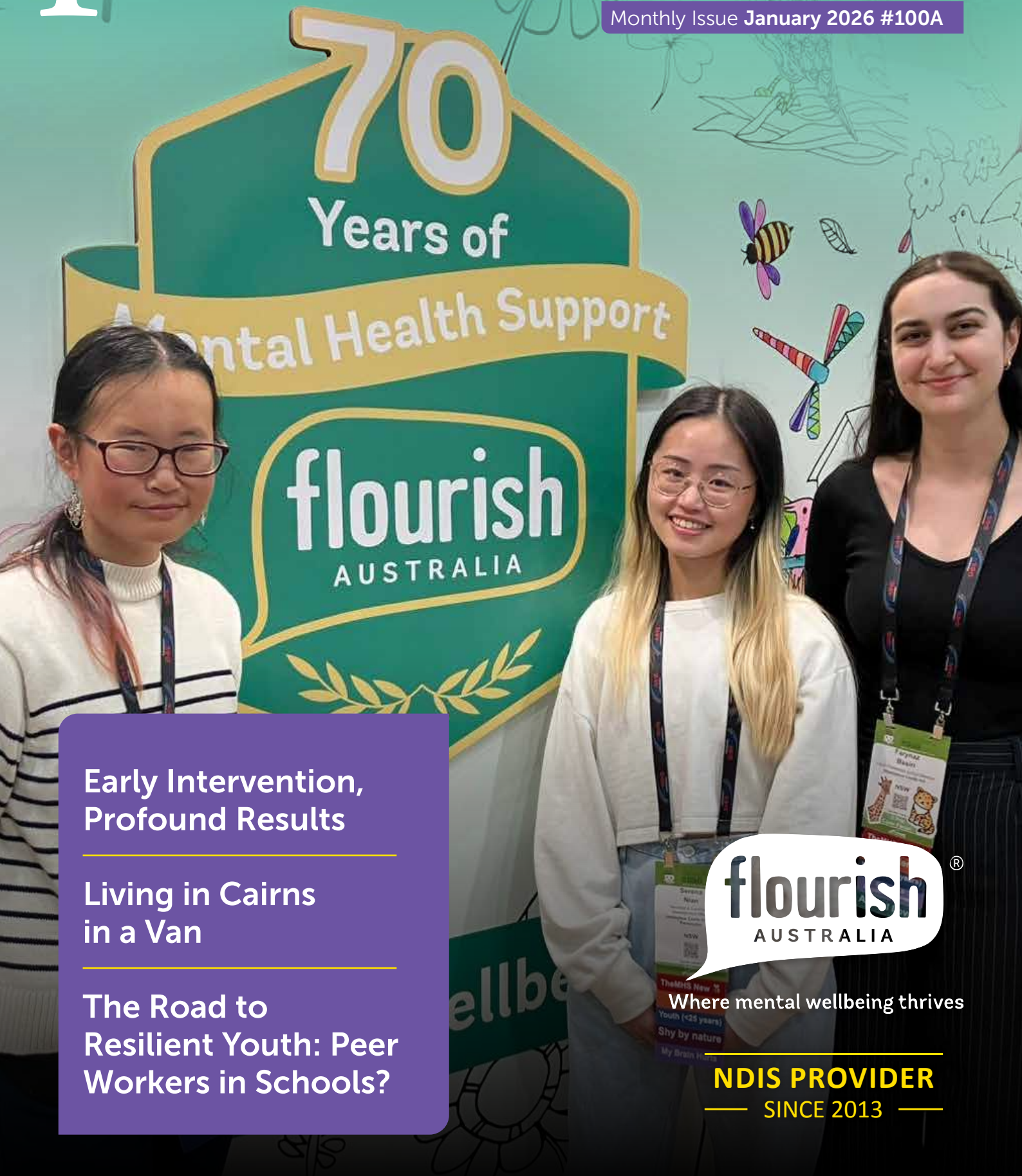


AWARD WINNING

panorama

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

Monthly Issue January 2026 #100A



**Early Intervention,
Profound Results**

**Living in Cairns
in a Van**

**The Road to
Resilient Youth: Peer
Workers in Schools?**

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AUSTRALIA

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Where mental wellbeing thrives

About us

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

Contact Flourish Australia!

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



Grant J Everett
Assistant
Publications
Officer



Warren Heggarty
Publications
Officer



Jasmin Moradides
Development
Projects
Manager

Peter Neilson

Chief Development Officer

Kylie Bolton & Kate Jones

Graphic Design

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Contributors include...

Alicia went from living in a van to permanent, stable housing... with support.

Andrew had amazing success with peer support, and that changed the course of his career.

Farynaz, Rebecca and Serena from headspace all spoke at TheMHS 2025.

Kailie covers the Koori Knockout 2025

Steph shows how peer support is helping her resume her dream of becoming a school teacher.

Angela shares how her daughter went from School Can't to School Can!

And thanks to Flourish Australia staff Jade Farrell, Jade Ryall, Kellie, Danielle, Jillian, Camilo, Georgina, Bek

Contributions are welcome!

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 January 2026

We cover the "Taking Steps On Your Wellbeing Journey" Art Exhibition held for the second year running at Buckingham House, Surry Hills (artist Jazmine, above).

We have some really inspiring recovery articles this month, including the journey that Alicia went through in being homelessness in a van in Cairns, and how she found stable housing (with a little help).

We have new Panorama Puzzle Pages, and if you need some hints, all the clues and hidden words can be found in other stories! We'll run the solutions in our next issue.

In Early Intervention, Profound Results, we share how Andrew went from experiencing a course change in his teens that has led to a career of giving back in the peer workforce and more!

In The Road To Resilient Youth, three members of headspace's Youth Reference Group explores the potential benefits of having peer workers in schools, supporting our kids.

In "It's a Knock Out!", proud Kamilaroi woman Kailie covers the 2025 NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knock Out.

