

AWARD WINNING

panorama

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

Monthly Issue February 2026 #100B



**The Rise of
DJ EZPeel**

Recovery is REAL

**After the Storm:
Living Well
Photography
Competition**

flourish
AUSTRALIA

Where mental wellbeing thrives

NDIS PROVIDER
— SINCE 2013 —

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

Contents

COVER: Alex, mixing music like nobody's business. Photo from Alex.

- 4 After the Storm. Living well photography competition.
- 5 Vale Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO
- 5 Council Column
- 6 The Rise of DJ EZPeel
- 8 Recovery is Real, Too!
- 10 An Art and Adventure Connection
- 12 Flourish Australia: Services Walking for Good Causes
- 13 Recovery Games Solutions
- 14 Join Our Family, Carer & Kin Advisory Committee!
- 15 Any opportunity to have a laugh: Halloween at Moree
- 16 Connect for Life: Lived Experience Wisdom
- 18 Bringing Services Together
- 19 Online is for Everyone

Contributors include...

Alex (or DJ EZPeel) has gone from a DJing to the world stage of radio

Helen shares how her most recent art exhibition went

Emily Peterson is an Administration Support Officer at our Penrith service

Michelle came third place in the Living Well Photography Competition

Andrew and Swen at Taree are both living their best life

James accesses Flourish Australia's Seven Hills service, and turned his life around in the best way

Yati, Manuel and Raymond were a part of the Connect for Life Photography Exhibition

Tricia and Jen are members of Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council

And thanks to Flourish Australia staff Tanya, Sarah, Rynnette, Luisa, Emily, and Tam

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 February 2026

As we were about to publish we heard news of the passing of Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO, former Governor of NSW and Patron of Flourish Australia (then known as RichmondPRA). We will include a full story in our March issue.

This month we have "The Rise of DJ EZPeel" we share the inspiring story of a Penrith DJ who started from the streets and became a radio star.

We have articles about two different photography shows that had mental health as their theme: Michelle placed 3rd in The Living Well Photography Competition, and Yati, Manuel and Raymond took part in the Connect For Life Photographic Exhibition. Michelle can be seen to the left, receiving her award from Steve Wood, General Manager of Mental Health Services in SLHD.

In "Flourish Australia: Services Walking For Good Causes" we have a story about two services separated by huge geographic distances, Salisbury and Broken Hill, raising money for charity by riding Shank's pony.

Coming up in March Panorama...

We remember Flourish Australia's former Vice-Regal Patron Dame Marie Bashir.

We have heard that a certain generation of youngsters have been expressing the view that interests and hobbies are "cringe." We know you don't really mean it. We are sure you will join us from March Panorama onwards for 'getting over the hump.' That is, over that speed bump in the highway of life that seems to be preventing you from engaging in Leisure for Pleasure. Especially Sports, hobbies and other interests. You know you want to. And we're going to show you how Plus: "When I Welcomed GYM Into My Life"

-Editor

**Don't worry if
you're not a writer -
that's where
we jump in!**

Spread
hope.
inspire others.

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

At Panorama, every story is valued.

We're constantly on the lookout for stories from those living with mental health issues, but 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

After The Storm

The Living Well Photography Competition

By Michelle Elliott



The Living Well Photography Competition run annually by the Sydney Local Health District during Mental Health Month celebrates resilience and wellbeing, and is open to people with a connection to mental health. The exhibition was hosted at the Professor Marie Bashir Centre (see next page) at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

Michelle, a valued Team Coordinator Peer Specialist at Flourish Australia's Camperdown service, won third place in 2025 for her photograph, "Kayaking Into A Waterfall."

'2025 is the first time I've participated in the Living Well Photography Competition since I won it back in 2015 with a long-exposure shot of the Rubic's Cube at Maroubra,' said Michelle. 'Everyone at the Camperdown service, staff and participants, were encouraged to take part. This year's

theme was "Taking Steps On Your Wellbeing Journey."

'This competition focuses on the story behind the photos in addition to the merits of the photographs themselves. Here's the description I ran with the photo:

"I used to kayak a lot when I was young as it gave me a sense of peacefulness. When I started hearing voices and I became unwell, I stopped Kayaking as much and I avoided it. For the last 3 months, I've had a family friend nudge me to get back into it. It was a day after the storm, the water was calm and the water fall was pumping. If it wasn't for my family friend, I wouldn't have gotten in that Kayak and experienced a glimpse of silence and peacefulness. This photo captures the after effects of a storm, the calmness. Recovery means to walk with someone in their journey, my dear family friend Min walked by me through this journey."



A Journey

'I've been doing photography for about 12 years, and it's something I really get into when I'm feeling up for it. I'm entirely self-taught, never studied photography in High School or anything like that. It's always just been me taking photos, learning for myself.'

'I've seen and experienced that creative expression can greatly benefit most recovery journeys, and photography has helped me to get through whatever I've needed to get through in life.'

'I love night photography, as I can play around with the long exposure and take the same photo ten times with different settings. As I need to work in the morning, night photography isn't feasible that often!'

'If you're interested in photography, phone cameras are so good nowadays, but I find a DSLR camera allows you to be more creative because you can play around with the settings. The downside is that photography is a very expensive hobby, because once you get a new lens, you'll want ANOTHER new lens, and they're not cheap!'

Thanks to Megan Still from the Flourish Australia Board and the Sydney Local Health District, for filling us in about Michelle's story. SEE 'Connect for Life'; pp 16–17

ABOVE: Michelle's award-winning photograph "Kayaking Into A Waterfall."

ABOVE INSET: Michelle and her award, standing with Steve Wood, General Manager of Mental Health Services in SLHD.

Vale
**Dame Marie Bashir
AD CVO
1930 - 2026**



As we were about to publish this issue, we were saddened by news of the passing of Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO, the 37th Governor of New South Wales. We honour her life and service to the people of New South Wales. Her tenure was marked by dignity, compassion, and a deep respect for public and community service, leaving a legacy of service above self.

