

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

panorama

Monthly Issue April 2023 #89A

Mutual Care
within **Marriage**

What is **Spiritual
Care** in Mental
Health?

Self Defence:
The Ripple Effect

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About us

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

Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 or
flourishaustralia.org.au

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

About Panorama

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

The faces behind Panorama...



Warren Heggarty



Grant Everett

Subscriptions, questions, feedback, praise, curses?

You can ALWAYS email us at...

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Disclaimer

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

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Contributors include...

Karl and Angela Zirn accesses services at Flourish Australia's Penrith office

Amy Cox (they/them) is a Mental Health Worker from Flourish Australia's Wollongong service

Harley Quinn and **Tori Carr** access Flourish Australia services at Wollongong

Jennifer Greenham works for the Spiritual Health Association in Victoria

Jessica Kuo shares what she's learned about overcoming trauma in her recovery journey

Contributions are welcome!

Publications People

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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



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

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*



*"Recovery means understanding yourself. Like knowing your triggers."
– Angela*

In Sickness and in Health: Mutual Care Within a Marriage

By Angela and Karl Zirn (as told to Grant J Everett)

Karl Zirn and Angela Zirn are a married couple who access Flourish Australia's Penrith service. Angela was one of the stars of Flourish Australia's 2022 Annual Report, and she and Karl were keen to share their experiences.

Studying For A Better Future

Angela: I've been studying short "edX" online courses that Universities all around the world. You don't get a university degree with these classes, and they're more about self-development. I started with Psychology through University of Queensland, then a Christianity course with Harvard, followed by a Science Of Generosity course with the University of Pennsylvania. On top of my edX studies, I've also completed a social work course, and I'm following up with the next one in that series.

Even though I haven't been in hospital for four years and I'm on an effective medication now, I didn't feel confident about going back to study at first. However Lisa, one of

the Flourish Australia staff from the Penrith service, encouraged me to just sit down at the computer and apply. And from there, I've realised that I love to study!

I started doing classes just for self-interest, but now I'm about to study a Certificate IV in Community Services through TAFE. I'm interested in working in mental health, so I hope this leads me back to employment.

Support from Flourish Australia

Angela: The last few years have been particularly hard for both Karl and I, but connecting with Flourish Australia has helped us so much. I found their Penrith service online, and I phoned them up to find out more. I was able to self-refer, so no need for a doctor's note.

When I first started attending Flourish Australia I'd already lost all my confidence and I was just barely holding onto my job. I was a part of their Outreach Program for a couple of years, so the staff would visit me in my home and drive me

to places like Warragamba Dam, or the museum in Windsor. This gave me an opportunity to discuss all the things that have happened to me and get them out of my system.

I now visit the Penrith service from Monday to Friday, and I do a couple of different groups each day. For instance, on Monday I attend Social Empowerment group, which is basically a coffee and a chat, Tuesdays I walk in the morning and do music group in the afternoon, and Wednesdays I play Bingo. Yesterday we drove to Birkenhead Point, and today I did some bushwalking. All this just suits me down to the ground!

Karl: I've been attending the Penrith service, too. I play a lot of guitar and talk to everyone, and it's the kind of place where you don't experience any stigma. But lately, I've been very busy at home with a major project: building a garden shed.

Angela: I also read Flourish Australia's Panorama magazine every time it comes out, and there have been some fantastic stories in there.

NDIS: The Labyrinth

Karl: Angela and I used to clean and maintain our house all by ourselves for a long time, but the load has been lightened by NDIS support. We now get visits from a gardener and a cleaner, and they fund my physical therapy and counselling. This has made a huge difference.

Flourish Australia were fantastic in helping with our NDIS paperwork. The NDIS people require so much paperwork, and they want to know EVERYTHING.

It wasn't easy to get the DSP, either, as you need to be out of work for 18 months to apply for it, and Centrelink wants you to get work again ASAP. But when you've had a breakdown, some days you can't even get out of bed, let alone leave the house.

