

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

# panorama

Quarterly Issue Autumn 2025 #96



**Ready to Change:  
Everything Worth  
Doing is Difficult**

**Make More of Your  
Mindfulness**

**Being in the Driver's  
Seat in Your Own  
Recovery**

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## Contributors include...

### Contributors include...

**Julie** is a Manager at Flourish Australia

**Lynda** ran a popular workshop at TheMHS. Lynda worked at South Eastern Sydney LHD for many years, and is Chairperson of SUPERCRO. She is now a happily retired Nanna.

**Jayme** is our Groups & Engagement Coordinator at Salisbury, SA

**Peter** loves restoring furniture, and taught himself to create art with a 3D printer.

**Michael** was part of a team presenting on the revolutionary DRIV-R app. Michael is a lived experience advocate, working with Flourish Australia's Research Advisory Committee, Community Advisory Council, and Social Citizenship Think Tank.

**Monom de Plume** has found ways to get through the hardest times...with the right support.

**Evan** has made enormous life changes after many lost decades.

**Peter** is Flourish Australia's Training Specialist

### Contributions are welcome!

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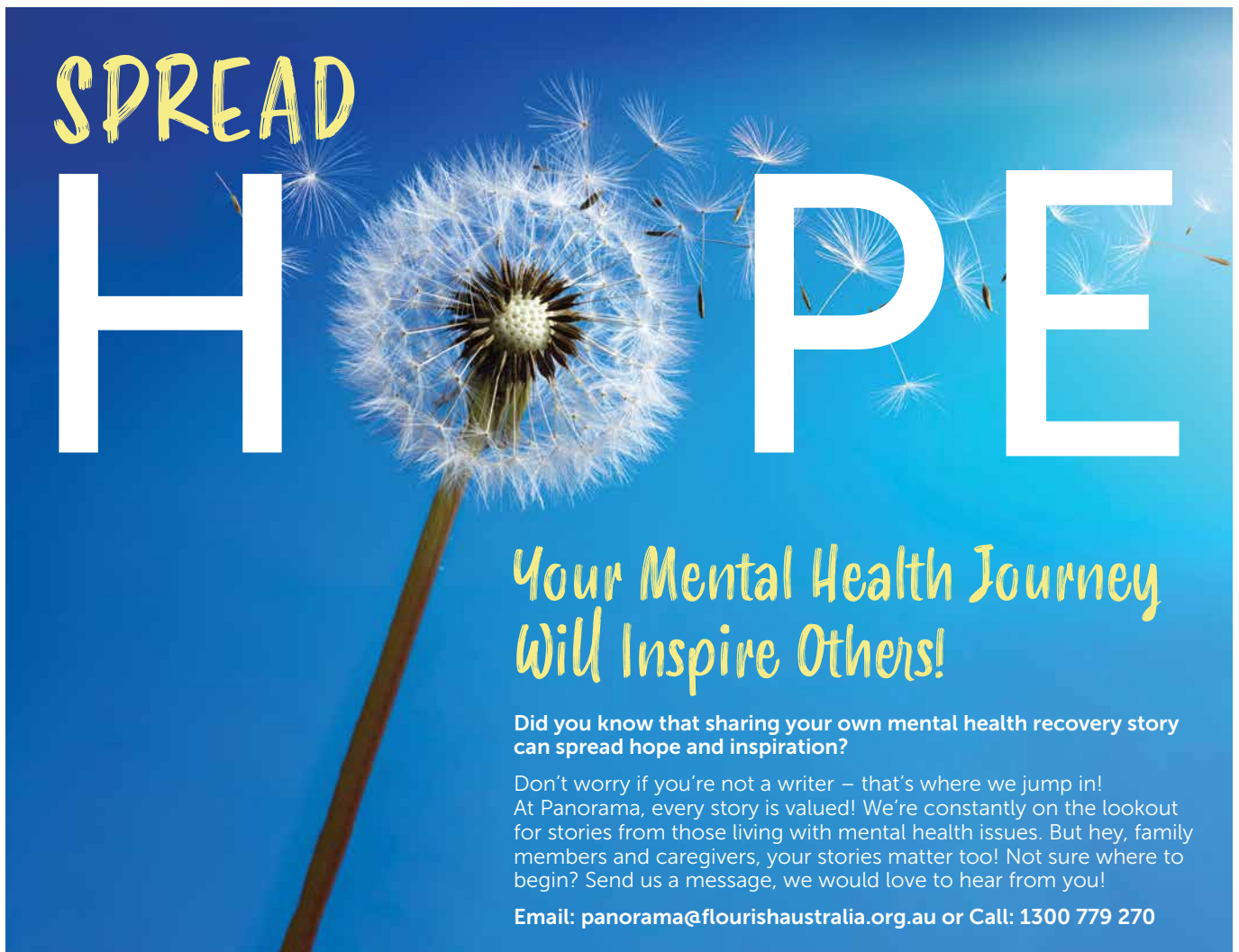
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**SPREAD**  
**H** **PE**  
**HOPE**

**Your Mental Health Journey Will Inspire Others!**

Did you know that sharing your own mental health recovery story can spread hope and inspiration?

Don't worry if you're not a writer – that's where we jump in! At Panorama, every story is valued! We're constantly on the lookout for stories from those living with mental health issues. But hey, family members and caregivers, your stories matter too! Not sure where to begin? Send us a message, we would love to hear from you!

Email: [panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au) or Call: 1300 779 270



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 70+ of our services in New South Wales, Southern Queensland, Australian Capital Territory and Victoria.

### Contact Flourish Australia!

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Chair: Prof Elizabeth More AM  
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### 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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*Flourish Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, sea and waterways upon which we live and work.*

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

*Panorama magazine would like to recognise all people who live with a mental health issue, as well as those who encourage and support loved ones. Our universal right to lead full and inclusive lives is the driving force behind why Panorama exists. We also recognise 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.*



# panorama

*is now available online each month!*

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[www.flourishaustralia.org.au/panorama](http://www.flourishaustralia.org.au/panorama)



Sign up online to get a **FREE PRINTED EDITION** every quarter.



# WE PROVIDE PRACTICAL Care for Carers

**Flourish Australia** is committed to working closely with families and carers in their important role of supporting people close to them with a lived experience of a mental health issue.

Using a family inclusive approach, we work directly and in partnership with specialist organisations to provide support and education services for families and carers.

Flourish Australia's family inclusive approach will enhance relationships between individuals and their families and carers, while providing an

opportunity for the voice of families and carers to be heard, and influence, the operation and development of Flourish Australia's services.

A list of helpful resources and Carer organisations for family and carers can be found on our website: [flourishaustralia.org.au/family-and-carers](http://flourishaustralia.org.au/family-and-carers)

OR SCAN THIS QR



## 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.

# Conversations with Art and Music

## Working the room with conversation cards

By Warren Heggarty



**When Panorama visited Flourish Australia's Marrickville Service to look at people's preparations for the October 17 Buckingham House Art Show, we thought we would bring a set of conversation cards, just in case people were a bit shy. After Warren and Brian demonstrated how to use them, the conversation just didn't stop.**

Support workers Natasha and Jess (who had joined us because she wanted to start up an art group of her own) warmed to the Conversation Cards very quickly. Around the room, the paints and coloured pencils were laid out. Some, like Jazmin, worked on elaborate designs, while Raymond practiced mindful colouring.

### Ronan and Ron

Ronan was working on a painting of various forms of The Avengers in animal form, with the animal

heads arranged in a circle. Ronan obviously had a background in drawing and painting!

Ronan came first in Visual Arts in Year 7 at Sydney Boys' Selective High School. 'There seemed to be more interest in Music at school, but my Art Teacher encouraged me, so I followed that through until Year 12 and beyond.'

Ronan also does music and likes the idea of stretching himself by applying classical training to popular music. He plays guitar and piano and studied music at TAFE.

Ron, who opted for the colouring book today, used to have a go at the drums, and his former wife is a musician. Despite a generation gap, both Ron (64) and Ronan spoke about music while they worked, centering on a Fleetwood Mac Tribute band due to perform that evening.

The conversation turns to exercise. Ronan cites ping pong and yoga, while Ron was a hard hitter in

cricket and a hard kicker in soccer. It was ice skating, however, that led to Ron meeting his former wife at the once famous Canterbury Ice Rink so many years ago.

'I like the idea of Tai Chi,' says Ron, 'because it's about balance of body and soul. I think it is important, how you present yourself and how you develop rapport with others.'

Ronan puts it more bluntly: 'Humans need social interaction, or we go mad!'

### Jazmin

When asked, 'What country would you most like to visit?', Jazmin quickly responded, 'Spain! I love the Spanish zest for life.'

Jazmin learned to speak Spanish and dance the Salsa while she lived in Ecuador for two and a half years. Her former husband was Ecuadorean.

'In Spain, they say I speak like a local!' says Jazmin, who has been a teacher.

The piece she intends to enter into the Buck House Art Show is a panel bordered by gold leaf featuring a tree in a circle. The interlacing of the boughs of the tree echo symmetrically the roots. So the picture gives a feeling of stability.

And of course, everyone was very keen on showing off their finished works on October 17.

FAR LEFT: Jazmin. RIGHT: Ronan working on his furry version of the Avengers. BELOW: Support Workers Natasha and Jess. Photos by Warren Heggarty

## Flourish Australia Marrickville

### Gadigal Country

6a Rich Street  
Marrickville NSW 2204

(02) 9393 9382

Weekday: 8am - 4pm



Ronan was working on a painting of various forms of The Avengers in animal form. He has a background in drawing and painting.





# Make More of Your Mindfulness

## SELF-CARE CHARGE UP AT SEVEN HILLS

By Warren Heggarty

**Atmosphere: A Buddha. A collection of shells. Mood music. Artworks all around. Candles. Dim lights. And, of course, muffins!**

Welcome to Mindfulness Group at Flourish Australia's Seven Hills service! Facilitator Fiona has gone to a lot of trouble to ensure that this is not just a 'relaxation' or 'switching off' session, but that it presents mindfulness as:

'... a special kind of awareness of what is happening in the present, in your mind and body, and eternally, around you.'

This is how she describes it in the Mind Moves handout that accompanies the sessions. Mind Moves is divided into twelve weekly sessions. The handout allows participants to work on their mindfulness outside the weekly sessions. It has tips about managing stress, mindful eating, mindful

cooking, mindful moving, chair yoga, self-compassion, gratitude, having a motivation mojo, and incorporating mindfulness into EVERYTHING you do. This includes brushing your teeth and hair, while you're in the shower, making a cuppa, washing up, cleaning, ironing, riding public transport, being outdoors, ALL of these things and more can be opportunities to practice mindfulness. Tammy Irving, who originally tipped us off about this group, did some mindful Rubiks cube puzzle solving while the rest of us gathered about the big red table.

At the core of all of this is that your recovery journey will be better if you PRIORITISE and PLAN your self-care.

Today's session included a 'self-care charge up.' AJ (Peer Worker) acted as scribe, writing up the ideas that came from the group as we went along, and there were plenty of suggestions.

Self-care includes the steps taken to prioritise your well-being and care for your mental and physical health. "Charging up" addresses the things that can deplete 'our reservoir of energy and emotional well-being. And if your battery is "flat," you are not in a good position to manage self-care.

The Mindfulness group is very welcoming, and people participate to the degree they feel able. All of the participants were asked if they wanted to share some 'self-care' items, and a few of us did so.

Bekk said, "You need a plan for when you are unwell. Sometimes there is not much you can do, but make sure you know who you can turn to for support."

Lisa said that she had recently had some success in controlling her personal budget. "I feel less stressed now," she reported, "and feel more freedom!"

Those of us who are subject to financial management by the Public Guardian can really benefit from developing a track record showing that they can work effectively within a budget. In this way, we can hope to regain control over our own money again.

Participants also shared some of their goals for the future.

Bekk said: "I want a job, and I'd like a dog. And I'd like to get my driving licence back!"

Lisa said, "I want to get a job in a supermarket. I want to be free of

**Mindfulness is a skill,  
and like all skills,  
it needs to be practiced.**



debt. And then maybe I'll want to save some money!"

So the participants here were specific about their goals and determined to reach them!

As usual, after the Self Care Charge Up, we looked at positive things in our lives.

Bekk said, "It's not just positive things you need. You need resilience to get through the bad days you are going to have!" She also reported that she found a free "cross training" exercise program she enjoys.

Fiona said that having regular dentist check-ups and doctor check-ups are positive things we can do to help us stay in control of our physical health. Also, there is spiritual self-care, which can take the form

of journaling, saying prayers, or practicing gratitude.

Lisa said that eating well, exercise and sleeping well are all important positive things we can do.

After this came the guided meditation with lights dimmed and sound provided by BRAIN FM! BRAIN FM is a website that provides music and other sonic backgrounds which (it claims) are scientifically proven to increase productivity. Today we did a body scan exercise, being mindful of our breath and relaxing each part of our body one by one.

All of the participants say they keep journals or scrap books that they have been building up week by week. Panorama noticed that the members of the group were very encouraging towards one another, recognising successes and showing support for their struggles. They all had their own views about mindfulness and its role in their lives.

**ABOVE: AJ and Fiona with a diagram of the self care territory covered today. OPPOSITE: Setting the table sets the mood. Styling By Fiona. Photos By Warren Heggarty**



To get a copy of MIND MOVES from BRAIN FM, scan this QR Code.



## Awesome Aphorisms and Fun Facts

And now here are some awesome aphorisms and fun facts from Fiona which you might like to experiment with scientifically to see how they work for you!

"Researchers have found that hot baths twice a week can help improve mood."

"Scientific studies link gratitude to many aspects of wellbeing. It has been linked to happiness, resilience, and good mental health."

"Comprehensive research reviews have shown that mindfulness-based programs help with symptoms of anxiety, depression and distress."

"Failure? Failure is growth! Embrace failures as valuable lessons. As we learn from experiences, we find it simpler to rise again and build our efforts to pursue our goals."

**For people who access Flourish Australia's services Fiona recommends...**

'Have a conversation with your keyworker using the PhysiCards to discuss your physical health.'

"Are you ready to work on our self-care plan? Have a yarn with your keyworker and see what can be added to your Individual Recovery Plan."

### Flourish Australia Darug Country

Unit 9, 197 Prospect Hwy,  
Seven Hills NSW 2147  
(02) 9393 9290  
Weekdays 8am - 8pm  
Weekend 8am - 4:30pm



# RECOVERY GAMES

## Panorama's Puzzle Pages

Our puzzle pages aim not only to entertain and amuse, but to help you retain some new words relating to mental health recovery. We have set out a Crossword and a Find-A-Word on the opposite page, and a Keyword puzzle below.

In KEYWORDS we have some very long and jumbled words which we challenge you to unscramble. All of the answers are to be found in Julie's story "Planning for the Pause" on page 12. All you need to do is read it and it will all become clear.

