

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

panorama

Monthly Issue **July 2025 #98A**

**Emerging Identity:
Kiri Connects With
Her Art Career**

**Where is Tech
Taking Us?**

**Be the Person Who
Drives Change**

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About us

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

Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 or
flourishaustralia.org.au

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

About Panorama

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

The faces behind Panorama...



Warren Heggarty



Grant Everett

Subscriptions, questions, feedback, praise, curses?

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Prefer snail mail?

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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

Contents

COVER: Kiri Smith.
Photo by Liam Benson of
"We are Studios"

- 4 Emerging Identity:
Kiri Connects With an
Art Career
- 6 My Resilient Career
- 9 Tailoring Connect & Thrive
- 10 How Anxiety Tricks Your
Body (With Somatic
Mimicry)
- 11 News Page
- 12 Airbnb's Welcome Support
- 13 "Be The Person Who Drives
Change"
- 14 Recovery Games:
Panorama's Puzzle Pages
- 16 Don't Knock Op Shops!
- 17 Advantages of Seeing
Things From Another
Angle
- 18 Where is Tech Taking Us?
- 19 Back On Track Health:
National Diabetes Week

Contributors include...

Kiri Smith is finding herself through a career in the arts

Felicity Stevens is an Airbnb Host who wants to encourage everyone to do their bit for the environment.

Fay Jackson shares her impactful career as a pioneer in the lived experience and peer movement.

Karen Jurss is Chair of the Community Advisory Council, and she shares the advantages of seeing the world from a different angle.

And thanks to Flourish Australia staff Jade Farrell, Brooke Jerritt, Francy Vargas Diaz and Sophie Edwards

Contributions are welcome!

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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.

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

SCAN QR TO
FIND OUT MORE





In Panorama July 2025

We have new Panorama Puzzle Pages, and if you need hints, all the clues and hidden words can be found in this month's stories!

Artist Kiri has been accepted by a likeminded community of creatives, and she shares the latest updates on her new career.

We explore the nature of anxiety, and how it can imitate the symptoms of a physical illness.

A very generous donation from Airbnb to our Women and Children's Program (WCP) will go a long way to expanding vital services for at-risk mothers.

Would you like the world to change for the better? What's stopping

YOU from making your planet a happier place?

Warren reflects on how technology is changing the shape of the future, both for good and for ill.

Coming up in August Panorama...

Matty shares his recovery journey with Flourish Australia, and how he gives back to his community both with the organisation and elsewhere.

Cooking Groups at Salisbury and Moree...with a twist!

How to mix up the structure of your life in POSITIVE ways

The mental health benefits of getting into moving and into nature.

BIG changes to rental laws in NSW.

And more!

- Editor

Spread 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
or Call: 1300 779 270



EMERGING IDENTITY

Kiri Connects with an Art Career

By Kiri Smith

When I first began attending Flourish Australia's Penrith service, I was socially isolated and had few friends. Today, I find myself to be an "emerging artist" with several exhibitions and commissions behind me or in progress. So what changed? Flourish Australia Support Worker, Amanda, encouraged me to connect with We Are Studios.

We Are Studios is a 100% disability-led studio for Western Sydney based artists with disability (We Are Studios, 2025). I cannot begin to explain how life-changing this was for me and for my family.

There are about 20 people in the studio, all with differing types and levels of disability, including two

of the group's co-founders, who are autistic. I have two daughters, eleven and nine years of age, and one of them is autistic. We Are Studios accepted not only me, but my daughters, too, and my eldest seeing people like herself really changed her outlook and mindset. It was great to see my children welcomed like this, and to have so many positive role models. It helps them to feel a sense of belonging and connection to the wider community.

Formerly I lived at Kingswood, a suburb of Penrith in NSW, and I was with another organisation when NDIS began. A support worker recommended that I try Flourish Australia's WestClub at Penrith. Initially I mainly had one-on-one sessions with a support worker, but I

wanted to get involved in something artistic and I tried the art group.

I have been told that Flourish Australia aims to support people in making their own connections in the community, and this is exactly what I needed. I've found there is a difference between art as therapy and art as a vocation. My interest was more at the vocational level, and I found that I wanted to go deeper into the art field as a professional artist.

I discussed this goal with support worker Amanda at Flourish Australia Penrith, and she put me in touch with We Are Studios. The difference with We Are Studios is that the members consider themselves to be artists rather than people who do art. At first, they took me on Gallery Tours and I was able to meet other people in Western Sydney who shared my interest.

My art is very broad in scope, and I have worked on mixed media installations with multiple components including painting, collage and found objects, and I have also worked in alcohol ink. I have also tried paper cutting (a form made famous by no less than Henri Matisse!- Editor).

In 2023, Blacktown Arts partnered with We Are Studios to create an exhibition of new works. I was invited to participate by creating a piece for the exhibition. This piece focused on my experience of being a person with disability who is also a mother to two children with disabilities.

At the time, my daughters were out of school for a while, and they let me bring them to the studio. They were able to see how the artwork was all about how families are affected by disability. One of the mixed media elements I included was deidentified medical reports, which I shredded and made into a collage.

This first exhibition at the Leo Kelly Blacktown Arts Centre in 2023 was such a big achievement for me. (Blacktown CC, 2025)

My second exhibition was at Westmead Children's Hospital in 2024, and the third was at the Hawkesbury Regional Gallery in Windsor.

In that same year I was also invited, along with other members of We Are Studios, to speak on an artist's panel at the Art Gallery of NSW to mark the International Day for Disability. (AGNSW events, 2024) It was really encouraging to be able to speak to a room of people like this and be accepted, though I was very nervous beforehand! I was treated as a proper artist.

Blacktown Worker's Club approached me to purchase some of my works to be hung outside their Board room. Next, I was selected to do a public artwork in Jim Simpson Lane in Blacktown CBD with three of my fellow artists from We Are Studios. This was funded and supported by Transport NSW and Blacktown City Council. Coming up next year in 2026, I'll be doing a work for the Bathurst Regional Gallery.

After working with other people who live with a disability and seeing how accepting they were of my family, it's true that we don't have to be defined by our disability. It is not my whole identity, as I am also a mum and also an artist and that gives me a strong feeling of connection and belonging.

OPPOSITE: Kiri with her paper cuttings. Photo by Liam Benson. TOP RIGHT: From Kiri's first art exhibition. BOTTOM RIGHT: Jim Simpson Lane installation. Photos by Kiri Smith and Liam Benson.