First-Hand Understanding

Karl: Back when Angela first got unwell with schizophrenia, depression and anxiety in 1989, I didn't know what to do. But I reckon a lot of people only have a minimal understanding of mental health issues. They might not realise that these issues are separate to the person, or how it can affect their entire life. It can be especially hard on their family. Over the years, Angela and I have become each other's carers.

I worked as a fitter and turner for many years, but the stress of employment gradually became a real struggle. It all got too much, and I had a nervous breakdown. And while Angela had been receiving treatment for decades, I'd never sought professional help for myself. I was surprised to be diagnosed with high-functioning autism, post-traumatic stress disorder and ADHD, and it was clear that these undiagnosed mental health issues had been making things difficult for a long time. I never understood why I had so much trouble communicating with people, but now I had an answer.

It took a while to accept my mental health issues, but everyone's got some kind of condition or illness they need to maintain, don't they? I've since learned a lot about myself, and I've been maintaining a healthy balance in my life. I'm also on an effective medication now, and I'm thinking about going back to TAFE to become a motorbike mechanic.



Ready for my closeup...

Angela: I had a really great time being a part of the Annual Report. I did the interview over the phone, and as I was a bit of a chatterbox that day, I pretty much shared my whole life story! I actually just saw my article and photos in my copy of the Annual Report, and I like how it all turned out.

The photographer and I did our photo shoot on the Walking Bridge over the Nepean River at Penrith. I felt like a model for the day! It was a really good experience, and I felt very relaxed for the whole shoot.

Want to know more? Google Flourish Australia Annual Report 2022





WHO WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY 2023: People Need to EAT, Not to Smoke!

By Grant J Everett

On the 31st of May every year, the World Health Organisation and public health champions around the planet come together to celebrate World No Tobacco Day. This year, rather than just sharing the health risks of smoking (something we all know well by this point), 2023's theme is, "We need food, not tobacco."

The current global food crisis is being driven by wars, climate shocks, and the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. But tobacco production is also playing a major role in worsening food insecurity in many low-income and middle-income nations.

The WHO is calling on world governments and policy-makers to step up by enabling the market conditions necessary for tobacco farmers to be able to shift to growing food crops, and as the majority of these farms are located in low-income and middle-income nations, the WHO wants to educate farmers about alternative crop production and marketing opportunities, providing them and their families with a better life.

Encouraging tobacco farmers in poorer nations to grow sustainable, nutritious crops would play a major factor in fighting the food crisis. The WHO has also predicted blowback from the tobacco industry, as converting their farms away from tobacco will definitely affect their bottom line.

Permanent Damage

Tobacco growing is very resource intensive, requiring heavy use of pesticides and fertilisers, and this contributes to soil degradation. Growing tobacco also depletes soil fertility, lowering the land's future capacity for growing crops. Overall, tobacco has a far more destructive impact on ecosystems than other agricultural activities, such as corn or even livestock grazing, making tobacco farmlands more prone to desertification.

Across the globe, around 3.5 million hectares of land are converted to grow tobacco each year. This contributes to the deforestation of 200,000 hectares per annum. 9 of the 10 largest tobacco cultivators are in low-income and middle-

ABOVE: Tobacco farmers rely on these cash crops to keep their families fed, but they will likely end up worse long-term due to soil damage. Could nutritious crops be a better option, both short-term and long term? PHOTO FROM PIXABAY

Encouraging tobacco farmers in poorer nations to grow sustainable, nutritious crops would play a major factor in fighting the food crisis. The WHO has also predicted blowback from the tobacco industry, as converting their farms away from tobacco will definitely affect their bottom line.

income countries, and 4 of these nations are defined as low-income food-deficit countries, meaning residents are either undernourished or chronically undernourished. Unfair contractual arrangements with the tobacco companies may keep farmers impoverished and legally trapped, and the child labour that is often a part of tobacco cultivation in low-income countries is a violation of human rights.

With all these drawbacks, the profits gained by farmers from a tobacco cash crop in a low-income or middle-income country may not be worth it, as their capacity to engage in sustainable food production in the future may be permanently stunted. Ideally, the land used to grow tobacco could be much more efficiently used to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal Two: Zero Hunger.