Flourish Australia was honoured to receive her patronage as our first Patron following the merger of PRA and The Richmond Fellowship of NSW in 2012, a gesture that strengthened and affirmed our work in community mental health during a defining moment in our organisation's history.

Dame Marie made significant and enduring contributions to mental health through her leadership in mental health services and her advocacy for equitable, and compassionate care. As Governor of NSW (2001–2014), she always highlighted the importance of promoting mental health, social inclusion, early intervention, and recovery-oriented care.

We extend our sincere condolences to her family, friends, and all who mourn her passing.



COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL COLUMN

By Tricia and Jen of the Council

The Community Advisory Council represents the people who access Flourish Australia's services. Using our lived experience of mental health issues, we also assist and advise management.

Normally we would be publishing the proceedings of our November Council meeting in this space, but we will have to defer that until the March issue of Panorama. This is because our Community Advisory Council Annual Meeting in November was put back until the day before Flourish Australia's Annual General Meeting which put it beyond the deadline for February. But don't worry, you will be able to catch up with everything in MARCH Panorama.

Recently, the scope and size of the Council's operations has increased. As we approached the tenth anniversary of the Council's operations, we began to have on a greater presence in Panorama. This is helped along by the PanCAC meetings (Panorama/ CAC, pronounced Pancake) which while not producing any actual pancakes has kept people informed. When Tricia, Jen and Warren began this, we envisaged a regular monthly column, but this sometimes stretches to a whole page!

If you would like to participate, please consider joining us. Firstly, if you are accessing Flourish Australia's services see the ad below for an Expression of Interest in the Community Advisory Council. Or perhaps you could join our Family Carers and Kin Committee. See the full-page ad on page 16 of this issue of Panorama!

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 from:

Monday 2 Feb 2026 until close of business Friday 27 Feb 2026

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

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

In the early days of COVID-19, there was a radio signal blasting across the airwaves called "Penrith Valley Bangaz," run by Alex, a DJ with a dream. Known as DJ EZPeel, little did Alex know this would be the foundation of a legitimate media empire...

The Streets

I was a Sydney street kid, and at 13 and 14 I used to sit outside the clubs at Kings Cross and listen to their awesome music. I'd sneak in once they closed in the early morning, and mess around with the DJ equipment while the cleaners were scraping the worst filth you can imagine off the floors.

As a kid, I'd be glued to the radio, listening to WildFM.

I was also a bush kid growing up, as I'm half Koori. When things got tough, I'd take a tomahawk into the Blue Mountains national park, cut down some trees to make a tree house, catch lizards, drink from the creek, build responsible campfires, all that sort of stuff. I've always felt a connection to this land.

It's been a tough, tough road from a rough beginning. My Mum never knew what to do with me, and sometimes I didn't know how to handle myself, so I was in Youth Detention at 14 and 15, and that was eye-opening. I've been a free man ever since.

I also live with Aspergers, and I was so young when they diagnosed me that I thought they meant ASPARAGUS! Aspergers can make interacting with people difficult, so I've always preferred to be around recording studios and DJ equipment.

Turning Point

I turned my life around with Father Chris Riley's Youth Off The Streets farm, where I did my Year 9 and Year 10. After that, I earned an Audio Engineering Degree at JMC Academy, where I learned sound production. As an audio engineer, it's my job to listen and to be a music almanack. If somebody hums a song, I'll usually be able to go, "Oh, that's so and so by so and so."

Pop (who went to school with Kerry Packer) was tasked with wiring up half the building.

I wasn't allowed to touch my Dad's electrical equipment, but I always messed with the switches and dials if I could get away with it. I copped more than one hiding for that!

I became a DJ for a while, just setting the mood for other DJs, getting paid \$160 for spinning an hour of music.

