

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

# panorama

Monthly Issue **March 2023 #88C**



**Decoding The  
NDIS With Flourish  
Australia's Support**

**Regaining our  
Physical Identity**

**Practice Makes  
The Presentation!**

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### About us

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

### Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 or  
flourishaustralia.org.au

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

### About Panorama

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

### The faces behind Panorama...



Warren Heggarty



Grant Everett

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### Disclaimer

Panorama's content is not intended as a substitute for the advice of any specialised or qualified professional. The views expressed herein are those of the authors, not necessarily of Flourish Australia, or any associated enterprises, their staff, management, employees, or service recipients

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COVER (L/R): Twanette Bonanno and Lisa Nattrass (Team Coordinator at Flourish Australia, Penrith). PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

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WITH YOUR STORY

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

Email us at: [panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au)



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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

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

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



## FAMILY & CARERS

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

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

### Other Organisations

Sometimes families and carers want more information and other contacts. There are a range of organisations that provide specialist supports and information for carers. A list with contact details can be found on our website at: [www.flourishaustralia.org.au/family-and-carers](http://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](http://www.copmi.net.au)*

ABOVE: George, still holding on against the odds. PHOTO BY AMANDA DIXON, SUPPORT COORDINATOR AT FLOURISH AUSTRALIA DERBY STREET, PENRITH

# Decoding the NDIS

## With Flourish Australia's Support

By Colleen Danieletto (as told to Grant J Everett)

**The Flourish Australia staff at Penrith's Derby Street service have always made me feel so welcome. They're the type of people who do their best all the time. They care too much! I particularly like Ruby, the Manager, she's amazing, and Amanda, my Support Coordinator, she's lovely, too.**

When you talk to the Derby Street staff, they're talking TO you, not AT you. I've been really lucky, having these nice people available whenever I need them.

### Getting in touch

I first linked up with Flourish Australia after a hospital admission. I was still unwell, and due to a series of ECTs, the details are a little fuzzy. But I'm glad I got in touch!

I used to enjoy it when Derby Street bussed us somewhere interesting, and we'd go for a walk as a group. However, I don't always feel like

talking, and I was never forced to. Everyone understood I needed space sometimes, but the offer to socialise is always there.

If it wasn't for Flourish Australia, I probably wouldn't be here today. So if somebody I know needs help with a mental health issue, I'd either encourage them to go to hospital, or to get in touch with Flourish Australia.

While I haven't gone back to Derby Street since my most recent relapse, I've had Amanda come over for a coffee and a chat, and I often talk to her over the phone.

### Supporting me to decode the NDIS

Amanda has been amazing in helping me to navigate the NDIS. I personally don't understand a lot about how the NDIS works, but thanks to Amanda I'm applying for everything I'm eligible for. For instance, I got some free

appointments with a podiatrist, as well as a comfortable pair of shoes designed for foot health. This has helped me get back into walking again.

The NDIS also pays for a lady to come around once a week and clean. While I mostly maintain my home on my own, the chronic arthritis in my neck, spine and joints means I can't clean anything from the waist down, and everything just hurts like hell. It's reassuring to know that if my health gets worse, I'll be getting the right amount of support with my day-to-day needs.

I'm currently looking into whether the NDIS can make some adjustments to my shower so I can use it more comfortably. I have a great chair that will make showering easier, only it doesn't fit in there! I think this should fall under a "reasonable adjustment" for a person with a disability, and I'll be seeing my NDIS support worker to see if this is possible.

### My lived experience

If you have an experience of bipolar or depression, it can hit like a roller-coaster. My depression still comes and goes, but it's pretty manageable nowadays.

I've been admitted to mental health units at Liverpool, Bankstown, Goulburn and Penrith, and that has often kept me safe. However, most of the people there are understandably feeling down, and that can affect you over time. Thankfully, it's been a while since my last admission, though I have come close.

When it comes to goals, I just want to be happy. I want to wake up in the morning and think, "I'm glad to be alive," rather than waking up and saying, "Not another day, please." I'd say I have more good than bad days.

### Loving support

Right through my mental health issues, I've had decent people who were there for me. Not everyone has that kind of support, so I think I'm one of the lucky ones. The people who are around you make all the difference, so you want to surround yourself with positive influences. My advice is to welcome in people who make you feel safe.

I'm happiest whenever my kids and grandkids visit, but just having them in my life is all the support I want from them. I already receive enough support for my mental health issues through Flourish Australia and other sources, so I can just enjoy being a part of a loving family. They're all busy leading their own lives nowadays, so I don't expect my kids to be here at my beck and call.

Honestly, though, I don't mind living alone. I can watch a movie, make a Vegemite and cheese sandwich, and enjoy my own company. My husband lives in the same house, and he sleeps downstairs, but we're still really good friends.

### Side effects


While my medication has been great for my mental health recovery, I experience a side effect where my whole body shakes without warning. As a result, I had a fall just last night, and my ankle is killing me now. It's just a really bad sprain, so I'm taking care of it at home.

While getting weaned off this medication may get rid of the shakes, I'll have to be very careful not to relapse again. There is no miracle option for curing mental health issues as of yet, unfortunately. Maybe one day!