Coming up in February Panorama...

We meet Alex, a radio announcer and DJ, who started on the streets and ended up as the Manager and Head Programmer for a dedicated radio station

We explore the profound effect of creative expression on recovery with four photographers and an artist

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



LIVING IN CAIRNS IN A VAN

Finding a home from square one

By Alicia

I was in my home for 6 and a 1/2 years, and the rent just kept getting kicked up higher and higher. I was finally told to pack when the owner was selling the house. The same thing happened to me 18 years ago, and now history was repeating, even though I did everything right.

As I'm on a Disability Support Pension, there was nothing I could afford. From the statistics I've seen, even a married couple working full-time can only afford something like 3% of the private rental market. For a single person on benefits, there's nothing.

I started calling and visiting every housing organisation, but nobody had anything for me. Some providers told me that I needed to become homeless to get their help, which was lousy, because I was trying to PREVENT becoming homeless!

A lot of the subsidised housing was for specific demographics I didn't fit into: teenagers, people with addictions, people just getting out of gaol. And I'd be waiting for the

Housing Department for years.

My final week in my home was terrible. I started to panic. I had anxious, racing thoughts from being go, go, go all day, and I'd forget to eat. The strain made me feel a bit suicidal. And despite doing everything I could, I had to go with my worst-case scenario plan: sell most of my possessions, and buy a van to live in.

People were worried the van would be difficult and unsafe to live in, and I was worried, too. It was most definitely not what I wanted to do. I thought I would be depressed and crying, but I put up butterfly stickers and encouraging quotes on the walls, and I actually quite liked it. I never cried once!

I did cop a bit of abuse from the public, yelling at me to leave. All I did was park my van in a parking spot, same as anyone else! People sleeping rough or in cars are often moved along, but where are we supposed to go?

I quickly found that it's very cold at night in Winter in a van, so I decided to drive north to Cairns, 5 days

away. Upon arriving, I contacted all the local services: Centrelink, Salvation Army, Anglicare, the neighbourhood centre, a free doctor's clinic specifically for homeless people, and many more. "I'm here now, please put me on your books!"

When Brittany from Flourish Australia service in Emerald started supporting me, mostly by phone due to distance, the focus was to help me to chase housing through every provider I qualified for, and to make sure I was traveling okay (homelessness does bad things to your mental health). We chased every avenue we could think of. But no matter what you do, finding subsidised housing is a slow and difficult process.

On the subject of support, I was blown away by the resources and help on offer for people who are homeless in Cairns, but you have to get in touch with services every single day to avoid falling through the cracks. You can't just sit and wait for things to happen. I'm always sure to be bright, bubbly and friendly, so they don't mind hearing from

me so often. Joining groups and activities was another way I made local connections, as I NEED to do worthwhile things with my time.

One thing I did was get involved with a theatre project about homelessness where people living on the streets would tell their stories. As I have a theatre background, I'm like, heck yeah, I'll do this! The project is due to launch in Canberra in 2026 where politicians will see it on their way to work, before touring the country and being adapted into a short film. So that's a really cool opportunity!

I've also been doing a mindfulness course to learn about why people act the way that they do.

A Step In The Right Direction

I got really, really sick during my time with the theatre project. A lady from the Salvation Army saw how ill I was, and she didn't think it was right that I was living in a van in poor health, so she took me to see a hostel run for the homeless. It would cost 25% of my income, I would have my own bathroom, bedroom, fridge and a kettle, and people worked the desk 24 hours a day. I went, "Oh, this isn't too bad. I can handle this!"

I was contacting the Salvos daily to see if a place had opened up, and after just a couple of days, they had some amazing news: there's a spot for me!

Putting Down Roots

After a while at the hostel I got a phone call from Access Housing, a community housing group, offering me a brand spanking new apartment on a quiet top floor with a view of treetops from the balcony. It turned out they were leasing the whole building, all 30 units. The rent was subsidised, and I arranged for it to be direct debited out of my pension.

Everything has fallen into place, and it's been miraculous because people are often homeless for years and years. I was very lucky that something came up so quickly.

Do All You Can!

I'm out and about making every day count. I earn money by buying and selling on Marketplace, so if I see something I can double my money

on, I'll grab it. I can do that all day and end up with enough money to eat and cover the basics.

I've been advocating for the homeless with many organisations and the City Council. We're given shampoo and toothbrushes and toothpaste, but no shower to use it. We need hot water to make drinks, and cold water after sitting in their car in 35° heat. We need shelter from the sun and the rain, and safe places to hang out. My whole adulthood's just been about survival, so now I'm trying to do some good for people.

We all need to keep occupied, no matter your situation. Find what you're good at, know where your strengths lie, and make things happen. Use your imagination, and don't wait for others to solve your problems for you. Engage with the community, do your bit.

I did an art therapy lesson using pastels, and I was surprised how easy it was to make something nice. Why not go down to the waterfront and draw pictures to sell to the

tourists? People are always after souvenirs, and \$10 is nothing to ask. If you can play guitar, go busking! If you know how to make fudge, then make and sell fudge. If you've got a Ute or a trailer, why not start delivering the stuff people buy on Marketplace for \$50? \$50 an hour is good money!

And share your stories! They're more valuable than you think.

LEFT: Thankfully, Alicia only lived in a van temporarily. **BELOW:** Brittany (Left), Alicia's Mental Health worker from Flourish Australia Emerald with colleague Kate. They were attending a Community Colour Run in Emerald. Photo by Catherine.

Flourish Australia Emerald

Kairi Kairi Country

Suite 1/10 Ruby Street
Emerald QLD 4720

1300 779 270 (option1)



EARLY INTERVENTION, PROFOUND RESULTS

Giving Back to the Community With Peer Work

By Andrew Turtle



Andrew at Machu Picchu

I got involved with a Flourish Australia at the age of 19 when I was in my first year of uni. I was struggling a bit, and I was hospitalised twice. After getting out the second time, I checked out a young person's program at Emu Plains run by Flourish Australia. This service provided housing and peer support for people under 26. I didn't initially WANT to go, but my parents urged me to give it a try. And I'm so glad I did, as it changed my life.