Heard that one before

The vast majority of the planet is already well aware of the dangers of smoking; we know it's the leading cause of throat and lung cancers, a major risk factor in many other types of cancers, and is one of the main causes of heart problems and heart disease. Each year, over 7 million people are killed across the globe by smoking tobacco, and it's important to remember that nearly 900,000 people are killed by breathing in second-hand smoke.

Of the billion-plus people who smoke worldwide, nearly 80% of those are in low-income countries where tobacco-related disease and death will have the hardest impact.

What Australia is doing about tobacco

The Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care is leading Australia's work on policies and laws to help reduce smoking rates in our community. They work with other organisations

on initiatives and programs to reduce tobacco-related harm. Their national strategies guide their work to reduce smoking rates in Australia, leading Australia's work on the policies, programs and laws that reduce tobacco-related harm in our community.

The Australian Government's tobacco control work includes:

- Working with various organisations and experts in the creation of policies and priorities for tobacco control and initiatives
- Tobacco plain packaging and graphic health warnings
- Bans on tobacco advertising and promotion
- Running campaigns and programs to reduce smoking
- Support for smokers to quit, including subsidising nicotine replacement therapies
- Creating policies to reduce the affordability of tobacco products
- Measures to prevent and minimise the illicit tobacco trade
- Signing a voluntary agreement with the 3 main tobacco companies that operate in Australia to disclose the ingredients in their cigarettes

Want to know more about the Department of Health's campaigns and initiatives?

Just Google...

The National Tobacco Campaign

Tackling Indigenous Smoking

Don't Make Smokes Your Story

www.who.int/europe/news-room/events/item/2022/12/19/default-calendar/world-no-tobacco-day-2023--we-need-food--not-tobacco

www.awarenessdays.com/awareness-days-calendar/world-no-tobacco-day-2023/

Community Advisory

COUNCIL BRIEFS

2022 IN REVIEW

We are so proud of Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council and its involved and hardworking members. They represent all the people who access our services. Here are some of the things they achieved in 2022!

Input into major projects, working with Senior Managers.

Covid transition plan – BOTH
Physi cards – capacity building approach in service provision
Employment Assessment tool – Warm line Processes – Escalation Pathways Procedure – Pathways to Community Living Initiative
Service Model - Emergency Plan Policies

Feedback to Senior Managers

Digital Capacity – Flourish Australia Newsletter feedback – Safety training – Organisational culture surveys – Marketing and Branding – Welcome Booklets, advertising and promotional events – WIFI Posters – CIMS Portal

Participating in workshops

Research Advisory Committee – Alcohol Research workshop – JRAS-DS Resource Tool Workshop – Community Business Employment Measures – Monitoring and Evaluation Framework – Harness Project – Complex Stories Workgroup – Involvement on interview panels – MH POD Peer training videos

Participating in Videos and Conferences

Recovery focus videos – Edwina and Luke. Council Promotional Video - all members. TheMHS Conference – Luke, Simon, Penny, Megan. National Commission Lived Experience Forum – Mozzey and Scott. Launch of the Flourish Australia Foundation – Luke and Megan Annual General Meeting – Luke. Board Strategic Day – Luke and Penny.

-KJ & WH



Visiting the TRANS & FRIENDS FESTIVAL at Wollongong Uni

By Amy Cox (They/Them), Mental Health Worker from Flourish Australia's Wollongong service (as told to Grant J Everett)

The first ever Trans and Friends Festival was held on the 13th of November 2022 at the University of Wollongong. Illawarra Shoalhaven Gender Alliance put this inclusive event together for the Trans community in the local area as well as the people who love and support them. As I am trans nonbinary, I wanted to support my community and get in touch with the organisations that had stalls at the Festival. I also wanted to support the members who attended.

The Festival was full of market stalls from LGBTQIA+ local businesses and organisations, including ACON, Sock Drawer Heroes, UOW Queer Collective, and the Gender Centre. There were panels run by people with a lived experience of being trans, as well as speakers from the medical community who covered topics like gender affirming care, as well as the realities of hormonal medications and surgeries. Local performers, including drag queens, bands and a DJ, showed off their talent at the UniBar and the Duck Pond Lawn.

