

AWARD WINNING

panorama

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

Monthly Issue **December 2025 #99C**



Guarding the Land for a Living

Youth Voice at TheMHS 2025

Panorama Wins WayAhead
Mental Health Matters Award!

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AUSTRALIA

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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 (option1) 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.

Publications People



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Publications Officer



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Contributors include...

Paul was supported through a severe illness, and now he's back to living life.

Edwina is our jet-setting, trendsetting travel correspondent

Dennis is in the Conservation and Ecosystem Management field.

Kieron shares the awesome things happening with people's fitness at Buck House.

Tricia and **Jen** are from our Community Advisory Council

And thanks to Flourish Australia staff Daniel, Georgia, Simon, Julie, Lisa, Peter.

Contributions are welcome!

Subscriptions, questions, feedback, praise, curses?

You can ALWAYS email us at...
panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au

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.

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 December 2025

Kieron from Buckingham House, Surry Hills (above) has undergone a considerable transformation thanks to his work with exercise physiologist Daniel Ho,

and so have other people who access services there.

In September the Annual TheMHS (the Mental Health Services) conference was held in Brisbane. Three members of Flourish Australia's delegation were from headspace Castle Hill NSW. They presented two thought provoking papers proposing solutions to some of the mental health issues facing young people today.

In this issue we feature recovery stories from two Aboriginal men who access Flourish Australia's Moree service, Dennis and Paul.

Coming up in January 2026 Panorama...

- We celebrate the artistic expression of people who access Flourish Australia services in the articles "An Art And Adventure Management" and "Taking Steps on Your Wellbeing Journey: Buckingham House Art Exhibit 2025."
- We learn about how IEA (Inclusive Employment Australia) will be a new milestone in how Flourish Australia can support people to find open employment.
- **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



Thank You for walking this journey with us!

As December rolls in, the team here at Panorama is taking a moment to pause, wrapping up final proofs like presents, tying off deadlines with ribbons, and sprinkling a little holiday cheer over our editorial plans to say a heartfelt THANK YOU.

THANK YOU to everyone who had the courage to share their story with Panorama magazine. We appreciate that this is not always easy to do, but your contributions are vital in making Panorama an effective recovery tool for people to use on their mental health journeys and give readers hope. As our readership is growing rapidly over time, your stories are reaching more people than ever before. You make

Panorama a living, breathing space for connection and recovery.

THANK YOU to the countless family members, carers, kin and Flourish Australia staff who walk alongside us every day.

This year, Panorama was privileged to share some truly inspiring journeys of recovery that came straight from YOU.

Alex told us about finding confidence again through community theatre, while Priya described the incredible shift from hospital stays to hiking trails, rebuilding strength step by step. Jordan opened up about how art became a lifeline during isolation, and Sam shared the empowering experience of returning to work after years of mental health challenges. Each story is a testament to resilience and hope, reminding us that recovery is possible and that creativity, connection, and courage can transform lives. These stories don't just fill pages, they ripple out, touching lives in ways you may never see, but we hear about every day.

In very exciting news, Panorama Magazine won the WayAhead Mental Health Matters Award for Media and the Arts this year! We are thrilled at this result and this is all thanks to you, for sharing your story and all of our readers.



As the year winds down and we pack away our publishing plans, we want to wish you a wonderful festive season, however you celebrate it. 2026 is already shaping up with exciting recovery journeys, bold ideas, and voices that will inspire, we can not wait to share them with you!

Thank you for being part of the Panorama community, your ongoing support means everything to us.

Warren & Grant



35,000+*
Readers

Across Australia, New Zealand,
India, Japan, and Canada.

Reach out at Christmas

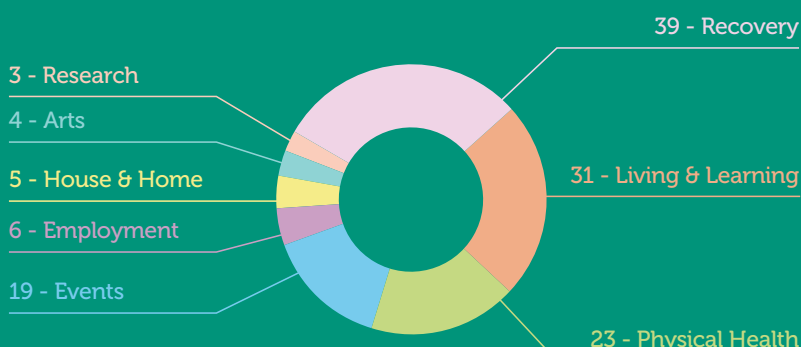
Some of us may struggle over Christmas. It can be a sad time, especially if we're alone. Reach out. Flourish Australia services are a great way to meet people, and it's never too late to make new friends. You could attend some local community events, or maybe you could knock on your neighbour's door with some gift-wrapped chocolates?

Take the first step!

If the festive season feels lonely, remember there are organisations ready to listen and support:

- Lifeline: 13 11 14
or text 0477 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636
- SANE Australia: 1800 187 263
- Headspace: headspace.org.au

The Top Topics of 2025 were...





PANORAMA WINS! THE WAYAHEAD MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS MEDIA AND THE ARTS AWARD 2025!