The Peer Difference

During my time with the youth service, I was able to resume the first year of my studies. The peer workers there provided me with the support and opportunity to accomplish that, and I don't think I would have achieved that without the program's help.

In addition to providing a place to live, there was a key focus on supporting the residents to learn how to live independently. Thankfully, I'd already developed most of these life skills, like cooking and cleaning and budgeting, while I was growing up. We also went for park walks as a group, and the support workers took us grocery shopping once a week.

This youth mental health program had such a positive impact on my recovery journey that I wanted to become a peer worker to use my lived experience to support others along their journey.

Moving Beyond

I moved from this youth service to on-campus at the University, and went on to finish my Bachelor's in Traditional Chinese Medicine, a degree in International Public Health, and a Diploma in Community Care Services. I have since become

involved in multiple consumer representative roles on local, state-wide and global committees.

I got quite involved in the lived experience movement starting in 2015. I've had a number of jobs, including volunteer work with the Local Health District (LHD) and the Department of Health Network, Peer Work for 18 months, and as a Local Area Coordinator for 3 ½ years in partnership with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). I also volunteered at St John of God. Their CEO offered me a job that I had to unfortunately decline, as I'd already accepted a full-time offer to work for Uniting as a Local Area Coordinator.

I was also on three different Peer Work Committees, and I'm a representative on international committees such as the Global Mental Health Peer Network. The combination of recovering at that

Flourish Australia youth service, having a lived experience of mental health issues, and my studies has equipped me to support others in the ways I once needed support.

This career path has been life-changing, and I'd encourage everyone to get involved in the peer movement in one way or another.

I'm currently Chairing a Committee of the Lived Experience Movement, as well as serving as the Australian representative on the Global Mental Health Peer Network (GMHPN). That was a game-changer when it first started, and I got really close with the Founder, Charlene Sunkel, who's become a good friend of mine. I am a life member with GMHPN.

There have been many highlights in my career. One of them was my time with the Primary Health Network, where I designed their Mental Health Navigation Tool (NavTool) in 2017. This was a website that mapped mental health services and other related services in my region. This tool is advertised on the website of the Public Health Network and Western Sydney LHD. As a result of that job, I joined the Partners In Recovery Program, where I worked for about a year. I helped to design a non-NDIS service at OneDoor, and with that I was provided with a lot of funding and given free rein to create the best service I could.

I'm currently studying a Diploma in Library Services, though I am also interested in a Diploma in Counselling as my next adventure. I have a dream of finding a way to combine Chinese Medicine with Counselling.

I would like to continue giving back however I can.

An Ongoing Process

At the moment I'm actually looking for support with a couple of things, but as I don't have NDIS funding I've been advocating for the creation of more services in Richmond so that other people without NDIS support don't fall through the gaps.

"My advice to any young people who are struggling is to not be afraid to accept support. Don't do it all on your own."

I have plenty of support from many people. I see a mental health nurse every fortnight, which is my key source of clinical support, and I see a psychiatrist every six weeks. I'm close with my family, and I'm living with my brother at present. There's also a girl who I used to date, and even though we've separated, she's still my best friend. We do everything together. I'd say she's my biggest supporter.

My advice to any young people who are struggling is to not be afraid to accept support. Don't do it all on your own. I wasn't keen on being in a youth program at the start, but I'm glad I did it. We all need to be directly involved in our own recovery. Don't isolate yourself. Find yourself a peer worker for support.

Books by Andrew Turtle

I've written several books about mental health recovery, the peer work movement, and my experience with them. They offer candid accounts of navigating the mental health system and emerging into purpose and leadership.

My latest book, *Lived Experience Power*, has just been published, and it explores the emerging global recognition of lived experience as a powerful force in shaping mental health policy, service design, and cultural change on a global level, from the rise of consumer-led change and peer-led alternatives to traditional psychiatry, to anti-stigma campaigns and beyond. It is a call to action to unify and advance the international lived experience movement.

I also wrote *The Consumer Journey*, and *A Turtle's Journey*, my autobiography. All of my published works are available on Amazon as ebooks.

LEFT: Andrew at Machu Pichu.

BELOW: Andrew today.
Photos from Andrew.



THE ROAD TO RESILIENT YOUTH

Is it paved with peer workers in schools?

By Farynaz, Rebecca and Serena



What can we do about the increase in youth mental health issues? Maybe the answer will be found among the young people themselves. Farynaz and Rebecca from headspace's Castle Hill Youth Reference Group, along with staff member Serena, presented their proposal to the TheMHS Conference in Brisbane last September (Here is a shortened version for Panorama readers - Editor).

In life, we all face challenges. But if you're a young person between the ages of 12 and 18, those challenges feel extra intense. During this time, many physical, emotional and social changes happen: puberty, body image, sexual and gender identity, relationships and work. On top of that may be bullying, peer pressure, and exposure to drugs and alcohol. It's overwhelming. Given the considerable amount of time young people spend at school, it is important to consider who is there supporting us.

Teachers play a critical role, but their primary focus is education. They aren't trained in providing specialised mental health support. The school counsellor is often perceived as authority figure. The perceived power imbalance here and rules that discourage personal disclosure become barriers.

What we need is connection through shared experience, to be heard. We want to talk to someone who truly understands us. This is where peer workers come in. Peer workers are trained to draw upon their personal lived experience to support others and provide hope for recovery.

With professional intention, peer workers level the power dynamics. The relationship is built on mutuality and reciprocity. Peer workers are living proof that it's okay to not be okay, and that recovery is possible. We can face challenges and still thrive. This is the unique strength of peer work.

