIL FENELON



Home cleaning skills through NDIS

Newcastle's new outdoor Friendship Spaces

ABOVE: People who access the Newcastle service contributed to the design. We hope to adorn the grey wall with our own mural in future!. PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAELI GWILLIAM

by Michaeli Gwilliam

Flourish Australia's Newcastle service, (known as Hunter Street Wellbeing Centre's) recently had an upgrade to its courtyard. This was thanks to funding provided through the Stronger Communities Programme after an invitation from the local federal member Sharon Claydon MP.

This funding was made available for small capital projects which will improve community participation and contribute to the vibrancy and viability of our local area. A grant amount of \$19,000 was given to us. This amount was matched by Flourish Australia.

Prior to the upgrade, our courtyard space was an empty concrete area where limited activities and programs could be facilitated. The upgrade to our courtyard has transformed this space into a vibrant and practical area for programs and activities to be facilitated for people who access the service, as well as a calm and relaxing outdoor space for people to develop friendships and decrease isolation whilst they're

here.

People accessing the Hunter Street service contributed to the design of the courtyard, and there has also been much debate about what improvements we could make in the future. It was decided that the grey walls will be adorned with a mural developed by our ArtReach program, and we'll add a vegetable garden.

We now have the potential to open up the doors and use this space for larger functions, such as engaging the local community with art exhibitions and markets. The courtyard space is already being used for a variety of group programs including gardening, exercise and outdoor art, amongst many others.

The new courtyard now enables multiple groups to use this space simultaneously, and our staff and the people who access our service are continuing to develop ideas for how to use it in 2020. We are looking forward to further development, including a vertical herb garden and wall murals designed by people who access the service.

Your household skills can become rusty if your life has been disrupted by mental health issues, long term hospitalisation or homelessness. Responding to this need, Flourish Australia has launched a program to support people to gain greater independence at home by developing their housework skills. This service will be available to people who need it as part of their NDIS funding.

Who better to do this than the people who work in our community cleaning businesses in St Marys and Warwick Farm? Our cleaning supervisors have experience supporting people with a lived experience of mental health issues in cleaning work.

- Some of the things covered include
- hygienic cleaning practices in areas such as bathrooms and food preparation areas
 - carpet and floor cleaning
 - safe waste disposal
 - general cleaning
 - clothes washing skills

'If you have eligible NDIS Core funding, you may apply to receive this support.' says James Herbertson, who heads up Flourish Australia's Community Businesses. 'It is for two hours per week for a period of 13 consecutive weeks. We will assist you to develop your own home cleaning plan. We will train you to clean using professional methods like separating cleaning utensils for bathrooms and kitchens, vacuuming, mopping and so on.'

At the end of the 13 week program you will get a training outcome report. Some people may be eligible for further skill development if necessary. 'At this stage the program will launch in South-Western and Western Sydney from our Warwick Farm and St Marys sites,' says James, 'however, if there is sufficient demand we hope to roll it out further to other regions where Flourish Australia Community Businesses operate.'

contact **Tara Ireland, NDIS Support Coordinator, Community Businesses at Tara.Ireland@flourishaustralia.org.au**





ABOVE: Big Issue Vendors gather for a “Vendor Cafe” meeting at Flourish Australia’s Newcastle service. Bill Robertson is in the centre at the top. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

Making a Big Issue out of supporting people who are marginalised

By Bill Robertson (as told to Grant J Everett)

Bill Robertson is The Big Issue’s Vendor Support & Community Street Soccer Program Coordinator in Newcastle. He spoke with Panorama about the special relationship between Flourish Australia’s Hunter Street service and the local chapter of The Big Issue.

Newcastle’s branch of The Big Issue runs a Vendor Café meeting every Friday, and the Hunter Street service of Flourish Australia has very kindly provided us a space for these weekly get-togethers. Flourish Australia have made us feel welcome, and as our organisations work with the same groups of people in many ways, we have a lot in common. We share many ideals, such as encouraging people to build on their existing skills so they can make decisions about their own lives, that sort of stuff.