### Fur bud

My dog, George, is a Pomeranian, and he's 14 years old. He's diabetic, has chronic arthritis, he's blind, and he's lost all his fur. Despite all this, George still knows how to get around the house, and he'll bark if he needs to go outside to the toilet. He also has kitty litter inside, just in case. He's been an amazing companion ever since I got him as a puppy, and his strength is inspiring.

With my help, George does his best everyday no matter what, and if he can keep going with the right support, then so can I.



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# Flourish Australia's Annual General Meeting 2022: Belonging

By Grant J Everett



**Flourish Australia's Annual General Meeting for 2022 was held at the Waterview conference centre in Bicentennial Park. It was the first one held in person rather than online since 2019.**

Professor Elizabeth More AM, our Board Chair, facilitated proceedings and introducing the many different speakers on the day.

The theme for this year's AGM was Belonging. Professor More shared how immigrating from Hungary to Australia as a baby meant she never entirely felt as though she belonged around those who were born here, and spoke of the desirability of belonging.

"True belonging only happens when we are free to be ourselves, and accepting ourselves," Professor More said. "It fights loneliness, connects us with our peers, and exercises social citizenship. Belonging can be the most powerful narcotic."

There was an acknowledgment of country by Uncle Raymond, who

welcomed this meeting on behalf of the Wangal people who have lived here for thousands of years. Our Chief Executive Officer, Mark Orr, acknowledged people with mental health issues. He also acknowledged the many families and carers whose tireless work literally keeps the mental health system functioning.

## Why We Exist

Things kicked off with a video about Luke Wrightson, the current Chair of Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council. Luke's uplifting story was one of many in the Annual Report, which is available in softcopy and hardcopy to anyone who wants it. Luke shared what helped his recovery journey, including his love of horse-riding, and the one-on-one support offered by Flourish Australia.

"I wouldn't be where I am without Flourish Australia's support and encouragement. I want to acknowledge the amazing work that the whole Council does, and this gives me great hope for the future."

Professor More added that the input of the Community Advisory

Council is crucial in how the Board of Flourish Australia operates, and it also effects the functioning of Flourish Australia as a whole.

Framed photos are going to be presented to everyone who starred in the Annual Report.

## Our Plans For 2023

Despite what Flourish Australia (and the entire world) has faced over the last three years, we have overcome, we have survived, and our work continues.

There will be an ongoing focus on growing the organisation's profile, conducting research, and continuing to do everything possible to provide quality, effective, COVID-safe services. This includes developing our Social Citizenship project with the aim of supporting the people who access services to feel like they're a part of their community. We are always exploring how to make the NDIS funding of people with a psychosocial disability to stretch further in order to meet their needs. We are also opening more headspace branches.

Flourish Australia is constantly building on its electronic presence and capabilities. And while cybersecurity has always been a priority, in the wake of a number of very large companies and government departments being basically held to ransom, we must be continuously vigilant when it comes to protecting ourselves from hackers.

As with every AGM, a number of matters were raised where the members were asked to vote with a show of hands. This included electing three new Directors, who will serve for the next three years.

### Keynote By Hugh De Kretser

Hugh de Kretser, who became CEO of the Yoorrook Justice Commission after 11 years of leading the Human Rights Law Centre, was our keynote speaker.

Hugh's talk was about the urgency of acknowledging Australia's very poor human rights record with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and how being truthful about this history is an essential step in creating societal change. This includes the treaty-making process. Hugh shared how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community is still experiencing ongoing, systemic racism and abuse, such as with the very high rates of Indigenous children being removed from their parents and subsequent denial of their culture, and the skyrocketing rates of incarceration of Aboriginal youth and adults.

Despite the severe impact of intergenerational trauma, Hugh told us of the incredible strength and resilience of the Indigenous community, and how he believes that lasting, positive change is possible.

### Numb3rs

In addition to the Annual Report being released in softcopy and hardcopy, the Annual Financial Report is also on offer to anyone who's interested. A thorough audit of Flourish Australia's finances is conducted annually, and the audience was welcome to ask questions about any details of the financial situation.

According to our Treasurer, Andrew Pryor, it's been a challenging year due to the ongoing pandemic, and Andrew explained Flourish Australia's financial operations and holdings. Some of the good news included that our many community businesses are thriving. As we've shared in Panorama on a number of occasions, appropriate work can be wonderful for boosting the self-esteem of people with a mental health issue, and provides opportunities to connect with other people in their community, form friendships, and feel like they belong.

One recent major milestone is that it's been ten years since the merger between PRA and Richmond Fellowship, a combination that was temporarily renamed as RichmondPRA, before being permanently rebranded as Flourish Australia.

Want to check out the 2022 Annual Report or the 2022 Audited Annual Financial Report?

[www.flourishaustralia.org.au/publications-and-reports](http://www.flourishaustralia.org.au/publications-and-reports)

Or just Google: Flourish Australia Annual Report 2022



RIGHT: Hugh de Kretser, Flourish Australia Board Member, was our keynote speaker for the Annual General Meeting 2022

ABOVE: Luke Wrightson, Chair of the Community Advisory Council, shared his story in the Annual Report.