Looking into the future, say to 2050, we would like to see access to peer workers as standard in every high school: visible, approachable and readily accessible to students. Students could talk to peer workers safely in familiar spaces like an empty classroom or the school oval. When peer workers aren't engaged in one-on-one conversations, they'd be present and visible in the school, fostering a culture of openness and connection. Their everyday presence will normalise mental health conversations and position help-seeking as a strength rather than something to be ashamed of. Thus it reduces stigma. Many young people describe peer workers as "more human, and less clinical."

With open conversation about mental health issues normalised, Peer

work can also be about prevention, about building up resilience, hope, coping skills and wellbeing.

Students would not have to choose between seeing a clinician or a peer worker: they could see both. With experiences of anxiety, depression and stress common among young people, and early intervention being a key priority in youth mental health, now is the time to act. We already have peer work in youth mental health services. It is time to bring it into our schools.

When we feel safe and supported, our learning improves, as well as our long-term wellbeing and happiness. If we start employing peer workers now, by 2050, every young person will feel seen, heard, valued and supported.

The benefits will impact entire school communities and, by extension, society.

ABOVE: Rebecca, Serena, Farynaz. Photo By Peter Farrugia

**Flourish Australia
headspace**

Darug and Bidjigal Country

253 Old Northern Road
CASTLE HILL NSW 2154

1300 779 270 (option1)

LIVING BEYOND PRECEDENT

Let's Do Lunch with Mary O'Hagan

By Grant J Everett



Flourish Australia invited one of the world's most influential mental health leaders, Mary O'Hagan, to present a speech for Mental Health Month 2025. Mary shared the practical lessons and milestones of her journey, spoke on the bright future of lived experience leadership, and celebrated how we can each take steps towards recovery and wellbeing. Her story was one of courage, advocacy, and hope.

Born in and raised in New Zealand, Mary went through depression as a teenager, and in her first year at University she experienced psychosis. During her time in a mental health unit, Mary experienced "peer support" before the term even existed.

"My first experience of peer support was how the women I lived with in the hospital dormitory would care for each other."

In and out of hospital for 8 years, Mary felt she'd gone from a promising young citizen to a patient, and described it as a "stripping" experience where they first took her clothes and possessions, and then over months and years they removed her dreams and credibility.

"I was very lucky to have a family who believed in me when nobody else would," Mary said. "Finding people who believe in us is essential to help us soldier on."

Mary found one of the most terrible things about living with a mental health issue was the stigma that changed how people saw her for the worst. She was informed her condition was chronic, recovery was impossible, she'd be on meds for the rest of her life, and she shouldn't have children due to her genes.

"And I loved proving them wrong on all counts!" Mary said. "I would love to show those horrible people from back there what REALLY happened."

Mary started her journey in peer work 40 years ago, transitioning from service user to advocate, and she hasn't stopped making a difference since. Mary's pioneering, global work has included advising many businesses, governments and organisations, including the United Nations and the World Health Organisation.

"We were independent of the system. We were pioneers, and we enjoyed forging a new path. We also formed identities beyond the ones the mental health system had forced on us. I've always been open about my lived experience from day one."

Mary said that some of the biggest advances are happening with the growth of modern community services, particularly the NDIS. Though she noted that we still needed to provide more peer led services and practical support for people to move on with their lives.

"I'm optimistic, as there's been substantial change. Where we started, I couldn't even IMAGINE we'd have the influence and impact we have now. But I feel there's more development needed. The

employment rate of people who access services is still low, early death is a continuing issue, as is social isolation, having kids taken away, poverty, and homelessness."

Moving Away from Precedent

"I've always thought it would have been better if mental health issues were treated in the social services system, as hospital can traumatised people. They may actually be worse off than ever due to 'risk management,' where the staff focus on avoiding incidents rather than providing care. This includes things like locked wards, enforced medication, and physical and chemical restraint, and it's corrosive to recovery. Why can't we develop more humane alternatives to a locked ward? It's an enduring mystery to me."

"Also, I would love for everyone who is struggling to be able to see a peer worker BEFORE they see a doctor. I'm amazed that this is still being done the other way around."

"Clinical treatment and peer work need to collaborate in a more holistic approach. Unfortunately, the clinical system is obsessed with getting rid of symptoms, but recovery is far more complex. I'm more focused on maintaining my relationships, doing productive things with my time, and feeling happy and content."

"After decades of advocacy, the main obstacle to the peer movement is PRECEDENT. The people in the engine room of the mental health system are basing their decisions on the two century-long legacy of a clinically dominated system, so changing this will require major systemic change. We also need to raise awareness so the general public knows more about the realities of mental health, as many people still have preconceived views on that."

"I try to maintain hope, even when it's tough. For instance, I do believe that stigma, particularly for those with depression, has gotten so much better."

Mary wrote the book "Madness Made Me," an honest account of her mental health issues and her challenges navigating the system.

ABOVE: Mary, delivering her speech. Screenshot from Teams by Grant J Everett

IT'S A KNOCK OUT!

2025 NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knock Out

By Kailie,
proud Kamilaroi woman



The Koori Knockout: a weekend full of footy, family, connections and community. An event that brings together mobs from all over New South Wales, sharing laughs, stories and being loud and being proud.

Importance

For 53 years the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of New South Wales have gotten together to connect over the beloved game of rugby league. It's a weekend of laughs, tears, blood and sweat. Many people play for more than themselves, they're playing for their family, for the ones that stand on the sidelines and the for ones that have joined the Dreamtime. They play in representation of their community and mob and they work hard in every game, to show the young ones that with determination and hard work, they can get anything done when they set their minds to it.

53 years ago in 1971 there were seven teams playing in the Knockout, but in 2025 there was a whopping 170 teams amongst the Women's League, Men's League and the Junior League. The increase in numbers not only of teams but attendees represents how despite being from different mobs, the collective connection to culture

and identity brings us together to share generational stories, connect with family, and enjoy our time watching rugby.

