

AWARD WINNING

panorama

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

Quarterly Issue Autumn 2026 #100



NSW Governor at
the Women and
Children's Program

The Rise of DJ EZPeel

Living in Cairns
in a Van

flourish®
AUSTRALIA

Where mental wellbeing thrives

NDIS PROVIDER
— SINCE 2013 —



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

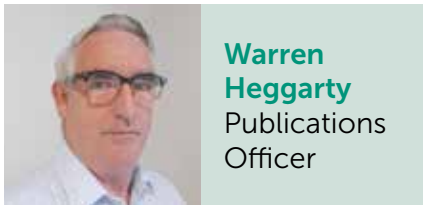
About Panorama

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.

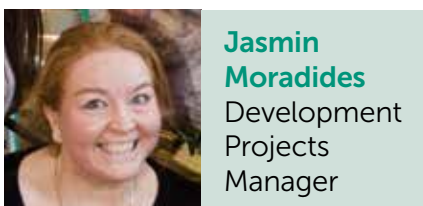
Publications People



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

Contents

- 6 Women, Children, Choice, and Change
 - 8 Reuniting My Family
 - 9 Parenting, Pampering & Pumping Iron!
 - 10 The Road to Resilient Youth
 - 11 Living Beyond Precedent: Let's Do Lunch with Mary O'Hagan
 - 12 It's a Knock Out! 2025 NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knock Out
 - 13 Preventing Suicide in The Alice
 - 13 Intergenerational Green & Gold
 - 14 Recovery Games: Panorama's Puzzle Page
 - 16 My Journey Back to My Dreams
 - 17 Neighbours Becoming Good Friends?
 - 18 School: From Can't to Can
 - 19 Recovery is More Than Beds
 - 20 Taking Steps on Your Wellbeing Journey: Flourish Australia Art Exhibit
 - 22 After the Storm
 - 23 The Magic of Meditation & Nature
 - 24 The Rise of DJ EZPeel
 - 28 Mental Health Issues are Real: Recovery is Real, Too!
 - 30 An Art and Adventure Connection: Andrew and Swen at Taree
 - 32 Flourish Australia Services Walking for Good Causes
 - 33 Puzzle Solutions
 - 35 Halloween at Moree
 - 36 Connect for Life Photography Exhibition Lived Experience Wisdom
 - 38 Bringing Services Together
 - 39 Online is for Everyone
 - 39 What Can the Internet Offer You?
 - 40 Early Intervention, Profound Results
 - 42 Living in Cairns in a Van
 - 44 Feathers & Fur: An Art Show by Helen Fenner
 - 45 Welcoming the Gym Into My Life and Finding My Safe Space
 - 46 Saving Gen Alpha From "Fast, Fun, Easy Failure"
 - 47 Lead Your Own Recovery With Standards!
 - 48 Vale Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO
 - 49 Farewell Dr Andy Campbell, Former Director and Chair RFNSW
 - 50 Let the Superbeast Reveal Itself!
 - 52 Global Mental Health Congress: Barcelos, Portugal
 - 54 Community Advisory Council Pages
 - 56 100th Issue Retrospective
- COVER: New South Wales Governor, Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, with baby Cohdax. Photo by Neil Fenelon**

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 entire 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!

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

Helen shares how her most recent art exhibition went.

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.

Isabella Martin* is a peer worker at one of Flourish Australia's regional NSW services.*

Helen accesses Flourish Australia's Newcastle NSW service.

Titania accesses Flourish Australia's Caboolture QLD service.

Becca, KC and **Victoria** access Flourish Australia's Women and Children's Program in NSW.

Julie Millard AM is a Consultant in Mental Health.

And thanks to Flourish Australia staff Sifa, Lisa, Jade Farrell, Jade Ryall, Kellie, Danielle, Jillian, Camilo, Georgina, Bek, Tanya, Sarah, Rynnette, Luisa, Emily, Mark and Tam.

Contributions are welcome!

*Name and location suppressed for privacy reasons.

Spread

hope.
inspire others.

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

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



Flourish Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, sea and waterways upon which we live and work.