PHOTOs BY NEIL FENELON





# An Awesome Time at the Newcastle Pride Festival Fair Day

By Kristen Olson, Team Coordinator Peer Specialist at Flourish Australia Newcastle

**We recently ran a Flourish Australia information stall at Newcastle's Pride Festival Fair Day with a number of staff members and people who access services at Newcastle. It was very eventful, and we had a number of very rewarding interactions during our time there.**

A handful of us arrived at 9am to begin setting up for the 11am start, but the first person to approach our stall around 10:15am was a young man who initiated a conversation.

"Oh, Flourish Australia!" he said. "I know about you guys, you supported my mother a few years ago. She lives with bipolar and was going through

a psychotic episode when she was connected with your organisation, and you helped her so much. I just wanted to say thank you, because you were so helpful for her in that time. She's doing better now!"

While this moment wasn't specifically about Pride, having this as our first interaction of the day was a truly beautiful testament to the importance of Flourish Australia face-to-face engagement with the community.

On a more Pride-related note, later in the day a young woman and her friend cautiously approached me. I greeted them, asking how their day had been so far, and how she came to be here. She was nervous when she answered.

"I'm pretty new to this stuff, it's my first Pride event after just coming out as bisexual..."

And she couldn't help but let go of the smile she'd been trying to suppress!

Her friend playfully hit her arm and said, "How does it feel to say that out loud?!" And her uncontainable smile was fully set free!

"Congratulations!" I said. "Now you can tell people that you are who you've always been."

As the conversation went on, I suspected that I was the very first stranger who she's ever told her news to. What an honour!



## Why Pride events are so important

I'm writing about these moments with tears streaming down my face. Thank goodness I invested my time and effort into showing up for people who so deeply, wholeheartedly need to be supported face-to-face. We participated in this Pride Festival to demonstrate that Flourish Australia staff, the people we support and so much of the greater community want nothing more than to support people to proudly be who they've always been. We appreciate, celebrate and value everyone as they are. And I often find that I learn a lot from others, too.

Being a member of Flourish Australia's Peer Workforce with a lived experience of a mental health issue, I am someone who has spent the majority of my life hiding parts of myself. This is why it's now my life's mission to help others to feel supported in being themselves. The psychological, spiritual, emotional and physical toll it takes on a person to hide major parts of their identity can be soul-destroying for many.

To everyone that contributed to making the Newcastle Pride Festival Fair Day such a special, meaningful, inclusive event, thank you a million times over. What a beautiful gift it was for so many!

## Never too early to learn acceptance and inclusion

Mecca Jones, Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Thornton Barr Promenade service, brought her seven-year-old daughter, Ella, along for the day.

"Kristen, thank you for all your hard work in organising the day," Mecca said. "I know that I had an absolutely wonderful time and Miss Ella also enjoyed it (although she got a bit restless at times). I'm glad we were able to be a part of such an amazingly inclusive day, and that my girl got to share this experience with the awesome Flourish Australia crew that volunteered.

"Hopefully I am teaching my daughter that it doesn't matter what differences we all have, but that we should all be treated with respect,



fairness and inclusivity each and every day. Once again, I am glad we were able to share this event with everyone that attended, and to support all of the people that make up the Rainbow Community.

"Ella's favourite part of the day was meeting the beautiful Dragon Queens (I was sure to tell her that they're actually called "Drag Queens") and getting photos with them."

**ABOVE, FROM LEFT: Liam Carver, Simon Swinson, Mecca Jones and Ella Jones, Janelle Dunlop, Tam Dunlop, Kristen Olson, and Kate Thynne. PHOTO COURTESY OF KRISTEN OLSON**

# YOU CAN DO A PRESENTATION

## #3 Grant's Personal Experience

By Warren Heggarty



**So far in this series, we have #1 convinced you that you can do a presentation, and #2 looked at how you might find a topic. In our #3 instalment, we will talk to someone who actually took their idea all the way to not one but TWO separate presentations.**

The first of those presentations was at The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Conference. TheMHS happens twice a year, and its October event draws people from all over Australia, New Zealand, and the world for four days. This year it was held in Sydney. We spoke with Grant about his experiences presenting at this TheMHS Conference.

**WARREN:** Your presentation at TheMHS 2022 was, 'The Power of Hope: Growing up in the Forensic System.' We don't come across many such stories, possibly because being a Forensic Patient, being involved in the criminal justice system, carries some stigma. But how did you settle upon making this your first conference presentation topic?

**GRANT:** I think the Forensic System is the most prominent part of my lived experience. I first floated the

idea of presenting at a conference being held by Justice Health, but they weren't interested. It seemed they were looking for input from doctors, nurses, jail governors and so forth, rather than patients.

**WARREN:** In the first instalment of this series, we spoke about 'changing the world.' What was the main message you were trying to get out to people? What were you trying to change?

**GRANT:** I think the whole Forensic System is misunderstood. Most people don't have any idea about it. So the main aim, you could say, was educational. More than that, though, I was trying to get across a message of hope. The theme was no matter how broken a life is, you can still rebuild it.

**WARREN:** Naturally the focus was on your own experience, but did you have input from other people who helped you to develop your presentation, and how?

**GRANT:** Colleagues at Flourish Australia helped a lot, including Jasmin Moradides, Fay Jackson, Julie Fraser and Mark Orr, the CEO. I also tried my speech out on family and friends. Jas helped me a lot with editing the text, and went through three full rehearsals with me. So I

had lots of input from people, which improved it 100%. I think a lot of them were taken aback by some parts of my story, particularly the conditions in prison.