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My Resilient Career

As a Pioneering Peer Worker (and more)

By Fay Jackson

challenges. We must advocate for improvements in the human and civic rights of people with mental health challenges.

I began my career in mental health 28 years ago at the age of 37. I was the first lived experience (consumer) volunteer speaker for BeyondBlue when it started. I also volunteered for the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund and toured Australia speaking for Rotary and BeyondBlue about what it is like living with the outcomes of trauma and abuse. Without giving too many details that may cause vicarious trauma, I spoke about my experiences as a child and adult with mental health issues, having my human rights stripped from me and being forcibly treated against my will for decades. When I was 40 I spoke at a mental health forum in the Illawarra, which is where I was living. At the time I was working as a casual teacher, but the morning after the forum I received a phone call telling me that I would no longer be required in this job role. This, of course, is discrimination and illegal, but I had had so many terrible experiences trying to get justice that I felt I couldn't continue the fight for myself. Rather, it put fire in my belly to fight for the rights of others.

Paid and permanent

So at the age of 40, my first paid, full time, permanent job was as a Consumer Consultant/Peer Worker in the public health system in the Illawarra. I advocated for individuals and systemic change, including advocating to develop a peer workforce. This was successful, and I became the Peer Work Manager supporting 8 Peer Workers, which was unheard of 25 years ago. Many public systems still don't have this many paid lived experience positions! The Peer Workers and I worked on psychiatric wards supporting patients, including people who were under the restraints of the forensic system. I worked very long hours to get the work done and to prove the value of the lived experience workforce. In those days, the clinical staff were itching to be able to prove that our existence was problematic, but we were determined to prove them wrong, and we did. I was promoted to a newly formed role as the Director of Consumer, Carer and Community Affairs, which was

**In the style of "Bridgerton,"
I would like to start this story
by saying...**

Dear Gentle Readers,

Last July (2024), after 10 years in the role of General Manager Inclusion with Flourish Australia, I stepped into the next phase of my life to spend more time supporting public Peer and Lived Experience Workers, advocating for the transformation of public mental health and suicide prevention services as an independent consultant. I have also made this change in order to spend more time taking care of my health painting, engaging in peaceful demonstrations about

the environment and advocating for the protection of old growth forests, writing, my family, close friends and my community, which was devastated by the floods that hit Northern NSW in February 2022 and the fires the Summer before. Thousands of people are still homeless and struggling since the floods.

I am very proud of the collaborative work we have undertaken while working at Flourish Australia, however there is still a great deal of work to be done to improve the mental health and wellbeing of people with lived experience of trauma, betrayal, grief and subsequent mental health

the most senior lived experience position in the public mental health field at the time, and still was until as recently as five years ago.

Brought into question

While working in the public system I sat on 126 local, state, and federal committees and councils relating to mental health, and worked an average of 70 hours a week. I was usually the only person with lived experience on these committees, and frequently had to fight for the rights of people against a room full of doctors, funders and magistrates. It was incredibly hard work, as whenever I said something the people holding the power didn't like, my mental health was brought into question and I was asked if I was taking my medication. This is not how workplaces should conduct themselves. I was often threatened to be put into seclusion and restraint if I kept raising issues. This too was discrimination, and nowadays would be a WorkCover incident.

While in this position I established a working party of people with lived experience and with the help of 400 (yes, 400) volunteers we ran events to break down the discrimination and stigma surrounding people with mental health issues. We used humour and irony to break down these barriers, ran The Basket Case Ball, Crack Up Comedy Night (the first of its kind in Australia), Fruitcake Family Fun Day, and the Is Anybody Really Sane? annual debate. We won many state awards for our work and I was nominated NSW Woman Of The Year. The most

wonderful part about this working group was the mutual care we had for each other, and that everyone on our team except for one person found jobs through our events. One person who had such severe social phobia that he hadn't been out of the hospital or his lounge room for 13 years actually got a job as a radio presenter from emceeing our events.

All of the senior roles I held were trailblazing positions. Many people in powerful positions were very much against the changes I was leading, and I dealt with verbal threats and aggression on a daily basis. After four years I left the public system to be an Independent Advocate and not be hushed by the people who held power. I founded VisionIn Mind, which is the business I still consult and do systemic advocacy through.

Deputy Commissioner

In 2013 I was appointed as the Inaugural Lived Experience Deputy Commissioner for the NSW Mental Health Commission. I was honoured to be an enabler and conduit for the voices of our lived experience community. I consulted widely with our community to ensure what I was advocating for was what the people needed. I am proud of many things we achieved in the six years I was Deputy, but perhaps what I'm most proud of was the development of the Peer Work Hub. www.nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/content/peer-work-hub

Peer work for positive change: why not?

While working as Deputy Commissioner, my belief that peer work and lived experience leadership was the best way to influence positive change only grew. I had been talking about the amazing outcomes lived experience staff could bring to services to improve people's lives at conferences both nationally and internationally, yet there was little take up of these positions in services.

I realised the only way to increase peer worker and lived experience senior roles was to prove to Australia that this workforce was what people and services needed, so I applied for and was recruited to the General Manager of Inclusion role at Flourish Australia, which had been previously held by Janet Meagher AM.

In 2014 my colleagues and I at Flourish Australia conceived of and rolled out the Why Not A Peer Worker? strategy, which saw our peer workforce numbers grow from 22 to 147 peer workers in 12 months. Over 50% of Flourish Australia's service delivery staff are Peer Workers now, and I hope this number continues to grow.

Continued next page...

OPPOSITE: Fay Jackson. Photo by Ellie Stinson from You'll See Photography
BELOW: The Community Advisory Committee in 2018. Fay is at the far right. Second to the left of her is Kim Jones, former Project Officer Inclusion. CEO Mark Orr AM is first on the left.