It was great to see trans people and allies learning and sharing information, and I learned about a number of new organisations and referral pathways around Illawarra and Sydney that trans and gender diverse people could safely access.

Overall, this was a great way for the Illawarra trans community and allies to celebrate diversity and inclusion, and to learn more about issues that are important to this community.

Supporting the trans community

Individuals, organisations, businesses and charities learned many ways we can all support the trans community. Such as...

- We can include our preferred pronouns in email signatures, on business cards, and on badges when we go to events. This will help to normalise the sharing of our pronouns whenever we meet someone new.
- On the other hand, some people simply aren't ready to share their preferred pronouns yet, and that's entirely up to them.
- If you accidentally get someone's pronouns wrong, correct yourself, apologise, then move on.
- Continue using correct pronouns even when trans people are not around.
- Correct people when they use the wrong pronouns or terminology.
- Put people's pronouns into your phone along with their name and number.
- Educate yourself about trans and gender diverse identities. If you're unsure about anything, there are plenty of online resources on offer.
- When in doubt while you're talking with a trans person, ask politely. However, don't expect them to explain every element of their gender and sexual identity, as this can be prove emotionally taxing.

- Do not assume someone’s gender based on their presentation.
- Stay up to date on the correct terminology.
- Show allyship by displaying trans flags in your office.

In Good Company

Two members from Flourish Australia’s “New Outlook” service at Wollongong, **Tori** and **Harley**, came along on the day. Here’s what they had to say about the Festival.

Tori Carr (she/her)

I heard about the Trans and Friends Festival through the Illawarra Rainbow Community Facebook Group page. I identify as a transgender woman, and believe The Trans and Friends Festival is a very important initiative. The highlights for me were the information stalls that shared local community support, and the seminars that helpfully answered some of my questions about gender-affirming voice training and hormone treatment.

It was a great day, and I believe this Festival will only get better with further backing from sponsors.

As time goes on, hopefully there will be more support and services available in the Illawarra to assist in gender affirmation, as well as more events that support the LGBTQIA+ community in general.

Harley Quinn (she/her)

I learned of the Trans and Friends Festival from the posters they put up at the New Outlook service. This interested me because I am pansexual, and I also wanted to support my friend **Tori** on the day. It was a good experience, and highlights included learning the many difficulties in transitioning, such as all the different ways they learn how to be more masculine or feminine. It was a fun day!

Question: How inclusive is Flourish Australia with supporting people’s gender and sexual identity?

Amy: “I feel Flourish Australia supports the gender identity and sexual diversity of the staff and the people who access services, such as how we can list our pronouns in our email signatures, how we display Pride flags at services, and our regular involvement with Mardi Gras celebrations.”

Tori: “When it comes to how Flourish Australia staff have accepted and celebrated my gender identity and sexuality, I could not ask for more.”

Harley: “I feel like Flourish Australia accepts and celebrates my gender identity and sexuality 100%”

Want to know more?

There are many services that exist to provide information, advice, support and counselling to the trans community, as well as the wider LGBTQIA+ community. Some examples include...

www.transhub.org.au
gendercentre.org.au
qlife.org.au/

IMAGE TOP RIGHT (L/R): **Amy Cox (they/them)**, **Tori Carr (she/her)**, **Harley Quinn (she/her)**, **Renee Harding (she/her)**.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY **AMY COX**

Flourish Australia
Wollongong
New Outlook DES
3 Station Street
Wollongong NSW
1300 779 270
Weekdays 8AM - 4PM



Jessica Kuo,
getting ready to
restart her life.
PHOTO BY
JESSICA KUO

Rebalancing Our Lives After Trauma

By Jessica Kuo (as told to Grant J Everett)

It can be difficult to regain our confidence and self-discipline after a major trauma. This could mean losing a loved one, experiencing a relationship disaster, or having a meltdown.

Trauma can definitely lead to a decline of one's mental state, affecting our ability to function in all kinds of ways. To heal from trauma and regain our life balance, we need to care for both our mental and physical health.