**WARREN:** Tell us about the actual presentation.

**GRANT:** I was nervous beforehand, but when I started talking it all fell into place. I remember I took notice of things like making eye-contact with the audience, and finer points like that. They laughed at some of the lighter bits and I heard some sharp intakes of breath in places as well. Afterwards, there was a tonne of loud and enthusiastic applause. People came up to me for the rest of the day to give amazing, glowing feedback.

When I delivered the presentation at Cumberland hospital two weeks after TheMHS, I actually had about 20 to 25 people in the audience, of whom maybe eight or nine were Forensic Patients. Afterwards, some of them came up to me and shook my hand, telling me they found my story really encouraging, that they felt an increase in hope as a result of my talk. I hope to continue spreading this message of hope!

Be sure to check out Grant's talk on page 14!



# Help Get it on the Shelf...

# And you are in high demand!

**You may have heard news reports about problems with 'supply chains.' Supply Chain is a way of describing getting goods to market on time and in sufficient quantity to meet customer demand. Not surprisingly, according to a recent special report, jobs in the field of Logistics, warehousing, supply chain, and transport are all in high demand.**

Many Panorama readers have experience and qualifications in some of these fields. A few years ago Flourish Australia ran an in-house Vocational Education and Training (VET) approved Warehousing Certificate course in which dozens of supported employees at our Harris Park and Marrickville sites participated.

There was already a skills shortage in these fields pre-pandemic, according to Rosanne Barrett's report in The Australian Newspaper, and the shortage has increased since then! (Barrett, 2022) There could be some golden opportunities out there.

The Logistics industry is talking about filling some of these gaps with skilled immigrants. For

example, for every six graduate jobs in the supply chain field, there are six unfilled vacancies. However, the Australian Industry Standards chief executive Paul Walsh told Rosanne Barrett of The Australian newspaper 'Skilled migration will be a short term assistance, but for the long term we see the need for ongoing investment in skills development, lifelong learning and also training in digital transformation to make sure we can actually meet demand.'

Local workers are needed in the long term to keep the supply chains moving, and if things stay as they are the demand will only increase. The Australian Industry Standards industry outlook figures found that the average age of existing workers was quite high, 46 for logistics, 47 for truck drivers and 48 for train drivers! Apparently, younger generations are not replacing the aging workforces at a sufficient rate.

Perhaps there is an image problem that deters people from this industry. The image of truckies seem not to credit the fact that they are highly skilled workers. Have you ever seen a big rig turn a tight corner in a busy city street? It takes time, effort, skill and knowledge to do such manoeuvres safely.

The supply chain and logistics industry has been very male

dominated which suggests that focusing recruitment action on women is more necessary than ever. Hermione Parsons, was recently appointed CEO of the Australian Logistics Council and she is 'championing a campaign for women to look for careers in this field. (Powell, 2022) One of the reasons women are under-represented in the field is due historically to the physical demands of some of the jobs. However, with technology things have changed and it is no longer just about physical skills. Communication and negotiation are more important than ever in these fields.

Take supply chain workers out of the economy and you will not only have toilet paper shortages, but society as we know it will collapse! So consider what role you could perform in the is field, either now or in the future, then get cracking!

#### WORKS CITED

Barrett, R. (2022, November 22). Staff Shortages a serious issue. The Australian.  
Powell, S. (2022, November 22). Hiring more women is one answer to the employment crunch. The Australian Newspaper.

**ABOVE: Society grinds to a halt if we can't get things on the shelf!**

**PHOTO BY WARREN**

These young children look like they are playing in a puddle, but they are actually developing their physical identities!  
IMAGE BY PETRA PEZIBEAR FROM PIXABAY

# Regaining our Physical Identity

## It's not sporty versus non-sporty any more

By Warren Heggarty

**'Physical identity' is a term defined by Daniel O'Neill in his unfortunately titled book 'Survival of the Fit.' In their review, Brett and Kate McKay write that the current lack of physical activity in adults came about because as children, the majority of us stopped developing the 'physical identity' we are all born with.**

Toddlers love to move, because moving is an important part of human flourishing. Some little ones show a natural interest in sport and so their parents sign them up for teams and it often becomes a lifelong interest. These children, say the McKays, develop an 'athletic' or 'sporty' identity.

Other children, likely the majority, are not that interested in team sports and so don't have this 'sporty'

identity. In previous generations non-sporty kids were still able to develop a full physical identity. This is because they rode bikes, hunted frogs, built cubby houses, engaged in free and unsupervised play and did compulsory PE classes and 'house' sport at school.

Nowadays, however, sport and PE are no longer as prominent a part of schooling (and many of us were able to get out of it!) The problem is, all the other activities that developed the physical identity of non-sporty people have become very difficult to do. This is due to increasing urbanisation and an increasing culture of 'safetyism.'

The result is that people who are not 'sporty' don't fully develop their 'physical identity.'

What is stopping us from correcting this arrested physical development? We need to encourage non-sporty people to take up activities through

which they can explore and develop their physical identity.