My resilient career...continued

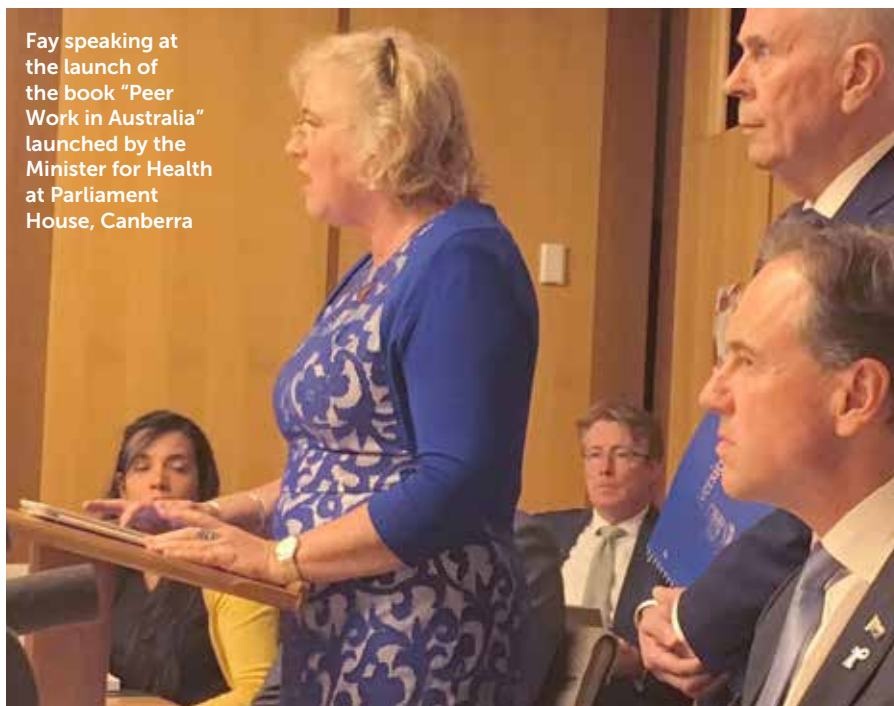
By having articles published in peer reviewed journals, producing the book *Peer Work in Australia*, and speaking at dozens of conferences about peer work and people with lived experience holding leadership roles, we've proved to Australia and other countries that a large lived experience workforce is not only possible, it's preferable. Peer workers relate almost immediately to the people we support because peer workers have had similar experiences, treatments, abuses, traumas and betrayals. We know how it feels to have our human rights, our self-worth and our place in society crushed. We are also the epitome of recovery, hope, and reclaimed Social Citizenship. Peer workers are now the fastest growing discipline in mental health. We did this!

Over my 10 years working for Flourish Australia I felt respected, valued, encouraged and invited to form many collaborations with other services, universities, communities, state and federal commissions. Some of the accomplishments I am most proud of is the collaborative work and the lectures I have given at a number of universities and other services, including Equally Well, which focuses on the physical health of people with mental health issues, and the regular lectures I gave through the University of Melbourne and Dr Chris Groote, Senior Lecturer, Psychological Sciences. I have also lectured at HETI, UTS, UNSW, and Sydney University.

Community Advisory Council

With the immense support of Kim Jones, the Inclusion Project Officer, I am honoured to have started and supported the Flourish Australia Community Advisory Council (their photo is on the previous page). Over that 10 years I was astounded at just how fast people grew into leadership roles by serving on the Council. The wisdom and passion the Council members bring is incredible, and very beautiful. Together we have written and published peer reviewed journal articles, co-designed our Co-Design Guidelines, our Social Citizenship

Fay speaking at the launch of the book "Peer Work in Australia" launched by the Minister for Health at Parliament House, Canberra



Framework, strategic plans and a multitude of other important documents and research papers.

They were wrong! So very wrong.

One of the many projects I have been involved in outside of Flourish Australia is the development and funding of the National Lived Experience Peak Body. I have been responsible for all of this and much more, yet psychiatrists had told me, "You will never work and never be a valuable member of society." They were wrong, so very wrong! I may never feel confident or brave, but I will always do my best to make this world a better place for people with mental health issues. Please join me and do all that you can to make this world kinder in any way you can. Sometimes, the most powerful thing we can do is have a cup of tea and a compassionate conversation with someone in pain. The Council Members proved to me that all of us, including those who are voice hearers or who have had an interrupted education, can be amazing advocates and leaders of positive change, as well as great friends, comrades and mentors.

Since leaving Flourish Australia I have been supporting Peer and

Lived Experience Workers through online mentoring and professional supervision sessions as well as some consulting work. I love spending time with other LE Workers as we mutually support and learn from each other. Young people are so eager to learn but they teach me so much too.

In closing, I would like to say three things. Firstly, thank you to every person in the Flourish Australia community that made my time with Flourish Australia some of the most rewarding and valuable times and experiences of my life. Second, do what you can to ensure that the human rights and civic rights of all people are respected and upheld.

Thirdly, don't work beyond what is good for your health as far as time and stress is concerned..

And finally, don't let anyone tell you that you can't work or be a valuable member of society, because, as the Peer Worker that lovingly challenged me, and changed the course of my life from one of victimhood to proactive campaigner, if I can do it (a voice hearer with a poor education, physical disabilities, severely traumatised and compromised memory) so can you!

Take care, dear people, and be the very best version of yourselves. You deserve this, and our community needs you.

Yours sincerely, Fay



Tailoring Connect & Thrive

By Jade Farrell, with thanks to Brooke Jerrett and Sophie Edwards

Mental health recovery support works best when it focuses on the needs of the individual, so when Flourish Australia creates new programs and activities to support people in their psychosocial goals, their input is invaluable.

Flourish Australia's Commonwealth Psychosocial Support program, known as Connect & Thrive (C&T) in the Sydney Region, have run group co-design sessions and asked people who access C&T to share how they felt the existing group programs support them in reaching their recovery goals, as well as asking them what else we could offer to better meet their needs.

The goal for these planning sessions was to ensure we are creating person-centered services, and we always strive for the people who take part to feel heard and have the opportunity to influence what is being delivered as a part of the C&T group program.

According to people's feedback, the C&T group program is seen as a social, kind, welcoming space where people can develop their

skills, hobbies, and goals, providing a great reason to engage in their community. The opportunity to meet new friends greatly reduces people's feelings of loneliness, depression and isolation, and having structure, routine and purpose in their lives is very fulfilling.

People reported the groups already on offer promote discussion and the sharing of ideas, providing opportunities for people to learn a lot from each other. It's also an excellent opportunity to improve their communication skills, build the confidence required to express their needs, further develop their coping skills, and share achievements.

The individuals accessing the service shared dozens of new group ideas (far too many to list here), and some of the most popular included:

- More outdoor activities
- A technology skills group
- A journaling group to keep track of good and bad days (and what caused them)
- Visiting older people who are socially isolated
- Mindfulness and coping skills like yoga, meditation and breathing groups

- A Dungeons and Dragons group, which has proved highly successful at other Flourish Australia locations

Community outings are always popular and good for recovery, so people wanted more trips to places like:

- The National Library
- Art galleries
- The Opera House
- The Botanical Gardens
- Science Powerhouse Museum
- Night markets and park walks.