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

Panorama magazine would like to recognise all people who live with a mental health issue, as well as those who encourage and support loved ones. Our universal right to lead full and inclusive lives is the driving force behind why Panorama exists. We also recognise the strength it can take to share our stories. The impact of reading about people's journeys cannot be overstated. Sharing our experiences has the potential to change lives and we hope by reading true recovery stories, it gives hope, optimism and support to our readers, especially those on their mental health recovery journey.



Read
panorama
online every month

Scan to see the latest digital editions

Subscribe online to receive a FREE printed copy every quarter



IN PANORAMA'S AUTUMN 2026 QUARTERLY ISSUE...

Welcome to Panorama's 100th quarterly print issue! Thank you to everyone who has supported Panorama over the past 30 years, particularly Peter Farrugia and the thousands of people who have appeared in our pages. Former Flourish Australia and PRA leaders Phil Nadin, Pam Rutledge AM, Janet Meagher AM and Fay Jackson have helped us keep the recovery dream alive.

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 above, receiving her award from Steve Wood, General Manager of Mental Health Services in SLHD.

We have some really inspiring recovery articles this time, including the journey Alicia went through in being homelessness in a van in Cairns, and how she found

stable (and stationary) housing with a little help.

We cover the "Taking Steps On Your Wellbeing Journey" Art Exhibition that was held for the second year running at Buckingham House, Surry Hills.

We have new Panorama Puzzle Pages, and if you need some hints, all the clues and hidden words can be found in other stories! The solution page can also be found in this issue.

In "Early Intervention, Profound Results," we share how Andrew experienced 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.

The Women and Children's Program was honoured with another Vice-Regal visit when The Governor of NSW spent her afternoon there on the 2nd February 2026. The story of this visit is followed by two more articles from mothers who are participating in the program. We meet Victoria and daughter Demetria (below), and we discover how the generosity of a local gym and a salon gave the mothers a chance to work on their self-care, wellbeing, and fitness.

Sadly, we farewell a former Governor and Patron of Flourish Australia (then RichmondPRA), Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO, as well as a former Chairman, Dr Andy Campbell. Both played an important role in mental health, as you will read.

Internationally, current CEO Mark Orr AM reports back on his Social Citizenship presentation in Portugal before a global audience with Julie Millard AM.

Panorama was at the launch of "Superbeast," the autobiography of David Hall OAM, wheelchair tennis great and gold medalist at the Sydney 2000 paralympics. Having come back from a catastrophic accident, David has plenty of recovery tips to share with us all!

The mere thought of the word "gym" can strike terror into some people's hearts. Isabella Martin was one of those people...until she gave it a go, overcame her anxiety, and became, in her own words, a Gym Sis!

And MORE!





Women Children Choice and Change

NSW Governor visits the Women and Children's Program

By Michelle Elliott

Flourish Australia's Women and Children's Program was honoured to receive a visit from the New South Wales Governor, Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, and her husband Mr Dennis Wilson, in February. Our guests toured the Charmian Clift residential cottages and spoke with the mothers and their children.

We were touched by the level of interest shown by the Governor and Mr Wilson, including the advice they shared from their experience.

Her Excellency was welcomed by the Chair of Flourish Australia, Professor Elizabeth More AM, Chief Operating Officer Susan McCarthy, Chief Development Officer Peter Neilson, Program Manager Nicole Charles, and members of the WCP team.

The key way the Women and Children's Program stands out from other homelessness and domestic violence services in NSW is that it provides a specialised and comprehensive program for

mothers and children facing mental health challenges. The dedicated WCP team provide support with the development of living skills and parenting skills, such as how to encourage their child's development, as well as sharing how to maintain good mental health.

And while women's refuges generally have a "stability focus," the WCP has a longer-term "recovery focus," which factors in good mental health. Above all, the WCP aims to provide a safe and nurturing environment where families can thrive.

"How are the mothers referred to your service?" the Governor asked.

"We have an open referral system," explained Nicole. "Mothers can self-refer, or be referred by other agencies. There is no age cut off, as we have mothers as young as 15, as well as some in their 40s. But for every seven mothers who seek help, six must be turned away. This is always heartbreaking."