Answers to all the puzzles are on page 31

### Keywords about some women's health issues

Unscramble these words and found in the story "Preparing for the Pause"

- 1. ISISTRENDOOOME** .....  
A women's health issue
- 2. SEXERICE** .....  
Helps recovery every day
- 3. ORANJUL** .....  
Helps recovery every day in a different way!
- 4. INMARE\*** .....  
A medical device
- 5. SOUPENEMA** .....  
Once called 'the change of life'
- 6. RIPE** .....  
A prefix for 5
- 7. CISSYDARPH\*** .....  
A brilliant invention by Flourish Australia!
- 8. PILSATE\*** .....  
A specific system of 2 above

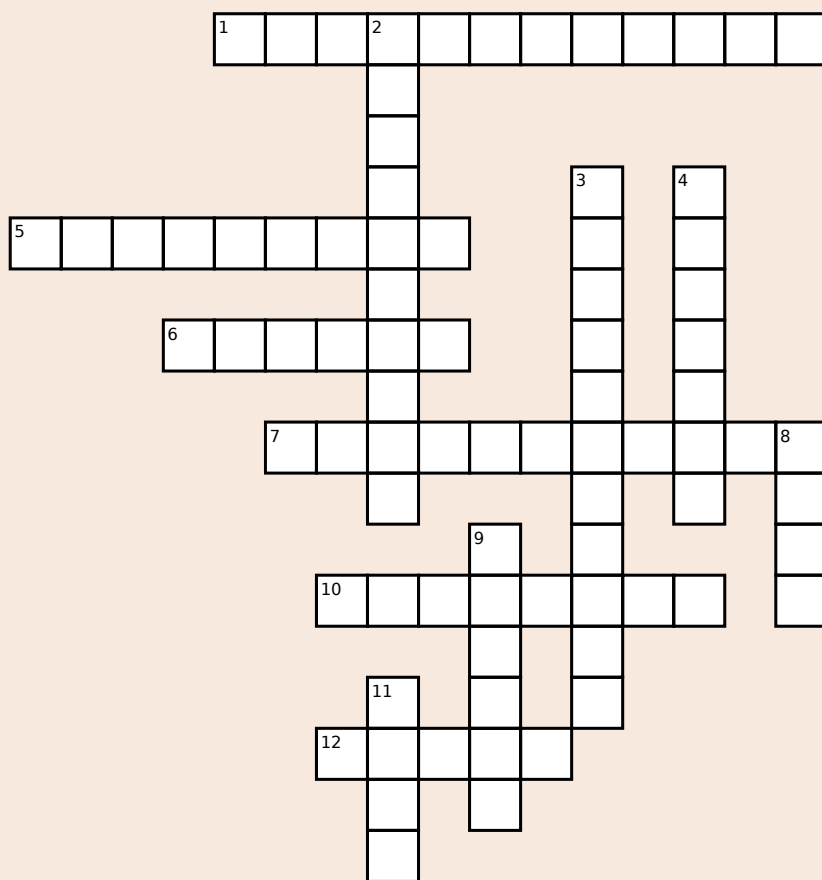
## Keeping physically strong & healthy will help you reach your recovery goals

Talk with your local Flourish Australia team today about keeping your physical health and recovery on track.



Back On Track Health Program

# Panorama Crossword



**Down:**

- 2. A way to earn money (E)
- 3. Being around and interacting with people (S)
- 4. Things you enjoy doing (H)
- 8. Every road to recovery begins with a first \_\_\_\_ (S)
- 9. Seeing the world (T)
- 11. The road to recovery can sometimes be \_\_\_\_ (H)

**Across:**

- 1. Choosing how we live our lives (I)
- 5. Studying (S)
- 6. Goals we aspire to (D)
- 7. Paying attention to your own mind (M)
- 10. Keeps us fit and healthy (E)
- 12. Someone who looks after another (C)

# Panorama Find-A-Word

- STUDYING
- RELAXATION
- MEDITATION
- EMPLOYMENT
- HOBBIES
- SOCIALISING
- PASSIONS
- SUPPORT
- POSITIVITY
- WRITING
- FRIENDSHIPS
- MUSIC
- CREATIVITY
- CONTRIBUTING

F	E	M	P	L	O	Y	M	E	N	T	S	S	A
R	G	N	I	T	U	B	I	R	T	N	O	C	H
I	U	D	P	I	C	S	N	E	C	I	C	S	B
E	C	I	O	O	E	E	I	L	R	G	I	U	S
N	H	R	S	L	N	E	I	A	E	N	A	P	E
D	O	S	I	A	S	I	I	X	A	I	L	P	I
S	B	G	T	M	S	E	S	A	T	T	I	O	P
H	B	I	I	U	B	R	I	T	I	I	S	R	A
I	I	O	V	S	D	T	I	I	V	R	I	T	S
P	E	T	I	I	I	Y	I	O	I	W	N	I	S
S	S	C	T	C	O	I	I	N	T	L	G	S	I
O	A	I	Y	U	C	V	T	N	Y	I	S	M	O
U	Y	I	M	E	I	M	I	B	G	I	U	R	N
I	N	O	I	T	A	T	I	D	E	M	R	L	S



# Planning for 'The Pause'

## Perimenopause & Mental Health

By Julie

**I had experienced anxiety and depression before, but I had never known anything like the level of anxiety that I experienced in perimenopause. Sometimes I could feel the anger and rage sitting on my chest; other times I felt incredible sadness and an inability to function. It was STAGGERING. My world was made very small and lonely.**

I have a diagnosis of ADHD, and I am also neurodivergent. Terry Matlen says, "One little-known side effect of menopause and perimenopause is they make your ADHD symptoms harder to manage." (Matlen: 2023)

Because menopause is something EXPECTED and a normal part of the life cycle, you might expect that there is a lot of knowledge of the interaction of perimenopause and mental health issues out there, at least among doctors. Unfortunately, this not always so. On the opposite page, we will look at perimenopause and menopause in general. But now to continue my own story.

I told doctors that 'this depression I had is DIFFERENT from anything I had ever had before. But doctors, sometimes even specialists, don't know the full story. I ended up having a long diagnosis journey of three to five years before I developed a clear picture of what was happening to me.

The anger I felt was so bad that it pushed people out of my life. I was also troubled by migraines up to 24 days out of every month. And on top of that was the pain of endometriosis, which runs in my family.

In February 2024, I had surgery to try to remove the endometriosis. I thought, "This will fix it, at last something is going to help." To my very great disappointment, the operation was not fully successful, and although I have less of a problem with "endo" it is still painfully present.

I had been working so hard to be well, I had done everything I was supposed to do and yet the surgery result was so disappointing that I began to think "Maybe it is

something else?" I certainly still did not feel like me

It was suggested that a "Mirena" might improve my mood. This is a type of intra-uterine device which releases progesterone slowly over several years (Wood). I had to overcome a deep scepticism of this, but I did try it. Surprisingly, three days after I began to use it on 4th July I began to feel better.

There were a number of other things that helped me on the long "diagnosis journey" and my recovery. Such as...

**SUPPORT** A friend encouraged me to find doctors who I could trust and who would listen to me. She helped me make appointments and would check on me afterwards. Knowing I wasn't alone made it easier to be an advocate for my health.

**JOURNALING** I kept a journal of symptoms focusing on migraine pain, enabling me to track a reduction in migraine attacks from 24 a month to 14 a month. I have kept a written record of what DID work and what DID NOT.

**PHYSICARDS** Inspired by Flourish Australia's Back on Track Health PhysiCards, I began to plan my doctor appointments. I would go through the cards and sort them into the three piles showing what my priorities were. As I have ADHD, I find prioritising difficult, but this was very helpful and I strongly recommend it.

**WEIGHT BEARING EXERCISES** I work out 3-5 times a week, focusing on weight lifting and a Pilates Reformer machine. Weight-bearing exercises, like these, are great for supporting bone health during perimenopause and menopause. I also pay close attention to avoiding added sugars and processed foods. You don't even need to go to the gym to do weight training - try filling a backpack with canned food and walking around with it for a simple at-home workout! After this experience, reaching Menopause, the actual entry into "old age," is looking really attractive to me. No more migraines, I hope!

Above: Julie sorts the PhysiCards. Photo Warren Heggarty



## More Information About Perimenopause and Mental Health

By Julie

**Many complex mental health issues persist throughout the lifespan, including menopause. This comes with physical and psychological symptoms of its own. Having pre-existing mental health issues, however, can add a layer of confusion. There is a danger of “diagnostic overshadowing” where a doctor blames all of the problems on one cause and ignores the others. Women need to make ourselves aware of how to navigate this complex situation.**

First, some definitions. “Menopause” is technically the first anniversary of your last period. Perimenopause is the period of five to ten years prior to that where the reproductive system “winds down.”

We know that women in the ten-year Perimenopausal period can be prone to new mental health issues - or flare ups of existing ones. Some women with no lived experience can be blindsided by the sudden onset if severe depression in middle age. How can women protect themselves? If issues do emerge, what practical steps can they take?

**MANAGE STRESS** Practice mindfulness, meditation, or regular exercise like Pilates to reduce stress and improve mood.

**STAY CONNECTED** Lean on friends, support groups, or a therapist to avoid isolation and maintain emotional well-being.

### ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF

Prioritise your needs by seeking medical support, adjusting your lifestyle, and making healthy choices like eating well, limiting processed foods, and maintaining a sleep routine.

Psychiatrist Jayashri Kulkarni, told ABC News that about that half of women around menopause might develop some mental health issues ranging from “brain fog” to depression, anxiety and memory problems. Kulkarni also says, “There is a high rate of suicide in women aged 45-54 years (coinciding with perimenopause). This may be related to the biological changes associated with menopause. Perimenopausal depression may present with symptoms that differ from those of typical depression.” (Kulkarni) This was certainly my experience.

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

According to Mary Claire Haver, “Much of the lack of treatment for menopausal symptoms is a result of the inadequately designed, evaluated and reported results of research conducted by the 2002 Women’s Health Initiative, which created panic among patients and physicians alike.” The message was that hormone therapy posed more risks than benefits for all women. (Haver, 2023)

Sophie Behrman and Clair Crockett wrote in the British Journal of Psychiatry Bulletin calling for clinicians to be “proactive” in asking questions of women in this situation. (Behrman & Crockett, 2023) Better still, women will be best served if they can advocate for themselves.

**ABOVE:** These women are dedicated to weight bearing exercise which is why they have stuffed their backpacks with several kilos of groceries. Image by Silvia from Pixabay

### Works Cited. Further info.

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Scan this QR Code to see Flourish Australia’s Back On Track Health PhysiCards

# LET'S DO LUNCH WITH MATT CARUANA

By Warren Heggarty with Doris Chen

The "Let's do Lunch" webinar is a highlight of Mental Health Month at Flourish Australia. 2024's theme, "Let's Talk About It," encourages open conversations about mental health. As our guest presenter, we were proud to welcome Matt Caruana, a renowned athlete and a mental health advocate and ambassador for Lifeline Australia.

Imagine being in your prime, with everything to look forward to when life is interrupted by a catastrophic injury. At 16, Matt survived a seven-story fall that completely severed his spinal cord and left him paraplegic. Instead of giving in to despair, he used this experience to fuel his personal growth and advocacy.

One of Matt's mentors, Keith Sagers, suggested he take up wheelchair basketball. It didn't seem ideal, "a twenty-one year old training with twelve year-olds," but Matt discovered it was fun, and it helped him by increasing his mental wellness and decreasing his degree of disability. Even though his spine was beyond repair, Matt as a whole was capable of moving forward.

"If I hadn't chosen to have conversations about mental health and to support myself in terms of recovery, to be honest I don't think I'd be here anymore."

Matt says that when you support a person facing serious challenges, it is important to show you care. One way you can do that is by noticing things about the other person and



reflecting them. For example, if you notice an outgoing person becoming quiet or irritable.

Matt says he has received support from all quarters, men, women, and even kids! (Seems those twelve year olds were good value after all!) Matt recalls that he was given a guitar in hospital (the two broken wrists didn't help) and he really focused on developing that skill as well as doing his physio.

In February 2024, Matt proudly represented Australia with the Emerging Rollers in a wheelchair basketball tournament against Japan. As a player for the Manly Wheel Eagles and a previous ambassador for Basketball NSW, Matt promotes diversity and inclusion, ensuring everyone has a place on the court.

Matt also holds the Guinness World Record for the most towel pull-ups in one minute, proving that personal challenges can be overcome through determination.

"Through my partnership with 'Transform Hope Thru Action,' we have a vision for humanity that

is centred around two words: Community, Unity."

"Since the Let's Do Lunch webinar, I've transitioned from Wheelchair Basketball to Para Climbing as my main sport, and I'm honoured to say that I was nominated to join the Australian Para Climbing Team for 2025. Through my involvement in the sport, I'd like to highlight how nothing is out of reach when the only way is up."

Matt's journey is featured in John Brogden's 2024 book "Profiles in Hope." This story serves as a powerful reminder of the strength of the human spirit, and offers inspiration to those facing adversity.

Matt's presentation was wrapped up by a 20 minute question and answer session facilitated by Flourish Australia's Chief Operating Officer Susan McCarthy.

**ABOVE: Matt Caruana working out with Ekso, the 'exoskeleton' device. Photos by Lifeline Australia**

## Bibliography

Brogden, J. (2024). Profiles in Hope: Sixteen Australians tell their stories of surviving suicide and finding the way back to a better life.



## Workshopping Dreams Unleashing Creativity at TheMHS

By Lynda (as told to Grant J Everett)

**I attended TheMHS Conference 2024 to run a workshop called “No Suppression - A Group of Creatives at Macquarie Hospital Finding Common Ground and Celebrating Difference” with Paula Hanlon, a director of Flourish Australia, and Judith Nicholas.**

This workshop was based on the work I’ve done with the No Suppression creative group since Paula Hanlon and Linda Mizzi founded it 13 years ago. We had 90 minutes, which was plenty of time, and because we had a really good turnout, we could run multiple groups at once. It’s really hard to get a workshop approved at TheMHS, so I was glad it turned out so good.

Paula ran a poetry table, where she asked people to write a few lines, and then put their contributions together into one big poem. It sounded as though they were having fun with it. Judith’s group did journaling.

My part of the workshop involved The Deck of Dreams, something we created at No Suppression by asking people to paint their dreams and write some words to go with them. We had these masterpieces printed onto cards, and ended up with 52 of them, a whole deck. They’re just beautiful. The printer did a fantastic job.

For my Dream workshop, I spread all the cards on the table, and asked people to select one that might relate to their own dreams, and explain why they picked that card. People were free to take more than one, and one girl ended up with four.

We had some good feedback at the end. A number of people said this workshop was the highlight of the entire conference!

### Expression, Not Suppression

At No Suppression we meet on the first Saturday of the month to sing songs, read poetry, and we even have a few stand-up comedians.

We’ve been allocated a nice room at Macquarie Hospital with access to a kitchen. We used to meet at Cornucopia at Gladesville Hospital, which has since closed down, to perform songs and plays in the café there.