One of the most popular requests was a cooking group where everyone would learn prep skills, budgeting, easy substitutes, food safety and good nutrition, and explore the food of other cultures.

As having a job has a massive impact on individuals' wellbeing, there were many requests for workshops focusing on life skills, including opportunities for mock interviews, learning about worker's rights and helping them to find volunteering opportunities.

Now that the Connect & Thrive staff have gathered these results, the work to make them concrete can begin.

"Many groups at Marrickville provide an opportunity for psychosocial support and growth. And everyone likes having things to look forward to!" said Sandra.

"Walking groups are great because you don't even realise how far you have walked because you are connecting with other people and relaxing," Anne mentioned.

Call us on 1300 779 270 to find out other Flourish Australia locations that run the CPS program.

ABOVE: The Connect & Thrive Program evolves according to the needs of the people who access services. Photo by Francy Vargas Diaz.

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How Anxiety Tricks Your Body

WITH SOMATIC MIMICRY

By Warren Heggarty

Justin*, aged about 40, staggered into a hospital Emergency Department with symptoms similar to a stroke. His pulse was racing, his blood pressure was elevated and he was terrified the end was near. Doctors carried out many tests and made him fast in preparation for brain surgery. But after seven hours they sent him home. The diagnosis was "anxiety." What was going on here?

Before we go any further, you should never ignore symptoms of stroke or heart attack. Always get help. It is not uncommon, though, for severe anxiety to mimic something a lot more deadly. Justin did the right thing, but he might have been sent home a little earlier if he had remembered to disclose that he had been hospitalised with an anxiety disorder!

In his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel van der Kolk describes how traumatic or anxiety provoking experiences can leave an imprint on us. This can show up as physical sensations or behaviours. In addition, when we are highly agitated, we may hyperventilate. This can lead to pins and needles, or even a feeling of paralysis, choking, suffocation or chest pains! These are all common signs of a panic attack, which while unpleasant, is not fatal. But they are also common signs of medical emergencies.

Phil Lane, writing in *Psychology Today*, describes this as a "chicken and egg" situation. Suddenly feeling like you are suffocating will CAUSE anxiety. But anxiety can also CAUSE you to feel like you are suffocating! The technical term Lane uses is "somatic mimic." How can we safely differentiate between a physical emergency and a "somatic mimic?" (Lane, 2025)

If you are prone to panic attacks, hypervigilance, hyperventilation or palpitations, your doctor or psychologist/psychiatrist should explain to you what is happening in your body as a result of your anxiety. The main weapon against these alarming symptoms is breathing control. When you are panicking, you tend to take rapid, short, shallow breaths. Taking long, slow, deep breaths will bring the oxygen level in your blood back to normal. It takes a lot of practice to be able to do this.

For example, I learned a technique over a period of months where, guided first by a psychologist, I conditioned myself to breathe in and out very slowly and deeply while associating out-breaths with the relaxation of my voluntary muscles. Initially I did this for one hour a day for two weeks, then began to space the sessions out once it became almost automatic. There are lots of variations on this. Try them out.

Another thing to do is to avoid automatically connecting a physical sign with doom. A headache is not usually a brain tumour. A chest pain might be indigestion or a "stitch" caused by exertion. You might be a person who gets chest pains when nervous.

It is very useful to develop a relationship with your GP, to allow both of you to get to know your physical body and its weaknesses as well as your mind. Justin* seems not to have done this. Get to know things like your blood pressure.

It also helps to know your family's medical history. Is heart attack and stroke common in your family? Is severe or disordered anxiety common? Perhaps there is a mixture? Be mindful and when you act on something act thoughtfully rather than reactively.

*Justin's real name has been changed to protect his privacy.

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Lane, P. (2025, February 6). *Somatic Mimics; How Anxiety Tricks the Body*. Retrieved from *Psychology Today*: www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/am-i-dying

ABOVE: Know your body, know your mind and develop a good relationship with your GP. Photo by Tung Lam from Pixabay.

Heart, Stroke or Anxiety?

"Experts stress the importance of seeking immediate medical help if you experience any heart attack symptoms."

If you are unwell with symptoms of a stroke or heart attack, seek medical help right away.

If you are well but you want more information about heart attack, stroke and the possible confusion with panic attacks, the best place to go is to your GP. In the meantime, here are some articles that might satisfy your curiosity.

Try this SBS article: "Panic And Heart Attacks Share Similar Symptoms. Is There A Way To Tell The Difference?" First, we meet a lady with chest pains and a racing pulse who thought she was having a heart attack, but wasn't. Then we meet another lady with tingling in her fingers who did not think she was having a heart attack, but was!

www.sbs.com.au/news/article/panic-attacks-and-heartattacks-share-similar-symptoms-is-there-a-way-to-tell-the-difference/pcnt1puv2

Health Direct has a detailed description of what happens with heart attack here:

www.healthdirect.gov.au/heart-attack#emergency

Health Direct has a detailed description of what happens with stroke here:

www.healthdirect.gov.au/stroke

Bear in mind, too, that you DON'T have to have an anxiety disorder in order to have a one-off panic attack.

WHO says:

"Globally, 90% miss out on MH services!"

Although we talk a lot about gaps in our mental health services in Australia, in a global context we are quite blessed! Here, the Health System and NDIS, including non-profit organisations like Flourish Australia, provide services for people with complex mental health issues. The same is not true world-wide.

According to a recent release from the World Health Organisation, "up to 90 percent of people (worldwide) with severe mental health conditions receive no care at all." And many who DO receive services get them from "outdated institutional models that fail to meet international human rights standards."

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Director General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has issued new guidance intended to give "all governments the tools to promote and protect mental health and build systems that serve everyone."

Key provisions in the WHO's guidance issued on 25 March 2025 include: upholding human rights, an emphasis on physical health promotion, addressing social factors like education and housing, adopting prevention strategies, and "ensuring people with lived experience...participate in policy planning and design." WH

www.who.int/news/item/25-03-2025new-who-guidance-calls-for-urgenttransformation-of-mental-health-policies



Black Dog's push for Peers in Clinical Teams

According to The Black Dog, there is a 32 percent shortfall in "mental health professionals" in Australia. This has led to reduced access to care, and many practitioners who remain are overburdened. The Black Dog expects the shortfall to grow to 42 per cent by 2030.