While The Big Issue has been in Melbourne for 20-odd years, it’s only been in Newcastle since November 2018. So Flourish Australia helped us launch it locally, really.

The people who attend the weekly Vendor Café meeting are from a range of backgrounds, including a number who have been marginalised by mainstream services in the past. They really are an interesting group from many walks of life.

Street Soccer

I interact with Flourish Australia on a regular basis in other ways, such as through the soccer program I help to run. My co-worker Phoebe and I run the Street Soccer program every Thursday, and that’s about engaging people by getting them to kick a ball while linking them up with services (*See Panorama’s story about the Street Soccer program in Newcastle in the June 2019 issue with the sailboat on the cover, page 20 - Ed*).

As my job role is Vendor Support, that means I support the people who actually go out and sell The Big Issue magazine itself. We train our vendors how to sell the magazine and provide ongoing support with it. We provide them with all the training and encouragement they need in order to get out there and sell.

The Big Issue provides an opportunity for people to work independently and effectively run their own business. It’s not an easy job, which is why I’m here to help. Selling magazines on street corners isn’t straightforward, and our vendors need fortitude, some forward planning and to put some thought into their budgeting.

All the skills that a vendor will learn in the process of selling The Big Issue are important to develop, and we hope

this will lead them towards their career goals.

The magazine is an outlet that allows people to earn a bit of money and build on their job skills while they’re at it. Of the \$9 a vendor gains from selling a copy of The Big Issue, they keep \$4.50 and the remainder is invested in creating future articles. Our vendors are often on government allowances, so they will appreciate the opportunity to make some more money.

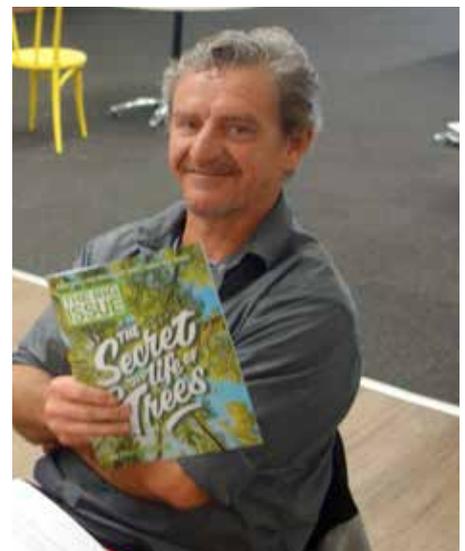
Some of our vendors have been very engaged in the community, and others have moved to Newcastle in recent years.

Marginalised

Sometimes there’s an awkwardness around the language to use when discussing people who are experiencing hardship or disadvantage, so we often use the word “marginalised” because it’s something that happens to people in terms of their access to services, rather than it being something that’s their fault.

Not only is The Big Issue an Australia-wide social enterprise, it’s sold all over the world. After starting in the UK, about two decades ago it was picked up in Australia and several other countries including America, South Africa and Korea. There are a number of region-specific versions of the magazine around the planet, and while they might not run the same articles or be in the same language, all of these magazines are still called The Big Issue. Nowadays you can find a number of street-sale magazines across many countries that use a very similar system to The Big Issue. It’s become an international movement, and inspired a number of imitators along the way.

BELOW: Local Vendor, Craig, showing off the latest edition of The Big Issue



Lucinda Brogden at
the Mental Health
Month Breakfast
2019:

We can all
contribute
to
workplace
mental
health



Above: Commissioner Lucinda Brogden AM PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT

“Love and work are
the cornerstones of
our humanness.”

Lucy Brogden

employs people with mental health issues, whether they know it or not

- 80% of the working population will have a mental health issue at some point, yet only 50% of organisations focus on the psychological health in their employees
- Employers have a legal Work Health & Safety obligation to provide a safe environment for their workers, and that includes psychological safety
- Poor mental health costs Australian organisations \$37 billion in sick leave alone, not counting the cost of treatment and ongoing debilitation
- Employers need to offer people with mental health issues the support they require to work effectively

By Grant J Everett

Our annual Mental Health Month Breakfast was held on the 31st October. Before the official proceedings, everyone mingled in the art area of Figtree Conference Centre, were caffeinated with free coffee brewed up by a barista team hired for the day, and were treated to an amazing spread for breakfast.