Trauma can happen to any of us. Oprah Winfrey, for instance, had a childhood full of intense loneliness, abuse, and neglect. In adulthood, Opera was always sure to fulfill others' expectations, but ignored her own boundaries, and this led to a food addiction. She was finally able to cultivate her mental and physical strength and health by connecting with her community.

As someone who has been through trauma, I feel that I can now assist and encourage other people who need support or advice.

Recovery

My last hospital admission was about three years ago. My emotions had all blurred together and my thoughts became tangled and twisted. I found it really difficult to communicate and process information, and this led to some erratic behaviours. I went on to spend almost a year in a mental health unit.

My mistake was not listening to what my body was telling me. Despite already feeling exhausted and stressed out from working, I started a second job anyway. Deep down, I knew I was struggling, and it eventually caught up with me just after I passed my probation period seven months later. I relapsed, quit my job, and was admitted to hospital all on the same day. Thankfully, I've since learned how to pay attention to my body's stress signals when I'm pushing myself too much.

I found it helpful to be placed on an effective medication, and I also got a lot out of talking with a number of different people in hospital who experienced similar symptoms to my own. Other major components of my recovery included engaging in positive self-talk, listening to the natural rhythms of my body, walking, exercising, appreciating nature, picking up new healthy habits, practising mindfulness, finding little things that make my life better, and

finding out what emotional regulation strategies work best. I try to keep away from crowds to avoid becoming overstimulated, I stay at home if my body tells me I need a day off, and I go to bed and get up early. I will often avoid unnecessary exercising.

I also found it essential to deepen my relationship with all my support people. This includes my parents, my sibling, my nephew, my friends, the support workers and music and art therapists from Right At Home, my colleagues from where I volunteer, my recovery coach, and my psychologist. I've found that keeping my support people close is like an anchor on a boat.

Preparing To Return To Life

I have spent the last eleven months resting, spending time with my family, and actively rebalancing my life. I'm cooking healthy meals for myself, I've gotten back into running, and I'm doing volunteer work at the Playgroup of North Sydney Community Centre for 2-4 hours a week, and one hour a week at the Tech Bar at Chatswood Library. I'm interested in getting paid work in Sales or as an Administrative Assistant in the Healthcare Industry, but I'm not quite ready for that just yet.

I began watching my diet and lifestyle after discharge. I started joining my brother at the gym and learned about jogging and weightlifting. I stopped eating junk foods and getting out of bed at noon time. My eating routine became so much healthier. I began to have good proteins and low-GI carbohydrates (for example chicken breasts, sweet potatoes and grains).

I've also been benefiting from my NDIS funding. It covers music therapy, art therapy, occupational therapy and psychology sessions. This is great for me, as I love to express myself by playing piano, singing pop songs, and creating abstract artworks with acrylic paint. The NDIS also funded a couple of classes and workshops with ClassBento. They offer arts, crafts, cooking, and more fun things to do.

I'm keen for the next step, but this time I'll be sure to pay attention to what my body is telling me.



Let's Use Strengths-Based Language!

The first of Flourish Australia's THREE VITAL BEHAVIOURS is to use strengths-based language. Strengths-based language encourages us to recognise our existing skills and abilities and to build upon them to get to where we want to go and to become who we want to be. We believe it is crucial to look at what each person CAN do, rather than at their perceived disabilities.

But what does strengths-based language look like in action?

One key element is to use person-led phrasing. For example, instead of saying "a homeless person," you would say "a person who is homeless."

Secondly, as the majority of people who work for Flourish Australia are on a mental health recovery journey, we know how vital it is to not reduce anybody to an illness or a diagnosis. So instead of saying "a mentally ill person" or "a schizophrenic," we would say "a person who experiences a mental health issue." A diagnosis can provide a starting point for a recovery journey, sure, but it should not be used to define who somebody is or what they're capable of.

A third point following on from this is that we refer to "people who access our services" in preference to terms like clients, or consumers, or patients.

So have you tried applying strengths-based language to your recovery journey? It might just change your life.