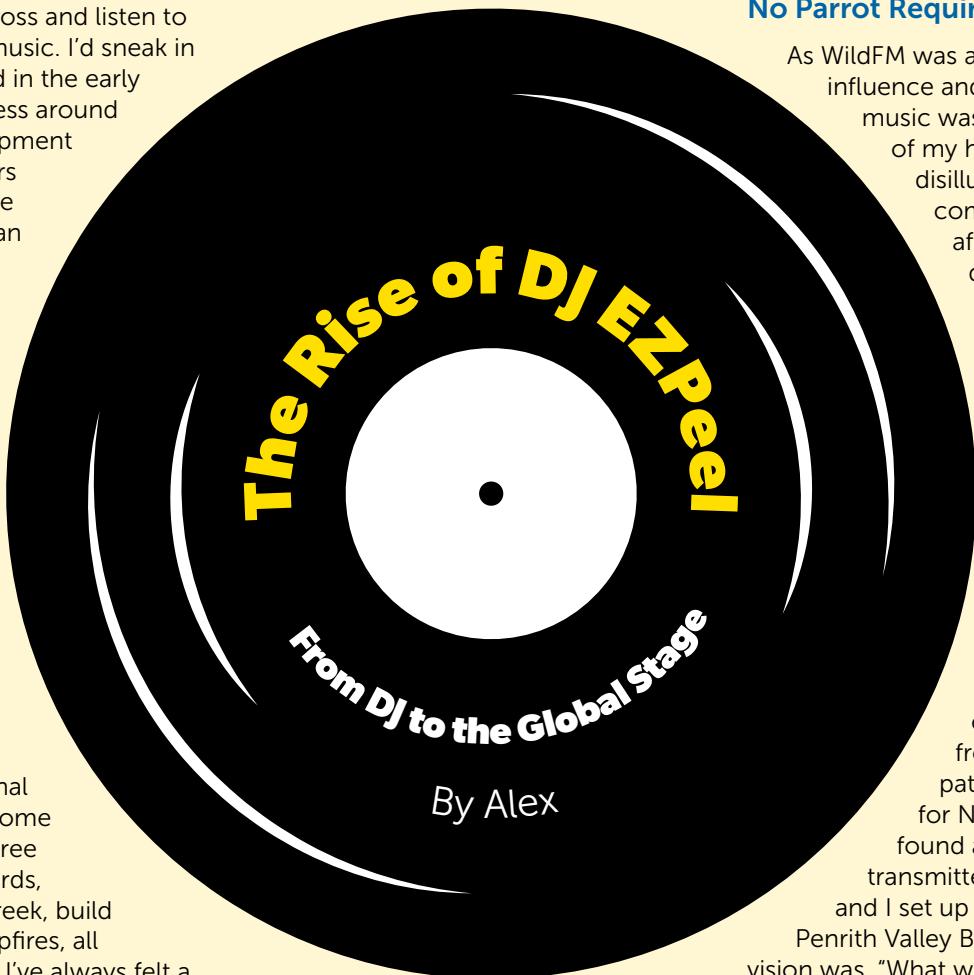
No Parrot Required

As WildFM was a massive influence and house music was the passion of my heart, I was disillusioned by commercial radio after WildFM shut down and was taken over by another community radio station, FBI 94.5. It was a sad day in Australian music history.

My new chapter in life started when I got a big tax cheque back from working as a pathology courier for NSW Health. I found a great little FM transmitter on AliExpress, and I set up a radio station: Penrith Valley Bangerz. My vision was, "What would WildFM be like if it was still around?"

I built everything from the ground up myself, and as I was a DJ, I could already program music like no one's business. I played dance music and gangster rap and hip-hop, and it caused a ruckus. I was already pretty well known in community radio circles, and people started talking about Penrith Valley Bangerz online and on Facebook, saying how great it was and how it should never leave the airways.

My signal was picked up by an unlikely fan: the President of an online Sydney radio network,



With my Music Theory module, I couldn't have gotten a higher score: a High Distinction of 99.99%. I didn't have huge hopes going into that exam, so this was surprising!

This kind of thing runs in the family. My Dad and his Dad were both electrical engineers (and both Koori), and that Grandpa was good friends with a guy who used to import all the best DJing equipment, so that all had a big influence on me. When Channel Nine was built at Willoughby, my

StarterFM. He reached out to tell me he was a bit of a fan of the Bangerz, so my station basically became my audition tape.

Keeping the Flame Wild & Deadly

I cut my teeth on radio journalism with StarterFM and did a lot of announcing (and I didn't always make the bosses happy with what I was saying!) before I started producing my own segment and brainchild, The Bangerz Show, where I played house music.

I'm now the Manager and Head Programmer for StarterFM's Starter Bangaz station, Australia's home of the fresh beatz and chunky bangaz, where I'm involved with day to day running and operations. We've always run on the smell of an oily rag, and still give commercial radio a run for its money. They've followed a few things that we've done.

My journey came full circle when I became friends with DJ Jimmy Z, the mastermind behind the WildFM CDs that inspired me as a kid. He's a staunch supporter, and to have one of the original architects of that sound approving of what we're

building here...it's the ultimate validation. It feels like we're truly keeping the flame alive.

Family First

I moved to Lithgow to be a full-time Dad and a carer for my Mum. I've been trying to start a community radio station for the locals, but I'm much better at dealing with the technical side of things than attending council meetings!

Looking after my family has always been my priority. Mum's decided to move into aged care, so I've been supporting her with that. She always did her best, showed me love, and that's the example I follow. I've had radio stations from Blackpool and Manchester in the UK reach out, saying they want to work with me, but I've had to refuse their offers for now for family reasons.

I'm still making music and producing songs. It's muscle memory at this point, and I still have the passion and the drive. My latest track, "Trumpshaker," is a hard-hitting house rework of Wreckx-N-Effect's "Rumpshaker."

Music therapy

Flourish Australia's service has supported me with my anxiety. It gets really bad at times, and for a couple of weeks it

was crippling, a constant battle. The words just wouldn't come like usual, as though my brain and tongue weren't connected. This started after my Grandfather died, and like my spiritual connection with the land, I always had a connection with him. Somehow I knew he'd passed away before I got the phone call from my Mum.

Listening to music and making music has always been my therapy. If I'm having trouble with communicating, I can do it through my music. Making a track is an act of taking back control. I'm all about positive mental health, positive vibes, positive wellbeing.

The Future

The gap I tried to fill with Penrith Valley Bangerz still exists. StarterFM is now working on the Starter Plus App so we can build a permanent, global home for our sound. We're the next chapter, so tune in for the freshest beats and chunkiest bangerz!

Want to check out the free Starter App? Scan this QR Code.



<https://starterfm.com.au>

FAR LEFT: DJ EZPeel doing what he does best: mixing music like nobody's business. **LEFT:** Alex hanging out at Lithgow, his new home. Photos provided by Alex.



Flourish Australia Lithgow

Wiradjuri Country

1 / 31 Railway Parade
Lithgow NSW 2790

1300 779 270 (option1)

Mental Health Issues Are Real Recovery is Real, Too!

By Warren Heggarty



James has been progressing on a wonderful recovery journey. At the time the photo on the opposite page was taken, he was celebrating four months sober and the completion of his first Alcohol and Other Drugs Recovery Module. Today as we sit in the Zen Den at Flourish Australia Seven Hills, we celebrate more than eight months!

James is a proud Darug man who has lived with a diagnosis of Schizophrenia and Social Anxiety. Last year, 2024, he was in and out of acute care mental health units, homeless for a short period and using Ice.

Peer Worker Fiona walked alongside James through this period, finding emergency housing and spending time encouraging his recovery.

'One of the things he has been doing is getting out on country and doing his art,' Fiona told Panorama. 'I then spoke to James about attending Odyssey House for one-on-one drug and alcohol counselling. He agreed to do so.'

James says 'I am really thankful to Sandy the drug and alcohol counsellor at Odyssey House

Blacktown as well as Flourish Australia. Being on drugs affects your family. It causes arguments, stress and division. There is so much tension so that you can't stay at home and you end up back on the street again in survival mode.'