Winners

After four long, hot days, it was a complete demolition for the Newcastle Yowies, having both the Men's and the Women's teams take home the victory of the 2025 Koori Knockout.

Emotions flew high during the last day of the Knockout. Through blood, sweat and tears, sheer determination, motivation and hard work, the Newcastle Yowie's Men's and Women's teams fought gallantly for their wins!

Markets

The markets this year were brilliant. You had the opportunity to purchase things such as clothing, accessories or artwork from big sellers that are very well known. For example, Ngurrbul Collection and the Koori Knockout merchandise store itself.

You could also interact with local and small Aboriginal businesses such as Abra and Co and Hailahs Yuluwirri Creations. The markets also included large corporations such as Tamworth Aboriginal Medical Services, Commonwealth Bank, NSW Transport, NSW

Ombudsman, and more. They were there to help individuals with any questions that they had, or information that they wanted.

ABOVE: Shaking hands: Queanbeyan Kanberri Connections VS Qurindi Connections. Photo courtesy of Kailie.

Mother & Daughter

Mecca, Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Newcastle service in Awabakal Country, was one of many who headed off to Tamworth on Kamilaroi Country for the 2025 Aboriginal Affairs NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout!

"My daughter, Lusiana played in the 17s for Central Coast Darkinjung Waters team," Mecca told Panorama, "So we went for the whole four days."

Lusiana, 15, has been playing for the past four years for the Butcher Birds, who are based in Charlestown near Newcastle and have won the Grand Final there. There is a corresponding boys' team called, you guessed it, the Butcher Boys!

Preventing Suicide in The Alice

“Overall, the rate of suicide among First Nations people has been trending upwards,” says the Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing. Battling this involves “understanding the complexity and interrelationship between protective and risk factors... in designing culturally appropriate... prevention programs.” (AIHW, 2025)

About 100 people a week visited Alice Springs hospital in suicidal distress or crisis. This is with a population of just over 40,000 (Ellis, Lange, & Brash, 2025). People who live in very remote places, particularly Aboriginal people, tend to have a higher rate of suicide and self-harm.

Recently in Alice Springs, World Suicide Prevention Day was commemorated with a walk along the banks of the Todd River. A new mental health care clinic at Alice Springs Hospital has been announced along with funding for research into suicide prevention and postvention among Aboriginal people.

Lead researcher Dr Judith Lovell told the ABC, “In our region... suicide is running...about five times higher than in other parts” of the country, and sometimes higher. Her research will look at integrating “traditional healing to inform suicide postvention practices.” WH

If you need someone to talk to, call Lifeline on 13 11 14

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AIHW. (2025, September 23). <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/population-groups/first-nations-people>

Ellis, V., Lange, E., & Brash, S. (2025, September 10). Alice Springs suicide prevention walk bolstered by funding announcements. Retrieved from ABC ALICE SPRINGS

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL COLUMN

By Tricia and Jen of the Council

The Council's November 2025 meeting that normally would have appeared in this space was rescheduled to late in the month to be closer to the Flourish Australia Annual General Meeting. **We will bring you news of those meetings in the February issue.** In the meantime, though, think about submitting an EOI to join the Council. See the ad below.

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST: 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:

1 Feb 2026 - 28 Feb 2026 | 1 Jun 2026 - 30 Jun 2026
1 Oct 2026 - 31 Oct 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.

INTERGENERATIONAL GREEN & GOLD

Not a lot of people can say they have represented Australia with their Mum. Milli Gentle will be able to do just that at the World Triathlon championships.

Recently Milli surprised her Mum, Flourish Australia peer worker Kerrie Gentle, who has featured in Panorama previously. Milli had taken a break from competing for a few years and had only recently returned to it. Now she is completing in her first World Championships. Kerrie, as regular readers will know, is no stranger to World Championships, but this will be special.

It all started because Kerrie began doing the three disciplines of running, cycling and swimming simply for fitness. Milli used to join her Mum for training sessions and now they were wearing green and gold together from 15-19 October 2025. The World

Triathlon Championships take place in Wollongong this year.

Kerrie, from Tumut, appeared in Panorama's Summer 2024-5 issue "Setting An Example: Encouraging Physical Activity," in which she talked about her role as a peer worker. The example certainly has rubbed off on her daughter Milli!

Kerrie and Milli were featured in a story on AusTriathlon's website "Road To Wollongong" on the 17th of September 2025. <https://triathlon.org.au/news/road-to-wollongong-i-Kerrie-milli-gentle>

WH. Pic courtesy of KG



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 November 2025 monthly online issue. Enjoy!

Panorama Find-A-Word

T Z A T Z U D W X P A J O W R D N I K K
J T H O M E L E S S J J R A T L Z Q K E
W E F M F M H K O Y V Z O B L G I W G P
E M R L Y D X C L R A X H O X B D D M K
N M D V N Z J N R S X Y I R P W X G R R
N V W C T X Y E P O R J D I J C W D V K
B P V H L G V T K Q A L P G Y P H Y K I
U F U A M G E V R Q N B S I O C G S N L
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HOMELESS
SUBSIDISED
HOUSING
BUCKINGHAM
CREATIVE
EXPRESSION
KNOCKOUT
ABORIGINAL
RUGBY
LEAGUE
GENERATIONAL
CHAMPIONSHIP
TRIATHLON
TRAINING

Panorama Crossword

Across

1. By spreading awareness of mental health, we N_ these experiences
3. When multiple generations do the same thing, it's I_
5. Z_ is a fitness program that involves cardio and Latin-inspired dance
6. Our support N_ includes our friends, family, and other people who support our wellbeing
8. An affordable type of accommodation is S_ housing
9. Many people are H_ when experiencing a mental health issue
10. Mental health recovery is an O_ process

Down

2. S_ is when people mistreat you due to your health issues
4. Early I_ with mental health issues can have huge results
7. Peer workers use their lived E_ to support other people