"We currently have a waiting list in the order of 30 to 35 people. We also try to connect people with

similar services in the community in the meantime."

"The average stay at the WCP is five months, and there is a Transition Program where participants may live at one of ten ordinary houses in the local area for up to two years," said Nicole.

"And is there any follow-up after that time?" the Governor asked.

"Oh yes!" said Nicole. "The mothers always want to share their milestones and their children's milestones with us."

Nicole, Peter and Elizabeth took the opportunity to describe the many valuable partnerships Flourish Australia and the Women and Children's Program have fostered with community organisations, and their positive impact on the program and the mothers.

Making Financial Sense

While funding and resources always remain a challenge for any service, the Women and Children's Program is actually providing the state with some significant economic benefits.

When we factor in the cost of Out Of Home Care (OOHC) that the state doesn't need to spend thanks to the WCP, there is a cost-benefit ratio of 1:3-5. So while our recurrent costs are \$1.7 million a year, the WCP saves the taxpayers of NSW between five and seven and a half million dollars per year!

Her Excellency and Mr Wilson spoke at length with the Flourish Australia representatives about our plans to expand the WCP, as despite the program's many successes, the demand far exceeds our capacity. Peter described our efforts in exploring the possibilities for opening another WCP service in the south-western area of Sydney, possibly in Campbelltown.

Safety Is Paramount

Mr Wilson asked whether it would be better for the children if they had both their parents involved in the program. Nicole explained that while fathers are sometimes a part of the process, in most cases the focus is on the mother and child. Sadly, a high percentage of the WCP participants have experienced domestic violence, and so the safety of the family is always paramount.

"They say it takes a woman seven attempts before she leaves the man who is mistreating her," Nicole said. "Which is why we need to be consistent with reinforcing the messages we teach to children about how to treat other people."

"And you refer to COMPLEX mental health issues a lot," the Governor noted. "What exactly does that encompass?"

Elizabeth explained that the "complexity" comes from how mental health issues can affect so many aspects of a person's life, often profoundly. The Flourish Australia focus is on supporting the person to take control of their own recovery and - through our framework of Social Citizenship - to engage fully in the community as citizens.

ABOVE, L-R: Tilly (mother) and baby Cohdax, the Governor (holding Becca's baby, Jonathon), and Becca. **OPPOSITE front row:** Elizabeth (Peer Worker) holding Cohdax, Becca holding Jonathon, Kaila (mother) and Stefania (mother). **Back row:** Alexander (Stefania's child), Lily (Kaila's child), the Governor, and Tania (Team Coordinator). Outside the window is Esme (Child Wellbeing Worker). PHOTOS BY NEIL FENELON

Becca

When Becca spoke with the Governor and Mr Wilson she was holding her four month old baby, Jonathon, who was sleeping very soundly. A little unusually, Becca also has an older son who is 19.

Becca has a history of mental unwellness as well as a post-partum deterioration that required considerable support. She's also experienced domestic violence through her Grandfather, Father, and former partner, and she wants to break the cycle with her generation, as do we all.

Becca explained she came all the way from Tamworth to Sydney because there wasn't a service like the WCP anywhere else.

She expressed her gratitude and good fortune at being a part of the WCP.

"Tamworth doesn't have sufficient mental health services to cover my own issues, let alone with a baby involved."

Mr Wilson asked Becca about life in Tamworth. She explained the town has changed a lot, and there are some really bad areas now due to the Ice trade.

Becca mentioned her eldest son was at the Conservatorium in Sydney. The Governor, who is a musician herself, was delighted to hear it. Becca proudly shared that her son plays the Euphonium, holds an Australasian Championship, and wants to become a conductor one day.

"We did a six week course called 'Women Choice and Change' that taught us we do have choices in life," Becca said. "I would have liked some more material that's targeted towards men in the course, though."

"I went to a private school," Becca added, "and they never taught ANY of what I've learned here at the Women and Children's Program. I think all schools should teach classes on respect and healthy relationships and making good choices!"