Among the suggested solutions to this is "integration of peer workers within clinical teams to bolster care and improve patient outcomes." Flourish Australia has been a pioneer in the push for putting peer workers at the centre of mental health recovery services, though we are largely non-clinical. Nowadays, it is gratifying that clinical services also recognise the role of peer workers in improving recovery outcomes.

Another problem recognised by The Black Dog in its push for systemic reform is the "missing middle." This is where people who have moderate issues miss out on services until their problems worsen and become more severe. The Black Dog also notes the "patchwork of varying services which can leave consumers confused about where to get help." WH

SEE www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/news/systemic-reform-for-a-resilientmental-health-system/ PHOTO by YAMA ZSUZSANNA MARKUS from PIXABAY



Airbnb's Welcome Support to the Women and Children's Program

By Warren Heggarty

The Women's and Children's Program (WCP) at Blacktown has received a wonderful donation of AU\$38,000 from Airbnb. To mark this gesture, Flourish Australia hosted local Airbnb Community Leader Volunteer Felicity Stevens, formerly of the global Airbnb Host Advisory Board.

As Manager Nicole and Team Coordinator Tania say, the WCP serves as a "de facto family" to women and children dealing with mental health issues and/or domestic violence. It also saves the wider community money and, most importantly, keeps families together. There are twenty families on the waiting list at the time of writing, but alas, we have to turn down five out of every six people who could be helped. This is why Flourish Australia is naturally keen to expand the service, and why we are so grateful for this sizable donation.

In case you don't know, Airbnb is an online platform that connects travellers to people who wish to rent out their properties, known

as "hosts." Felicity Stevens is very active in the Host community. She had nominated the Women and Children's Program for a donation after hearing about it from a friend and was very keen to visit the Centre.

Felicity was greeted by Flourish Australia's Chief Development Officer Peter Neilson, Nicole and Tania. Later, Felicity also met alumni Taylor Rhodes and her son Choppy who is now three and a half. Choppy showed Felicity around the centre's play kitchen and they both had a go on the playground equipment.

The Airbnb organisation has a Community Fund which in its fourth year has donated over \$US8.5 million to 160 causes in over thirty countries. Until recently, Felicity was one of 22 Airbnb hosts selected to be a member of the Airbnb Host Advisory Board. This Board identified three issues that were of importance to the host community: economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, and ending abuse and exploitation. (Airbnb, 2025)

Other recipients in the Asia-Pacific region included a Korean

organisation promoting overseas youth volunteering, and an organisation in Japan helping preserve local culture in a region recently impacted by earthquakes.

We hope to be able to help more mothers and children in the future through this generous donation.

FURTHER INFORMATION

See recent Panorama stories on the Women and Children's Program in Summer #95Q pages 6 to 12, Autumn 2024, Spring 2023)

Airbnb. (2025, February 25). "Airbnb Community Fund Donates Over \$8.5 Million To 160 + Nonprofits Globally." Retrieved from Airbnb : <https://news.airbnb.com/2025-community-fund/>

ABOVE: Gathering in the garden at the Women and Children's Program (L to R): Felicity Stevens, Community Leader of Host Club Airbnb, Peter Neilson, Chief Development Officer, Flourish Australia, Taylor Rhodes, Mother and Alumna of the Women and Children's Program, Nicole Charles, Manager WCP, Choppy, Taylor's son, also an Alumnus of the program, Tania Buchanan Team Coordinator WCP. Photo by Doris Chen.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Peter Neilson listens to Felicity Stevens along with Women and Children's Program staff Tania Buchanan and Nicole Charles. Photo by Doris Chen.



"Be The Person Who Drives Change" ...and impress the guests

By Felicity Stevens

In 2020, Costa Rican Diplomat Christiana Figueres said something that inspired me: it was to the effect of "you can be the person in your community who drives change." Figueres is currently Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

I have been an Airbnb host for about 13 years. Back then we needed more space, so we moved somewhere with a bigger yard for my children. It also came with a second house. A former friend introduced me to Airbnb, and leasing the house out worked so well for me that I got invited to join the Airbnb Host Advisory Board.

I come from an eco-friendly family that includes biologists and other environmentally aware people. There is an element of community activism, too! My husband's grandfather, although a Pakeha (Non-Maori New Zealander), did what it took to become a Maori Master Carver. He was eventually recognised as an elder in this tradition. Eventually, he started a carving program that operated inside prison. He was even able to teach styles that were relevant to the particular person's local Maori community. This helped prisoners develop a sense of belonging with their local area and helped reduce the rate of re-offending.

I have always been into recycling. Even my involvement in fashion included sewing scraps! So my response to the climate crisis is to try to lead the most sustainable life I can. But it goes further.

The best Airbnb homes reflect their owners' personalities. This is the opposite to the generic way a hotel would usually present itself. We present a "home away from home" feeling. And there is a saying: "Like attracts like."

The guests I hosted were impressed by our compost bin and the eco-wise aspects of our cottage. As an Airbnb host, I took practical measures to make my accommodation more "eco friendly," and it paid off for us as we began to get repeat business because of it.

I would like to take this even further, and my husband and I have looked at ways we can spread the idea of eco-friendly accommodation. This would mean publicising the way the houses manage energy, water and waste. I am hoping to launch something on YouTube soon, and in the meantime I run a sustainable hosting site that asks the big question: "Do you want to become a sustainable host, but don't know where to start?"

www.sustainablehosting.com.au

How to Get Into the Driver's Seat

In Felicity's story, we learned that Hosts have a Board which influences the direction of the company. Within Flourish Australia, there is the Community Advisory Council which performs a similar role.

The idea behind the Community Advisory Council is to allow the people who access Flourish Australia's services to have a voice in important matters that concern Flourish Australia as a whole.

Over the years, the Community Advisory Council has made countless important contributions to the organisation. If you access Flourish Australia's services, think about becoming part of the Council one day.

For further information, talk to your support worker or call on 1300 779 270 for General Enquiries.

RECOVERY GAMES

Panorama's Puzzle Page

Time give your brain a workout!

The Panorama Puzzle Pages aim to not only entertain and amuse, but to help you learn and retain some terms that you'll encounter when dealing with mental health recovery.