By Peter Farrugia (in Canberra) and Warren Heggarty (in Sydney)

The annual WayAhead Mental Health Matters Awards celebrate outstanding contributions to mental health in NSW, honouring individuals and organisations that have made a significant impact on mental health awareness, services, and support, celebrating the achievements of those driving positive change in this space.

In 2025 the awards were held at the beautiful Sofitel Wentworth Sydney on September 26. Speakers for the

awards included Rose Jackson, NSW Minister for Mental Health, and Australian media personality and actress Sam Frost. Organisations from across the NSW mental health system were represented on the day, all on the cutting edge of modern mental health recovery and wellbeing.

As Flourish Australia's Panorama magazine was nominated for the Media and the Arts Award, we had a whole delegation there on the day, including members of the SLT, Board, Panorama staff, the Council, and two women who have starred in Panorama. Our whole table erupted

when our magazine was declared to be the winner of our category!

Tickets to the event included a 2-course plated lunch with drinks.

Judging

The judging panel for the awards included independent mental health experts, sector professionals, past award recipients, and category specialists, but WayAhead staff don't participate in this process. For each category the judges had to whittle dozens of worthy nominations down to a final three, then declare an ultimate winner. This is always a tight race, as every nomination has earned the right to be there on the day.

The judging is based on:

Innovation. Are you doing something new, or combining existing things in a different ways? Are you bringing a new perspectives to existing systems?

Involvement. How are consumers, carers, or the community involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of your nomination?

Response. How has the project been received, and what impact has it had?

We absolutely have to thank...

A heartfelt thank you to our contributors, supporters near and far, Flourish Australia's Senior Leadership Team, especially Peter Neilson and Mark Orr AM, as well as Prof Elizabeth More AM and the entire Board for your unwavering support of Panorama. We're thrilled by the recognition and proud of what we've built together. Deepest thanks to our readers and everyone who has the courage to share their story. You inspire us and our readers and give hope to so many people that recovery IS possible..

ABOVE: Grant J Everett, Warren Heggarty and Mark Orr AM accepting the WayAhead Media and the Arts Award.

2026 Isn't Far Off!

If you know of a worthy individual or team, why not nominate them in the relevant category of the WayAhead Mental Health Matters Awards for 2026? Got to be in it to win it! Here's the QR Code to the WayAhead website.





YOUTH VOICE AT THEMHS 2025

HEADSPACE TRIO PUT THEIR CASE IN BRISBANE

By Warren Heggarty

One of the big issues today is the fact that young people seem to be experiencing an increase in mental health challenges. Why is this so, and what can be done about it? Fortunately, three young people from Flourish Australia's headspace put their heads together (as shown above) and came up with a presentation for the 2025 Brisbane TheMHS Conference.

Serena, Farynaz and Rebecca presented two items to the conference: "Resilient Youth of 2050: Peer Work in Australian Schools," and "Why Aren't Mental Health Outcomes Improving?" As well as that, Rebecca was selected to Chair the session "Service Delivery For Young People And The Role Of Lived Experience."

Serena is the Services & Community Development Officer for headspace

at Castle Hill and Parramatta. Farynaz and Rebecca are members of the local headspace Youth Reference Group. All three attended a Mental Health First Aid course together, so when Farynaz and Rebecca began developing ideas for a TheMHS presentation, they invited Serena to come on board as well.

Farynaz wanted to explore how to overcome barriers to good mental health among young people. Rebecca thought that peer workers were such an effective idea that perhaps they should operate within every Australian High School.

As Farynaz explained to Panorama, not only do young people spend a lot more time on social media and other forms of IT, there are now so many different forms to choose from. A generation ago, there was only Facebook. Now we have TikTok, Instagram and others. This brings a whole new wave of overseas influence, especially from the USA.

"When young people have a problem," says Farynaz, "social media may be their first port of call. Unfortunately, the type of support they will get from it is not necessarily professional. There are no controls on what sort of information goes out."

"There are definitely not enough parameters around Social Media content," agrees Serena.

"There are also words and images that are very triggering," says Rebecca, and images that are very graphic. Mindframe issues guidelines on how to deal with mental health issues in the media, but social media does not follow those guidelines."

To complicate things, Rebecca says, "Young people's brains have not fully developed, so they are not so adept at critical thinking. This makes them easy to manipulate. Social media can be a force for good or for bad, but it is much easier at the moment to find the bad than the good!"

Farynaz and Rebecca had no public speaking experience before their appearance at TheMHS. In High School, Rebecca had even been a bit on the shy side. So how did they do it?

"I came out of my bubble," laughs Rebecca.

Farynaz says, "Peter Farrugia from Flourish Australia trained us in Mental Health First Aid, and he was really helpful and made it easy for us! He was a great mentor! We actually practiced our presentation every week for two months using Zoom. It was great and it meant that we had less in the way of nerves."

Another presentation they would have liked to have included concerned the use of Dialectical Behavioural Therapy in High School. Rebecca says, "DBT has skills that are very useful and can be taught and remembered easily using acronyms. I think it would be great if the principles could be used in schools, perhaps in Personal Development, Health and Physical Education classes to help young people manage their distress."

Rebecca says she might have another try at this topic next year. But this year she was also chosen to Chair a session. It was the first time she'd had a Chairing role!