Our guest speaker was Lucinda Brogden AM. Lucinda is Chair and Commissioner of the National Mental Health Commission, a very influential group that meets twice yearly with the Prime Minister to provide guidance on how we deal with mental health issues as a nation. Lucinda also Chairs with Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance and the Australian Advisory Group for Suicide Prevention. She has over 25 years of experience with major companies in accounting and finance and she has more than ten years in organisational psychology. In 2015, Lucinda was named as one of the 100 Women of Influence in Australia. She has also been a key support person for her husband John, who has a history of depression.

Each of our Mental Health Month Breakfasts have a theme, and this year it was “Mental Health in the Workplace.” As she is more than qualified to speak on this subject, Lucinda had a lot to say. Some of her findings included...

- One in five Australians will struggle with mental health issues each year
- The numbers say that EVERY workplace

- We need all workers to become aware of what they can do to support mental health in their workplace (and elsewhere)
- A strong peer work focus is essential for all organisations
- We need to open more acute beds for people in need
- According to the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan 2019, our “stubborn” suicide rates refuse to

Below: Workers discuss mental health in the workplace at work over breakfast. PHOTO BY GRANT J EVERETT



go down, and they are a stark and tragic reminder that people are suffering

According to the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance (of which Lucinda is also Chair), there are six ways employers can help to reduce the severity of mental health issues and increase good mental health in their workplaces.

1. Designing roles and managing workloads to reduce harm to employee wellbeing
2. Equipping managers with leadership capabilities, in turn enhancing the whole team's resilience to stress
3. Building resilience in employees, particularly those who are exposed to unavoidable stressors
4. Encouraging early help-seeking behaviour for those who are experiencing mental health symptoms
5. Supporting return to work for those who have become debilitated by their mental health issues
6. Increasing awareness and working to reduce the stigma that still exists around mental health issues

A big thanks to all the organisations who attended the breakfast. They include Arthur J. Gallagher, BDO, Breakthru, Central and Eastern Sydney PHN, Donorcentricity, Generation Health, Independent Advisory Council to the NDIS, Integricare, Marketing Buzz, Mental Health Commission of NSW, MHCC, Mirvac, NSW Health, PWC, Republic of Everyone, Resonate Solutions, Sydney Olympic Park Authority, The Salvation Army Aged Care, TheMHS Learn Network, and WentWest Limited.

Hope to see you all next year!

Further reading

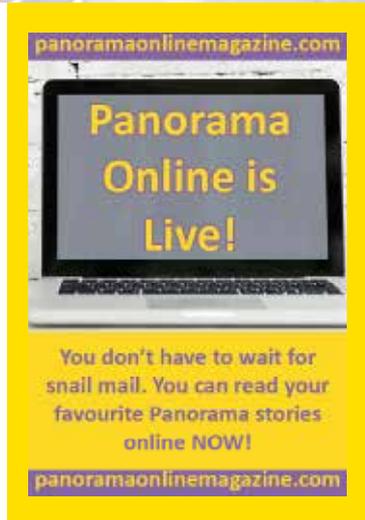
Building Stronger Communities and Workplaces by Lucinda Brogden AM
Making Connections with your Mental Health and Wellbeing: Imagine 2030
The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance
National Mental Health Workplace Initiative
Mentally Healthy Workplaces: Good for Business
Mentally Healthy Workplaces: Good for Business



Haaayyyy!!!

In our June 2019 issue, page 24 in the spread on "Rainbow on the Plains," we wrongly captioned the picture of the person holding the LEETON sign as Ledy. It is, in fact, Sarah Dossetor.

Sorry for any embarrassment or confusion caused by this error. And by the way, we appreciate it when readers point out where we could have done better. If you spot a mistake in Panorama, don't hesitate to tell us about it at panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au



Family and Carers

National Carers Week

Flourish Australia understands how vital the roles of family members and volunteer carers are in supporting people who live with mental health issues. That is why we use a family inclusive approach.