What is Spiritual Care in Mental Health?

By Jennifer Greenham (as told to Grant J Everett)

RIGHT: Jenny Greenham, Mental Health Team Leader from the Spiritual Health Association. OPPOSITE: Postcard resource from the Spiritual Health Association ALL IMAGES FROM SPIRITUAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION WEBSITE



I work for the Spiritual Health Association in Victoria. Our organisation believes that everyone has the right to have spiritual beliefs of all shapes, sizes and manifestations, and this includes people who have a lived experience of mental health issues.

While having spiritual beliefs can provide us with many benefits, our organisation isn't pushing any one view or belief system: we promote open, inclusive and respectful recognition of all the paths that people take in their spiritual life. Our distilled, working definition of spirituality is that it is whatever gives you meaning, purpose and connection.

For some folks, this may include a religious practice, or it could be their artistic expression, or the volunteer work they do. Australia has become more of a secular society in recent years, gradually moving away from the peak of organised religion in the 1950s and 1960s, but that doesn't

mean Australians aren't spiritual. You can find meaning, purpose and connection in just about anything, and I've found that many Australian's have a profound connection with nature. We love going camping, fishing, bushwalking, and swimming.

I want to share the message that caring for your spiritual health can also help with your mental health, and what we are promoting is more than inclusive: it's universal.

What Needs To Change

Despite being an important aspect of everyone's personal expression and a recognised domain of the World Health Organisation's definition of health, spirituality gets resoundingly overlooked when people with a lived experience of mental health issues access services. I often hear that people are afraid to talk about their spirituality or religion when they are in care, because they feel like they'll be punished or seen as unwell just because they're talking about God. I think that's just

disgraceful. But so many people find so much relief in their practices, whatever they are, and it's often not until one finds themselves between a rock and a hard place that they are actually forced to wonder about the bigger questions in life.

Despite the fact that the whole experience of a person is meant to be taken into account during their care and recovery, in my years in this role I've found that many staff members just don't know how to have conversations about spirituality because it wasn't a part of their undergraduate health care training. And if somebody doesn't have a strong sense of their own spirituality, then they'll be a bit lost at sea when somebody they're caring for wants to have a conversation about this stuff. I believe all categories of staff in the mental health sector, from peers through to clinicians, need to be equipped to either conduct a basic conversation about spirituality, or to be able to refer that person to someone who can. It's about creating awareness.

"I believe all categories of staff in the mental health sector, from peers through to clinicians, need to be equipped to either conduct a basic conversation about spirituality, or to be able to refer that person to someone who can. It's about creating awareness."

I find the existing medical model to be very inflexible at times. Psychiatry and God have an uncomfortable relationship because the scientific model likes to have proof for everything, but all of humanity has been wondering, contemplating, and pondering God for eons. Just because the science model hasn't proved something definitively, that doesn't mean it should be discounted. When we discount something outright, we do a great disservice to people.

Our Goals

One of the Spiritual Health Association's big goals is to share stories about the value that people place on their spiritual beliefs so we can encourage others and our ultimate goal is to have qualified and experienced spiritual practitioners in all mental health facilities across Australia. We're also gathering a register of people from across Australia who are interested in supporting the work of our organisation, and if we can assemble a network of 500 voices across the country, that's substantial. We are also currently working on a universal model of spiritual care.

My Part

I became an Interfaith Minister after doing my degree in New York, and prior to that I worked in mental health services for almost 40 years in a social work capacity. Interfaith is the celebration of all the ways there are to know God, a broad study of many of the world's spiritual beliefs. At the end of that part of my life, I came out with a much greater appreciation of the differences and similarities of all of the different things we believe in life.

Part of my role is working in collaboration with the Victorian Transcultural Mental Health Service in Melbourne, and I cofacilitate a reflective practice space for mental health workers with another mental health spiritual care worker, a psychiatrist, and an education consultant. These 90 minute sessions are aimed at the whole

spectrum of the mental health system, and we've been running these themed groups over ZOOM for the last three or four years. We've collected a lot of useful data so far, which is fantastic, and we now want to incorporate a lived experience person to help run things.