So how did the trio's well-practiced presentations go over with the audience in Brisbane?

"I think we got our message across," said Farynaz. "People came up to us afterwards and told us that they agreed with all the things we were saying!"

Why Not You?

For those who find the idea of presenting at a TheMHS Conference daunting, the message from Serena, Farynaz and Rebecca is this: "Just keep trying and push through. It can help if you present with people you feel safe around too." They also expressed their gratitude to Peter Farrugia and Stephen Suttie.

And of course, don't forget to practice, practice, practice!

ABOVE (L-R): headspace trio Farynaz, Serena and Rebecca. Photo by Serena.

OPPOSITE: On stage at Brisbane. Photo by Peter Farrugia.

YOU: NEXT YEAR AT THEMHS? 4-7 AUGUST 2026

The experience of Farynaz and Rebecca shows that if you go about it the right way, you too can present at TheMHS. If you have ideas about how to improve mental health or the way services are delivered, people need to hear what you have to say, and TheMHS is a great platform.

But you need to get cracking now, because the Deadline for the submission of abstracts within Flourish Australia is the 13th of February 2026 (To Be Confirmed)

Of course, Farynaz and Rebecca from the headspace Youth Reference Group had a little backup from Serena, and also had help and mentoring from Peter Farrugia of Flourish Australia.

But so can you!

We are planning to hold a 60-minute online Information Session online in the weeks leading up to the 13th of February 2026 deadline. Flourish Australia staff and people who access our services will be advised of this closer to the time.

We also hope to provide additional support to entrants to ensure that Flourish Australia's presenters have the highest possible chance of being selected by the judges for presentation

Start working on your ideas now!



FROM FLOURISH AUSTRALIA TO THE WORLD!

2025 THEMHS CONFERENCE

By Peter Farrugia



Flourish Australia attended The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Conference in Brisbane from September 2-5, taking centre stage with a delegation of people who access our services, carers, headspace Youth Reference Group members, Community Advisory Council representatives, staff, and senior leaders. 2025's theme was "Envisioning 2050: Towards A Better Mental Health System."

As Flourish Australia is the Platinum Sponsor of TheMHS, our CEO Mark Orr AM spoke at the official opening ceremony, highlighting the important role our organisation plays in Australian's mental health sector. Mark's speech set the tone for 3 days of keynote addresses, round table conversations, workshops, Q&A's, networking, social events, and friendship building. Mark later shared his thoughts with his presentation, "Leading To Reach Utopia: Delivering On The Promise Of Mental Wellbeing In 2050."

Flourish Australia's presence in the exhibitor hall was a wonderful opportunity to meet conference attendees from all walks of life and to talk about mental health and wellbeing. Our colouring wall is

always a great drawcard! Co-Chair of Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council, Mozzy (and his partner and carer, Donna), did an amazing job as the face of Flourish Australia. Thanks for your commitment to a great cause!

Highlights included Chair of our Council, Karen, presenting "2050? We Have The Power Now: Peer-Operated Spaces and Authentic Peer Practice." Karen represented Flourish Australia's Hervey Bay service, and she's an experienced speaker who enthralled the audience with her unique style. It was a wonderful presentation.

Former Council member JA presented "Back To The Future: Lived Experience Leadership," about how the Council's work affirms our commitment to recovery-oriented practice and person-led recovery.

Of special mention is Flourish Australia's headspace Castle Hill Youth Reference Group. Farynaz and Rebecca were among the youngest delegates at the conference, and represented themselves, headspace and Flourish Australia faultlessly. Supported by staff member Serena Nian, they presented the thoughtful and intelligent speeches, "Resilient Youth of 2050: Peer Work in Australian Schools" and "Why Aren't Mental Health Outcomes Improving?" We are very proud of

their contributions and pleased to have had them in our delegation.

A special mention to Rebecca for chairing, "Service Delivery For Young People And The Role Of Lived Experience." Chairing involves coordinating speakers, managing times and facilitating Q&A. Not an easy task with seven speakers and an inquisitive audience both live and online!

John Attard, Mental Health Worker from Bathurst NSW also attended the conference in his capacity as Young Carer. We congratulate John on his commitment and dedication to this important responsibility.

Flourish Australia thanks TheMHS Learning Network for another successful conference. We cherish the partnership between our organisations and look forward to an even bigger and better presence in 2026. On that note, every year Flourish Australia invites submissions from people accessing services to represent us at TheMHS, so If this is something you'd like to do, please talk to your Flourish Australia support worker. We'd love to discuss your ideas for 2026!

TOP: People enjoying the colouring wall at Flourish Australia's exhibition stand.

LEFT: CEO Mark Orr AM with our headspace delegates Serena, Farynaz and Rebecca. **RIGHT:** Community Advisory Council Chair Karen presenting to a focused audience.

the time your lift ride takes! For example. 'I'm Stan the lift mechanic, with 20 years experience and I'm on a job search.' To which one might reply 'You've come to the right place, Stan.'

Of course it's not really for random strangers but people who might be able to help you. If you can rehearse a little 'elevator pitch' you will always be ready to let rip when you meet the right person.

Conferences and meetings are good places to network. Read the story by Caitlin Taylor about the Sydney Disability Employment Expo in October Panorama. That is a great place to let people hear your elevator pitches!