If we DON'T develop that side of ourselves, it leaves us more prone to metabolic syndrome. This is the cluster of physical illnesses which many people with mental health issues experience which can be attributed to poor nutrition, lack of exercise and unwanted side effects of medications. These conditions can reduce our life expectancy by a couple of decades or thereabouts. Physical activity can help us to escape, ameliorate or even reverse these conditions.

### How to develop your Physical Identity

If you don't see yourself as a sporty or athletic type, that doesn't mean you don't need to activate and develop your dormant physical identity. Nurturing your physical side can protect you from so many

### How opportunities to developed full life-long physical identity have shrunk.

Everybody has a physical identity, both sporty and non-sporty people. Years ago, both kinds of children had plenty of opportunity to develop their physical identity. However, more recently, it has been harder for 'non-sporty' people to develop their physical identity past early childhood. So not everyone has a fully developed physical identity nowadays, leading to an increase in obesity, diabetes and other problems (Adapted from O'Neill as described in McKay and McKay).



problems, not to mention that it can be fun as well. You are never too old to take up a physical activity.

Take this list: Hiking, Frisbee, bush-walking, cycling, dancing, yoga (fast and slow), skiing, swimming, and a host of other activities are available.

What about golf? And even table games like pool, snooker, billiards. Then again, if you now regret not having been a sporty or athletic type, you can still give it a go.

### What about your kids' physical identities

Just because you got off to a slow start doesn't mean your children have to. Don't write them off as being non-sporty too soon. Just because you were non-sporty doesn't mean your offspring will be. And vice versa.

Brett McKay says, 'Little kids are up for trying whatever, so give them experience with different sports and see what happens. Maybe they won't like it and will opt out. But maybe they'll find something they really dig.'

If they do opt out of team sports, remember that doesn't mean their physical identity can be neglected. If you are physically active yourself, it is likely your kids will copy you. Set a good example.

When you play with your kids, or when you ride bikes or play catch in the yard you are ultimately helping them to avoid illness later in life by getting them used to enjoying physical activity as a normal, everyday part of life.

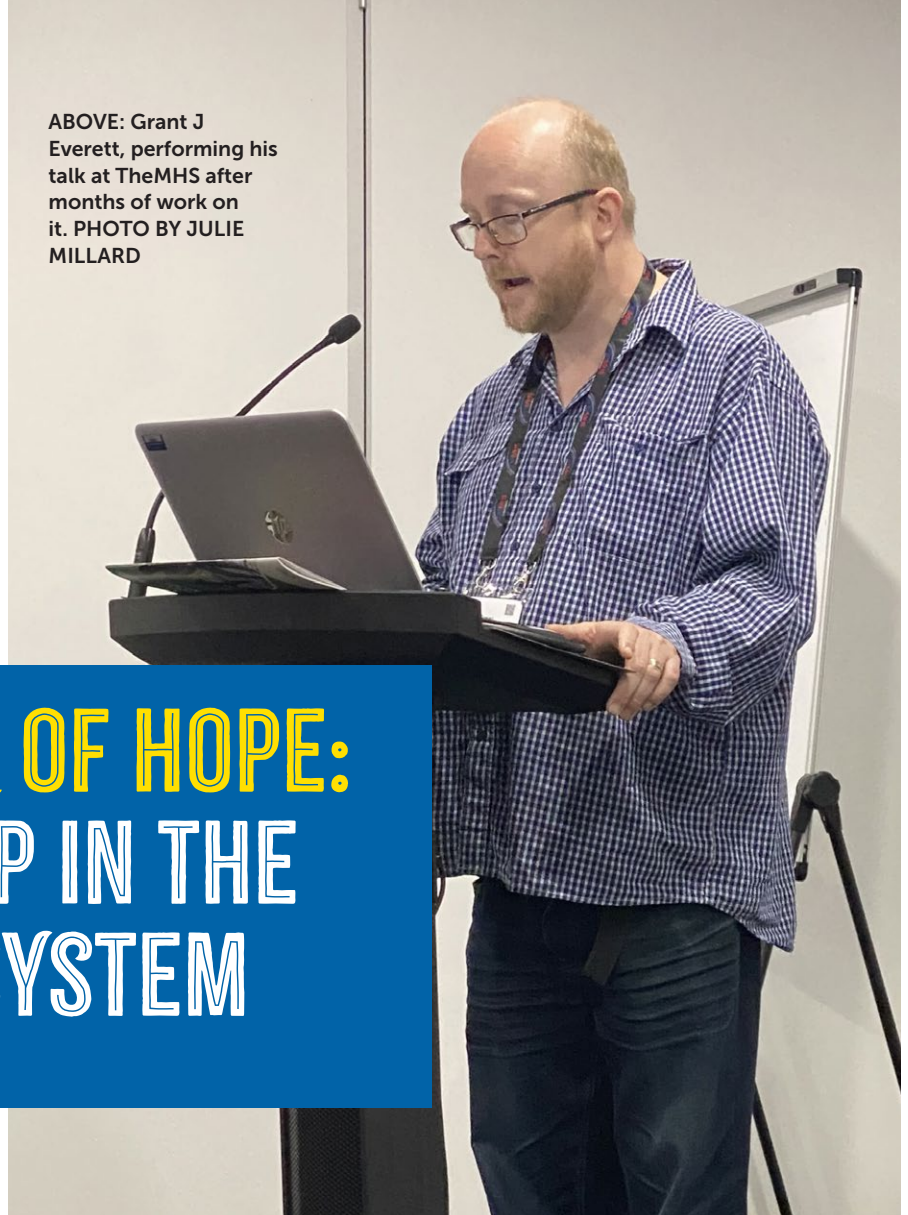
Daniel O'Neil thinks that PE should be mandatory from Kindergarten to Year 12. A couple of decades ago it WAS mandatory! As a non-athletic type myself (born into an athletic family!) I used to play golf for school sport, which gave me a 10 kilometre walk once or twice a week. It didn't do me any harm! And even today I get the urge to jump down into the creek to find lost golf balls and... catch frogs!