I turn up at various different conferences over the year. I go to TheMHS Conference each year, and I did a presentation at TheMHS 2022 about the spirituality education project I run here in Melbourne. I'm heading to Ireland in May 2023 for an international network on spirituality, and I'll be presenting a couple of papers there.

Resources

Late October is Spiritual Care Week, and our website has posters that you can download, print off and put up around your health services, which is a great way of sharing our message. In 2022, the theme of Spiritual Care Week was "Relevant And Responsive In Times Of Crisis," and it was about how people's mental health is wearing a little thin after three years of the pandemic. We also released a little booklet a few years ago called "Heart And Soul Matters: A Guide To Providing Spiritual Care In Mental Health Settings."

Want to know more and see what resources are on offer?

Google "Spiritual Health Association"

WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

Spirituality is a dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate **meaning, purpose, and transcendence**, and experience **relationship** to self, family, others, community, society, nature, and the significant or sacred.

Spirituality is expressed through



beliefs



values



traditions



practices

Puchalski et al. 2014

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL CARE?

Spiritual care is the provision of



assessment



counselling



support



ritual

in matters of a person's beliefs, traditions, values and practices enabling the person to access their own spiritual resources.

Spiritual Health Association

SELF DEFENCE: THE RIPPLE EFFECT

By Warren Heggarty

When you consider it carefully, practicing martial arts has many benefits, mental, physical and social. It is a form of self improvement that you DO rather than just read about. As the old martial arts saying goes: 'A black belt is a white belt who never quit.' An expert is a beginner who kept going. More than that 'when a person learns how to defend themselves, it has dramatic ripple effects throughout their entire life.' (ShirudoSelfDefence.com.au)

Martial arts for self defence include Karate, Tae Kwon Do, Judo, Jiu-jitsu, kickboxing, wrestling, Muay-Thai and many others. The thing that most of them have in common is that they have an underlying value system which transcends the brutality of fighting- they are defensive rather than aggressive. Most of them also operate along a clear line of progressive stages from beginner to expert.

According to Focus Martial Arts in Brisbane, self defence is 'a set of skills, techniques and various countermeasure tactics that

enable you to keep yourself safe from harm by being aware of your surroundings, avoiding risky situations or standing up for yourself in case of aggression.' (Focus Martial Arts, 2023)

The most commonly mentioned benefits include:

1. Building confidence
2. Developing discipline
3. Setting goals
4. Boosting health and fitness
5. Learning responsibility and values

Connection

Many martial arts schools, including the ones mentioned here, are willing to cater to all fitness levels and ages. 'You don't need to be flexible or fit to learn Tae Kwon Do,' according to Focus Martial Arts. To do well of course, you will need to put effort in and not quit. In return, according to sports scientist Paulo Barroso speaking for 'Exercise Right Mixed Martial Arts,' they 'emphasise the mental and physical connection.' As we have said many times before in Panorama, people were made to move! (Exercise Right, 2023)

"You have to expect things from yourself before you can do them."

- Michael Jordan

Bullies? What Bullies?

What other benefits are there? Well, according to Shirudo Self Defence, right from the start you learn things like...

6. Non-violent conflict resolution
7. How to deal with bullying -including recognising tactics used by bullies
8. Protection from 'stranger danger' and their strategies
9. How to identify a dangerous situation

Respect

If that isn't enough to sell the idea of martial arts then how about these?

10. You develop a sense of personal security
11. You develop agility, flexibility and better coordination
12. You improve your concentration and ability to focus
13. You sharpen your reflexes
14. You increase your energy levels
15. You learn courtesy, loyalty and respectfulness
16. You increase your mental well-being, reduce stress

Now if all this sounds a bit beyond you, remember that Michael Jordan once said that "you have to expect things of yourself before you can do them." And if that hasn't sold you on self defence, remember this: It's FUN.

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LEFT: You may never have to do this if you learn how to 'see bullies coming' and outwit their tactics. But just in case....PHOTO BY INNA MYKYTOS FROM PIXABAY




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