When someone asks us for support we talk about how family members or other carers might become involved in their recovery journey. Subject to the person's consent, we ensure that family and carers are provided with information, feedback, and the opportunity to have their views considered.

We aim to enhance the relationships between individuals and their families and carers. The way we work with family and carers is guided by six partnership standards. In brief these standards state that staff in all of our various services should identify and engage with carers as soon as possible, and also that we have suitable information sharing protocols in place to protect people's privacy.

You can find more information in our Family and Carers brochure or via this link: www.flourishaustralia.org.au/how-can-we-help/i-am-family-member-carer-or-friend

According to a 2010 research paper by J. Pirkis and others, about 15 per cent of the Australian adult population plays a crucial role every day in the ongoing care and support of people with a lived experience of mental illness. That's about 2.4 million people.

National Carers Week, from 13 to 19 October 2019 is a time to recognise the estimated 36 million hours people spend each week caring for family members and friends. Carers work not only with people experiencing mental health issues, but those with disability, chronic conditions, terminal illness or who are frail aged.

This year, Carers Australia invited people to TELL US WHY YOU CARE. People went to the National Carers Week Website and shared their carer stories. Here is the web address for those who are interested in taking a look: www.carersweek.com.au/tell-us-why-you-care/

Career Springboard at Harris Park:

When supported employees want more responsibility, we like to give it to them



Above: "We often take turns at doing one another's jobs." Richard, William and Courtney in the Bond Lodgement Office. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

By Warren Heggarty

At Prestige Packing Company Harris Park, there is an innovative project which is supporting employees toward open employment. The work itself is outsourced from the Office of the Small Business Commission and it is carried out in an office at our Harris Park service by people who had previously been table hands in the packing workshop. We found that:

- Richard has been doing the ground work towards his goal of running his own lawn mowing business
- William, who is currently also a patient at Cumberland Hospital, says he was 'brought up around computers' and would like to use his natural affinity with them to work in an IT role.
- Courtney, whose future employment goal is to return to the administration work she once did in the Northern Territory, considers this current role is a perfect springboard.

Site Manager Mihaela Stanculescu told Panorama that she expects this project to continue and even expand.

She told us that there are always some employees at Prestige Packing who are 'underutilising the past qualifications and skills they have already acquired.' This under-utilisation can be demoralising for the person as well. The contract with OSBC means that we are able to allocate more responsible work to those who need it.

Each day, the 'Bond Lodgement Office' at Harris Park receives a package of work to be performed. William, who leaves hospital three days a week to come to work here says that there is an average of twenty lodgements per day.

'On a quiet day' says Courtney, who works five days a week 'there might only be ten; but our record day was 53!'

Richard, who does four days a week, says 'we scan all the documents, cheques and correspondence and look after the day to day administration.'

After the mail delivery, the documents have to be scanned and uploaded. Courtney proudly showed Panorama the top-of-the-line scanner used for this purpose. It looks just like an ordinary desk top printer, but it is worth \$17,000!

'Yes, this little thing costs as much as a car does' Courtney confirms before showing the older, larger, slower version. The new one is fast, but it is also temperamental. The team needs to make sure that the staples and other paraphernalia are fully removed before scanning.

Richard is, for the most part, responsible for creating users in one of the two web based systems they use for their work. William's special role is creating leases. After these tasks are done, they will create a spread sheet and check the bond requests against the cheques received. If all is well, William is usually the one to take the cheques to their next destination.

Being there five days per week, Courtney does a bit of everything.

Flourish Australia
Prestige Packing Co
23-25 Station Street West
HARRIS PARK NSW 2150
1300 779 270

Employment Panorama



Above: "Yes, this little thing costs as much as a car." The scanning machine at the centre of their work...but it's more than just scanning. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

Richard says 'we often take turns doing each others' jobs. We all try to make ourselves as big an asset for our employer as we can by doing good work. All of us are immensely proud we have achieved these roles.'

So what are their backgrounds?