We’ve received awards for our work with No Suppression, and just last year we were nominated for a state award. The recognition was nice! They served us a lovely dinner, and we had some amazing photos taken.

### The Alliance

I checked out a few talks at TheMHS. One of the most exciting was a presentation from the new Mental Health Consumer Alliance, the national peak body for consumers (called “the Alliance” for short). They’re going to employ a consumer worker in each state, and I hope they’ll be fighting for the consumer movement.

Priscilla Brice, the CEO of Being, was recently appointed as the CEO of the Alliance about a year ago now.

There is also a peak body for carers called Carers Peak, and I think it’s overdue for peer workers to have some sort of board or committee.

### Integrated Care: A Reality?

The highlight of the conference for me was a seminar about an integrated care pilot at Hornsby Hospital that aims to bring the health sectors together for people in crisis, so your GP, psychiatrist, psychologist, and mental health workers can speed things up to deal with issues on the day, particularly if a person is in distress. It’s amazing stuff, and we need to support this pilot.

Afterwards, I said to the presenter, psychiatrist Dr Paul Fung, “This is the sort of service I’ve been looking for since 1994 when I first got unwell.” After all these years, something I’ve been campaigning for may finally be happening.

Scan this QR Code to visit the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance website.





# MANAGE YOUR DIABETES

## ENJOYING POPCORN & CAPPUCCINOS

By Warren Heggarty

**On a visit to the optometrist, Ron discovered that he had thin cataracts on his eyes. It was not a serious problem and it has been caught before it got worse, but it is one of the things that you might need to look out for if you have diabetes.**

Ron, 64, who accesses Flourish Australia's Buckingham House service, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes about six years ago. 'I have a daily routine that I follow to keep my blood sugars in balanced.'

'In the morning, at lunch and at night I have insulin. Sometimes I am wayward and leave out lunch. Then for overnight, I take a slow acting form of insulin that keeps me going until morning.'

'I don't miss out on treats. I love popcorn. All popcorn is, is little kernels of corn that have been popped open. So there is nothing much too them. Of course, if you add butter and salt, it might be a different story!'

Ron showed Panorama an App that

he has on his phone which can measure blood sugar level. Ideally, Ron should balance his medication (insulin) with his eating so that his blood sugar remains relatively constant. This is how it would be if he did not have diabetes.

In reality, his sugar levels go up and down a bit. He showed us a 'sine wave' which recorded the levels over few days.

'There is an upper limit and a lower limit. As long as I keep that curving line between the limits, it is OK even if it wiggles a bit.'

'For example, if my sugar level drops below 6, I could get the shakes. I get sweaty and shaky and start to lose balance.'

We asked what happens then. 'Well I have a cappuccino contingency. I find that having a cappuccino restores the sugar to a better level and I'm usually right after that.'

Well, that's a great reason to have a coffee! But by the same token, too MUCH sugar is also a problem. The ideal is a balance between sugar and insulin.

What can people do to manage their diabetes- or even prevent it in some cases?

'I found the biggest benefit for me was quitting alcohol, I also quit any other chemicals as well, because I found that they all tended to give me more trouble than benefit! Once I had given it all up I never looked back!'

We asked if it was hard to manage controlling your food intake so rigorously. How do you do it? Do you have hobbies to divert your attention.'

'Well, apart from my experience with car detailing and vehicle restorations, I'm also a cook' says Ron. 'I worked for years as a kitchen hand and a cook. The way I look at it having diabetes means that I get to experiment with dishes. Plus I have a dietitian who helps by guiding me what to eat and what not to eat.'

"Having diabetes means that I get to experiment with dishes."

**ABOVE: Ron relies on having a good daily routine but also gets support from clinicians and, of course, Flourish Australia. Photo by Warren Heggarty**



# Back On Track Health



**The Editor of Diabetic Living (Are Media) Alix Davis says, "Every five minutes another Aussie is diagnosed with diabetes. When the shock subsides, they need to be empowered to manage - or reverse - diabetes. We inspire them to do just that." Diabetes is even MORE common among people with mental health issues than the general public.**

Alix Davis mentions "reversing" diabetes. How do you achieve a remission of Type 2 diabetes? According to Diabetes Australia, "The most common ways people have achieved remission is by achieving substantial weight loss following very intensive dietary changes..." Although most people do not achieve actual remission, the attempt brings its own rewards.

To people who use Flourish Australia's PhysioCards, you can find links to sources of expert information on the backs of the cards! (you can find the address of Diabetes Australia on the back of the Diabetes PhysioCard, by the way)

Ron's story on the opposite page demonstrates how using PhysioCards might benefit you!

From his story we can see that Ron had three three main health concerns

**#26 Eyesight**  
**#15 Diabetes**  
**#24 Alcohol (until he quit)**

And indirectly you could include #13 Diet and Nutrition. These four things are all related to one another through diabetes.

According to the Kiziltoprak et al in the World Journal of Diabetes, diabetes causes a wide range of eye problems and Ron's problem, cataract, is the most common of them. If untreated, blindness can result but fortunately treatment for cataracts is now common, effective and inexpensive.

Every person is different and so Ron's treatment routine will be made to suit him. One thing that really suited him was getting rid of alcohol from his diet. And as we have seen he takes a positive view of

his dietary restrictions, seeing them as an invitation to experiment.

Other people living with metabolic syndrome, of which diabetes is one component, may refer to other PhysioCards. They might find they have questions about #My energy levels; #My Legs #My Feet, #My weight and some other things as well. Now if you have the appetite for more personal stories, the following QR code will lead you to the Diabetes Australia website.



**Scan this QR Code to see Flourish Australia's Back On Track Health PhysioCards**

Sources: Kiziltoprak, Hasan et al (2019) "Cataract in Diabetes Mellitus" World Journal of Diabetes, Mar 15; 10(3): 140-153.

# BE PREPARED! HAVE A PLAN!

## Stay informed about bushfires

By Jayme

**In 2019 and 2020, Panorama ran stories on how our lives are effected by bushfires, by smoke haze and by severe heat. Some parts of the country have had cooler and wetter Summers than usual since then, and that makes it more likely there will be a return to a "normal" blazing Summer.**

People living in rural and remote areas are most at risk of bushfires, but people living in urban-fringe areas (where suburbia meets bush land) can be affected, too. Being prepared, having a plan and staying informed can prevent or minimise damage to property and injury or loss of life. Let's go through the risk elements we need to be wary of...

### Embers

Embers can be just as, if not more destructive, than an actual fire. An ember is a glowing fragment from a fire, the remnants of a tree or grass that is still hot or "glowing." Embers are small and light, so they can be picked up by wind and blown several kilometres ahead of the main bushfire, to create new fires.

A bushfire can still be a risk to people living in the suburbs (where people may not consider a bushfire to be a problem) as embers can fly

into leaf-filled gutters, gardens, or gaps in the roof where there is an abundance of flammable material.

### Smoke

Bushfire smoke can be blown many kilometres (including interstate!) and can cause eye irritation and respiratory issues. Bushfire smoke can also contain burnt toxic material, so inhaling it should be avoided. Staying inside and keeping doors and windows closed can help to minimise smoke entering your home. If necessary, consider wearing a mask (P2/N95) or other cloth mask or face covering you have available to reduce inhaling the smoke if you are affected by it.

### Radiant heat

Radiant heat is the heat felt from a fire, and it can start new fires in combustible material before the flames reach it. Trees, plants and grasses are flammable and contribute to the spread of a bushfire. However, some plants can help slow a fire from spreading or reduce damage to your home: these plants store more water than others, and this either prevents them from burning or slows the rate of fire spread. They can also absorb the radiant heat from a bushfire or capture embers, preventing them from impacting and burning your home and other structures.

More information on the types on these types of plants can be found on the following websites:

Fire  
Resistant  
Plants,  
Australian  
Plants  
Society



Why  
Choose Native  
Plants?  
State Flora  
website.



### Know the signs: the Australian Fire Danger Rating System

The Australian Fire Danger Rating System provides a nationally consistent and simplified system of four main rating levels. These levels provide advice on what action to take during the fire danger season. The Australian Fire Danger Rating System does not show the likelihood of a fire starting, but rather the risk and level of action to take should one occur in that area.

The four main levels are:

- Moderate (Green): Plan and prepare
- High (Yellow): Prepare to act
- Extreme (Orange): Take action now to protect your life and property.
- Catastrophic (Red): For your survival, leave bushfire risk areas.
- A fifth White bar indicates no rating for days where no proactive action is required. This does not suggest a fire cannot happen, but it's likely to have little impact on the community if it does.

Knowing the fire danger rating for your area can help to inform your level of preparedness. More information on the Australian Fire Danger Rating System can be found on their website:

<https://afdrs.com.au/>

**ABOVE: Radiant heat can cause new fires to break out before the visible flames make contact. Photo by Tim Owers, Tumut NSW (2020) OPPOSITE: Windblown embers can ignite leaves and other flammable substances far away from the fire front. This was Nowra NSW around New Year 2020. Photo by Adam Muir**

# PREPARATION TIPS:



**Create a Bushfire Survival Plan.** If you live with other people, involve them in the creation of the plan. Contact your local fire and emergency service organisation for more information on creating a Bushfire Survival (or evacuation) Plan.

Reduce or remove flammable material (anything that can catch alight and spread a fire) such as grass (particularly if it is long and dry) and other vegetation within 20 metres of your houses/ structures (sheds).

Trim tree branches that are overhanging the house/ structures.

Clean gutters of leaves and other material that embers may ignite.

Trim branches away from houses and other structures.

Secure any flammable liquids (petrol cans, aerosols) and don't store them in the open.

If available, check if your home and contents (and other asset) insurance covers fire, including bushfire.

Seal areas where embers may enter the structure (such as eaves and under-floor areas and roof ridge cap, gutter line and fascia boards).

Ensure emergency services can access your property. If you live in a rural or remote area, Firefighters

may need to drive onto your property to fight the fire. Fire trucks require 4.5-metre-wide driveways/ trails to safely access a property. Trees and shrubs may need to be trimmed.

Prepare for mains power and water outages, as they can occur when bushfires damage infrastructure, or if service providers proactively turn off power to prevent downed power lines from starting a bushfire. Power outages can last for a long period of time, from hours to days in regional and remote areas. Mains water can also be isolated.

Minimise the number of times you open a fridge or freezer during a power outage. Keeping it closed will help to keep food cooler for longer, preventing it from spoiling.

If you have a laptop or other mobile device (tablet) and your mobile phone can connect to it, it could become a last resort battery charger for your mobile phone.

Have activities that don't require power to keep you occupied, such as reading books,

Keep windows covered (blinds or curtains drawn) to reduce the Summer heat warming up the house.

If you require medical devices to live, such as CPAP, BiPAP or home dialysis, have a plan for moving

to another place that has power or obtain an alternative power source (generator) for equipment. If necessary, contact your GP or local health service for advice.

Mains water may not be available during a bushfire. Have a supply of drinking water available, enough for each person with you, to last for several days.

Roof mounted sprinkler systems in bushfire risk areas with an independent water system (not using mains water) can reduce the radiant heat from a bushfire and prevent embers taking hold. Contact an irrigation specialist or local fire and emergency service organisation for more information on appropriate and recommended sprinkler systems, pumps and independent water supply.

And finally, if you are travelling through areas of high bushfire risk, knowing bushfire safer places and having a plan can help you be better prepared in an emergency. Before undertaking your journey, notify one or more people when you will leave, what time you're expected to arrive at your intended destination, and the route you will take. Keep them updated regularly with your current location and any changes to your intended arrival time. Ask them to check in with you if you don't notify them when you have arrived at your destination on time.

# FEELING HOT! HOT! HOT!

## *Preparing for extreme heat*

By Jayme

**Sunshine, warm days, beach trips – Summer is here! But severe heatwaves can pose a health risk to many of us. Preparing for extreme heat can help to make the summer months more comfortable.**

Hot temperatures during the day do not make a heatwave alone. Overnight temperatures are a significant contributing factor. If overnight temperatures cool, it allows people to recover from the high daytime temperatures. If the daytime temperature is high and the night temperature remains high, you don't get a break from it. The Bureau of Meteorology has a formula for heatwaves that considers not only temperature, but the number of days and the average temperature at a location. The tiring effects of heatwaves on people can last for several days after temperatures have dropped.

Extreme heat can cause people to experience heat stress/heatstroke, and can impact infrastructure, utilities (power supply) and public transport.

Australia has a national warning system with three heatwave intensity levels: Low Intensity heatwaves are frequent in Summer and most people can cope. In Severe heatwaves, vulnerable people with medical conditions may be at risk. In rare Extreme heatwaves, anyone, even healthy people, can be at risk if they are not

careful, especially outdoor workers or people who are homeless.

Here are some of the things you can do to keep comfortable and safe during extreme heat.

- Be informed on temperature forecasts and warnings issued by the Bureau of Meteorology
- If you need to go out, do it early in the morning to avoid the hottest part of the day.
- Cool where you live by using curtains, blinds, air conditioning, fans, or using a spray bottle with cold water in it.
- Stay hydrated with water. Avoid alcohol and energy drinks, which can dehydrate you further.
- Check on pets and bring them inside if possible, or ensure they have water and shade or a cool place to rest.
- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing, a hat with a brim and sunscreen when outside.
- If you are unable to stay cool at home, consider visiting places with air-conditioning such as libraries, community centres, or shopping centres.
- Check in with neighbours, friends and family and provide support if able.

Power outages can occur during times of extreme heat, from excessive power demand or damage from bushfires. In rural areas they can extend for days. See the article "Be Prepared: Have

A Plan" in this issue for tips about how to deal with power outages.

### **Other Summer risks**

During Summer, creeks and waterways can become dry with the heat drying and reducing surrounding grass and scrub. Summer rains can produce flash floods from sudden downpours where the water cannot soak into the soil quick enough. If flash flooding may be a risk in your area, consider creating an emergency/evacuation plan to a safer place, so you are prepared when it does occur.

During Winter or periods of rainfall, trees absorb water and swell. During Summer, trees dry and this can cause tree branches to crack and fall with little notice. Seeking shade under a tree may seem like the best option to stay cool, but there is potential for significant injury or death from resting or camping under trees during Summer.

Extreme heat can be a health risk, but with a little preparation, staying informed of the weather and extreme heat forecast, Summer can be an enjoyable time of the year.

**PICTURE: Dolls Point NSW; If you are lucky enough to be near cool water, remember to protect yourself from sunburn! Photo Warren Heggarty**



## TAYLOR BY CANDLELIGHT A SHOW TO PLEASE EVERYONE?

By Warren Heggarty

**You need to get out more, right? Don't we all. Yet without even trying we can find 1001 reasons NOT to bother. So how about doing something impossible? First, we take two people, one a Swiftie and the other a Classical music buff, and send them into The City to find a show to please them both. And next, we take three blind people to watch a play about 20,000 people acquiring a serious disability on orders of the Emperor!**

Ladies and Gentlemen, presenting the Phoenix Collective String Quartet in "Taylor Swift by Candlelight" at the Sydney Masonic centre, 4th October 2024. Both Annabella (a Swiftie) and Miles (who prefers Bartok) had a good time. Annabella recognised every song, and bopped along through more than twenty of Taylor's masterpieces.