We have a SCRAMBLE of some long words which we challenge you to rearrange and a FIND-A-WORD, and there's a CROSSWORD on the opposite page.

If you're having trouble figuring out a clue, every answer can be found in July 2025's articles. Let this serve as encouragement to really get the most out of Panorama's stories! Answers will be published in the August 2025 monthly online issue. Enjoy!

Panorama Word Scramble

See how quickly you can unscramble these key words from Kiri's story "Emerging Identity" on pages 4 and 5 of this issue.

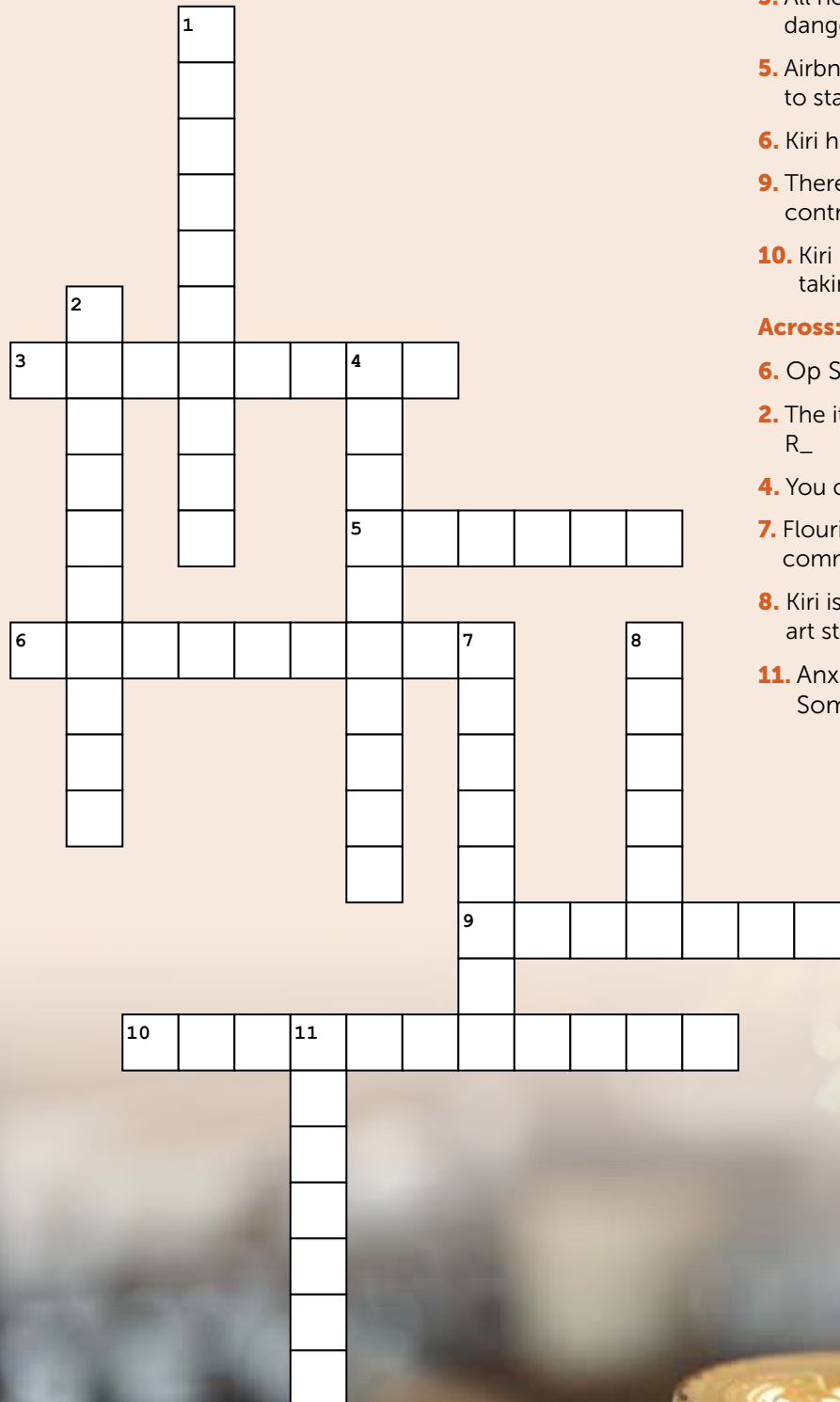
- TIBIALYDIS
- CUSTITIA
- TRACTISI
- LANOLINSTAIT
- OCCINNEON
- GONGNIBLE
- NUMMOCITY
- CAVOONIT
- IBEXITHONI
- STEWEIRDUOS (3 words)

Panorama Find-A- Word

CONNECTION
PHYSICARDS
TAILORING
BARGAINS
LIVED
ACCEPTANCE
EXPERIENCE
EMERGING
PROGRAM
JOBSEEKERS
GARDENING
IDENTITY
THRIVE

WNNKVEVINVRYNZPLGIFYFEDDATXGTKN
RNNFYORFTGZHRADAQXRTPWOGIDBMPC
WBQMUFZZTUZGYBMB SXFD FLJRLNMNCN
WKKKJPXTSZVPNBWLCONNECT IONZVON
LFOSZYHIEMERGINGJQJQACCEPTANCE
OJC IARQLRPIUEFUDFAVETVYBUXTZAUA
AOSOQDPZBDNYSFKQDDJQBDKMBYFRNE
VRLEFSPDQGJSPZCDTRMUWLJTTEWPDK
TTVNWHEONGCNZMBLUTJXQWVYIUEZEEN
MCBAGFINFJSYDGLPIEZSSTXLUCCSN
FJPKMMWDGJSPJSUTAMLQXMFPTLFTYU
SBK LQWTTTTRPHNAEJFZAXWMNVEANW
SIJ VXF XPGIVMMYIFQNEPKFBARGAINS
ZCARUSJRREQEVKLSWIIDSGAJZNGOLYM
AGHWZQXOFFNUMSMIEXPERIENCEBOQN
IXXSNUVGNTBKVOHBCFZJQMWVALWROZ
LDWCXBPRUMYGPHJSAANHPUHEHFPFIDH
ITEKJSUAHFRZALEQSWRQMIVRGLLNVM
VHJNNTMMRGBJWRSMOHWDYGODLCVGLJ
ERXVTIGTQJZKZQDHPNUSSLWGHUPRL
DIHDXIMVCOUTSYWEZVKGKHJBNRCFUL
SVSVVYTAXBREHEYJZNWRSXMBWSUTBHG
MEAOCIRYGSA LVWYXHIMQTLCSXSIGNU
FVUMBVBBAEKLVKHQKHNNITIGYSFLAB
QAPDDAGIBECHUZFOMVRGUAGMVXD FGN
MKFQLNONIKNMMOPHXPCLPFINTCPOG
PCAGWRSETEQUWMKZNUIOYYMCIOVBA
BJEJJKKD HAROUMYBKJDKWTXDXSQIZMF
PZZVHONZBSQDVZBCCPD AZSCXZITFJ
YEDUCHUXZF PNUFN NROVEGEVFLWTS HA