**"We all try to make ourselves as big an asset for our employer as we can by doing good work. All of us are immensely proud we have achieved these roles."
-Richard**

William told us 'I experienced being out of employment for ten years due to my mental health issues. One day while in discussion with Kathy Te Nuku, one of the Peer Workers at Harris Park, I told her I had a 'Certificate IV in Information Technology' from nine years ago. Coming to work in the Harris Park factory was good because it got me into a work routine again. For me, some of the jobs can be boring, where I am doing the same thing over and over. You can get into a rut working as a table hand.'

William is also a self producing DJ, with a Certificate II in Music Production (Digital Audio Workstation) and a Certificate IV

in event management.

Richard has a Certificate III in Information Technology which he received in 1999, plus a Certificate III in Librarianship, and a Certificate IV in small business management. He was a librarian at Silverwater Correctional Centre, and did clerical, library and computer work at Goulburn, Grafton, Silverwater and Windsor prisons.

'You consistently have to use your brain

in this Bond Lodgement job, so we all prefer the office work to the shop floor' he says.

Courtney has a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from the University of Canberra. 'Knowing my qualification, people I've worked with in the past have wanted me to review their books' she says almost jokingly. Courtney worked for the Northern Territory herbarium in Darwin and was office manager at the Darwin Botanical Garden.

'One of the things I did there was book weddings. I would show people around the venue. And I also sold books and dealt with tourists. And of course, having worked in the herbarium, I have dealt with plenty of "plant boffins."'

Courtney finds her current work to be challenging and stimulating. 'We set ourselves targets during the day and see how far ahead we can get!' It sounds like there is a bit of competitive spirit here as well.

Gratitude is a very important component of their feelings of success. All three express how grateful they are to have been given this opportunity to take their supported employment further, and as we saw at the beginning of the article, they already have plans for what that 'further' might look like!

Below: Herbarium, mixing desk, Library... the work background of Prestige Packing employees is very diverse PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY



Working in the Cleanroom



ABOVE: Staff in the new cleanroom working on a batch of Nexcare Skin Tapes PHOTO BY JUSTYN WARREN

By Warren Heggarty

Victor, the leading hand of the cleanroom at Prestige Packing Co, Marrickville agrees that having the work experience of a responsible position in a cleanroom will look really good on your resume. However, it won't suit everybody.

"Some people will feel a bit claustrophobic," he warns. "And it is noisy. But time goes quickly because you are always on the go, like Speedy Gonzales! You can never do too much work here!"

The Marrickville site handles a multitude of packing and related contracts, carried out by supported employees who live with mental health issues. Employees in our refitted cleanroom were selected from the main floor of the packing factory. Because a lot of standing is involved, there is an allowance to cover that.

"Some people were brought in as a trial to see how they go," says Victor. "Some don't like it. Others love it!"

Victor, who has been with Prestige Packing Co for many years, clearly loves it. Sales Manager Lisa Sorenson says

that Victor was selected as leading hand because of his extreme reliability and confidence.

Because they are dealing with materials that need to be ultra clean or sterile (like skin tape dressings for placing over wounds) the eight to ten workers here need to "gown up" in an airlock before reporting for duty. There are instructions posted at the entrance to the airlock outlining the cleaning and hygiene procedures.

"I think working here means a lot of satisfaction for the employees," says Victor. "Staff do not necessarily have to have any special existing skills, but they do need to be able to follow directions, stay on track with the team's procedures, keep count, fold, cut and tolerate the unusual environment."

On the day Panorama visited, six employees were measuring out quantities of sealed skin tapes for placement into boxes to go onto shelves for sale. Victor says that the contract with 3M involves a number of different products. Robert Warrington, Supervisor at Prestige Packing, says that employees can "rotate" through the different individual tasks involved in the process from beginning to end.

As well as the cleanroom proper, there is an outer room that contains an inkjet printer which stamps "use by" dates on the boxes that the products will be placed into. We found Adam at the inkjet conveyor belt stamping the boxes. Normally two people work on the inkjet while eight people work beyond the airlock in the cleanroom. Adam says that work is important to him, not only for its own sake, but because he gets out of the house and meets people.