James' experience of mental health issues involves a lot of confusion and misunderstanding. 'I was in and out of hospital and I really didn't understand WHY. I felt like I was normal, I was OK. But I felt that other people were doing something secret behind my back. I felt really isolated. I felt that I couldn't talk about things because other people had completely different ideas to me. I didn't realise that the drugs were behind this.'

'Drugs might make you feel good, but they won't bring you happiness. My thoughts were all over the place. My conversations were very erratic. I was like that for eight years. I had to go to hospital to detox.'

'The Medication I am on works for me. I now have strategies that help me cope. And I know I can ask my family. Mental Health Issues are real! The voices were real to me. I could hear other people talking to one another. But I got motivated to learn all I could and I understand that those voices are inside my head and

other people don't hear them.'

'I'm motivated to renew my connection to the land and country and art and the symbolism of art. I have more confidence now.'

I love to watch my 12 year old son Josiah's sporting matches and follow his school work. They are important to me. I motivate him and he motivates me. I have gone back to staying with my mother. My mum is my carer and I like to work around the house with the laundry and that. Mum is a Wiradjuri woman, Dad is Ngamba. I was born here in the West of Sydney on Darug country.'

'It's important to accept advice from family and to learn from them how my being on drugs and having mental health issues affected things. It's important to REALLY LISTEN. I haven't been in hospital since January and that is great because it makes mum worry and it affects her health too. Now mum can let me go out of the house without having to worry. That's a great thing.'

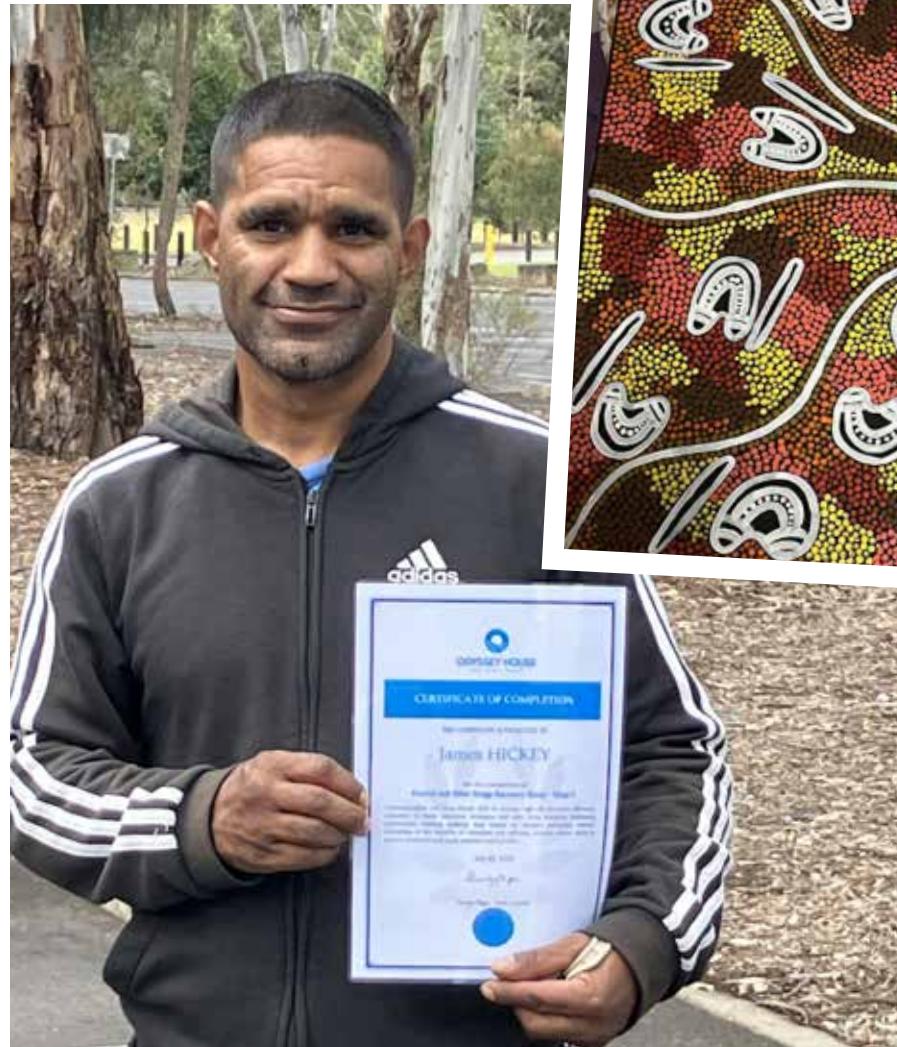
'I love to go out on country in nature and with the ancestors. That helps me stay well. I love going to Pemulwuy Hill.'

For those unfamiliar with this legendary Aboriginal warrior, Pemulwuy fought back against the

encroaching British during the early days of settlement. The hill was his vantage point, only a few minutes down the road from Seven Hills. It is the highest point in Western Sydney between the sea and the Blue Mountains so naturally form here, Pemulwuy could exercise his 'home ground' advantage and be aware of who was coming.

Fiona agrees that she can see the makings of a park guide or ranger in James or something of that nature. He often falls naturally into that role when they visit places like Nurragingy Park (near Doonside). That would be James' dream job because it would allow him to be out on country while supporting himself and his son.

'My son asks me, "other kids' dads all work, why don't you?" I find it really hard top explain it to him that I am on a disability pension. I really would like to work, I hope that now I have an NDIS package it will help me along those lines.