Miles was intrigued by how the material was successfully adapted to this new medium. One problem was that pop vocal lines rendered on strings - without words - can sound a bit samey. As one of the quartet members herself admitted after the show, "Some songs go better than others in the new medium."

The audience lapped it up! The candlelight made for a VERY romantic setting, but that didn't stop a fair measure of delighted screaming for encores. You could also have your picture taken in a special candlelight grotto. Miles thought he saw a lady go down on her knee and propose to another lady before the photographer.

### Plan Carefully

Annabella and Miles travelled from the Western Suburbs to catch the 8:30pm show. Fortunately, Annabella has an app developed for people with disabilities that came in rather

handy. Although the concert was only 75 minutes long, finishing by 9:45pm, they knew they'd only just make it to the last bus of the evening.

Unfortunately, their bus had to be diverted because of an emergency operation, and the driver forgot to tell the passengers. Miles is lucky to have full vision, but Annabella knew about the diversion because of her app! Fortunately, Miles and Annabella were able to swap anecdotes about storms in the meantime, as both of them are avid storm chasers.

Money is a real obstacle to nights out, don't we know it? The tickets for this concert ranged from \$62 to \$100. Fortunately, both Annabella and Miles are in open employment. However, if you are on a pension and can't afford shows like this, try the Conservatorium of music in Sydney, which has lunchtime concerts for a "gold coin donation." They are well worth while.

### Action you can hear!

Another show that Annabella saw was a play at the Riverside Theatre in Parramatta. She went with a couple of vision impaired friends and found that not only did they get front row, but there was audio description as well. Yes, some theatres have a person off-stage who organises a description of the ACTION on stage, which if you cannot see, is sometimes difficult to catch. Annabella says a lot of theatres will organise this if you ask.

The play, called "Guards at the Taj" was written by Rajiv Joseph and directed by Bali Padda. It was based on the myth that once construction of the Taj Mahal was complete, the Emperor Shah Jahan ordered that all 20,000 people who built this Wonder of the World, would be mutilated so that they could never build anything more beautiful. That sounds a bit grim, but Annabella reports that it was actually full of humour.

Now it's your turn. Tell us about your nights out at the footy or movies or wherever. Tell us, the good bits, the bad bits, and the transport successes and failures. Because we all need to get out more!

**ABOVE: The Phoenix Collective String Quartet in action. Photo by Warren Heggarty**



## ROAD TESTING THE **DRIV-R** APP

### *The Future of Finding Recovery Goals!*

By Warren Heggarty

**In recovery, it is important that YOU are in the drivers' seat, so to speak. At Flourish Australia, we put the person at the centre. The newly developed DRIV-R app will allow people who access our services to explore their own recovery and identify what is most important to them.**

You may have read about the DRIV-R app in previous Panoramas. It is a computer software application developed by University of Sydney, Flourish Australia and Helen Glover. The idea is to allow people to record and monitor their own recovery journey along four main domains.

1. Doing things I value
2. Looking Forward
3. Mastering My Mental Health Experience
4. Connecting and Belonging

These domains are from the Recovery Assessment Scale Domains and Stages, or RAS-DS for short. While the RAS-DS is an outcome measure, it is much more than that. Thanks to the new DRIV-R app, the RAS-DS it can be used as a recovery TOOL.

Currently, DRIV-R is being tested by people within Flourish Australia to see how well it works, and this testing stage will continue for a while yet. In the meantime, Panorama caught up with some of the people involved and asked how the DRIV-R road test was coming along so far.

Francy is a Mental Health Worker with Flourish Australia's Connect and Thrive Program at Maroubra NSW. She is one of over 30 colleagues already trialling DRIV-R with people we support. Francy told Panorama that she can see definite benefits in using the DRIV-R app. "I like the way that people can compare their recovery progress over time, week to week or month to month. The app gives them a colourful visual representation of this that really helps them understand that they are progressing."

Francy also spoke highly of the RAS-DS resources that are a part of DRIV-R and cover every topic.

"I find that there is a big difference between sending a person away to read through resources on their own and going through it together with a staff member. The person

shows more interest if we go through it and discuss it together." We learn by doing!

Francy knows that simple things can make all the difference. Many people with mental health issues feel that nobody understands them, and this creates social isolation and avoidance that hinders recovery. The DRIV-R app helps to overcome this.

"I give high marks for this resource," Francy says. "There are lots of down-to-earth and relevant examples. People are likely to think, 'Hey, they're talking about someone like me!' It's well designed and helps people develop their OWN ideas to move forward with."

"In the future, I think we should introduce the DRIV-R app as soon as possible after we start working with a person. That would be a great opportunity for people to generate their own realistic goals to start working on right away. It can help people - and staff - to understand who they are."

**ABOVE: Picture yourself in the drivers' seat. In the future The DRIV-R app could help you control your own recovery! Photo from Adobestock**



# Negotiating Rent **INCREASES** IN EXPENSIVE TIMES

By Grant J Everett

**With the cost of living increases we've all felt recently and as housing is likely your biggest yearly expense, it is vital that tenants understand how to negotiate rent and rent increases with their landlords and real estate agents.**

Landlords and real estate agents EXPECT us to negotiate the rent when we first sign up, and ESPECIALLY when an increase comes around. The worst they can say to your request is no, but if you're a good tenant, it is in their best interests to keep you on. If you move out over an increase of \$30 or \$40, then the landlord is at risk of being the one who will lose money, not you. This is a prime reason to keep your home clean and in good condition, to always pay your rent on time, and generally be a delight to deal with.

## Rent Check

To navigate the housing market successfully, you need to do your market research, and for tenants in NSW, using the Fair Trading Rent Check tool is a good start. This app can be used to get an idea of

what the average rent is like in your postcode for comparable homes, and while this is not an official rent valuation or recommendation from the NSW Government, it will give you a ballpark figure. For other states, you can get in touch with services like Consumer Affairs Victoria, Office of Fair Trading Queensland, or Access Canberra Consumer Rights.

Scan the QR Code below to see the NSW Rent Check tool.



## When And How Often Can Rent Be Increased?

Rent increases can happen at different times and frequency depending on your rental agreement. However, the Residential Tenancies Act protects tenants from having rent increases more than once in a 12 month period, and a tenant must get at least 60 days written notice of any increase.

Generally, your landlord or agent must state the proposed new

amount of rent, when the increased rent is payable, sign the paperwork, date it and properly address it to the tenant, and provide this on the renewal of your fixed-term agreement.

## Disputing An Increase

If you think a proposed rent increase is too high, before the new rent rate starts you can negotiate with the landlord to reduce the amount of the increase or withdraw the increase altogether. If they agree to a lower increase, this new, lower rent increase is due from the same date the original increase was payable. You can also use information from the Rent Check app to guide your research and discussions with your landlord.

If you cannot reach an agreement with your agent or landlord, you have the right to lodge a dispute with the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) within 30 days of receiving the rent increase notice. You will have to prove the increase is excessive based on the average rent for similar properties in the area, the state of repair and amenities provided, and the landlord's expenses. Other states have similar services, like VCAT in Victoria, and QCAT in Queensland.

**Do you have a hearing with NCAT coming up or need other advice from your local Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service? Scan this QR Code.**



Flourish Australia provides housing assistance through many of our locations, such as the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI), Community Living Supports (CLS) and Supported Independent Living (SIL), as well as being able to refer people to other housing and homelessness support.

You can call Flourish Australia on 1300 779 270 or go to [www.flourishaustralia.org.au/contact-us](http://www.flourishaustralia.org.au/contact-us)

**ABOVE: Picture By Mohamed Hassan, Pixabay**

# Lithgow Mental Health Month Open Day: New Traditions

By Grant J Everett



**On the 15th of October 2024, Flourish Australia's Lithgow service held a Mental Health Month open day opposite Lithgow train station in Cook Street Plaza, which is decorated by beautiful street art based on nature and First Nations culture.**

## A New Tradition

"Today was about raising awareness for the mental health programs and supports available in the Lithgow Local Government Area, which covers 4551 square kilometres, a huge area," said Marissa, the Flourish Australia Mental Health Worker who arranged this event. "Flourish Australia's Lithgow service is right here in the centre of town, but rural and regional areas tend to have less services on offer. This is why I am passionate about raising awareness of how we can address the extra challenges felt by people who are living out here."

"This event coincided with Mental Health Month, so this was a good opportunity to bring the local community together, and hopefully start a new tradition," said Sarah, Team Coordinator and Peer Support Specialist from the Penrith office. "The theme for Mental Health Month 2024 was *Let's Talk About It*, so our theme for today was *Let's Talk About It Lithgow!*"

The Flourish Australia team

especially wanted to get the word out about their CPS, Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI), Community Living Supports (CLS), and NDIS support.

## Working Together

In addition to Flourish Australia, Service NSW, headspace, and LINC (Lithgow Information & Neighbourhood Centre) all ran stalls on the day. These four local services partner in providing holistic psychosocial recovery support to the residents of Lithgow and surrounding towns, and they all handed out lots of information and literature about the services they provide, such as disability support, aged care, youth work, and counselling.

The Service NSW stall had a QR Code allowing people to sign up to the MyGov app, which allows users to do business with dozens of government services, from Centrelink to the Australian Taxation Office to Medicare, easily on their phone.

## Wrapping up

Things wound up around 2pm when the Flourish Australia raffle was drawn and the prizes distributed.

"We received ten wonderful donations from local businesses to give away in today's raffle," said Marissa, "and if you put a money value on it, the prizes would be worth around \$500 or \$600.

We're very appreciative of their generosity."

"We've had some really positive engagement with people today, and handed out some referral forms," said Sarah. "As they now know what we have to offer, if they or a friend or a loved one needs youth support from headspace or housing support from Flourish Australia, they know where we are."

"This is the first time we've done anything like this for the Lithgow LGA, so it's early days, it's unknown territory," said Marissa. "We had a lot of locals walking through on the day, including young people and mums, but many people had never heard of Flourish Australia, which is exactly why we wanted to provide a space to spread the word. I'm really hoping that in future years we're able to make this event bigger and better."

**ABOVE:** Flourish Australia staff Marissa, Margot, Sarah and Tulsi. Photo by Grant J Everett

**Flourish Australia  
Lithgow**

**Wiradjuri Country**

1 / 31 Railway Parade  
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02 9393 9400



## Guest Speaker

Dr Sam Bennett from the Grattan Institute think tank was our guest speaker. According to Sam, Grattan Institute is independent, non-political and unbiased, and their focus is influencing the government on policy and reform. Sam and his team are conducting an independent review of the NDIS, which could have a far-reaching impact.

Sam's numbers showed most people in Australia with disability are not receiving NDIS support, and that there are very limited housing options for people with psychosocial and learning disabilities, but getting our most vulnerable citizens out of group homes and into their own places is an urgent need, as everyone needs agency in their lives. Better, safer, sustainable housing will require a large investment, however.

Sam encouraged us to keep delivering outstanding support in a time of difficulty by focusing on upskilling the people who access services, as well as addressing instances of alcohol and other drug abuse. Sam encouraged us to optimise our technology in providing the best level of support.

## The Future

In 2025, Buckingham House will hold a Platinum celebration after providing hope and support at the same address for 70 years. Flourish Australia also has two new services opening: the one in Rockhampton, Queensland will also cover Emerald, Gympie and more, and there's also a service opening in Salisbury, South Australia. Paula also announced we have been granted a government mental health contract in Adelaide.

**ABOVE** Kelly from the 2024 Annual Report with Professor Elizabeth More AM. Photo by Neil Fenelon

Scan this QR Code to read the 2024 Flourish Australia Annual Report:



# Annual General Meeting 2024

By Grant J Everett

## The theme of Flourish Australia's Annual Report this year was HOPE.

Director Paula Hanlon shared that we are all the holders of hope, a very important responsibility, as hope motivates change, but hope often requires hard work, too.

More people took part in this meeting in person than last year, with 43 in physical attendance. Many Community Advisory Council members were there on the day, and some traveled a great distance. Paula described the Council as the "embodiment of hope."

Karen, Community Advisory Council Chair, confirmed the people we support feel heard, and receive enough support to move and grow. In the wake of COVID, the Council are now able to meet face to face rather than on ZOOM, a change they prefer.

The financial report was presented by Board Treasurer Andrew Pryor. He reported a strong financial

foundation and a number of lucrative investments. Andrew spoke about the soon-to-be-launched Flourish Connect service, and how useful it will be. Another major focus this year was further strengthening the security of people's personal information..

## Annual Report

The AGM was the official launch of our Annual Report. This publication contains 6 uplifting recovery stories, and we commend everyone who shared their journeys and successes. Kelly, who appears on the Annual Report's cover, spoke at the AGM about her experiences.

The Annual Report details a big and busy year, with some notable events including Fay Jackson retiring from the organisation after 12 years, and how we lost Annie Sykes, a giant in the lived experience movement. Annie is sorely missed, and we pay our respects to her and all the other pioneers and trailblazers we have lost along the way.

# NDIS

Support for you, your family,  
and your carers.



We will walk alongside you on your recovery journey, as well as help you live in the community, learn new skills, and do the things that are important to you

## AT FLOURISH AUSTRALIA we can assist you to:

### Our NDIS services

Flourish Australia is a registered NDIS provider. We support people who have a complex mental health issue to live the life they want to live. We have been in business since 1955 and have assisted many people to:

- Find a job
- Undertake training or study
- Make friends
- Connect with their communities
- Sort out day-to-day issues
- Find a place to live
- Stay healthy
- And much more

The most important things to us at Flourish Australia are your health, wellbeing, and recovery journey.

## We are here to help

We know that applying for the NDIS or seeking support can be a confusing and intimidating process. Contact us and we will help you during all stages of the process.

📞 1300 779 270 ✉️ [hello@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:hello@flourishaustralia.org.au)

🌐 [www.flourishaustralia.org.au](http://www.flourishaustralia.org.au)

📱 Follow us @FlourishAus



Find out if you can access the NDIS

Think about your current needs, goals, and supports



Meet with your NDIS planner and get a plan

Decide which service providers you want support from



Put your plan into action



SCAN QR TO  
FIND OUT MORE

**flourish**  
AUSTRALIA

Where mental wellbeing thrives

NDIS

For more information, visit  
[www.flourishaustralia.org.au/  
foundation](http://www.flourishaustralia.org.au/foundation)

Every community  
can flourish with  
a strong foundation

flourish  
foundation  
AUSTRALIA

## Flourish Australia: Building Suicide Safer Communities

Peter Farrugia, Training Specialist

The Australian Government's National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025–2035 has been released. This strategy is important, as suicide rates in Australia remain unacceptably high. Every year in Australia, more than 3,000 people die by suicide. It is also the leading cause of death for people aged 15-44.<sup>1</sup>

Flourish Australia is playing its part in creating suicide safer communities by presenting a suite of evidence-based learning from LivingWorks. All Flourish Australia frontline staff take part with LivingWorks Start, a 90-minute online introduction to suicide alertness. This training presents the four-step TALK model:

**Tell, Ask, Listen, Keep Safe.** This supports learners to recognise when someone might be thinking about suicide, and teaches ways to connect them to help and support.<sup>2</sup>

All staff are then invited to participate in **LivingWorks safeTALK**, a dynamic 4-hour, face-to-face group learning experience suitable for persons 15-years+. The 'safe' in safeTALK stands for **Suicide Alertness For Everyone**, as everybody can learn to become a suicide-alert helper. Here, staff learn how to identify if a person could be thinking about suicide, and how to link them up to a Keep Safe connection.