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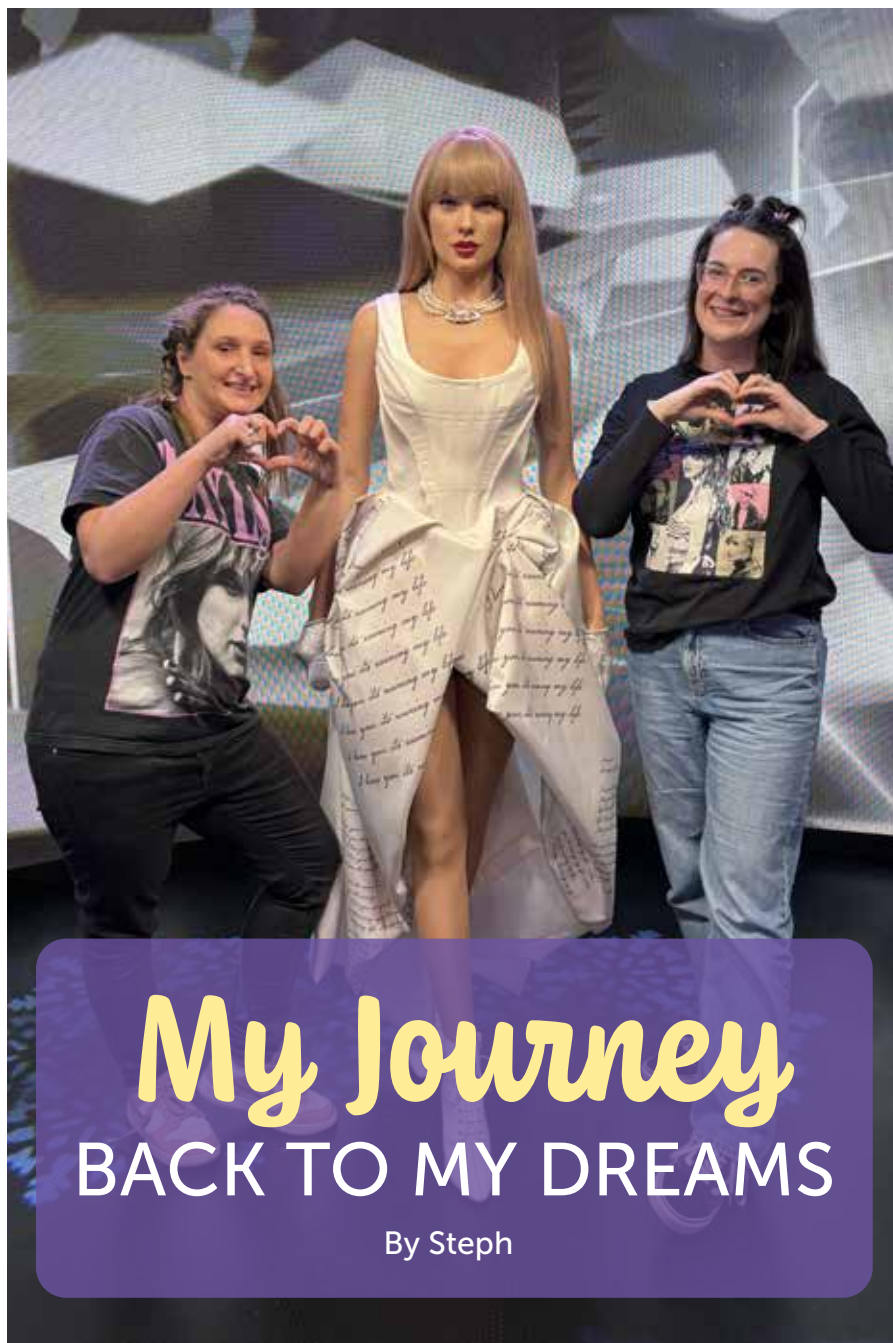
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Panorama Word Scramble

1. How you feel overall:
NBLGLEEIW.....
2. How well you recover from setbacks:
LTEERNSII.....
3. The opposite of a weakness:
TGHRNSET.....
4. What you aim to do:
INIETONTN
5. Possessing great potential impact:
FLAINTIUENL.....
6. How trusted your word is:
TEIIDCRYBIL
7. Leading the way, doing something new:
IENNRGPOEI
8. Speaking on another's behalf:
ACAYODVC.....

**Answers
in Panorama
February
2026!**



My Journey BACK TO MY DREAMS

By Steph

Steph has dreams of becoming a teacher, moving to Qld and starting a family. Flourish Australia and her other supporters are helping her along the way - Editor

Have you ever had a big night out, or had a really bad cold, where everything is a foggy jumble and you feel exhausted? That's honestly how I would describe living with mental health issues. The difference is it's long term and persistent, and a Panadol or a few days of rest isn't going to fix it.

For me, that's my everyday life, something I've been battling for over ten years. I've had multiple hospital

admissions, done group therapy, had weekly therapy sessions, and been on various medications. And while these treatments are all valuable in their own way, something felt like it was lacking.

During my last hospital admission, I spoke to a social worker who referred me to Flourish Australia. I now have regular support sessions with their mental health workers, particularly Georgia the Mental Health Worker from their Liverpool pool service, who I see through Outreach. I look forward to these sessions, as I feel it allows me to have a break from the clinical world that often dominates mental health treatment.

During these sessions I have agency,

Georgia is there to support me, and I have the opportunity to tackle the goals that I've developed during time in treatment.

This has allowed me to connect to the world around me, and I've realised that there are so many opportunities in life to have fun and try new things while knowing that someone is there with you, slicing that anxiety in half.

Sometimes support looks like being reminded to eat and take a shower. Other times it involves going out and having fun. For me, one of the things that helps my mental health is music. Music helps me to escape the constant noise that is going on in my head: it's a circuit breaker sometimes, and it allows me to reset. My favourite singer is Taylor Swift (yes, I'm a Swiftie, and I'm proud of it, don't be a hater!).