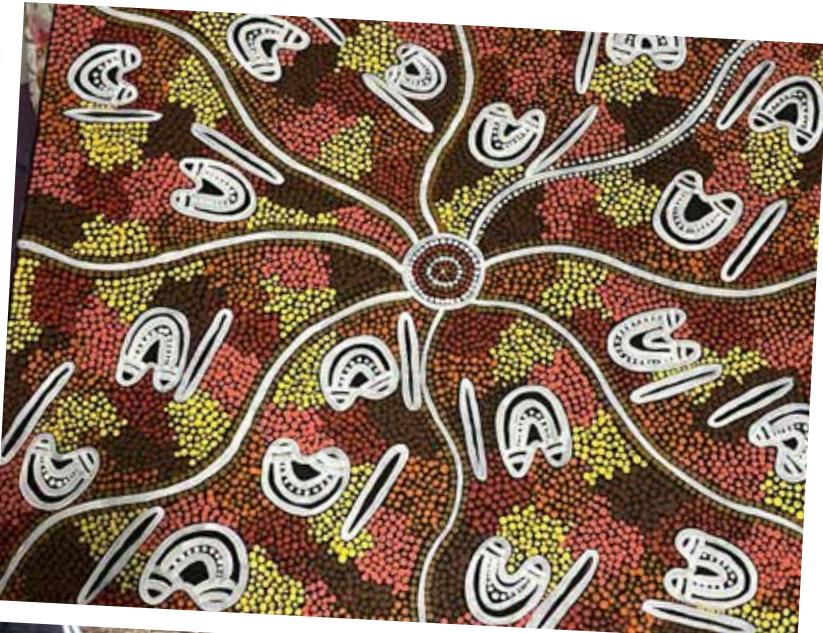
James and Fiona shared a few anecdotes with Panorama about their visits to the Western Sydney Parklands. 'My totem is the goanna, which is also my mothers'. I am motivated to learn as much as I can. I can show you how a bush compass works with a gum leaf and water. Not so much bush medicine. I am more of a "bush mechanic" he laughs. 'I really would like in future to go to Uluru and Tennant Creek. But for now I'd like to go to Art Class and work on that as well as on my mental health.'

LEFT: Peer Worker Fiona and James in the "Zen Den" retreat room at Flourish Australia's Seven Hills service. Photo: Warren Heggarty

BELLOW RIGHT: One of James' amazing dot paintings.

BELLOW LEFT: James proudly displays his certificate after completing the AOD Recovery Course at Odyssey House, Blacktown. Photos provided by Fiona Arakelian.

"Drugs might make you feel good; but they won't bring you happiness."
-James



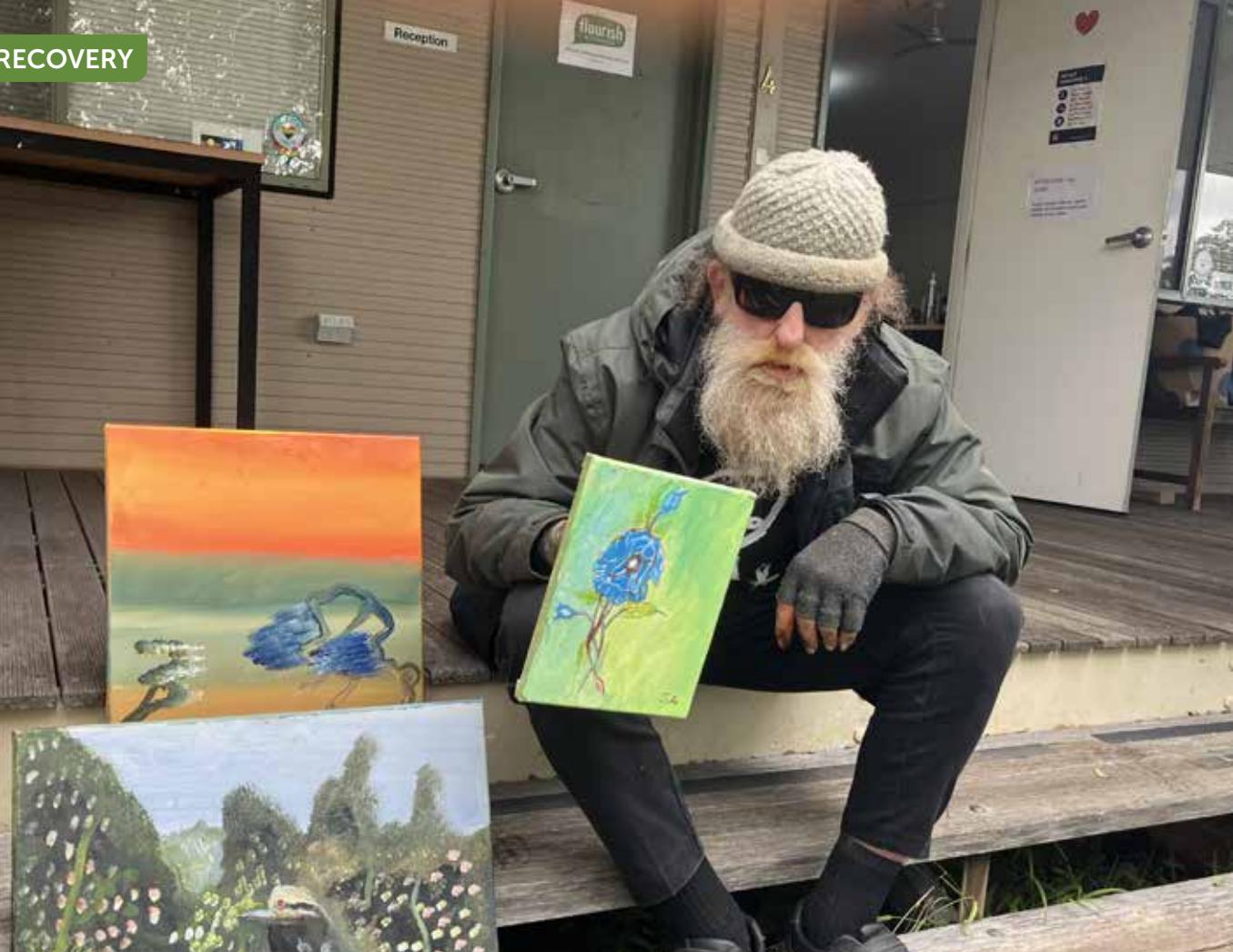
**Flourish Australia
Seven Hills**

Darug Country

IEA, HASI, NDIS

**Unit 9/197
Prospect Highway,
Seven Hills NSW 2147**

1300 779 270 (option1)



AN ART AND ADVENTURE CONNECTION ANDREW AND SWEN AT TAREE

By Warren Heggarty

Swen and Andrew are both pleased to say that it has been years since either of them were in hospital because of their mental health issues. They both access Flourish Australia's Taree service, and along with individual support, they are a part of the Adventure Group on Sundays and the Art Group on Thursdays.