### Further Reading

McKay Brett and Kate McKay (30 August 2022) The Importance of having a physical identity on The Art Of Manliness web site.

O'Neill Daniel Fulham, MD Survival of the fit, New Hampshire available from Amazon

ABOVE: Grant J Everett, performing his talk at TheMHS after months of work on it. PHOTO BY JULIE MILLARD



# THE POWER OF HOPE: GROWING UP IN THE FORENSIC SYSTEM

By Grant J Everett

**A Forensic Patient is somebody who has been found Not Guilty of a crime due to mental illness. There are around 500 men, women and young people in the Forensic System in NSW, which is a crossover between the Justice System and the Mental Health System.**

After a lifetime of poor mental health, I became a Forensic Patient at 19. My road was paved by every conceivable loss, and although I was very unwell, I had an idea of what my future held, and I often felt suicidal. I eventually adjusted to my new environment, and life went on.

Becoming Forensic is NOT a "get out of jail free" card. It's an indefinite sentence that carries no guarantee of release. Recovery and rehabilitation are high priorities, but the safety of the community comes first.

## Beginning the Journey

My four years in maximum security were quite the experience. I looked about 16, so I got a lot of unwanted attention. Thankfully, I was mostly treated pretty well.

Like in the community, there's a stigma to having a mental health issue in prison, which is why mainstream inmates are reluctant to reveal they have a mental health issue, even if they're suffering.

I started my Forensic journey in D Ward, commonly known as Dungeon, Long Bay Hospital's infamous acute unit. You would NOT describe Dungeon as a place of recovery and rehabilitation. Its cells contained a bare plastic mattress on a concrete slab, a fire blanket, and a one-piece metal toilet and sink. It was common for inmates to have nothing in their cells beyond a paperback and the

underpants they were wearing. I was unfortunate enough to get the cell without a toilet, and was instead provided a bucket until a "better" cell became available. I experienced all kinds of little degradations like this, such as having my shoelaces snipped down to stubs due to safety regulations, or having to pick my greens from a communal pile, or strip searches at the crack of dawn.

Even though I did transition to a better ward, prison routine is always the same: I'd wake up to a guard yelling at me, then move back and forth between the yard, the dining room and the common area until it was time to be locked in my cell for the night. I found that while the hours were unbearably boring, the lack of stimuli meant there was very little to remember, so the months somehow went quicker than the days!

## ***‘What I really want to share is the great worth of success stories. When people get Unconditional Release, they move onto better lives, and we don’t hear from them again. But their untold success stories prove that rebuilding does happen.’***

There was nothing to do but smoke White Ox and talk rubbish while waiting for the next coffee trolley or horrible meal. While the hours were unbearably boring, the lack of stimuli left very little to remember, so the months somehow went quicker than the days!

The new Forensic Hospital was built after Dungeon was demolished, and good riddance! This complex is staffed by nurses instead of guards, we wear civilian clothes, the food is edible, and we’re treated like humans. You can exercise at the gym, and study. It’s great for recovery and rehabilitation.

### **A unique demographic**

Statistically, Forensic Patients are very different to mainstream prisoners.

According to Associate Professor Kimberlie Dean from the University of NSW, Forensic Patients have a 6.3% chance of reoffending, compared to the 40% reoffending rate of mainstream prisoners. That is an ENORMOUS difference!

On the other hand, many of us will go round and round on the carousel of prison and hospital if we get too unwell or break any conditions, like failing a urine drug screen or not returning from leave on time. This can mean your years of progress get reset to zero, like living on borrowed time.

### **The Tribunal: they hold all the keys**

The Mental Health Review Tribunal is a panel that Forensic Patients see every six months. They make all the big decisions in our progress.

Tribunal members are experts at the top of their fields, such as Supreme Court Judges, Kings Councilors, and Psychiatrists. However, for many years everything that the Tribunal approved had to be ratified by a state-level government Minister, making progress glacial. I recall

one guy was recommended to be transferred to medium security, and after two years of radio silence he was knocked back with no explanation. You can only imagine how hopeless he would have felt.

Thankfully, the Tribunal now has the power to make its own decisions, and results are usually given on the day.

I was almost sick before I attended my first Tribunal. At just 19 I was sitting in a room full of powerful people in expensive suits who held my future in their hands. This was so daunting that I still can’t put it into words. I’m up to about 35 Tribunals now, and I look forward to sharing my latest accomplishments with them.

### **Kicking goals on the way to real freedom**

I live independently in the community on Conditional Release, but my ultimate goal is Unconditional Release: exiting the Forensic System entirely.