Another thing you can do is reactivate dormant contacts. If you 'used to know' someone but you've lost contact, it can't hurt to remake their acquaintance. Some people would view this as 'using people.' And it is, if you would not be prepared to help THEM with a problem. Remember the first R is 'reciprocity.'

Another important thing is ALWAYS FOLLOW UP. If you have someone's contact number, ring it! If you met someone at a job seekers forum say 'thank you for talking to me at the job fair. I appreciate your help.'

If you work like this, whether you find a job or not, you will have met a lot of people. Those people will hear about people who are looking for a worker. Naturally, if they have your contact, they might just call you with an offer or a suggestion. If you are looking for a tsunami of offers in the future, you have to start a little ripple today.

ABOVE: This little black duck has started a ripple on a pond and already, other ripples are forming in its wake. Photo by Warren Heggarty

START A RIPPLE FOR TOMORROW LONG TERM NETWORKING AND JOBS

By Warren Heggarty

You have to have hope. But once you have hope, you also need a PLAN. Having a complex mental health issue seems to make it harder to get a job. Even people without a disability find it hard. But what you need is not magic. It is something that almost everyone used to have which we have forgotten about it today. They rebranded it "Networking" to make it sound like something new and ingenious.

Angela Gibbings has a 3 minute YouTube video which is worth watching (it's on the Vision Australia Employability page). She says 'networking is about building relationships... that have depth

and have meaning.' In other words, it is actually a normal part of life. This explains how people used to get jobs before the term 'networking' was even invented. And without doing a multiple page application addressing 27 essential requirements on speculation.

Angela Gibbings uses the acronym RIPPLE to describe how networking works. Reciprocity (mutual action). Interest (in others). Presence (having an impact). Purpose (focused on genuine help). Language (developing rapport). Elevation (helping people UP).

One thing that can help you is the so-called an Elevator Pitch. It's a brief description of who you are, what you do and what you are looking for that can be recited in

Is finding paid, fulfilling work a part of your goals? Give Flourish Australia a call to see what support we have to offer jobseekers.

1300 779 270 (option1)

Twenty Years Since My Final Cigarette

By Grant J Everett



It's now been two decades since I had a cigarette. I've been tempted, obviously, but I know that one cigarette is too many, and a million isn't enough.

I started in my teens, when I was at my most impressionable. I wasn't a "social smoker" or anything: I was a SMOKER who put away 25 to 30 rollie cigarettes a day. I mostly bought White Ox, one of the strongest tobaccos on the market, and smoked it without filters.

Cigarettes were my first priority when I woke up, and the last thing I did before bed. Buying food and paying rent happened AFTER I got my tobacco. My first flat had multiple ashtrays, and I hate to think about the damage I did to that place with second hand smoke.

Most smokers I've known who want to give up usually set a specific time: once I get out of hospital, once work calms down, once I graduate. But I felt like if I didn't give up now, I'd be making excuses for the rest of my life. There's literally no better time to quit than right now.

Frigid Poultry

I was going through a lot of changes in my 20s, assessing the person I was becoming and the roads I was walking down.

My successful quit attempt started as an experiment to see if I could go a day without a cigarette. In the late evening, a wise man asked me, "You've done a day, why not keep going?" I cracked just before bed, which felt so wretched I decided that would be my last smoke ever.

I went cold turkey. This got me through the physical withdrawals fast, as I wasn't constantly resetting them with nicotine replacement therapy. It wasn't fun (the withdrawals would wake me up shaking in the night), but I was doing much better within a week.

The hand-to-mouth routine of smoking gets extremely ingrained, and not doing it feels like losing a part of your body. I carried around a rolled-up cigarette paper with nothing in it, and occasionally put it in my mouth, as I found the psychological withdrawals just as bad as the physical ones.

I got really grumpy and fidgety and my attitude went down the toilet, but that was a small price to pay. Though I'm surprised somebody didn't give me a clip on the ear, to be honest.

I had nothing in my life at this point beyond cigarettes and coffee, so some may say this was a poor time to quit. However, I took my mind off things by getting into volleyball, diving into my art and writing, and learning to cook.

My friends supported me simply by not offering me a smoke.

The Positives For Me

Drawing It Out: I don't have to go through the nightmare of being on a long trip where I can't smoke.

Out Of The Game: I'm no longer asked, "Can you spare a cigarette?"

Saving Cash: Cigarettes have tripled in price since I smoked. I'd need a calculator to work out how many tens of thousands of dollars

I've saved.

Life Is Delicious: My sense of smell and taste returned. The scent of coffee is incredible, and food tastes so much stronger and complicated.

Wellbeing: By this point, my body has fully repaired itself from the damage I caused by smoking. I'm not going to bang on about the awful things cigarettes do to your health, as you know all about them already.

Longevity: Not smoking may add years, even decades, to my life expectancy.

Lucky Me: My wife hates cigarette smoke, so there's a good chance our relationship wouldn't exist if I'd been a smoker when we met.

The Ball Is In Your (Volleyball) Court

Nobody can make you give up. It's an individual choice.