Panorama Crossword



Down:

- 3.** All new innovations have potential dangers and potential B_
- 5.** Airbnb helps people find H_ homes to stay in
- 6.** Kiri has shown her artworks at G_
- 9.** There's a lot you can do to prevent, control and even R_ diabetes
- 10.** Kiri makes money as an artist by taking C_

Across:

- 6.** Op Shops rely on V_ to operate
- 2.** The items at the Op Shop are priced R_
- 4.** You can learn T_ to deal with anxiety
- 7.** Flourish Australia S_ people in the community
- 8.** Kiri is a part of "We Are Studios," an art studio for P_ with disabilities.
- 11.** Anxiety tricks your body with Somatic M_



Don't Knock Op Shops!

For Volunteering or for Bargains

By Warren Heggarty



Have you ever thought of gaining retail experience by volunteering in an op shop? Op Shops are a way of redistributing goods from donors (who might have more than they need) to people who have trouble paying full retail price. The quality is often near-new. Some organisations are keen to take on volunteers.

Panorama visited several Op Shops which will be featured in coming issues. We also hope to profile volunteers to whip up your enthusiasm. Our first stop was an independent shop operated by a local church group and approved for Centrelink Job-seekers.

Michelle Choy manages the Inner Journey Op Shop in Padstow NSW and says that there are plenty of donated items to sell, but looking after the shop requires people with time to volunteer. 'We have a garage full of things out the back as well!' she says.

When it opened in 2023 the local Torch newspaper said it was the first Chinese Op Shop in the country. The idea was to raise funds through the shop to support problem gambling counselling services and the less fortunate in the local community.

Michelle says that they are very careful about the quality and

cleanliness of what they stock. In fact, most of it is nearly new. Children's books and toys are carefully vetted. Clothing and shoes, furnishings and crockery, accessories and jewellery are all on sale at very reasonable prices.

Rent has to be paid and commercial rent is expensive, so Op Shops have to look at costs like any business. They need to be able to generate enough income to make their fund-raising endeavours worth-while.

Panorama spoke to Michelle during a 'break' in her office and we had people coming in and out the whole time. One volunteer took dictation for a letter Michelle wanted to draft in English (not her native Chinese) in order to help another volunteer.

'We have many people with disabilities who work here. I love working with everybody.' Pointing to her 'scribe' she says 'Ah, this one is a good-hearted person, she has a heart of gold.' Today, there are two other volunteers, a lady at the front counter, and a man working in the garage at the back of the shop.

Michelle proudly displays some publicity material which she recently had produced for her. 'Cathy is helping from home in Melbourne with our marketing and VIP membership. Charles is a designer who works from Hong Kong.'

So, this crowded little shop in Padstow is an international operation! Michelle also told us a few stories about how she had supported volunteers to develop themselves both personally and as workers. We hope to bring you some personal stories in future Panoramas.

Clearly Michelle is willing to help people develop themselves, but in general what qualities would a manager value? In any retail role, you have to love customer service and dealing with people. A recent advertisement for a retail assistant job at Salvos Riverwood mentioned the following other qualities: 'Integrity, openness and honesty. A positive attitude. Teamwork and cooperation. Punctual and reliable. Open to new ideas. Willing to learn about retail. Willing to make friends and have fun.'

ABOVE: Michelle Choy, manager of the Inner Journey Op Shop in Padstow NSW. Panorama found a very cute Cheong Sam dress that wasn't our size, so we settled on some cushions. Photos by Warren Heggarty

The Inner Journey Op Shop is independent. It is at 8 Padstow Parade Padstow, right next to the station and bus stop.
Email ljm.info2011@gmail.com or ring Michelle Choy on 0420 206 464.



Advantages of Seeing Things From Another Angle

By Karen Jurss

Karen enjoyed last month's Panorama article about World Autism Awareness Day, and had some wisdom to share about what it's like to be a neurodivergent woman living in modern times...

For many late-diagnosed people such as myself, "masking" (hiding our autism) is often a major issue, as we have usually gone decades being glared at, yelled at, and told off just for being ourselves. So we learn to present in an "acceptable" way when we're in public. Like an actor, or a secret agent.

As you can imagine, this is exhausting, so we eventually crash and need time to recover. This also contributes heavily to why employment levels in the autistic community are so low, and why suicide rates are much higher than average.

As Chair of Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council, an important way the organisation has supported me as a neurodivergent woman is by giving me a space to unmask. From the perspective of a person with autism, it is discouraging that much of society expects us to change to fit in with people who are neurotypical, rather than them making small changes that allow us to live full, contributing lives.

Being in a space where I can truly be myself, and not have to constantly monitor my facial expressions, tone, volume, and what I am saying, is so freeing and empowering.

Humour

It's a common belief that autistic people have trouble understanding sarcasm or humour. Autistic humour is different, but definitely exists. A favourite joke in the community

is when someone asks us to do something, we say "No," and then start doing it. Classic confusion and misdirection are hilarious to autistic people, but confusing to a neurotypical person, who may go away thinking the autistic person is a jerk.

In my experience, the more pervasive issue is when people use indirect language, and get upset when the autistic person doesn't respond in the "typical" way. For example: an autistic person is eating biscuits, and someone comes up and says, "Those biscuits look tasty. I'm really hungry." An autistic person will take that statement at face value and may respond, "Yes, I love these biscuits, they really hit the spot." The other person will then go away and complain about the autistic person being rude by not offering to share their biscuits. The autistic person will be confused, since they were never asked to share.