Homemaking can be challenging for people with mental health issues. Andrew and Swen have both had their own challenges on the home front.

Andrew remembers around 2008 some people suggested he go along to Flourish Australia's service at Taree. In fact, he was among the

first to access the Taree service! "It's worked out well," says Andrew, "I'm a lot better off now than I was before. I'm more independent."

When Panorama originally spoke to Swen a year ago, he was going through the complex process of taking on a mortgage while also experiencing a very stressful period following the serious illness and passing of his sister. Now, we are happy to report that Swen was successful in getting a home loan for the remainder of this mortgage, and is successfully paying it off!

Andrew has had different challenges. "I think I had a lack of money and a lack of experience," he says, describing times when he struggled to maintain his home. "I am right on top of it now!" He says proudly. "I have a regular weekly routine, and

I've learned how to cook, wash, organise and be on time."

An affinity with the sea

Both Swen and Andrew have had an affinity with the sea. Andrew used to surf when he was younger, and his favourite place was Bonny Hills near Port Macquarie where he says there is a very high surf.

As his Swedish name suggests, Swen has a Viking background and inherited a love of the sea from his father who worked in the merchant marine in the war. "I was a skipper on a Barramundi boat, too, plus my mother was a WAC (in the Women's Army Corps)." "I've visited a lot of countries," says Swen. "Spain, Italy, France, Belgium, Germany, Istanbul. As a 15-year-old, I helped the skipper in the wheelhouse of a ship.

I used to paddle my own canoe on the river, and I built a mast and sail myself. I love motorbikes, too. I've had some Hondas and Yamahas, including 4 cylinder and shaft drive. The best one was a Harley Davidson I rode down from Brisbane."Andrew designed Swen's shirt. He focuses on cartoon characters like Astro Boy or the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and picks a different one every week. Andrew also designs his own characters. He plans his pieces in an art folder at home before working on them in the Art Group. Swen has painted landscapes and likes leatherwork and embossing, and some of his subjects have included roses and portraits, including one of Ned Kelly. Both men have entered the Brushes With Life Exhibition.

Andrew and Swen reckon that in addition to a good diet and exercise, it is best to steer clear of drugs because some of them can cause mental health issues.

In the future, Andrew hopes to put his images onto items like crockery and sell them, and he has also planned a comic book. Swen has a hopeful plan to move into an "Eco-Hut" while renting his house out so that he can pay the mortgage off more quickly. Thank you to Simon Edwards and other staff at Taree for helping with this article.

LEFT: Swen on the steps with some of his artworks. **RIGHT TOP:** Andrew and Swen have been doing art together and staying out of hospital for years. **BOTTOM:** Andrew and some works. Notice how both of them have their own individual creative style!
Photos by Neil Fenelon

Thank you to Simon Edwards and other staff at Taree for helping with this article.



Flourish Australia

Biripi Country

Unit 4/80 Wynter Street
TAREE NSW 2430

1300 779 270 (option1)



Flourish Australia: Services Walking for Good Causes

By Tanya, Charles and Ashley

When like-minded people get together for a good cause, there's no limit to what they can accomplish! Two of Flourish Australia's services - Broken Hill NSW and Salisbury SA - may be separated by huge distances, but they both had the same idea for Mental Health Month: getting active for charity!



Salisbury, SA

As a team, the staff and the people who access services at Flourish Australia's Salisbury service participated in the One Foot Forward Campaign to raise funds for mental health research at the Black Dog Institute. All up, they raised \$674 and walked 583kms. A great effort from them all!

"On the 31st of October, we held a BBQ and walk at Fremont Park to celebrate everyone's contribution to One Foot Forward Campaign, as well as to celebrate Mental Health Week," said Tanya, Team Coordinator at our Salisbury service. "There was some great

feedback from the participants about how much they enjoyed this afternoon of eating, playing games and walking in the park, and we hope to make this an ongoing part of our routine."

"This picnic was a good opportunity to raise awareness about mental health and socialise, and I thoroughly enjoyed the BBQ lunch," said Liam, who accesses services at Salisbury.

Charles

Charles Grant, Mental Health Worker at the Salisbury service, did an epic walk of his own to raise funds for Black Dog as a part of the One Foot Forward Campaign.

"1 in 5 people experience a mental health issue each year, so I chose to raise funds for Australian's impacted by mental health issues and suicide," Charles told us. "The

funds I raised through exercise went to Black Dog Institute so they can develop and provide groundbreaking mental health treatment, education, and digital services to the people who need them most."

"This year, my goal was to walk 100 kilometres to raise \$100. I ended up raising \$132 and walking 173 kilometres. So I want to give a huge thanks to everyone who sponsored me and supported my 100km challenge. I couldn't have done it without you!"

Together, we can all create better mental health for all Australians. As you read in this article, everybody has something to offer!

ABOVE LEFT: Charles Grant, Mental Health Worker at Flourish Australia's Salisbury service.



Where mental wellbeing thrives

**Does Flourish Australia
support your family member
or a person you care for?**

**Join our Family, Carer & Kin
Advisory Committee!**



This is a paid opportunity to bring your family, carer & kin experiences to the Flourish Australia Leadership Team to inform how we plan, deliver and improve our services.

**If you are interested in joining
the Family, Carer & Kin Committee please email
council@flourishaustralia.org.au**

PICTURED: Halloween is an ideal time to dress up and have a laugh with your friends. Photos by Luisa Linares.