Just remember that some of the smartest people on Earth – including labs full of the brightest chemistry prodigies money can buy – are working together to make it IMPOSSIBLE for you to quit. I know people who have given up illicit substances, but can't give up tobacco! How good would it feel to beat them at their own game?

I have no doubt that when society looks back a century from now, the tobacco industry will be vilified along with all the other worst things in history.

Interested in quitting smoking?

Talk to your Flourish Australia support worker.



This is an Open Letter of Appreciation for Daniel Ho, Exercise Physiologist at Buckingham House.

LITERAL TRANSFORMATIONS HAPPENING AT BUCKINGHAM HOUSE

By Kieron

We want to take a moment to shine a light on someone who has truly transformed our community at Buckingham House: Daniel Ho, our Exercise Physiologist. I ran this letter of appreciation by the other gymgoers at Buck House to ensure it is reflective of their general experience of working with Daniel. They all shared my appreciation!

From the day Daniel joined us, his professionalism, passion, and genuine care have been clear in everything he does. Working with people who live with complex mental health issues takes not just skill, but understanding, and Daniel brings both in abundance. He doesn't just see the person's physical needs; he sees the whole person.

One of Daniel's many strengths is how he writes individual exercise programs that not only suit each person's needs, but also allow the other staff to work with us in

a way that reflects Daniel's own thoughtful, effective methods. This means his impact extends far beyond his own sessions, influencing the quality of support across the entire program.

My goal in working with Daniel was recovery, both mental and physical. I have come a long way on both fronts. My workout program includes box squats, bench press, planks, shoulder presses, bicep curls, tricep extensions, leg presses, lat pulldown, and leg extension. My numbers are continually increasing. Ultimately, working out is a competition against who you were yesterday.

I am blessed to live about a half hour brisk walk each way from Buckingham House, surrounded by beautiful parks, so I get in lots of steps each day, too.

My most noticeable result of going to the gym is that I'll need to buy a new pair of jeans and a new belt before long, as both are falling off me! I've lost roughly 10kg over the

course of 2025, and more than 40kg in total. I've been told my beard makes me look like Kratos from God of War, so it would be a nice bonus if my physique were to match!

Daniel talks to everyone at Buck House to make sure no voice is left unheard, and every consultation he offers involves personalised care. Every session, every conversation, every decision Daniel makes comes back to one thing: putting clients first. We're lucky to have Daniel, and grateful for the difference he's made, and continues to make, in the lives of so many at Buckingham House.

But Daniel's vision reaches even further, as he's now training students from the University of Technology Sydney, planting the seeds to grow this program in other Flourish Australia sites and communities. That means his dedication won't just stay within these walls, it will ripple outwards, helping even more people in the future.

With heartfelt thanks,

Kieron, and the Buckingham House Community

ABOVE: Kieron hard at work on the exercise routine that has transformed his body and his life. Photo by Jonathan Chen, student on placement.

**Flourish Australia
Buckhouse**

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Taking a Winter Break

Touring New Zealand with our Travel Correspondent, Edwina

For somebody with a background in fashion like Edwina, visiting trendy New Zealand was a great opportunity for her to indulge her love for design. It was also a chance to catch up with her family after a long break.

When I traveled from Sydney on a bright, sunny Winter's day to Auckland, New Zealand, I knew cold weather was on the cards! After arriving at Auckland International Airport, I caught a connecting flight to Wellington Domestic Airport so I could see some relatives on my Dad's side. That second flight only took an hour. That was already two flights down, and there were many more to come!

Family Ties

My cousin is a married mother of four, and her eldest (21) picked me up at the airport. I stayed with my cousin's family, and I also visited my sister, my Uncle and my Aunty. I was so glad to see them again after being unable to visit for two years.

There was a lot to do and see at Wellington. We drove through Oriental Parade, which is an

iconic waterfront spot, and the yellow sequin lights on Wellington Harbour's black water are very pretty at night. As fashion was very much a part of my agenda in NZ, both on and off the plane, a highlight was going to see the WOW Fashion Festival display, where they showcase wearable art. This annual festival attracts worldwide participation. I was also sure to enjoy all the yummy New Zealand dairy!

My Uncle gave me an All Black's t-shirt which looks like a Canadian Hockey jersey, and my Aunty gave me some nice clothes. Another Aunty gave me a tour of her new home and gifted me a possum fibre scarf.

After my time at my cousin's was up, my Aunty dropped me off at Wellington Domestic. That evening a storm set in, cancelling many flights, but eventually our flight was given clearance. After a

comfortable 1-hour flight to Gisborne, another Aunty picked me up so I could spend more time with my extended family in Ruatoria, 200 kilometres away. Most of the roads of this region are not sealed, and extreme caution is required.

During my four days there I got to see the land, mountains, rivers, streams and oceans where my people come from. I loved visiting our whenua urupa (family cemetery),

where my Dad rests after passing away in 1981. And I spent time with my cousin in Gisborne Hospital until close to midnight.

I flew back to Wellington for a final family dinner before going home to Sydney. I shared my recovery story, and my Uncle assured me, "We will always love you." When my Aunty dropped me off at the airport the next day, tears welled in her eyes.