My Dream

My greatest wish is for the neurotypical community to meet us where we are, not where you expect us to be. You don't need to read into things the way you would with a neurotypical person, so if you don't like what I'm saying, don't tell me you don't like my tone: tell me why you don't agree with the information I'm sharing. If I appear smart because I have retained a lot of information and facts, don't assume I'm 100% capable in every other aspect of my life. If I look annoyed, I might just be deep in thought, or my face has gotten stuck in an expression which doesn't match how I'm feeling now. And when I share my diagnosis, please don't tell me, "You don't look autistic," as that's not the compliment you seem to think it is. And no, not everyone is "a bit autistic."

Current social media has allowed autistic men and - more importantly - women to share their stories and experiences so we can feel heard and understood. We are not "broken" or "failures," we just see the world in a different way; not wrong, just different. And the world is a better place because of us, not despite us.

ABOVE: Photo of Karen Jurss. Photo by Neil Fenelon

Where is Tech Taking Us?

AI: Monster or Miracle?

By Warren Heggarty



Some researchers like Jean Twenge point the finger of blame at poorly regulated Social Media consumption for the recent spike in mental health issues in young people. Recently, the Australian Government restricted access to Social Media by young people. But now we have so-called Artificial Intelligence (AI) to deal with.

All new things have potential dangers and potential benefits. In a recent talk, Sophie Winkleman, patron of the education charity "School-Home Support," recommended that we as a society need to take a step back rather than rushing headlong into the digital future.

'Social Media is described as a great connecting force,' says Winkleman, "and it can be a wonderful thing, but when we stop noticing people in our immediate surroundings in favour of the swirling masses online, I don't think of it in quite a warm fuzzy glow." (Winkleman, 2025) Sophie cites things like families in a restaurant, each member glued to a screen - including a two-year-old - rather than interacting with each other. Our social skills or even

our desire to socialise waste away, and loneliness increases. Humans are social animals, and the digital world, it seems, does not provide us with the kind of society we need to flourish.

Winkleman also cautions us about embracing AI indiscriminately.

Indeed, she questions whether Ed Tech (computer-based education methods) are really what we need to learn, as the interaction between a human teacher and her students is more germane to human nature. The "hard" way of note-taking from books rather than cutting and pasting from web documents is, she claims, a superior way of learning new material.

"I agree with a lot of what (Winkleman) says," Sandy, who teaches students on the autism spectrum at a large Sydney Primary School, commented. "I am pretty negative in my view about much of AI... it can hinder executive functioning in the brain, it is a catastrophe for body image, it is inauthentic and can hinder social skills...the list goes on.

However Sandy, who has a sensory disability, added, "I am also discovering it is not ALL bad.

Assistive technology for people with disabilities like mine is absolutely brilliant, and just getting better and better. It is increasing accessibility and independence and is much, much more portable."

With AI, experienced teachers can take shortcuts with administrative work, but Sandy says it is not so good for beginning teachers. Her classroom uses a lot of tech, but interactive boards have not replaced butcher's paper and "Cut & Paste" has not replaced handwriting. In addition, children are growing up in a world where they need to understand and work with new technology so as not to be disadvantaged.

On "Social Media flooding," Sandy feels the horse has bolted. "It's too big, too much. People need to contest and question things and parents need to take a stand. But it's not as simple as refusing access anymore."

Winkleman, S. (2025, February 18). The Most Compelling Argument Against Tech In Schools. Retrieved from Alliance for Responsible Citizenship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7V6nuckKFK88>

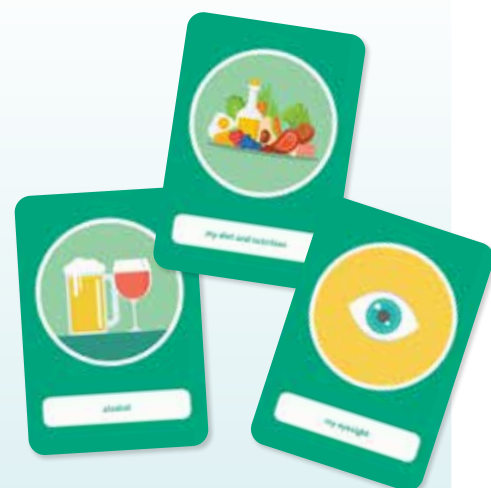
ABOVE: Have we created a monster, or will Ed Tech and AI improve the way we live... or both? Image by Warren Heggarty (with apologies to Godzilla)

Back On Track Health

Type-2 Diabetes

Doesn't have to be chronic

PhysiCard:
Diabetes
National
Diabetes Week
14-20 July 2025



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.

By Grant J Everett

Six years ago my GP told me she didn't like the readings of a recent blood test. After another visit to the pathology clinic, my GP was sad to inform me that I had Type-2 diabetes.

Like many people who acquire Type-2 diabetes, it was mostly due to poor lifestyle choices. I ate a lot of the wrong things and didn't do sufficient exercise to burn off those excess calories. It also didn't help that I'm on medications that can mess with your blood sugar, and another that makes me endlessly hungry.

Preventing, Controlling, Reversing

I now take medication to manage my diabetes, I inject insulin twice a day, and I have recently started a new weekly injection that my doctor told me should lower my blood sugar and suppress my hunger. I hope it works as advertised, as my blood sugar has been high for a while now, even first thing in the morning. I keep emergency insulin

at work in case my blood sugar gets too high, but you should always check your levels first.

FYI, as I hate needles, having to go on insulin wasn't ideal. I still can't watch the needle go in. Yuck.

As a diabetic, I know how important it is to take my medications as prescribed, as is regularly checking my glucose levels and caring for my feet (as diabetes can affect your circulation). Like with any major medical issue, I do all this with professional support: I have a regular diabetes clinic over the phone with a team of health professionals.

It may sound too simple, but a major component of preventing, controlling and even reversing Type-2 Diabetes is to maintain a healthy weight, make good dietary choices, and get in enough exercise.

The Link?

According to "Relation Between Diabetes and Psychiatric Disorders" on National Library of Medicine, there is a link between many common mental health issues

and Type-2 diabetes. Diabetes and mental health issues have a two-way relationship, with each condition influencing the other in different ways. This makes it a major concern for many people who access Flourish Australia services.

Diabetes

Type 1 Diabetes

Your immune system is attacking your pancreas, so your body is making little to no insulin. Type 1 is usually diagnosed in children and young adults. People with Type 1 need to take insulin every day to live.

Type 2 Diabetes

Your body doesn't use its own insulin properly. Type 2 is the most common type of diabetes, and you can develop it at any age. Type 2 Diabetes isn't necessarily chronic.

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

🌐 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



NDIS