On that subject, what I really want to share is the great worth of success stories. When people get Unconditional, they move onto better lives, and we don’t hear from them again. But their untold success stories prove that rebuilding does happen, and if I’d known how many Forensic Patients succeed, my journey would have contained much more hope.

### **The people we meet along the way**

My wife and I successfully transitioned to Conditional Release from the Forensic Unit at Cumberland Hospital. We’ve continued visiting the hospital chapel to support Forensic Patients, as well as other patients. We met some of our best friends in hospital, and we often get together for dinners and movie nights and birthdays, and we even celebrate Christmases together.

With the right support, I’ve learned that rebuilding your life is always possible, no matter how ruined it may seem. At the age of 39, I’m proud to say I’ve moved into my own home in the community, married the girl of my dreams, left the Disability Support Pension behind, and held gainful employment for a decade. My success has been thanks to the support of a lot of people, and I am who I am because of their time and love and encouragement.

### **What works best for you?**

Every recovery is different, but in my case, writing was the key.

It was my escape from prison, so to speak. Writing is one of the few things I was good at in high school, and it’s been fantastic for my mental health. I literally penned a couple of novels in prison, which I transcribed onto a computer that was little more than a glorified typewriter. I had to hide my disks, as they were contraband. Thankfully, I smuggled them out when I was transferred to a medium security unit.

Writing is now my career. I’ve written for Panorama magazine for a decade, I helped to create the RAS-DS mental health workbook with a team from the University of Sydney, and had my science fiction comedy trilogy, Scum of the Universe, published through Black Cockie Press.

### **What do I want you to take away from all this?**

We can all play a positive role in other people’s recoveries. With the right support, I have seen many Forensic Patients flourish, becoming normal people just making our way in the world. And isn’t that what we all want from life?

If you’d like to know more, you can email me at [grant.everett@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:grant.everett@flourishaustralia.org.au)



“I was still a bit nervous just beforehand, but once I started I was right!... I loved it... I’d love to do it again!”

## Practice Makes

# THE PRESENTATION!

## The Confidence Conference

By Warren Heggarty

As we say in our serie “YOU can present at conferences”, making presentations at conferences is something you CAN do. We spoke to Helen Fenner who tells us how making a panel presentation to the 2022 TheMHS (The Mental Health Services conference) lifted her confidence even further! The topic was: “Flourishing Lives by strengthening individuals & community using a Recovery approach and Integrated Services”

‘My daughter,’ says Helen ‘happens to work for Wesley Mission whose office is upstairs from the venue where TheMHS was held this year. So she was able to come and see me present!’ ‘I loved it’ says Helen. ‘I’d love to do it again! I loved meeting the people as well.’

Panorama has recommended that people should practice their presentations to reduce their nervousness. Helen can vouch for this.

‘Kate Thynne (mental health worker, Newcastle) and I practiced each week for a couple of months. So we took time to plan it. I was still a bit nervous just beforehand, but once I started I was right!’

A few days before speaking to Panorama, Helen attended an interview for a new voluntary role and again Helen was able to prepare with Kate and also Cleo to support her. She was nervous before the interview but the feedback was that she had done OK. So the message is: it is probably impossible not to be nervous at all, but if you prepare and practice you WILL get through the nerves and be OK.

At TheMHS Helen and Kate both spoke as part of a ‘Panel.’ There were four or five speakers all up telling about their lived experience, after which audience was able to ask questions. ‘We got quite a few questions.’ says Helen. ‘We even met

someone from Flourish Australia in Melbourne who, like me, was interested in Art!’

Kate was impressed by how much time Helen puts in to meeting and talking to people and also inviting people to join in the conversation. ‘She is so willing to talk and include people.’

‘Well,’ Helen explains, ‘I know what it is like to be alone in a big city.’ Kate says that she has learned a lot herself seeing Helen’s recovery over a period of time!

### Helen’s Art Update

A different kind of presenting is exhibiting artwork, and we have covered some of Helen’s publically displayed art in September 2022 Panorama (p.4). Two of her goals were 1. to exhibit her work and 2. to visit the National Gallery in Canberra. The latter goal she achieved in December!

Recently, after about a years’ preparation including a visit from a curator, she reached the second goal of exhibiting. Her works were shown at ‘Reader’s Cafe’ at the East Maitland Library. ‘I sold about five works, raising money for Maitland Suicide Prevention Group. I was sitting there drawing and people were coming up to me and talking to me about my designs.’

**ABOVE: Helen Fenner: ‘Having a go! That’s what Australia is all about, isn’t it?’ She seems very pleased to having a go at The Mental Health Services conference 2022. PHOTO by KATE THYNNE**



# Global Intergenerational Week 2023: Connecting the Generations

By Grant J Everett



**It's so common for us to separate the generations into their own little boxes, almost as though they belong to totally different species: Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Millennials, and so on.**

We're constantly hearing about how they don't understand each other, and the mass media seems to enjoy reinforcing that only frustration can come from young and old crossing paths.

Of course, the generations are more similar than the clichés may

indicate. Global Intergenerational Week celebrates the common ground that different age groups share, and seeks to connect people of all ages so we can combine our ideas and inspiration to improve the world together. Another major goal of this event is to reduce ageism, to share that there's no such thing as "old," just older.