**LivingWorks ASIST** takes suicide safe communities to a whole new level by going beyond simply identifying and connecting people. This 2-day, face-to-face workshop specialises in teaching suicide first aid that uses a model of support in order to hear a person's story, support them in identifying a turning point (a moment of hope), and develop an actionable safety plan.

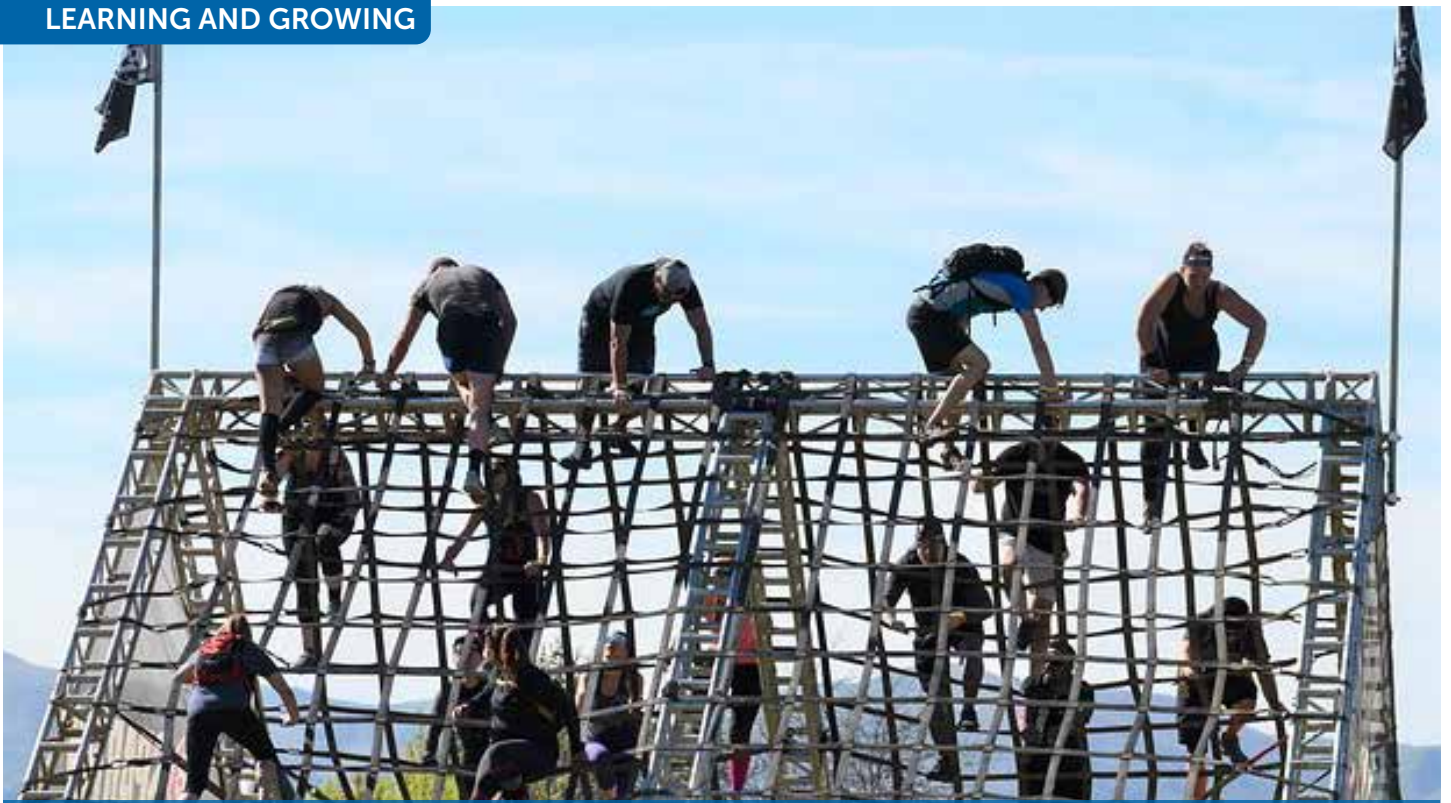


Flourish Australia is investing money and resources into suicide safer communities, and all these early intervention workshops are facilitated by fully accredited trainers to deliver quality, evidence-based learning. To learn more or to have Flourish Australia present training to your organisation, contact us via [e.learning@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:e.learning@flourishaustralia.org.au)

### References

1. The National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025-2035. [www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-02/the-national-suicide-prevention-strategy.pdf](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-02/the-national-suicide-prevention-strategy.pdf)
2. LivingWorks Australia [livingworks.com.au/](http://livingworks.com.au/)

**Photo:** Flourish Australia staff in the NSW Hunter region gather for safeTALK in February 2025.



# PAIN AND GAIN

## Curiosity Builds Confidence

By Warren Heggarty

**There are two ways of approaching a difficult situation: avoid it, or learn to deal with it. The avoidance strategy has to be repeated anew every time a difficult situation arises. But learning to deal with it will prepare you for next time. And the more you learn, the greater your confidence.**

When we are struggling with a challenge do we see it as a chance to learn and grow stronger, or do we get frustrated and complain? Or worse, do we seek out an easier game? Some people take the attitude that challenges are not sent to destroy us but to instruct us. Sometimes this saying comes across to us as being absurd, even mocking. But there is an element of truth in it.

And that is why some people SEEK OUT challenges: for the learning and exercise! (Holiday & Hanselman, 2016, p. 284). Seeking out challenges in order to learn is actually a skill in itself: curiosity. Curious people can analyse challenges and obstacles and find ways through.

A musician will be keen to find out if they can play a difficult piece and if they can't they practice until they can. Practice means working out the best technique to use as well as sometimes developing new muscles or new levels of physical coordination. Rockers, if you limit yourself to playing easy stuff, you will be playing the riff to "Smoke on the Water" for the next 40 years, but you won't be paid megabucks for it like Deep Purple. You may not even play it accurately, seemingly simple though it is!

One obvious benefit that overcoming challenges will bring you is in job seeking. When being interviewed for jobs you will often encounter a question along the lines of, "Tell us about a work challenge you overcame." Employers really value an employee who arrives at a difficult situation and then works out a way to get through it and learns from the experience.

In job interviews you can use the STAR method to describe overcoming challenges. STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result. For example, "I found a mistake in our advertised pricing (S), I had

to fix the error before it got to the customers (T), I had to work with the people who made the mistake to find out how it happened and how it could be prevented in future (A) and we fixed the advertisement and are confident now that we won't make that mistake again (R)." Go online and read more about the STAR method before your next interview. (Clark, Elliott, & Bojanic, 2023)

Meaning and purpose are important things in life and in recovery. Have you considered that without taking on new challenges, you may actually be missing out on the very experiences that provide meaning and purpose to life?

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Clark, B., Elliott, K., & Bojanic, S. (2023, February 13). Answers to "What Challenges Have You Overcome?". Retrieved from Career SideKick: <https://careersidekick.com/challenges-overcome/>

Holiday, R., & Hanselman, S. (2016). *The Daily Stoic: 366 Meditations On Wisdom, Perseverance And The Art Of Living*. London: Profile.

**ABOVE:** One of the best ways to overcome a challenge is to overcome it together with others. Sometimes the team seems greater than the sum of its parts! Photo by Romy from Pixabay



# Fear-Free Connection

## The Middle Path out of Social Anxiety

By Warren Heggarty

**One-on-one connection with other people, including dating, can seem like a very high stakes game. This can scare us off, but it doesn't have to be that way if you take the "middle path."**

Recently, Brett McKay's *Art of Manliness* podcast featured Australian-born Clinical Psychologist Thomas Smithyman (McKay & McKay, 2024). They engaged in an interesting discussion on socialising, dating and anxiety. Smithyman had attended an all-boys school in Australia, but found himself in a co-ed college scene in America, where he found talking to girls very anxiety provoking. This led him on a quest to learn about what causes social anxiety and what we can do to alleviate it.

Humans have evolved certain characteristics that are meant to PROTECT us. Avoidance is one of them. Avoiding wild animals is easy to understand. But we can also avoid things that are not

obviously dangerous. Why? To protect our bodies, our minds, our social positions etc from the consequences of not dealing with them successfully.

Because humans are social animals, our reputations are valuable to us. Many people fear socialising or dating out of a fear of being scrutinised, judged and rejected. Many of us are particularly sensitive to this kind of scrutiny out of the fear that on some level or in some way we are just not good enough. Believing we will be judged harshly on what we feel we lack socially, we avoid socialising.

This is not just a matter of being shy or outgoing, introverted or extroverted. Smithyman says that many of us want to connect with people socially so badly, but we can feel such fear that we shut ourselves down. Some just accept this situation, because it is easier to say I they don't like something (socialising) than to admit that they are scared.

**Avoidance** is self-defeating, but being **Performative** can sometimes be a worse strategy. This is where you try to plug the imaginary gap between "who I can/should be" and "who I am." This can actually make you more self conscious, more anxious and more likely to struggle!

So what can you do about social anxiety? Smithyman suggests taking a middle path between extremes of **Avoidance** and **Performance**. We tend to OVERESTIMATE the likelihood that a one-on-one meeting or a date will reveal our inadequacies, and we also UNDERESTIMATE our ability to handle it if things do go wrong.

It's important to note that most people will not notice the things we perceive as our flaws. Even if they DO notice them, they may in fact approve of them ("My, what a charming accent you have!").

**So how do we overcome this ?**

"What people look for in a conversation," says Smithyman, "are warmth, curiosity and authenticity."

WARMTH means showing you are interested in the other person, what they say and what they do. This often causes the other person to automatically become more interested in you. CURIOSITY means asking questions that enable you to get to know them better, and also involves self-disclosure (but not too much!). AUTHENTICITY means just being yourself, not a performer, or some jazzed up clown version of yourself.

These things all come with practice. Smithyman says that many of the social skills he developed with his mates in high school were transferable to dating later on. Get to know them, let them know you, smile, use eye contact, and ask questions!

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 McKay, B., & McKay, K. (2024, September 25). What's Going on With Your Social Anxiety. Retrieved from The Art of Manliness: <https://www.artofmanliness.com/people/social-skills/podcast-1025-whats-going-on-with-your-social-anxiety/>

**ABOVE: Photo by Surprising\_SnapShots on Pixabay**

# The Restorative JOY of Making Old Things New Again

By Peter  
(as told to Grant J Everett)



**Peter has found fulfillment in a new hands-on hobby breathing life into old things, and brought his love for arts and crafts into a high-tech form...**

## Restoration

I've done a lot of furniture restoration in the last few years. Sanding, polishing, staining, just generally bringing old furniture back to life. I've been interested in this since high school, but only really gotten into it recently.

One of the first items I did was a table, and I'm working on restoring an old BBQ setting table that has wheels and draws. I have a dressing table that I'm upgrading with clear Perspex, and a lovely cabinet that I want to restore with glass panes. I also have an old miner's lounge, which is a combination of a bed and a lounge that you can fold and put on a pack horse and take from town to town. It has a lot of history and had a tough life, so I've been restoring that.

A large marble piece of mine got broken when I moved house, and I've been reassembling it with

metallic epoxy in the cracks, so where it joins together is all gold and glittery and looks really nice.

It's so rewarding making old things beautiful again!

## 3D Printing

I've always been a hands-on kind of person, and I've done lots of arts and crafts over the years. More recently, I've taught myself how to do 3D printing so I can design my own 3D models with CAD-CAM (Computer Aided Design, Computer Aided Manufacture) software. I can now create and print anything from jewellery to wall hangings.

I've given my models away as gifts, and selling them is the next logical step, so I'll market them, and see how I go from there. The way I see it, though, you should never do arts and crafts purely for profit: you need to LOVE doing it, as it's difficult to charge an amount for a piece that makes it worth the investment of your time and effort and materials. Even breaking even is hard. Some projects will take hours and hours and you'll never get that time back.

3D printers often use a PVA type plastic to print, but some can print

with wax, gold, all kinds of things. My printer is an expensive model, so it can use different types of mediums. 3D printers can be a bit frustrating sometimes, though! One time my printer filled itself up with gunk for no good reason, and I had to take the whole thing apart to clean it out.

## The Joy Of Cooking

I love cooking. Anything I see in a cookbook, if I want to make it, I'll be able to.

My grandmother on my dad's side was a fantastic cook. She was German, and the scones she whipped up were amazing. We'd bring around a load of manure once a week, and she'd have fresh scones with cream and jam waiting for us. Might be why I enjoy baking so much!

I've created a chicken parmigiana recipe that I can do in a single frying pan, no need for the oven. So long as it gets the job done and the meal on the table, everyone likes an easy recipe, right? I've currently got silverside in the slow cooker right now, and that won't be ready until tonight. Just this morning I made a

lemon pancake with a crispy edge from flour and lemon drink.

I have helped out with the cooking at a few mental health services in the past, even if it was just a sausage sizzle. Everyone loves a sausage sizzle!

**Study**

I started off studying Electronic Engineering, but switched to a Diploma of IT. This Diploma led me through TAFE pathways into my Bachelor of Computer Information Science. This was the beginning to a new pathway into University, and my group was the first to graduate using this approach.

As I've had a lot of programming experience, naturally I've written my own software and apps. But making money from that can be disheartening, as there's so much competition for every conceivable idea, and people will do anything possible to get your app for free. Everyone loves to cancel their payment one day before the free trial period ends!

I've also done Photoshop courses, and for something different I was doing religious studies with an Online University. Online uni courses can be quite expensive, even when they offer discounts, so you really have to decide whether it's worth it or not.

**Flourish Australia**

The Flourish Australia staff from the Salisbury service regularly come visit me at my home, take me out on trips to places like the beach and for coffee, and are always very helpful if I need anything. Just recently they helped me update my NDIS paperwork. Even though I couldn't find my birth certificate or my parent's birth and death certificates, they were able to get everything sorted.

Flourish Australia has provided me with so much direction, motivation and inspiration in doing what I want to do, and will occasionally give me a little push if I need it. If I'm capable of doing something myself, they will encourage me to try it out first, but they always support me when life feels daunting.