One adventure that I had with Georgia, my Flourish Australia support worker, was a trip to Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum, where we went to see the new statue of Taylor Swift, inspired by her album "Tortured Poet's Department." For me, going out to a crowded place gives me anxiety, but knowing that I had a safe person with me allowed me that joy.

Small things like that allow me space from all the intensive clinical treatment and allows me to experiment joy while also facing my anxiety of being in crowded spaces. Having the support from Flourish Australia gives me more autonomy and the confidence to experience the simple pleasures in life.

I have a whole network of people who support me, including my support coordinator Bec, my psychologist Ange, my dietician Liz, my Flourish Australia support worker Georgia, and my GP. I'm supported by my parents and my best friend Matilda. I also regularly go to Ashfield Leisure Centre and do Zumba and Aqua classes, and I've made a whole network of friends from there. We regularly for dinners and trivia sessions. And I can't forget my Spoodle, Joey!

I'm currently working in before-school and after-school care, and I'm completing a Swim Instructor Traineeship with Canterbury Bankstown Council. My whole team,

including Georgia from Flourish Australia, are supporting me to continue my goal of becoming a qualified Primary School Teacher. I'm planning on returning to complete my Bachelor's Degree in Education when the time is right.

My biggest goal is to reach the point where I feel ready to move interstate to Queensland. I want to build up my independence, my tolerance for distress, my confidence and my

communication skills, as well as saving the money I need in order to achieve this goal. I'd also love to start a family of my own in the long term.

Flourish Australia and my team are so supportive of my recovery journey, and I have faith that with their support, I'll achieve my goals.

ABOVE: Steph and her Mental Health Worker, Georgia, at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. And technically, Taylor Swift is there, too! Photo by Georgia.

Flourish Australia Liverpool

Dharug Country

19 Flowerdale Road
LIVERPOOL NSW 2170

1300 779 270 (option1)



Neighbours Becoming Good Friends?

By Sasha Elisha, Team Coordinator

Flourish Australia's Sydney Accommodation Work Group operates across several locations, including the Camperdown units we use as transitional housing for participants leaving hospital with the aim to move them into stable, permanent housing. This program is run in partnership with the Sydney Local Health District.

We also have the Supported Independent Living Sites, a program funded under the NDIS to provide supports in relation to Daily Living. This includes cooking, medication

support, laundry assistance, appointments, and so on.

The people who access housing support at our Flourish Australia sites will sometimes get together to organise and enjoy things like the Cherry Blossom Festival, going to the Cinema, and trips to the Easter show.

On the 10th of October, Mental Health Day, the residents and the staff celebrated Mental Health Day at Bicentennial Park in the way that the people who access services arranged: some outdoor activities, a BBQ, and taking photographs of the beautiful surroundings.

It's great that this community has become a group of friends!

ABOVE: Residents who access housing services through Flourish Australia's Sydney Accommodation's Team. Photo by Sasha.

**Want to know
more about
Flourish Australia's
Accommodation
services?**

1300 779 270 (option1)



Many of our readers know that mental health issues have a serious negative affect on our education and school attendance. In turn, this can affect our whole life. Angela describes how, with proper support, her daughter Riley was able to return to the classroom and not get left behind.

- Editor

SCHOOL: FROM CAN'T TO CAN

SUPPORTING A CHILD TO RETURN TO SCHOOL

By Angela

By the time my daughter Riley reached Grade 10 she was attending school only 40 per cent of the time. She had seriously fallen behind. This year, she is in Year 11 and has been attending school every day. What deep-seated factors had caused her to fall behind, and what kind of support was needed to achieve this positive result?

My daughter's journey began in Grade 5 when she lost her best friend and became the target of bullying from another child in her class. Another challenge came when her elderly grandparents, who she adored, passed away. This combination of emotional loss and harassment led to Riley being diagnosed with severe anxiety and ADHD.

We as parents really struggled in the beginning. This was one of the most difficult times of my life, but I threw myself in completely, which I will never regret. I even quit my job to

be with her full time.

We approached our GP for help and thankfully he was passionate about early intervention and getting the right support. As any parent with a child struggling in this way knows, you can't sit back and wait for things to improve on their own. Without proper support, mental health issues can quickly escalate and take a toll on a child's grades, social connections and overall wellbeing. I can't tell you how many birthdays and social engagements Riley missed during this time. She was so depressed we were scared she would rot in her bed. What had happened to our beautiful, witty girl?

Holistic Approach

For many children in Riley's situation, overwhelming stress leads to physical symptoms, including weight loss. She was treated in hospital in an attempt to help her regain weight and strength. Once sufficiently recovered, she enrolled at a school for kids struggling with mental health challenges.

Thankfully, this was a game-changer. The school took a holistic approach, with an amazing team of staff who worked with the aim of supporting her to reintegrate into mainstream schooling.

A major component to Riley's program was rebuilding her confidence, and one unexpected benefit was that Riley began to explore music, something that she had always been anxious to engage in. All the children at the school were encouraged to learn an instrument as a healing way to express their emotions.

Riley joined the school band as its lead singer and performed three songs in front of 50 people at her graduation. We witnessed Riley's confidence soar, and the support and personalised care at the school was outstanding, giving her tools to rebuild herself emotionally and academically. We as a family learned so much during this time.

Since graduating from the specialist school, Riley entered Year 11 as a mainstream student and has been

attending every day. The teachers organised a "buddy" who welcomed her into their friendship group. I think having friends has gone a long way with helping Riley with her attendance. All her teachers have her back, and medication also helps her focus. Her grades have improved significantly across the board, reflecting the fact that she is a bright and capable child. She is happy, thriving in school and doing well in all aspects of her life.