Global Intergenerational Week takes place from the 25th of April to the 1st of May. Each of its seven days celebrate a different topic, such as the value of actively making friends of different ages,

working together with different generation groups for a brighter future, celebrating intergenerational solidarity by breaking down the age barrier, and being creative in what we have to offer one another. This week looks to inspire individuals, groups, organisations, local and national government and non-government organisations to fully embrace intergenerational practice, connecting people of all ages, especially the younger and older generations.

**Originally a UK event, it has since gone global.**

Individuals, groups, organisations, local and national government and non-government organisations are all encouraged to fully embrace intergenerational practice. It's an opportunity to plan for the future, develop new ways of connecting, and being creative in how we use our spaces and places, as well as thinking about what the generations have to offer one another. So if you have an inspiring intergenerational story to share, know of an amazing intergenerational project in your area or have plans to build on an intergenerational community, be sure to take part!

As we emerge from the worst of COVID-19, it's more important than ever to work together to rebuild our communities, to reduce the isolation and loneliness of marginalised people, and to support each other's health and mental wellbeing, regardless of age. Loneliness has the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, so tackling isolation in your community might just save lives.

Want to know how to be a part of this event? Simply Google "how do I get involved with intergenerational week?"

So say NO to the age gap, and yes to breaking down those barriers!

**#IntergenerationalWeek**

<https://generationsworkingtogether.org/global-intergenerational-week>

<https://giwireland.com>



## Flourishing Awards 2022: *Being Valued and Appreciated*

By Grant J Everett

**The annual Flourishing Awards celebrate the great work done by almost 900 Flourish Australia staff members and supported employees across more than 70 services and businesses.**

### First Off, The Winners Are...

The Flourishing Awards celebrate excellence in areas such as peer work, mental health work, management and supervision, employment support, and accommodation support. All up there were 69 nominations, the largest response we've ever had, and we'd like to thank all the nominators for taking part.

The Flourishing Individual Award went to Kylie Lantry, Team Coordinator from the Newcastle office, and she did NOT expect this! She shared that she felt a little emotional at winning, and said she was honoured to receive this reward. The Highly Commended Individuals were Cara Bastian, Team Coordinator from Tamworth,

Connor Egan, Team Coordinator from Griffith, Lisa Hyde-Mills, a Mental Health Worker from Newcastle, and Belinda Jenkins, Regional Manager for Greater Western Sydney

The Flourishing Team Award went to our CHAS Accommodation Frontline Leadership Team in the Hunter: Janelle Dunlop, Kristy Johnson, Brooke Sharp, Jay Hoyes, Madalyn Weir and Kylie Lantry... yes, the same Kylie Lantry who won the Flourishing Individual Award!. Teams that were Highly Commended on the night included the Caboolture staff, as well as the Women and Children's program at Blacktown. Belinda Jenkins, the Regional Manager of the Women And Children's program, and she was also one of the runners-up for the individual award.

This was also an opportunity to commend people's long service to the organisation, with many employees being recognised for 10, 15 and even 20 years with Flourish Australia. Those who hit the two decades mark with Flourish Australia

this year include Belinda Jenkins, Bing Hoi Cheng, Robert Hall, Miriam Nanavo, Sarah Campbell and Peter Green. Thanks for having such a long, eventful a career with Flourish Australia, all of you!

### Connecting

This was the first time that the Flourishing Awards have been held in-person for a number of years, and it was a great excuse to enjoy delicious drinks and canapes, live music, and even a roving magician! Teams traveled from as far as Hervey Bay, Caboolture and Moree, and this presented a wonderful opportunity to mingle and network in person rather than through a computer monitor.

### Appreciation

Professor Elizabeth More AM, our Board Chair, spoke about the past and the future of Flourish Australia, as well as the dual meanings of the organisation's name: "flourish" means to grow and develop in a healthy, vigorous way, especially as the result of an agreeable



environment. However, a “flourish” can also be a bold or extravagant gesture or action to attract attention, and the organisation definitely makes itself heard!

Professor More also thanked everybody out there who supports somebody on a mental health recovery journey.

### Thanks

Our CEO Mark Orr AM recognised the contribution of every single staff member across Flourish Australia, being proud of how they embody the values of Flourish Australia. Mark thanked people from the people and culture teams, Alison Perizi for doing an awesome job as Event Manager, the camera people who filmed and photographed the whole event, and thanked the Waterview Conference Centre located in the beautiful Bicentennial Park.

The final message for the night took up the whole display screen, and summed up how much our almost 900 staff members and supported employees mean to the organisation:

“Congratulations! We value and appreciate you!”



TOP: Kylie, Jay, Janelle and Brooke from the Newcastle team NSW. OPPOSITE TOP: Kelly, Katherine, Suzanne, Meena and Nicole (absent Belinda) from the Women and Children's service at Blacktown NSW. PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Two employees from our community business at Harris Park enjoying the photo booth. PHOTO BY THE AUTOMATED PHOTO BOOTH (BEEP BOOP BEEP)

# Your Journey **TO EMPLOYMENT**




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

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

**Flourish Australia DES locations:**

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

To see if you qualify for our free service, please call us for a confidential discussion or visit our website for more information.

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