**LEFT: Peter, spending quality time with his house mate. RIGHT: An assortment of Peter's restored furniture! Photos by Peter**



**Flourish Australia  
Salisbury**

**Kaurna Country**

Unit 7/103-107  
Salisbury Highway,  
Salisbury SA 5108

Mon-Fri: 9.00am-5.00pm

**Recovery Game Solutions**

**KEYWORDS**

- 1. Endometriosis
- 2. Exercise
- 3. Journal
- 4. Mirena
- 5. Menopause
- 6. Peri
- 7. PhysiCards
- 8. Pilates

- 3. Socialising
- 4. Hobbies
- 8. Step
- 9. Travel
- 11. Hard

**Across**

- 1. Independence
- 5. Education
- 6. Dreams
- 7. Mindfulness

**CROSSWORD**

**Down**

- 2. Employment

- 10. Exercise
- 12. Carer

**Panorama Find-A-Word**

F	E	M	P	L	O	Y	M	E	N	T	S	S	A
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- STUDYING
- RELAXATION
- MEDITATION
- EMPLOYMENT
- HOBBIES
- SOCIALISING
- PASSIONS
- SUPPORT
- POSITIVITY
- WRITING
- FRIENDSHIPS
- MUSIC
- CREATIVITY
- CONTRIBUTING

# “Let’s Talk About It” Buckingham House Art Exhibit

By Grant J Everett



**After a long hiatus due to COVID, the hugely popular Buck House Art Show has finally returned for Mental Health Month 2024!**

Formally kicking off at 7pm, over 80 art lovers visited the large display area at Buck House for this exciting event, so thankfully there was enough space for all of them to mingle. There was a great vibe with plenty of conversation going on, and the event was fully catered with trays of canapes and drinks constantly making the rounds.

Artworks of many different styles by dozens of artists who access Flourish Australia services had been hung beautifully, and many of the works were for sale. Quite a few pieces were sold throughout the night.

Congratulations to the Sydney Region Team, particularly the Buck House team and the marketing and communications team, for making this event happen.

## David

David, who accesses services at Buck House, had three drawings on display.

“Bright is best,” David said. “All my art is colourful. It’s delicate, and deliberate. We actually had an

art group at Buck House just this morning, and we did origami paper folding. We learned how to make a crane, a whale, and a heart. It was really good.”

Also, not only did David play piano beautifully on the night, the piece was of his own composition. Talented guy!

## Kieron

Kieron attends Buck House, and he presented a framed piece of writing that was an analogy of how people who are homeless or have mental health issues are often treated like pigeons, something people prefer to ignore, or even look down upon.

“Pigeons are the most maligned, institutionalised creatures I know of,” Kieron said. “They are simply ostracised, and to this day they are completely dependant upon humanity, cruel and heartless as we can be. Do you see the correlation?”

“I was much younger when I last wrote prolifically. I have won a few writing competitions, but I would much rather win people’s hearts. A number of people have asked me to write more. A sequel to the work displayed is on the way, and I hope to complete a book over the next year.”

“I enjoyed the artwork. Jaz’s piece stood out to me, being reminiscent

of the 14th Century iconographer Andrei Rubley.”

Kieron also acknowledged people with mental health issues during the formal talks of the night, right after the Welcome To Country.

## Mark Orr AM

Much of the Senior Leadership Team were there on the night, including CEO Mark Orr AM and Board Chair Professor Elizabeth More AM, who presented on the power of creative outlets for people with mental health issues, how important it is to celebrate and encourage artists, and how art can transcend a person’s recovery. They particularly thanked the Buck House Connect and Thrive Team for making this night possible.

## Nadia

Nadia was selling copies of her book of collected poetry “Transmogrify” on the night.

“I got this opportunity through my awesome support worker, Cam,” Nadia told us. “He asked me if this was something I’d be interested in, and I said yes yes yes!”

“I was glad the art show included writers and poets, as all art is valid. Looking at a beautiful painting and reading a written piece is two entirely different experiences, and both are so important to tap into.



And while I was quite busy talking with people at my stall, I especially loved the beautiful First Nations dot painting by Graeme that kept catching my eye. I looked at it many times on the night."

"I also had the opportunity to read out four short poems, and live readings are something I love to do, even though I can feel a bit nervous.

Live readings feel like an outpouring from my soul, connecting me to my past self in an indescribably meaningful way. I would be so up for doing a live reading again!"

Nadia shared her recovery and publishing journey in Panorama's October 2024 Monthly issue and the Summer 2025 Quarterly issue - Ed

**LEFT:** Incredible dot painting from Graeme.

**BELOW:** 1. David. 2 David's drawing. 3. David playing piano. 4. Nadia, Poet, reciting four poems. 5. Painting, Jazmin. 6. Painting, Lynelle. 7. Kieron with his written piece. 8. Painting, Tara.

**Photos by Grant J Everett**



1



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3



4



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7



8

# EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION

## Does the media encourage it?

By Warren Heggarty



**“Emotional intelligence means being able to read your own and other’s emotions, and being able to respond to the emotions of others in a cooperative, functional, and empathetic manner.”**  
- John Gottman

It is useful to be able to “regulate one’s own emotions (including controlling, expressing and modulating emotion) in a culturally and situationally appropriate manner.” (Tuning Into Kids, 2024) According to authors like Ida Rose Florez, emotional regulation is not instinctive, it is learned behaviour, and people need support to develop it appropriately. Teachers, parents and the social environment we live in play a crucial role in moulding our emotional intelligence. (Florez, Jul 2011)

Many modern social commentators consider that even adults today are often emotionally dysregulated, and that this could have serious consequences. Emotional lability, which is having difficulty controlling one’s emotions, is a sign of mental unwellness.

Do you think we get rewarded for oversharing and displaying emotional incontinence these days? Social commentator Paul Joseph Watson claims this to be the case. He says that we have been

indoctrinated to think that “insipid sentimentality” is the real deal.

“Some people live their lives vicariously through celebrities on reality television then base their own personalities on that.” (Watson, 2018)

Watson also claims that we are being encouraged to become more and more emotionally labile, which he asserts is akin to encouraging mental health issues. Emotional self-regulation is regarded as a sign of good mental health, but of course views will always differ as to how much self-control we should exercise. Or how much we need to “let it all hang out.”

A dramatic example is public reactions to deaths. The passing of the late Queen after 70 years on the throne might well be expected to produce mass public grief. However, are such mass displays really appropriate for celebrities, those who are famous for being famous? Watson refers to our seeming “inability to process the concept of death” by asking, “Are public outpourings of grief and canonisation of dead celebrities a sign that humanity has never been more afraid of its own mortality?”

In any case, it is vital to our collective wellbeing that we are able to regulate how we emote, at least in public. It is seen as a sign of

maturity and awareness, and leads to lower levels of stress (though “bottling it up” might cause greater stress in time). It also enables more satisfying friendships and lasting intimate relationships. Staying calm allows you to focus, concentrate and think when faced with a challenging situation, and helps with resilience in times of change and stress.

Perhaps it would be better for all of us if we watched less reality TV and spent more time learning about emotional intelligence, fostering calmness and looking towards the solution, rather than the problem?

Scan the QR Code to visit the Tuning In To Kids website.

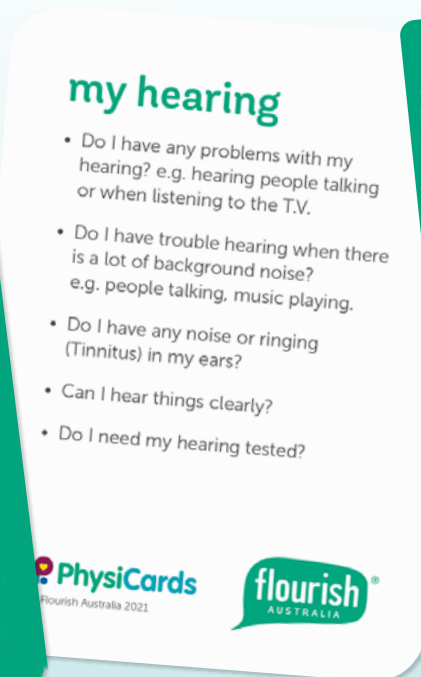


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Image by Htc Hnm, Pixabay

# Back On Track Health



*Flourish Australia's PhysiCards® are an interactive, person led approach to reviewing, identifying and responding to physical health and wellbeing concerns.*

*If you access Flourish Australia services, you can use the PhysiCards as an easy tool to help identify any physical health issues. Just speak to your support worker to find out more.*

## Hearing loss can happen at any time and has many causes, but is most common as you age.

Hearing can be affected by many things, such as infection, blockages, build up of ear wax (which can easily be removed by a doctor - it's FUN) or the hearing apparatus being damaged. More often than not, it is a relatively easy fix. A common problem is being unable to distinguish between several sources of noise, such as other people and the TV.

Two very unpleasant ear problems are earache, which can be very painful, and tinnitus, or ringing in the ears. Get your doctor to keep an eye on these things to make sure you receive proper treatment so your hearing is not damaged.

### Swimmer's ear

If you swim regularly, you are a champion! Make sure, however that your ear canal is kept as dry as possible. Some of us are prone to otitis externa or "swimmer's ear." You can get it from sticking things in your ear that are not clean, but wet ear canals are perfect for fungus and bacteria that cause inflammation. If you get an earache, make sure you

see a doctor. Swimmer's ear can be prevented by using ear plugs, caps, and ear drops. Talk to your chemist about what suits you best. Swimming in salt water may help as well.

### Deafness as a disability

People are either born deaf or acquire deafness through illness or injury. An interesting book you might like to read is "Think Again" by Australian Olympic decathlete Dean Barton-Smith AM, who is deaf. Barton-Smith tells of how he had to overcome other people's low expectations. He wrote, "I really relate to this quote from the Editor in Chief of TIME magazine: seeing success in someone who looks like you, thinks like you, grew up like you, can change the course of a life." This is why it is important for people with disability to share their stories!

Barton-Smith found that on the sports field he was able to excel and be recognised for it, unlike the classroom where teachers were of the opinion he would not amount to much. He went on to occupy such roles as CEO, board member and Chair of various organisations.

## Loneliness

Developing hearing problems can contribute to feelings of loneliness because it makes communication more difficult, leading to isolation. A study by the National Acoustic Laboratories with the University of NSW found that elderly people with hearing loss were twice as likely to have higher levels of loneliness than those who did not. On Hearing Australia's website, Pdraig Kitterick of NAL said "...the risk of loneliness increases if their hearing problems affect their ability to communicate with people and take part in everyday activities." This makes it important that we detect our hearing problems early and take action to address them before it gets to this point!

Scan the QR Code to read this article on the Hearing Australia website.



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## ROCK FOR RECOVERY

### HUNDREDS ATTEND BATTLE OF THE BANDS FOR THE MINDS OF YOUNG

By Warren Heggarty

**Flourish Australia's Young service was determined to put their South Western Slopes town on the map this Mental Health Month. From their local weekly music group grew the germ of an idea - a battle of the bands - that went on to become Rock for Recovery on the 28th of October 2024.**

The organisers from Young faced challenges from a rival, as nearby Parkes already had a radio telescope and an annual Elvis Festival. This meant Young needed a big show of its own to stand out. So not only was Rock for Recovery a battle of the bands, but it was also a classic car and bike show to boot! And what show would be complete

without face painting, a jumping castle, lucky dips, Information stalls and prizes for the best musical performances? Local member of Parliament Steph Cook MLA also attended to give a Mental Health Month speech.

"This event is good for the town," said Casey, Flourish Australia Team Coordinator at Young, who was undaunted by the enormous amount of organisation required. She was assisted by her colleagues Maestro Ed, Donna and Jess.

The music group at the Young service meet once a week to try their hand at guitars, drums and even the odd harmonica, and their core participants include Scott M, Scott L, Steven, Trent, Harley, Paul,

and others. Peer Worker Ed has a band of his own with the not-so-unlikely name "Black Dog Blues."

Local store M&M's Music Studio is a big supporter of the Young music group, and their generosity allowed the hiring of a stage and sound equipment at very reasonable rates. Other generous local businesses include the South West Slopes Bank, who put up \$3,400 to make the day a success. Thanks to all this help, the local PCYC Netball Courts were transformed into the site of the first ever Rock for Recovery.

The competition was comprised of three bands and four solo acts. The honours went to "Engine Light," a band from Temora High School who covered some Nirvana and White Stripes as well as playing some original material. The pièce de résistance was when the guitarist played his axe behind his head in the style of Jimi Hendrix! Hall of fame material there! Move over, Silverchair. Runner up was singer/guitarist Juicy Lane who sang country-style ballads with what Casey agreed was, "The most beautiful voice."

The winner's names were even engraved on a trophy. Now THAT is a way of becoming part of rock history!

Vehicle exhibitors included the Young Heritage Motor Club and the Yass Chapter of the Sacred Syndicate Motorcycle Club. There were about 40 classic cars and 30 classic bikes. The annual Black Dog Ride also had a stall of their own, and they want to make an appearance at this event every year.

The \$2 raffle made \$420 for people who are homeless, which Casey says will go towards blankets, pillows and cooking utensils.

There are already people jostling to be on the organising committee for next year, so keep your ears open, it's going to be big!

**ABOVE (L/R):** Steven, Harley, Paul, Ed (Peer Worker), Jessica (Mental Health Worker), Donna (Mental Health Worker) and Casey (Team Coordinator). Photo Warren Heggarty

# BOUNDARIES: SAYING NO

## ESSENTIAL FOR YOUR MENTAL & EMOTIONAL SELF-CARE

By Warren Heggarty



**People pleasers, listen up! You can't please all of the people all of the time. In fact, our efforts to be liked and to feel useful to other people can actually make us overwhelmed, and then we really won't be very useful.**

What you need is BOUNDARIES. In all of our relationships, including work, home and friends, poor boundaries may lead to resentment, hurt, anger, and burnout.

According to The Resilience Centre, "Personal boundaries are guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates to identify reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave towards them and how they will respond when someone passes those limits." (Soghomonian, 2019)

"Boundaries help us take care of ourselves by giving us permission to say NO to things, to not take everything on. Boundaries draw a clear line around what is OK for us and what is not."

We sometimes add some extra words to the NO to emphasise that we are not saying NO to be nasty, but "excuses" are not necessary.

1. No, thanks.  
*Simple and direct is best. Anything too elaborate may signal that you have some doubt, and this may encourage the other person to persist!*
2. Sounds nice, but I'm not available.
3. I'm sorry, but I can't help you at this time.
4. I'm not available at the moment, maybe next time.
5. Unfortunately, this is not something I can do right now.
6. I really appreciate you asking me, but I can't commit to that right now,
7. Sorry, but I can't make it, maybe another time.
8. Thanks for thinking of me, but I can't.
9. That's a great idea, but I can't participate right now.
10. I have a lot on my plate right now, so I can't take this on.
11. I need to step back and focus on my (other) responsibilities.
12. Wish I could help, but I'm maxed out right now.
13. I've got a lot going on right now, so I have to say no.
14. No can do, I'm afraid. Got too much on my plate as is. (Calm.com)

**Some people find the above sentences really difficult. Why?**

We are people pleasers - often at the expense of ourselves. When we prioritise ourselves we feel (wrongly) as though we have let someone down. No one likes losing the approval of others, but ask yourself: Will saying "NO" really lead to losing approval?