Strike A Pose

Interestingly, during the flight back to Sydney, the flight attendants asked for feedback on their uniforms. I've had an ongoing interest in fashion, including designing my own hats and studying Millinery at TAFE, so I was the right person to ask! My verdict was I liked the asymmetry of the women's hats, as they reminded me of male GI's from the 1950s, and I liked the spiral patterns (koru) of their pink cerise knee-length dresses with bold printed designs. Royal purple patterns (kowhai) are traditionally from a yellow tree unique to New Zealand. The men wore 3-piece pinstripe suits with patterns on their neck ties that suggest business. The uniform designs were a collaboration between ta moko practitioner/artist Te Rangitu Netana and Emilia Wickstead, a Kiwi fashion designer. All in all, the cabin crew looked good!

LEFT: Edwina, on her way to her birthplace of New Zealand. **RIGHT:** Edwina LOVED the WOW Fashion Festival! **FAR RIGHT:** Edwina with her Aunty. **TOP RIGHT:** Edwina's cousin's cozy country cottage. **BELOW:** Amazing beach view from Edwina's cousin's place. Photos by Edwina.





I had a double bypass just last year, and it was a very difficult time. I was in hospital for a long while, but thankfully the staff at Flourish Australia's Moree service visited me regularly to support me. They were there for me when I was down all the way.

I've been attending Flourish Australia for about three years ever since one of their support workers invited me to come check it out. After a tour and meeting everyone, they told me I was welcome to access their services.

It was a great decision to start going to their centre, as I've made some good friends there who are into the same things I am, and we do lots of fun things together. The support workers take us out to bowls and golf, and we also go fishing. I enjoy fishing: the quiet is very relaxing, and I like cooking up my catch when I get home.

We have BBQs and cooking classes

at the centre, which is good for me, as I really like to cook. We had the art group just yesterday, where I did some painting and drawing, and we do some gardening in the back yard every Tuesday. We've been planting and looking after the garden for a few years now.

As Moree is a big place, the staff help us out with transport if we need to get to appointments. They also take us out on the town, where we'll go to cafes and go shopping. My worker actually just rang me a half hour ago to ask if I wanted to do anything today. Never a dull day!

I live in my own home and manage all my own day-to-day responsibilities, and I'm happy to have my own space. Flourish Australia will come visit me to help me out if I need it, and I also have family in my support network who I can rely on, including my brothers, who are always there whenever I call.

Flourish Australia helped me out a lot with my NDIS paperwork so that

I could get everything I need to get by, and I'm pleased with the results. It involved a lot of red tape, so I appreciate their hard work.

I'm happy with the service Flourish Australia offers, so if you're managing a mental health issue and you want to do something worthwhile with your time, I'd recommend getting in touch with your local Flourish Australia service. They're really nice people!

TOP: Paul (L) and his friend David Gallagher taking a breather at the gardening group.

ABOVE: Paul LOVES fishing! Photos by Luisa Linares

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What Makes a Great Teacher?

Perhaps you have it!

By Warren Heggarty

There are teachers working right now who have backgrounds of serious disability and/or complex mental health issues. Maybe working towards a career as a teacher is not as fanciful as you suppose? The University of Sydney recently reported new research led by Professor Alyson Simpson A/Professor Wayne Cotton and Dr Rachel White into what qualities make a great teacher.

"Our study is a world-first, evidence-based framework of qualities that contribute to the make-up of a great teacher..." Prof Simpson told USyd News (Clayworth, 2025). She and her team identified 50 "indicators of quality that contribute to teacher excellence, including traits which cannot be taught in formal training." These personal qualities, writes Liv Clayworth, "reflect the depth, resilience, and humanity required to thrive" in teaching.

"We are looking at the person that the teacher needs to be, not just the act of teaching," said Professor Simpson, who pointed out that teaching is so much more than a kind of "nine to five" routine. Their research has been published in "What's the Evidence? An Investigation into Teacher Quality,"

edited by Rachel White (Western Sydney University) and Prof Simpson.

Let's go through some of those fifty traits. One is "Reflection" (by the way, "reflective practice" is something all staff at Flourish Australia are expected to do as a matter of course). But if we call it "learning from experience," we see that it is something many of us do on our recovery journeys.

Resilience is something a lot of us have in spades. Just to get through a normal day can be difficult for many people with mental health issues, and an important part of recovery is finding our own ways to work through the challenges. Related to this are "adaptability" and "persistence."

"Motivation" is often talked about. Some medications can reduce your motivation, but we all have a friend in "Discipline." Discipline often does ten times the work of Motivation.

"Respect" is another quality. That is, respect shown by the teacher. We know that teachers often face DIS-respect from some parents and students, but teachers still need to display it when others don't. "Ethics," or being guided by integrity, demands it. It also helps if you are skilled at explaining ideas - good communication requires that you are able to listen and understand

others. "Patience," too, is a great virtue for a teacher.

Collaboration, being a team player, is also very important. While you must have boundaries, you also need to practice a little give and take. New teachers especially will need the guidance of their fellow teachers.

The study also looked at 40 other traits, and was funded by the NSW Department of Education, examining 548 teachers.

"Teachers of Tomorrow" (USA) had a similar list of 15 traits that also included "Expertise," "Loving A Challenge," "Creativity," "Constant Growth," "Self-Awareness," "Humour," and "High Expectations" (Teachers of Tomorrow, 2025).