Any opportunity to have a laugh Halloween At Moree

By Luisa Linares

Here are some photos from Flourish Australia's service at Moree, where we held a Halloween-themed group session. Participants got together to celebrate, dress up in fun costumes, share sweet treats and have a hot lunch, and enjoyed dancing to Michael Jackson's Thriller as a group.

These activities created a fun and inclusive atmosphere, encouraging social connection, laughter, and positive engagement. It was a wonderful opportunity to support participants' mental health and emotional well-being by fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Quotes from the day

What do you like about visiting Flourish Australia at Moree?

"I like being around people like me, people who understand what I'm going through and won't judge me."

Have you made friends at the service?

"Friendships take time, and it's a big responsibility, so I don't feel I have close friends yet, but I'm willing to build them."

"Yes, I've built some good relationships here, people I can call friends."

What do you and your friends at the service do as a group?

"We do cooking groups, go for walks, talk, and share our interests and hobbies."

"I really enjoy the gardening activities."

Flourish Australia at Moree offers a range of psychosocial support through NDIS, as well accommodation support through HASI (Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative) service and the NERSHH (New England Regional Sustainable Housing and Homelessness Group) support people who may be at risk of losing their home.

Flourish Australia Moree

Kamilaroi Country
NDIS, HASI, NERSHH
Unit 6/25 Auburn Street
Moree NSW 2400
1300 779 270 (option1)

Connect for Life Photography Exhibition

Lived Experience Wisdom

By Grant J Everett



The Connect for Life Photography Exhibition showcased the work of nine artists who used their lived experience and creativity to shine a light on suicide.

Three of the photographers - Yati, Manuel and Raymond - access Flourish Australia services at Liverpool. The trio attended an eight week peer support and therapeutic program facilitated by organisations Folkal (who offer art therapy supporting mental health) and Ironbark Therapy (for people struggling with suicidal thoughts, bereavement and addiction) that aimed to connect people, share stories, and develop new skills in

Yati

Flourish Australia at Liverpool have been supporting me since 2022, and I've really enjoyed all the activities and the outings I've done over the years. I've seen many beautiful places, and learned a lot about their history. Doing interesting things with my time helps me to feel better. I attend this service every second day.

For the Connect For Life

photography exhibition, we took snaps of many subjects at many different places over a period of weeks. I created a story with my photos, and it was so great to see my work on display for a whole month.

I like both black and white and colour photography, and I particularly enjoy photographing nature. Gardens, forests, trees, anything that's green!

I love using social media on my phone to share my photos with everyone I know.

Manuel



Raymond, Yati and I did our photography together at many different places, like ponds and trees in nature. As I have a car, I'd give them a lift there and back. I purchased my own

camera, a Canon. This is still very new to me, but I've found photography fulfilling.

I've had a very good experience with Flourish Australia over the last year. I felt so lost, I didn't know

what to do, and I was being very tough on myself. Flourish Australia saved me from a dark time where I didn't care about anything. Their whole team is so nice, and I've learned so much from them. I've lost a lot of time, but Flourish Australia has given me life and hope, and I'm now doing the best I've ever been.

I enjoy cooking the BBQ, the walks, and the outings. Keeping busy is good for me, as I don't like sitting on my couch, doing nothing.

I'm going to see if I can be a part of the photography exhibition next year. There might be many more people involved in our group than this time!

Thanks to Tam Nguyen, Support and Access Officer.

Raymond



Even though I've never had much of an interest in photography, I decided to take part in the Connect For Life photography exhibition. Six of my colour photos ended up being shown at the exhibition at Moss Vale Civic Centre Atrium, as did Yati's photos and Manuel's photos. They also featured photographs from many organisations and services. The three of us visited the exhibition with a whole group from Flourish Australia.

I've found that art stills your mind, so I get a lot out of creative expression now. If something strikes me, I'll take a photo of it.

There's another exhibition next year, and I'm going to be a part of that one, too, though I'll have to find time to fit this in around my job (Raymond appeared in Panorama in November 2023 where he shared his journey to open employment – Ed).

A major rule of the exhibition was that the photos had to be done with an actual camera, not a phone. Thankfully, the Connect For Life organisation lent the three of us a high-end Canon camera to use, which was really nice of them. It was really helpful to have access to a proper camera for this event.

their creative expression. After the eight week program wrapped up, Yati, Raymond and Manuel participated in a design process where they shared wisdom and insights into their mental health issues through photography, addressing some of the myths and harmful narratives surrounding the topic of suicide.

The Connect for Life Photography Exhibition aims to shift the myths and narratives around suicide through the medium of lived experience voices.

Their photos provided centred on how their mental health recovery journey is being supported, and how they find the light of hope in the darkness, as well as how they've formed friendships by attending group activities together.

OPPOSITE: Yati with her collection of photos They really tell a story! **TOP:** Manuel with his photos. **BELOW:** Raymond, who recently discovered the benefits of artistic expression.

Photos provided by Tam Nguyen.

Flourish Australia Liverpool

Darug Country

19 Flowerdale Road
Liverpool NSW 2170

1300 779 270 (option1)



BRINGING SERVICES TOGETHER

Networking Health and Wellbeing Support at Balranald

By Grant J Everett

The Balranald Health, Wellbeing Support and Services Expo 2025 hosted information booths from over 40 rural and remote services that support the communities of Western NSW, offering a broad spectrum of wellness support that city slickers likely take for granted. This expo was attended by more than twice as many staff members and volunteers as last year, and the crowds were packed tight into The Theatre Royal in Market Street, Balranald.

This half-day event brought together many local organisations, agencies and providers of health, wellbeing and support services in order to promote what they offer to the community and also to network.

Flourish Australia was represented on the day by a delegation that included Peer Worker Ashley Arnold from our Broken Hill service, and two participants from the

Lower Murray CPS (Commonwealth Psychosocial Support) program, Brett and Antony. Brett and Antony have both been working on overcoming their psychosocial barriers and building their capacity.

Throughout the day, these three gentlemen shared the many different psychosocial support services that Flourish Australia at Broken Hill has to offer, with Brett and Antony explaining all they've achieved in the time they've been receiving support from Flourish Australia.