We fear conflict so much we prefer to back down and lose rather than to stand up for ourselves.

We dislike guilty feelings so much that we give in to demands unrelated to what we are really guilty of.

When we don't value and respect our own time or needs, it is like we are a raw bundle of nerves unable to deflect even the most annoying or exploitative request. We need to get over this. You don't HAVE to do things if you don't want to.

We people pleasers need to practice being honest, firm and direct. We are often inclined to weaken our NOs (even when we manage to utter them) with ifs and buts. This will not help.

I bet the person inviting you would actually feel bad if they found out you had agreed to something you disliked just because you felt obliged to them. Think about it!

**ABOVE:** It's not selfish to culture good mental and emotional health by saying "No" when you need to. Photo by Yamu\_Jay from Pixabay

[www.calm.com/blog/how-to-say-no-nicely](http://www.calm.com/blog/how-to-say-no-nicely)

[www.theresiliencecentre.com.au/2019/09/23/boundaries-why-are-they-important/](http://www.theresiliencecentre.com.au/2019/09/23/boundaries-why-are-they-important/)



# Ready To Change

## Everything Worth Doing is Difficult

By Evan

**After decades of using drugs to self-medicate my trauma, I've finally turned my life around. I've gotten clean, started getting really honest with a therapist, and connected with community services that support me in all areas of my life.**

It's been a battle to get to where I am now, and a big part of turning my life around has been seeing a psychologist who specialises in helping people who have been through very bad experiences. If I hadn't experienced trauma, I don't think I would have had any interest in drugs in the first place. I used to be near the top of my class in school, and I might have gone far in life if I'd kept studying.

In the past, therapy didn't work for me because I was only half committed at best, and still using a lot of drugs. I wasn't letting the therapist in, as I wasn't ready to be helped, and they can only work on what you tell them.

I used to be very sceptical, even sarcastic, about therapy. What did these people know? Sure, they've gone to Uni and read a lot of books, but that didn't convince me that they actually understood me.

I've been experiencing real results with this therapist for months now, and I'm still clean to this day.

Of course, talk is cheap, and anyone can say anything. I know I need to keep working hard to stay clean, and that's a long-term commitment that will last the rest of my life. I'm

aware that I need to end my pattern of addiction entirely for this process to work.

I found once you get clean, your empathy comes back, and you'll finally understand the hurt you've caused because of your addiction. You'll see what you've become due to drug use, and you won't like it. It's horrible to face all you've done wrong, and I've been feeling a lot of guilt and accountability. I know I can't change my past, but I can recognise my mistakes and be better now and in the future.

Nowadays when I think I'm going to say something or do something I'll regret, I will simply remove myself from the situation. I always wanted the last word, and this led to a lot of my problems. Taking a few minutes

away can create a completely different headspace.

I'm taking life day by day. I'm still alive, so there's still hope.

### The Right Support

I've been accessing support with Flourish Australia since August 2024. I originally got in contact with Sarah from their Penrith service, and she invited me to come visit the Lithgow service to have a chat with her and Marissa, who became my support worker. The service from Flourish Australia has been excellent, even if it's just having a chat when I need it.

Marissa started accompanying me to an organisation called Nana's Touch. They do all kinds of things, like running a soup kitchen on Wednesday nights and \$5 hampers on Fridays, to help the community. They do a lot of good work. They also have a Men's Group on Fridays. I've been getting to know the people who run that, and now that I'm comfortable there, some weeks I go on my own without Marissa.

Marissa has also supported me to explore what community services are available in my area, things I'd find helpful, like subsidies with my electricity bill.

One of my drugs of choice made me lose my mind. I thought there'd been a nuclear war and Saddam Hussein was the Prime Minister of Australia, and that I had telepathy and could talk to people through the television. I really lost touch with reality for years.

Some drugs can give you incredible highs, but also the most terrible depression. You get delusions of grandeur, but when you come down it's the lowest of the low. At one point this led to me not wanting to be here anymore, but I was also scared of killing myself. I ended up in hospital getting my stomach pumped.

It made me feel that the people looking out for me were plotting against me, that they were just pretending to like me so they can use me and hurt me. You feel unlikable, and you'll push everyone away. Friends, family.

Drug addiction takes everything and leaves you with nothing. It's all false. All it does is fry your brain. You're living in a delusion.

### Lost Years

People on drugs get so caught up in themselves. It's all about them, other people don't matter. You're the centre of the universe. You can do the worst things as an addict: lying to family, stealing from them, saying horrible things, like you're entitled to do whatever you want. Addiction leads to crime, to doing things you never expected to do in a million years.

Due to addiction I've pushed away everyone who ever cared about me, and I can see now that I must have been impossible to be around. And while drug use can be very isolating, it also leads you to mix with the wrong kinds of people. Take drugs out of the equation, and there's usually no actual relationship there. Friend or not, when addicts get desperate, they can be capable of anything.

You can try to hide your addiction, but it's just a cycle of regret and shame and depression, and people will eventually see through it.

### Lessons From The School of Hard Knocks

People who conquer their addictions can use their stories, their experiences, to prevent others from going down that same road. I hope one day I can get myself together enough to use my own life an example for young people of what not to do.

If I'd known at the beginning what I know now, my life would have been completely different for sure.

**LEFT:** Evan attended the Lithgow service's open day for Mental Health Month, and had quite the story to share. Photo by Grant J Everett

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## Dual Diagnosis

According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, around 50 percent of people with a mental health issue also use substances. This combination is called "dual diagnosis," and can greatly impact a person's ability to function. And don't forget substances such as marijuana or meth are known to trigger psychosis.

Flourish Australia offers a holistic approach, supporting people to identify their recovery goals. This can potentially include giving up substances. If somebody is a chronic user, we may refer them to appropriate support in their area.

Flourish Australia's Drug & Alcohol and Safe Work policies (provided in the Welcome Pack given to new participants at intake) prohibit being under the influence of substances at our services or when dealing with our workers.

Admitting you have a problem is the first step towards recovery. A dual diagnosis therapist is a good place to start, and support groups like Narcotics Anonymous can teach healthy coping strategies. With the right support, people can and do get better. However, this will involve building a new life where substance abuse no longer has a place. It can help to develop meaningful relationships, exercise regularly, use relaxation techniques, have healthy eating habits, and getting enough sleep. Do things that give you a sense of purpose, and avoid the people, places and things that trigger your urge to use.

Be patient, as recovery doesn't happen overnight. It's an ongoing process.

Scan this QR Code to read "Dual Diagnosis: Substance Abuse and Mental Health"





## Being In The Driver's Seat In Your Own Recovery

By Michael

**Michael was very busy at TheMHS Conference 2024, as he presented talks on not one, but TWO separate papers! And for those of us with a lived experience, what Michael presented on could change the course of your recovery journey...**

### Driving

My first presentation at TheMHS Conference 2024 was about a new, co-designed app called "Driving My Own Mental Health Recovery," or DRIV-R for short, that is being developed by the University of Sydney with help from a number of testers who access Flourish Australia services.

DRIV-R is a simple phone app that supports people with a lived experience to identify what areas they may need to address to make the most of their recovery journey. DRIV-R can expand on and clarify anything you're unsure about, and it's designed to measure your progress over time. When you can look back on your progress to date,

it makes it easier to communicate to support workers exactly what you need now.

I was one of the testers for the DRIV-R App at the University of Sydney, working with a large team of academics and people with a lived experience, and I was able to draw on my recovery journey to understand where people were at. The app is still being developed, but I've personally used it in depth, and it's really, really good. During the workshops, I demonstrated how easy the app is to use, and with a little bit of instruction, people quickly learned how to operate it, allowing them to use it in their own time in their own space. If you're a little tech-savvy, it's even simpler to learn.

At these workshops, I always saw how respectful the University team were to everyone who took part in this research, and everyone testing the app reported feeling heard.

Staff are now being trained to support people in using the app, but in the beginning there was a concern that DRIV-R was yet ANOTHER thing they'd have to learn.

During the workshops, though, the staff quickly came to see the value in DRIV-R, as it makes it easier for service providers to understand people's recovery priorities.

Over time, DRIV-R will support mental health researchers and practitioners to critique their existing approaches, and extend the "co" in their "co-design" activities.

### State of the NDIS

I also worked on a paper with Flourish Australia's Research Advisory Committee and the Community Advisory Council about the NDIS. As providing NDIS psychosocial support is a core component of Flourish Australia's services, my talk was relevant to anyone with a form of disability.

A recent independent review of the NDIS identified gaps across the sector, showing there's not always a good match between people's needs and the services available. Our team took a deep dive to see how these supports have changed since the introduction of the NDIS, the ongoing challenges, and the way forward. There's currently 250,000 people on the waiting list, with many badly needing support, so there's still a lot to be done for the NDIS to work as intended.

I saw a recent story about a person who was found ineligible for an NDIS plan he really needed, so they got A Current Affair involved. The next day, he was approved. No one should have to go to A Current Affair to get an NDIS plan approved! It should just be available to those who need it.

**ABOVE:** Michael Wren, presenting at TheMHS. Photo by Peter Farrugia

### Sources

"Co-Design – The Research Process Of 'Finding Common Ground': Learning What Works."

"How The NDIS Changed Psychosocial Supports In Community Managed Organisations: Reflections From People Accessing Service"

### Further reading

"How to Measure Your Recovery New App to Drive Better Outcomes," page 55 of the Winter Quarterly 2024

"The NDIS Review Final Report: Putting People with Disability Back at the Centre," page 38 of the Winter Quarterly 2024





***“I want people to know that they have it inside of them to overcome whatever that life throws at them.” - Ensieh***

## **A Whole New Outlook On Life**

By Ensieh

**Ensieh’s goals in connecting with Flourish Australia eighteen months ago were simple: she wanted to become happy, active, and make some friends.**

When I started accessing services at Flourish Australia’s Marrickville service a year and a half ago, it was a big step towards my recovery. I was diagnosed with Bipolar disorder in 2010, and have experienced many episodes of mania and depression. I felt awful, and at times I was sick of being alive.

The Flourish Australia staff supported me to overcome my problems and create a better life by setting healthy routines, connecting with services that met my needs, and making other positive changes. The staff who supported me included Antoinette, Blanka, Blaire, Ed and

Kimi. They’re all very good listeners, and helped me to open new horizons to my life. I found them supportive and caring, which is important, as when you are sad, you need someone to sympathise with you. I loved having one-on-one support in a friendly environment.

I was also able to discuss my children with Antoinette, who taught me parenting techniques so I can do my best at looking after my kids. Antoinette has since become my role model, and I want to be a role model for my children in the same ways.

### **My favourite groups**

I have learned a lot about how to connect with other people through Flourish Australia’s women’s group, and I also become good friends with the other ladies. I used to be very isolated, and now I’m not. I was

also able to listen to other people’s stories, and offer support of my own.

The other activities and groups at Flourish Australia were soothing, too, like the weekend group, which has also been great for my social life.

### **Achieving all my goals**

I have achieved my original goals of feeling happy, being active, and making friends, and now I have made even bigger goals for my future. A major one was to start studying at TAFE. As Persian is my birth language, Antoinette supported me to enroll in an English certificate to improve my language skills. I’ve already made some new friends at that class!

I am 46 now, and I plan to be starting Business Management at University at the age of 50. I hope to be working in my dream field of Business Management by 55.

### **Changing my outlook**

When I’m not feeling well nowadays, I can call a friend, go for a walk, sit in the sun, cook, shop, swim, pray, read or write. Going to beautiful places with beautiful people makes me really happy. And most of all, it makes me happy to be a mum to my children.

**ABOVE:** Ensieh, living life and achieving her goals! Photos by Antoinette, Flourish Australia Mental Health Worker, Marrickville

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# Finding the Will to GO ON

By Monom de Plume

**I have been battling a host of physical and mental health issues for many years, but my parents, Lifeline and my Husky, Henry, have collectively gotten me through the toughest times. I've also had excellent results with Flourish Australia.**

Flourish Australia helped me to walk straight when I was wobbly. When I first got in touch with them I didn't know how to properly articulate what I needed, only that I required help, and didn't know where to start. They connected me with a wonderful support worker named Bron from their Inverell service, and she started paying me home visits. I also have phone support when I need it.

Bron and I were in the same age group and had the same sense of humour. Bron didn't tell me what to do, she listened. When I was processing loss and grief, looking forward to her visits was a stabilising influence in my life. Having something to look forward to, even small things, can make a massive

difference. She told me from the beginning that she'll do things with me, but not for me.

Bron saw me on my good days and bad days. She helped me get stuff done, and made me feel like I was living a normal life. It was great having Bron take me to the shops, especially when I experience migraine seizures. Instead of happening in the pain centre of the brain, my migraines happen in the movement centre, paralysing me. They don't hurt, but they can make me talk gibberish, and it can appear as though I'm having a stroke. This can freak everyone out, as I can't physically tell passerbys that I will be okay, but with Bron reassuring them it's all under control, they don't get involved.

My rescue dog, Henry, is very gentle when he knows you're not a threat to me, and he's my carer during my seizures at home. During the first major migraine I had with Henry there he simply sniffed me, licked the back of my hand, and gently laid down beside me on the floor until the paralysis wore off.

## Hoarding

It can be easy for the housework to get away from me, as I tick a lot of the boxes for hoarding, so every few years I go through a massive purge. It can be difficult to part with things, even if my urge to keep them makes no logical sense. Something that's been proven to help with hoarding is having a regular visitor, so Flourish Australia supports me with this, too.

## NDIS

Prior to connecting with Flourish Australia, I was discouraged from applying for the NDIS after being told how hard it was to get and how a rejection could take months. I tried other ways to get help, but had no luck.

When Bill Shorten became the head of the NDIA I heard his National Press Club speech, and that gave me the hope to apply. I got my paperwork done through the NDIA over the phone, and it went through beautifully in the space of 2 hours. I'm terrible at forms, so the lady on the phone was an angel.

I contacted Lifeline to ask them about what organisations I could go to for help. There's so much support out there, but if you don't know about it or have somebody who does, it's difficult to find. Thankfully, Lifeline were the ones who put me onto Flourish Australia.

### Things I Enjoy

I am a songwriter and a composer, and I've been told I'm decent at it. I've always felt my music is my priority, and I've sung in pubs and in church. One time I did a 40-minute set in Redcliffe Pub, and the only negative feedback was from the publican, as nobody had bought any drinks during my set because they were all listening to me! Though on the days when I have energy, I tend to spend it on doing the housework rather than my music.