Most people derive a great deal of satisfaction from work – especially teamwork - and this is often crucially important for people who have experienced mental health issues. The isolation that people can experience after long hospital stays (for example) can be detrimental to recovery, whereas work is known to be beneficial.

What is a Cleanroom?

When you think of packing plants, you might think of fork lifts, wooden pallets and cardboard boxes, but pharmaceutical and medical items need to be packed as well. This requires a cleanroom where the cleanliness and air quality must be monitored to an exacting standard. For example, when

Employment Panorama

you open up a packet of bandaids, you expect it to be super clean.

“Our cleanroom will have regular testing and auditing to make sure it meets the standard,” says Lisa. “3M will conduct an audit in the next two weeks to ensure we are meeting the standards. Every two months, the HEPA filters have to be tested to ensure the air is pure enough.”

Cleanrooms have strict cleanliness rules governing the surfaces of the room, the equipment, the air quality and the dress and conduct of the workers. There are regulations about regular cleaning, clothing, protective gear, hair nets and booties, gloves and even how these items are to be put on, taken off and disposed of! There are nine types of cleanroom, or “Standards.” The most common Standards are 7, 8 and 9, ours being an 8. The Standard is based on the maximum number of particles (dust,

bacteria, etc) in each cubic metre of air. Normal air has millions of particles, but cleanrooms cut this down to thousands, or even lower numbers.

Fast upgrades to meet our customer’s demand

“To meet 3M’s extra requirements, we had to upgrade our cleanroom to Standard 8 accreditation,” said Flourish Australia’s Sales and Marketing Manager Lisa Sorenson. “We also had to do it quickly to meet our customer’s needs. Not only did we have to upgrade our air conditioners, but we had to add an airlock room and seal some of the existing surfaces to meet the stricter criteria. We also had to act quickly to upgrade our facilities and procedures to have everything ready within a month!”

“We were very lucky that the firm we

used, LinMark, specialises in hospital grade air conditioners and they were able to complete the upgrade within three weeks. We also needed carpentry work from NOVY Interior. Robert Rogolinski was very prompt and completed the job on time.”

All up, the upgrade required an investment of over \$35,000, enabling us to keep up to ten supported employees engaged in this work.

**Flourish Australia
Prestige Packing Co,
Marrickville
6A Rich Street
MARRICKVILLE,
NSW 2204
1300 779 270**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **Lisa Sorenson, Sales Manager and Warwick Poulton, Manager of Prestige Packing Co Marrickville.** Victor pointing out some of the equipment in the air lock. Workers on the conveyor belt outside the air lock. The filter. PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY CENTRE Adam working on the inkjet printer conveyor belt. PHOTO BY WARWICK POUTON



flourish
AUSTRALIA

Community
Businesses



We
support
the NDIS

EMPLOYMENT & YOU...

Are you living with a mental health issue?

**Would you like to get back to work
but feel unsure about where to start?**

Flourish Australia Community Businesses support people living with a mental health issue to take part in meaningful employment.

Whilst providing employment support in areas of lawn maintenance, packing & business services we meet strict service standards to ensure real employment outcomes.

Employees of the community businesses have access to one-on-one support from our peer workers and the option to attend our onsite recovery groups that cover a range of vocational and life skills topics.

We also offer tertiary qualifications onsite, including:
Cert. 3 in Warehouse Operations and Cert. 3 in Horticulture.

When you feel you are ready to enter the open workforce, we are here to support you with the transition.

**Flourish Australia is a registered
National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider.**

OUR CURRENT JOBS AVAILABLE

Prestige Packing Harris Park:

Supported jobs in packing and light assembly.

Marrickville Business:

Supported jobs in packing and light assembly and scanning and document management services.

Flourish Maintenance St Marys:

Supported jobs in lawn mowing, grounds maintenance and professional cleaning services.

Flourish Maintenance Warwick Farm:

Supported jobs in lawn mowing, grounds maintenance and professional cleaning services.

To find out more or to APPLY: Phone: 02 9393 9000 Email: clare.evans@flourishaustralia.org.au

 /CommunityBusinesses  flourishaustralia.org.au