Brett

I really enjoyed the Balranald Health Expo. It was great to see so many local and regional services sharing what they did and what they had to offer. The atmosphere was friendly and welcoming, and I felt a sense of connection in learning about support services that I didn't even know existed. I also had the chance to talk directly with people who really care about helping others. I left feeling more informed, encouraged, and motivated to focus on my wellbeing.

I was able to share how genuine and supportive my Flourish Australia team is. My journey has been overwhelming at times, but it's been support workers like Ash who make the journey smoother, and I couldn't be more thankful for the time he's

taken in helping me achieve the goals I set for myself. I feel heard and understood. It's about growing confidence, learning new skills, and being part of a community that believes in recovery.

My advice is to take things one step at a time, and don't be afraid to ask for support. Recovery isn't always a straight path, so it's important to celebrate the small wins along the way. Stay connected with people who lift you up, and make use of services like Flourish Australia.

Antony

I really like the fact that my support worker at Flourish Australia, Ash has taken the time to listen to all of my needs, supported me to relocate, publish 5 books, and engage in multiple community events. I feel like my life has value and meaning.

Get to know your support worker, build the trust required so you can figure out what you want and need in order to build the life you want to live, and never be afraid to ask questions.

Wrapping Up

2025's Expo was a great success, with considerably more booths than last year, and much larger crowds. In addition to being held in Mental Health Month, this event also ran during Gamble Aware Week (20-26 October) to raise awareness about gambling harm and what services are available for the people (and their families) who are impacted by it.

This is the 3rd time this annual event has taken place, so thanks to "The Strengthening Community Access, Inclusion & Wellbeing Advisory Committee" and the Balranald Shire Council, in partnership with Emma Moore and the team at Maari Ma Health Balranald. And a BIG thank you to all the services that made an appearance, as well as the local community for taking an interest!

Karen Murray, a Balranald local, was the proud recipient of the free raffle prize provided by Flourish Australia on the day.

"It's about growing confidence, learning new skills, and being part of a community that believes in recovery" - Brett

ABOVE: A busy day at The Balranald Health, Wellbeing Support and Services Expo 2025. Photo provided by Rynnette.



ONLINE IS FOR EVERYONE

Safer Internet Day 2026

By Grant J Everett

Using the Internet effectively is more important than ever, as it allows billions of us to learn, work, socialise and share our lives on countless screens. But in an increasingly digital world, it's a reality that the perils of the Internet are a part of everyday life.

Safer Internet Day is a global call to action for communities, schools, organisations and companies to raise awareness of online safety issues, and how we can all work towards a safer experience. While Safer Internet Day only comes around once a year, promoting online safety is something we need to do all year round.

If your knowledge of how scammers operate, the way that viruses are spread and how to protect your sensitive data online isn't up to scratch, don't worry! These are all things that can be learned, and you don't need a degree in IT to know what to watch for. If you are interested in being able to use the Internet with more confidence, you can see your Flourish Australia support worker about building on this skillset. Many Flourish Australia sites have internet-capable computers that people are welcome to use while they're visiting.

Upskilling

"At Flourish Australia's Harris Park Community Business, we ran a 14 week Digital Skills for Work program that included teaching internet safety, among many other modules," said Kirsten Cameron, Training and Assessment Coordinator. "This was done through the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Navitas, funded by the Commonwealth Government's Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program. The course was very popular with the 42 employees at Harris Park, so I'm exploring a re-run in mid-2026. We'll invite some participants from the North Parramatta Community Business as well."

"I'm happy to speak with anyone interested in my experience in setting up this kind of arrangement."

(See our story "More Than Calls and Texts: Staying Current with Digital Literacy at Harris Park" in our August 2025 issue about how the workers at our Harris Park Community Business are keeping up with tech trends in the workplace -Ed).

ABOVE: Photo by TBIT on Pixabay

WHAT CAN THE INTERNET OFFER YOU?

You may think the internet has nothing to interest you, that you're doing fine offline. But what about these modern conveniences?

- Declaring your income with Centrelink
- Doing your grocery shopping online
- Shopping for ANYTHING!
- Doing your banking quickly and easily
- Ordering food from every restaurant in range
- Planning trips, like finding good deals on accommodation
- Easily finding out how buses, trains, trams, and planes are operating
- Entertainment of every medium
- Engaging with your specific interests with the online community. Your people are out there!
- Learning practical skills from YouTube videos
- Scanning QR Codes with your phone to instantly visit a website of interest
- Learning how to cook all your favourite meals
- Keeping up with your friends and family on social media
- Arranging tickets for the cinema, the theatre and concerts with ease
- Studying online and finding work with employment apps
- Sending emails.
- Storing all your photos, identification, and important documents in a safe place

Employment Support

Empowering individuals living with mental health conditions to achieve meaningful, sustainable employment.

How we can support you

At Flourish Australia, we understand the vital role that purposeful work and supportive social connections play in overall wellbeing. We work closely alongside you and prospective employers to ensure best match, providing personalised and ongoing support that helps you not only secure employment but thrive.

With 14 locations, we offer free, professional employment services and dedicated support to help you reach your employment goals and maintain long-term success.

Our locations

- ◆ Bankstown
- ◆ Bega
- ◆ Broken Hill
- ◆ Caboolture
- ◆ Caringbah
- ◆ Harris Park
- ◆ Hornsby
- ◆ Maitland
- ◆ Penrith
- ◆ Seven Hills
- ◆ Surry Hills
- ◆ Tamworth
- ◆ Ulladulla
- ◆ Wollongong

Let's work together

We are committed to connecting you with the right employment opportunities for long-term success.



"I am writing to compliment your employee Emaid Mustapha (Penrith) for the outstanding service he has given me. With his kindness and patient help and guidance over about one year, I can be back to work now and escape from my life's darkest moments. I sincerely appreciate and am grateful for all he has done for me, and I have many thanks to Flourish Australia."

Ying, Penrith