I'm a bush kid, so I also find bushwalking in my local National Park particularly healing. Cicadas are one of the best sounds in the world, the sound of happiness.

### Not Wanting To Be Here Anymore

I experience bad depression, but I am not obliged to allow a mental health issue to make my choices for me. Once I recognise my mind is going down that dark road, I'll do what I can to fix it. I might eat something, or talk to someone. Contacting my support networks really helps. In the past, when depression turned my world grey for long enough, a switch would go off and I'd start wanting to self-harm. Thankfully, I no longer get these feelings.

In the depths of misery, it's easy to believe my loved ones would be better off without me. Obviously, that is a WHOPPER of a lie, but in a state of exhaustion, you can lack the energy to dispute it. This makes my lived experience of chronic fatigue syndrome yet another serious obstacle, as it requires a lot of patience to live with. Insomnia is also one of my triggers, and I am convinced that many deaths by sleeping pills are the result of somebody with severe insomnia taking pill after pill night after night trying to sleep, and they just aren't working. Please look after your beloved insomniacs!

I also have a diagnosis of ADHD and Aspergers, so I have problems with concentrating (especially if something's boring) and I tend to go in circles a lot.

I recently turned 59, and my first suicidal ideation was at five. Even on days where I feel happy, I would still prefer not to be here anymore. What doesn't help is people using guilt trips on me. When I'm that close to the abyss, comparing my life to those who are worse off, or telling me I have no reason to want to die, doesn't help, as I know all this already. It only alienates me further.

We need to find the will to live in ourselves, as well as in others. Once I rang an intelligent friend to ask her why she wanted to live. I wasn't after anything philosophical, I just needed a reason to be safe on that day. She told me, "Well, I have three interesting books on my bedside table I want to finish, and a good meal planned for tonight." Her answer grounded me. She didn't want to die simply because she was

engaged in living, even though she had truckloads of pain like I did.

There are no answers I can give that will justify my urges not to be here anymore. But a curiosity for what happens next has given me the will to live, and the changing of seasons and new beginnings give me hope. Rather than seeing bad days as write-offs, though, now I see them as bridges to better ones.

**ABOVE:** Bron, Monom de Plume's first support person from Flourish Australia. Photo by Monom de Plume

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## Safety From Suicide

By Peter Farrugia

Thinking about suicide is a normal experience for many, but we don't have to act on such thoughts. When we feel like this, finding hope or shifting our mindset can prove difficult.

If you think someone is at risk of taking their own life, it is important to be direct when you ask them, "Are you thinking about suicide?" If the answer is yes, this provides an opportunity to connect them with support to keep them safe.

When seeking a qualified professional to manage suicidal urges, a good starting point is your GP. They can create mental health plans, prescribe medication, and refer you to specialists like psychologists and therapists. Having connections with people who love and understand us can also provide a source of safety, like family, friends, colleagues, people in our faith communities, online friends or even pets.

Resilience is our capacity to cope, and we build resilience by overcoming hardship, threats, challenges, pain and adversity. Self-love, self-acceptance, self-esteem and self-compassion are all powerful attributes to tap into when we feel vulnerable.

Alternative therapies include mindfulness, meditation, self-help groups and physical activity. A balanced, healthy diet can support wellbeing, help us to think clearly, and establish creative ways of coping. Many cultures use healing practices like connecting to country and embracing their heritage.

Flourish Australia staff are trained in suicide prevention and intervention, so we invite you to reach out if you, or someone you know, could benefit from support. And don't forget Lifeline is always available on 13 11 14, and offers a confidential one-to-one text service on 0477 13 11 14.

# Is Comfort Bad For You?

## HOW 'HORMETIC STRESSORS' WORK

By Warren Heggarty

**The short answer is 'yes' and according to exercise physiologist Paul Taylor, comfort may be killing a lot of us. This is because our bodies are MEANT to experience certain levels of stress and discomfort to allow them to work at their best! This paradoxical idea is called "Hormesis."**

Taylor is a former Navy helicopter pilot who became an Exercise Physiologist and Neuroscientist. He has written the book, "Death by comfort: How modern life is killing us and what we can do about it." (McKay & McKay, 2024) (Taylor, 2022).

You have probably noticed that most of us dedicate our entire lives to comfort and convenience. You may also have noticed that over the years as life (for most of us) has become steadily more comfortable and convenient, people have become steadily less fit and healthy. Among people with mental health issues, "metabolic syndrome," which helps keep our life expectancy much lower than the general population, is associated with both our lifestyle and our medication.

Taylor explains that the human genome (that is, the way human

beings are designed and our ideal operating conditions) has not really changed for 45,000 years or more. Our ancestors did seven to ten times more physical activity than most of us, which is more in line with what our genome presupposes. (McKay & McKay, 2024)

Such a lifestyle requires physical stress and exposure to substances that are "bad for us" and that in high doses might even kill us! To be able to "switch on" our ability to tolerate ingredients in certain foods, we need to be exposed to them first. Think of food allergies.

Enter the modern world, and while our genome is still the same, we are stretched out on a comfy couch watching Netflix eating chicken nuggets. This puts our bodies out of tune.

"Living with air conditioning," Taylor tells us, "is reducing or ability to cope with temperature variation." Look at pictures of how the local Tourist Board of Tierra Del Fuego tells visitors to dress, compared to how the Yahgan people of Tierra Del Fuego used to dress (QR Codes below).

This is a subantarctic climate, in which they lived and worked with almost no clothing and no permanent dwellings! (Instituto Fuegino de Turismo)

Hormesis suggests that there is an ideal range of exposure to stress and toxins that is best for us. Take the rays from the Sun. We know that too much exposure to sunlight makes us more prone to potentially lethal illnesses like melanoma, but we also know that a LACK of exposure interferes with our ideal Vitamin D. At the end of the day, people who learn to deal with "sub-lethal" physical stressors do better with psychological stressors.

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**ABOVE:** An old photo of the Yuhgan people, an ancient tribe. Photo from Warren



# NOW IS NOT A GOOD TIME *I'm having a CRISIS!*

By Warren Heggarty

## Preventing Suicide

See related story  
on WISPC on page 9  
of the November  
2024 issue.

**Suicide prevention is something that can reduce the need for a later 'intervention' by others during a crisis. For a person to armour themselves against suicide, they need to examine themselves, ask questions and change things. This cannot properly be done in a crisis. We all make better decisions when we are in a calm situation and our "grey matter" can work best.**

Within the context of repeated crises - which call for a particular kind of intervention - a person is less likely to learn how to help themselves to not have another suicide crisis. So they are prone to going through it all again.

Besides, if a person thinks that they have some compelling reasons to die, what good is a crisis intervention? Such ideas that persist outside of a crisis need to be met by even more compelling reasons NOT to perform suicide.

"Suicide awareness" and "suicide prevention" are no longer dark, taboo topics that are hidden from public discourse. Even companies have suicide prevention plans for their employees. Writing in the business magazine *Forbes*, Bernie Wong says this:

"... having a crisis management plan in place is important, but a crisis

plan alone is like putting a bandage on a gaping wound. Some estimates say that up to 87% of suicide victims had been previously diagnosed with a mental health condition. However, it takes 10 years on average from when a person first experiences symptoms of a mental health condition to when they seek care — a 10-year window for prevention." (Wong, 2019) (Note: Figures reflect the American situation).

So there would appear to be a ten year "window of opportunity" during which a person might be empowered to think of ways OTHER than suicide to manage their unsatisfactory situations and their overwhelming emotions. If we leave it until a Triple 0 emergency or Lifeline crisis develops, we may well save the day, but we remain vulnerable to a repeat at a later date.

The person who is prone to suicidal thinking are themselves the ideal one to head this off. We need to provide support to people during this "non-crisis" time because the issue of suicide can then be faced in a calmer and more balanced way.

Nor is the answer necessarily found in medicine. Bertolete (2004) says, "It is remarkable that the introduction, by the middle of the 20th Century, of effective medication for the control of major mental disorders associated with suicide (e.g., depression and schizophrenia) has brought no significant reduction in national

suicide rates in those countries where the medication was widely used."

This might be because the medication is not so targeted that it can eliminate specific thoughts - which is surely a good thing. Rather, the answer lies in the person being permitted to think whatever thoughts they will, yet learn how to live with overwhelming emotions. This is because such emotions are a normal part of life. Some people, perhaps unfairly, experience more than their share. Ultimately, however, eliminating the negative will backfire. As evolutionary biologist Brett Weinstein says:

"Negative emotions and sensations are products of adaptive evolution, every bit as much as positive ones. Blocking the ability to suffer from them is a profoundly self-destructive act." (Weinstein, 2024)

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**ABOVE:** Recovery needs deep roots to be sustainable. Photo Klimkin from Pixabay



# PHYSICAL SKILLS

## The Basic Moves

By Warren Heggarty



**To take full advantage of the benefits to your mental health that physical exercise brings, make sure you get the basic motor skills down pat. Jumping, running, catching, throwing, kicking, lifting and other basic actions seem to be missing from a lot of people's lives these days. You can change that.**

Basic skills you need for sport include...

- Balancing
- Running
- Throwing
- Catching
- Kicking
- Hitting
- Dodging
- Hopping
- Galloping
- Skipping
- Jumping (vertical)
- Leaping (horizontal)

These can all be managed without any specialised equipment. When you apply them to sport (or dancing) you get variations. "Hitting" becomes batting in cricket and swinging in golf. You hit forehand or backhand in tennis and even then you have a single hand or double hand shot.

You can buy a packet of tennis balls from the Two Dollar shop and practice bouncing, catching, throwing up and catching, throwing against a wall and kicking.

With a partner you can play catch. Throwing a ball to another person, then catching it when they throw it back is something that kids used to do without prompting, leading to many hours of fun. You would be surprised how much laughter it brings. Plus you give your legs a workout and improve hand/eye coordination. If you do it in the street, you need to be careful not to get run over. There you go, another useful

skill! But you can't do it while you are watching Netflix: you have to keep your eye on the ball and the cars..

Basic motor skills, once developed, will open the door more widely to team and competitive sport. You may not feel like doing that now, but when you develop skills and fitness you will want to show off with all your friends. Who knows, you might get REALLY good and do yourself an injury!

Seriously, Mr Roberts was a rugby coach at my school (which was notoriously good at it) and he even did the odd international. He assured us boys that the human body is incredibly strong and resilient, and challenged us to put aside our fear of being tackled on the parched and cracked dustbowl of Birrong Park. I know what you are thinking: that's why I took up golf...

Golf is a good example of a sport that can be played by older people.

# The Ins and Outs of PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Its main point of exertion is walking. You walk about ten kilometres playing nine holes. Walking with a purpose through nature is definitely good for you. If that is too far to walk, you can practice and build your way up.

Gold shots are divided into Drives, Chips and Putts. A Drive is basically hitting as far as you can, so you learn to judge distances. Different club numbers will allow you to fine tune the distance. Eventually you learn that brute force is no match for grace. With Chip shots you are more concerned with accuracy - the trick here is the opposite of driving. Don't hit it too far! Putting moves up to another level of accuracy. Here, you really have to understand how the ball will roll across the green.

There is a sport out there for you, and to prime you for it, we will look at the basic skills here in a nerdy, bookish sort of way. This info is distilled from the Senior High School PDHD and PE curriculum in Queensland. (Atomi, 2019) The top table might help you think about the different ways we can classify actions from discreet movements to strategies. The bottom row compares fine motor skills with gross motor skills.

If you were thinking, "Hang on, scoring a goal in netball uses arms and shoulders which are LARGE muscles," you'd be right. Most actions are in between Fine and Gross or Closed and Open. It is a continuum. This leads us to our final classification of actions: in the lower table, which looks at actions in the dimension of time.

To read more about "Physical Education: Motor Skills," scan this QR Code.



## Bibliography

Atomi. (2019, October 28). Motor Skills. Retrieved from QLD Y11-12 Physical Education: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hELHdIGmpA> (Atomi, 2019)

**ABOVE:** Soccer players practicing shooting: It's a serial motor program in a closed environment, but it's more fun if you don't worry about that! Photo by Warren Heggarty

## CLASSIFICATION OF BASIC PHYSICAL ACTIONS

MOTOR SKILL	MOTOR PROGRAM
The ability to carry out a discrete physical action such as gripping a ball.	A combination of a series of skills that make up a complex action. For example hitting a ball consists of at least four motor skills; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Grip</li> <li>2. Stance</li> <li>3. Placement</li> <li>4. Follow through</li> </ol>
CLOSED ENVIRONMENT SKILL	OPEN ENVIRONMENT SKILL
A technique or strategy carried out within a relatively controlled environment that has few variable factors; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Penalty Goal Kick</li> <li>• Bowling at 10-pins</li> </ul>	A technique or strategy carried out in an environment with lots of variables, such as other opposing players, wind, water, mud; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sailing is VERY OPEN</li> <li>• Netball game is MODERATELY OPEN</li> </ul>
FINE MOTOR SKILLS	GROSS MOTOR SKILLS
Use small muscle groups and often take a long time to perfect; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting at Golf</li> <li>• Standing Goal in Netball</li> </ul>	Use large muscle groups; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Running with the ball</li> <li>• Scoring a try</li> </ul>

## THREE WAY CLASSIFICATION OF ACTIONS

DISCRETE	SERIAL	CONTINUOUS
A single action which has a beginning and end point; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Throw a ball</li> <li>• Kick a ball</li> <li>• Golf swing</li> </ul>	A combination of movements in a specific sequence; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lay up in Basketball</li> </ul>	Repetitive and ongoing; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Going for a run</li> </ul>

# Employment Support

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

## Available roles

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



Commercial and Home Cleaning



Packaging Solutions



Mail Delivery Solutions



Ground and Garden Maintenance



Digital Scanning and Secure Document Management



Fleet Vehicle Cleaning

“Having work to go to gets me out of the house every day and motivates me to take better care of myself.  
*Julie-Ann, Tamworth*”

## We are here to support you

Flourish Australia walks alongside people with complex mental health issues to get back on track and reconnect with the community to live contributing, flourishing lives.

If finding work is one of your recovery goals, we will support you in finding a job that is fair and rewarding. As an Australian Disability Enterprise, we:

- Help people find work
- Meet strict service standards
- Encourage people to achieve their employment goals
- Provide on-the-job training and support

## Come talk to us:

We will help you achieve your employment goals.

📞 1300 779 270 ✉️ [hello@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:hello@flourishaustralia.org.au)

🌐 [www.flourishaustralia.org.au](http://www.flourishaustralia.org.au)

📱 Follow us @FlourishAus

We have a range of training and employment opportunities through several programs including:

- DES (Disability Employment Services)
- Supported employment through the NDIS, DECoS, and other government funding
- DECoS (Disability Employment Continuity of Support)
- Support through mental health contracts, including CLS, CPS, and HASI

We have an extensive history of helping people meet their employment aspirations, including transitioning to open employment, receiving support in the workplace, connecting with their community, and more.



Where mental wellbeing thrives

Employment Services