What do you think? Cast your minds back to when you were at school, and think of the teachers who really had an impact on you. What traits did they display? Do YOU also have what it takes to teach?

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Photo by dschap from Pixabay.com

GUARDING THE LAND FOR A LIVING

By Dennis

I'm an Aboriginal man who has always felt a connection to the land, so I wanted to find a job where I can protect Australia's flora and fauna, where I can accomplish something fulfilling and become more independent.

With this goal in mind I did a twelve-month course at Moree TAFE called Conservation and Ecosystem Management Certificate III, which ran two days a week. The course covered all our native plants, where they're located in Australia's ecosystems, how to identify them, their scientific names, and how to grow them. I really enjoyed my studies, and I never missed a lesson.

The Flourish Australia staff at the Moree service supported me with my studies: they assisted me with the enrolment process, filling out the Centrelink paperwork, and transport. This made TAFE much more accessible.

My ideal job role is to work in conservation with my local council,

but I had to do a second course with their Ranger Program to be qualified to do so. I'm happy to say I recently completed those studies, and I'm hoping to be employed for 20 hours a week.

I have worked in the past: I was at an abattoir at Dubbo for many years, which was tough work, hard work. I am sure working in conservation will be heaps better.

I've got a 10-year-old son who looks up to me, and I want to be a good example so he can do well in his own life. I moved from Dubbo to Moree to be near him, as I was missing out on seeing him grow up, but I'm making up for lost time now. I just spent the holidays with him, and that was great.

Making friends at the Moree service

I've been attending the Flourish Australia service at Moree for three or four years now after being referred, and Luisa is my support worker there.



I get bored sitting at home, so I visit the centre three to four times a week, as often as I can. Sometimes there's two of us, sometimes there's ten of us. There are groups and programs to attend, but we might just do something fun like play darts, maybe have a little competition. Some days, like today, we cook up a feed for everyone.

The Cooking Class is held on a Monday, and we've been putting together a cookbook of everything we've made. Once the cookbook is ready, everyone will take home a copy. We've prepared lots of interesting dishes that are good, healthy and filling, as well as being affordable and straightforward to make. That's the best kind! I honestly didn't know you could make so many nice meals that were so cheap.

I've been involved with this group since they started making the cookbook, and I never miss it.

Flourish Australia also helped me get on the pension a while back, as it was very hard to make ends meet on Newstart, and I'm currently in the process of applying for NDIS support.

Independence

I've been living in my own private rental for a while now, and I'm comfortable there. The only downside is that it floods on this side of town, and I've been in two so far. The first one wasn't so bad, but the second flood reached right up to my knees. It ruined the carpet, but thankfully I was able to put everything up on the tables and benches to protect it.

The Flourish Australia staff visit me at home to pick me up, but I haven't needed any practical help with the upkeep of my flat (though I'm sure they'd help me out if I asked them to). I've also got my Mum and my brother staying with me at the moment, as they have nowhere else to go, so I'm helping them get back on their feet.

I've been wanting to get my license, but I get anxiety as I don't feel like a very good driver, and lessons can also be expensive. I have heard about a local place at Moree that teaches you for free, so I'm planning on looking into that soon.

If you have mental health issues and you have goals you want to achieve and you want to meet new friends, my advice is to not do it all on your own. There's a lot of help out there, like Flourish Australia.

ABOVE: Dennis in the great outdoors: his passion. Photo Neil Fenelon.



What is Conservation and Ecosystem Management?

Love our sunburnt country? Want to protect it and keep it beautiful? A Certificate III in Conservation and Ecosystem Management might be for you!

This Cert III is all about protecting and preserving Australia's ecosystems and the flora and fauna within them, so you'll learn how to identify native plants and animals, control weeds and pests, combat erosion, support ongoing conservation projects, assess significant ecological and cultural sites, and read and interpret maps. Graduates go on to work in roles like Ecological Restoration Practitioner, Landcare Worker, Bush Regenerator, and National Parks Field Officer.

The course is a mixture of theory and practical work. While there are no entry requirements, it's recommended that you can manage physical tasks like preparing soil, using machinery,

and kneeling to plant trees and shrubs. It is also very helpful to have a Class C Drivers Licence. As this role is mostly outdoors in all kinds of weather, you'll need to Slip Slop Slap and wear suitable protection like gardening gloves and enclosed shoes. You will also need a computer with an internet connection for your coursework.

This Cert III has two Core Units (Conduct An Ecological And Cultural Site Inspection Prior To Works, and Contribute To Workplace Health And Safety Processes), but there are 141 Specialty Units based on how you want to specialise. While this course is available at a number of physical TAFE locations, you can also study it online at your own pace.

Other TAFE courses in this field include a Statement in Bushland Management, a Diploma of Conservation and Ecosystem Management, and a Certificate III in Parks and Gardens.

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Finally, TAFE can provide students with all kinds of support to help them in their studies, including disability support and help with developing literacy and numeracy. If you are receiving support from Centrelink, it's important to consult TAFE before you enrol.

Scan this QR Code for TAFE courses Australia-wide.



COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL COLUMN

By Tricia H and Jen L from the Council

Some members of the council will be nearing the end of their terms so there will be behind the scenes work to arrange for more new members and a new Chair as Karen's term comes to an end next month. If you access Flourish Australia services, have a look at the Expression of Interest notice on the bottom of this page and make a note in your diary! In the meantime, Dylan, a former member of the Council has rejoined us.

At the time of writing we had just completed our October meeting. Dr Janice Biggs, General Manager, Quality and Practice updated the Council on the scope of practice for staff who work in our residential services. Also, Janice spoke to us about YES surveys, which stands for 'Your Experience of Service.' We can't wait to have a chance to give our feedback.

Peter Farrugia, Training Specialist, spoke to us about attendance at a session of the A.S.I.S.T. (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training)

course he will be conducting in February. Paul and Tricia from the Council will be attending.

With Lisa Gott, Executive Director Lived Experience Leadership, we previewed the awesome new Peer Workforce Framework. A Family, Carer and Kin Advisory Committee is also in the pipeline and will be advertising for members soon. We also discussed Local Champions: this is a very important opportunity to have your say at your local service!

We thought the groups who made presentations at the 2025 TheMHS Conference in Brisbane were all awesome! Council Chair, Karen and Co-Chair, Mozzy as well as J.A. (a fellow Council member) were all there. Congratulations to Serena, Farynaz and Rebecca from headspace Castle Hill for making their presentations so welcoming and conversational in tone. You'll be reading more about it in Panorama soon!

Finally, Tricia joined Flourish Australia's table at the WayAhead awards. Congratulations to Panorama for winning this year's Media and Arts Award!

Expressions of Interest for Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council

Do you currently access Flourish Australia's services (including supported employment)?

Would you like to provide Flourish Australia with lived experience advice on planning, service delivery, policy and improvement?

NO PRIOR EXPERIENCE NEEDED - you will gain experience in this role!

Expressions of interest in joining the Council will be received during the following periods:

- 1st February 2026 until 28th February 2026
- 1st June 2026 until 30th June 2026
- 1st October 2026 to 31st October 2026

Talk to your support worker or contact us for an EOI information pack
council@flourishaustralia.org.au

Please note: This is not available to staff, volunteers or students.



Victor Pondikas Flourish Australia's longest serving employee, farewelled at 83. Trish and Jen share their fond memories of their co-worker and friend.

Jen and Trish attended Victor's funeral along with many of Victor's friends from the local service at Marrickville, as well as from Flourish Australia's support hub and members of his family.

Jen, who often fills the role of spokeswomen among the Marrickville

Team, had a melancholy task in giving a Eulogy for Victor. Staff member Zac Longworth also eulogised.

"I recall him as the strongest man I know," Trish said. "He was so nice to work with, he always knew what to do." Victor loved WORDLE and had a sweet tooth, so everyone simply HAD to have a couple of extra sweet morning teas in his honour!

LEFT: Victor enjoying the Powerhouse Museum. Photo from archives.



Lived Experience Framework Launch

2 decades of learning and leadership in 1 document

By Lisa Gott

The Framework was co-designed by Peer Workers, leaders, and colleagues across Flourish Australia. It is grounded in Lived Experience and collective wisdom, giving us a common language and approach. This Framework is one more step in building a future which is inclusive, hopeful, and grounded in recovery.

The theme of the 2025 TheMHS conference in Brisbane was "Envisioning 2050: Towards A Better Mental Health System." Achieving this goal requires a well-resourced, integrated mental health system where people are empowered to exercise genuine choice. A critical enabler of this vision is the integration of Lived Experience at all levels, including impactful lived experience leadership. The Framework will contribute to achieving this vision.

Flourish Australia is already recognised as a leader in peer work, and this Framework strengthens that position. With a vision for at least

Over the years, Flourish Australia has developed one of the largest peer workforces in the country, made up of people who proudly identify as having a lived experience of mental health challenges.

Peer Workers build connections with people through Lived Experience. They model hope and recovery in ways that inspire trust and possibility. But they don't work in isolation. Flourish Australia's unique impact comes from the way all staff work together, valuing each other's skills, perspectives, and contributions.

Now we're excited to launch our Peer Workforce Framework, a milestone that captures more than two decades of learning and leadership in peer work at Flourish Australia.

This Framework has been designed first and foremost for our identified Peer Workforce, but it's also for all the people involved in Flourish Australia. For all our workers It provides shared foundations that strengthen our collective practice

You can read the Lived Experience Framework on our website by clicking this QR Code.



and help us lead the way in psychosocial recovery supports.

In the Framework we set out the values and principles that underpin peer work and strengthen our recovery-oriented culture. We provide clarity and consistency for identified Peer Worker roles, while also supporting others to walk alongside and champion peer practice. Wellbeing, peer supervision, and professional development are embedded into it as shared priorities so that we all contribute to a safe, supportive workplace.

50% of service delivery staff to be Peer Workers, it also sets the stage for us to grow our workforce.

We aim to make Flourish Australia an employer of choice by continuing to improve professional development, training, and support for peer workers. This includes structured training when peer workers commence, dedicated professional peer supervision, and the creation of strong communities of practice.

ABOVE: Victoria and Deb at Queanbeyan. Photo by Neil Fenelon.



Peer Workforce Framework



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



flourish
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Where mental wellbeing thrives

NDIS