Carers and Stigma

It is vital for carers to look after themselves. The expectations and guilt placed on parents of children with school related struggles can be immense. The children too can be wracked unfairly with guilt. I think the stigma is reflected in the older terms that were once used: "school avoidance" or "school refusal." They suggest that the child is simply choosing to avoid school. Our experience tells us that they want to go to school, but are overwhelmed by mental, emotional and environmental factors. We need to acknowledge and address these factors like trauma, bullying and severe anxiety so that these children are not left behind.

ABOVE: They want to go to school, but they are overwhelmed.

OPPOSITE: The Old Macquarie Hospital. Photos by Warren Heggarty.

Supporters for Carers

Some groups that I wish I had been aware of sooner are Carers Qld and Carer Gateway which offer counselling support and respite for carers. I also joined the 'School Can't Australia' Facebook page and found so much peer support. School Can't Australia was established in 2014 'in response to the lack of dedicated support services for families whose children and young people are experiencing school attendance difficulties.' It is run by volunteers who are themselves parents and carers.



Scan QR Code
for School
Can't Australia
website

Recovery is More Than Beds

What news may miss in Mental Health reports

By Grant J Everett

There is so much more to recovering and staying well than psychiatrists, medication and hospital beds. Disappointingly, the media is sometimes not helpful in painting the full picture of the sector.

In mid 2025 the ABC's Four Corners Program ran a report called "The Long Wait for Help," which was critical of a lack of resources and funding and for patients in the NSW public mental health system. It was hard to listen to the personal stories of people who have not felt supported in their times of need.

Doctors interviewed on the program shared about the constant pressure they are under to discharge people as early as possible so that others can take their beds. This, the doctors said, can lead to a vicious cycle of people going in and out of hospital without having the time to recover properly. Once discharged, according to the program, an estimated 60,000 people in NSW per year report that they aren't getting the follow up care they need.

The program said that the mass resignation of over 200 public health system psychiatrists over a pay rise dispute running at the time

had not helped the situation.

4 Corners, however, focused entirely on the clinical, medical side of mental health in NSW. But there is an entire other side that is often overlooked: the peer work movement. This includes the many positive outcomes we see daily at Flourish Australia.

It's a shame there wasn't any mention of the peer work movement, as it has moved forward in leaps and bounds over the past quarter century, and has really changed and enhanced the way people with a lived experience recover.

There also wasn't anything about community mental health programs, housing programs and employment services. Here, people can access one-on-one supports, often from a peer worker, that are central to anyone's recovery journey. These services help to keep people out of the hospital and remain thriving in the community.

Flourish Australia is one of a number of mental health sector leaders that continues to advocate for reforms for a greater role for peer workers. We help people navigate through their recovery and provide psychosocial support from a human rights foundation.





"Taking Steps On Your Wellbeing Journey"

Flourish Australia Art Exhibit

By Grant J Everett

The 2025 Buckingham House Art Exhibition displayed fifty original artworks, with submissions being open to anyone who receives support from a Flourish Australia program. Artists from across Sydney, Wollongong and Queensland took part. The theme this year was "Taking Steps on Your Wellbeing Journey."

This exhibition celebrates the immense power that a creative outlet can have on people who are on a mental health recovery journey, and appreciating the creative works that result from this very personal process is a great way to support the artists and their wellness.

There was an open invitation for the public to come and experience recovery through the lens of creativity, drawing many art lovers. Of the 17 pieces that were for sale, 13 were sold, and the artists received the proceeds.

The formalities were MC'd by CEO Mark Orr AM, who introduced 2 guest speakers: Councillor Zann Maxwell from the City of Sydney Council, and Flourish Australia Board Chair Professor Elizabeth More AM.

This exhibition was also an opportunity to promote what Flourish Australia has to offer across

multiple Australian states, and to foster a sense of community among the people who access these services.

This event was only possible thanks to the hard work of many Flourish Australia staff including Mitchell Sykes, Sarah Webster, Laurence Ganon, Jade Farrell, Brooke Jerrett, Nicola Bucci, Peter Neilson, Doris Chen and Rachel Tee. Thanks!

Kieron, Buck House

"I was asked to do a speech in recognition of people with mental health issues on the night, and I wanted to show Peter Meyer's painting as a part of that (see Kieron leaning on the painting, above). Peter and I were the best of friends, he was like the older brother I never had, and he played a significant part in shaping the man I am today. Sadly, we lost Peter to suicide on the 1st of January, 2003. I'm keen to honour Peter and others who have fallen, and to encourage everyone who is suffering to reach out to somebody before it's too late."

Jazmin, Connect & Thrive

"My acrylic Uncover Your Power was created at the Connect & Thrive Friday art group over a year. It was inspired by the cover of The Invention of Hugo Cabret by Brian Selznick, a graphic novel set in 1930's Paris about a boy who discovers an automaton that can draw, and is also one of the few connections Hugo has left with his Father. It's a coming-of-age story which was adapted into the movie Hugo. I found the book in a Balmain Op-Shop in pristine condition.

"I practise art to maintain a stable routine and as a wellness tool. I have a passion for fine arts, crafts, needlework and knitting. This art project helped me to regulate my emotions during a very stressful time."

This is the second year that the Buckingham House Art Exhibition has run after being reinstated in 2024. Before that, it had been on a long pause due to COVID lockdowns and other restrictions. See you at the next one!



Want to check out the Buck House Art Expo 2025 catalogue? Scan this QR code!

WORKS FEATURED:

1. "The Fire" Donna Black.
2. "A Thousand Words" by Josip Bazdaric
3. "Uncover Your Power" by Jazmine Doyle.
4. "Not For The Faint Hearted" by Anonymous. All photos by Philip Lederman.

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4



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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

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Find out if you can
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Think about your current
needs, goals, and supports



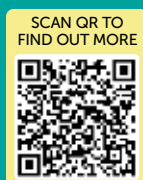
Meet with your NDIS
planner and get a plan



Decide which service providers
you want support from



Put your plan into action



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Where mental wellbeing thrives

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