Prof More asked Becca what she wanted to do further down the track.

"I'd like to study. I've done TAFE Certificates, and one day I hope to finish a Degree in Business Administration so i can work in a medical setting."



Our Vice-Regal Patrons

Flourish Australia is honoured to have Vice-Regal Patrons at both State and Federal levels. This reflects our organisation's origins within the State of NSW and our later expansion across several states of the Commonwealth. The Governor-General of Australia is Her Excellency The Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC, and The Governor of NSW is Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC.



REUNITING MY FAMILY

(With Some Help From Flourish Australia)

By Victoria

counsellor for my addiction issues, even though I hadn't touched anything for two years, long before Ezra was born.

When I became pregnant with Demetria, it counted against me in the eyes of the DCJ. She was another difficult pregnancy, and during this time I'd been living with my partner in a granny flat at my Mother's. She ended up throwing me out, and for a time I was homeless.

I needed much more support as a Mother, and nobody was offering me that. I don't have contact with my parents anymore, as I grew up in a difficult home, and I am one hundred percent motivated to ensure my children do not go through what I went through. This led to the DCJ's argument that because of my lack of family support, I was unfit to look after my son.

I didn't have an opportunity to care for my son, and I couldn't bear history repeating itself with Demetria. So I knew I needed to find support somewhere.

Women And Children's Program

Something I do as a person with autism is to research everything I'm interested in in great detail, so I decided to apply this part of my personality to find out what support was on offer for Mums in my situation. That's how I found out about the Women and Children's Program (WCP) at Flourish Australia.

I joined the WCP in March 2025, not long after my daughter was born. I have been working with the program to improve my parenting, which includes ongoing therapy for my mental health issues, passing drug tests, learning about relapse prevention, taking my medication, and checking in when I need to.

In exciting news, I've recently had contact visitations with my son, and I've been able to build and maintain my relationship with him.

My next step, after so many setbacks, is looking forward to living independently in the community again with my daughter...and eventually, with Ezra too, so our little family can be together again.

ABOVE: Victoria holding her daughter, Demetria. PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

My partner and I have two children: a son Ezra (14 months) and a daughter Demetria (3 months). Our children's full names reflect our hopes for their future. Ezra's middle name is Tāne Mahuta, referring to a Māori god of the forest. Whenever we go for a walk, he always has to touch every single tree we pass! As for Demetria Christina Amaia, named after the Greek goddess of the harvest, she is only three months old, but she sure loves her food!

My son was taken into care by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) because of my mental health diagnosis and past substance abuse. When my son was removed, it broke my heart. It was like losing part of my soul. I'd had a tough pregnancy with Ezra, and I

was frequently sick in the hospital. There were also personal problems in the background.

My two diagnoses are Autism and Borderline Personality Disorder. I've encountered stigma due to my mental health issues, especially to BPD, as the DCJ claimed that this diagnosis can make a person more likely to harm their own children. I honestly think that this might be the other way round, that people with BPD have this condition as they'd been the ones to experience trauma as children. This was certainly true for me.

Along Comes Demetria

The DCJ gave me a lot of tasks I had to fulfil to be reunited with my son, starting with doing relationship counselling with the father of my children, receiving proper counselling for my mental health issues, and completing a parenting program. I was also asked to see a

Women and Children's Program

PARENTING, PAMPERING & PUMPING IRON!

By KC

The mothers at Flourish Australia's Women and Children's Program were recently able to work on their health and wellbeing as KC's story reveals, thanks to being provided with free access to their local gym and free haircuts and pamper sessions at a local salon.

My daughter Kaia and I connected with the Women and Children's Program three months ago. I've been living in one of the units provided by the WCP, and my next step in the process is to find housing in the community I can move to.

I've been taking part in a program every week called Women's Choice And Change. The mothers learn about having healthy relationships, and how to tell the difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship.

The best thing about being a part of the WCP is the support, how empowering it's all been, and gaining an understanding of my own situation. So I've recently been able to do that.

Another goal was to learn more about parenting, such as knowing what to do as Kaia grows into different stages of life. I definitely feel like I've been able to greatly build on those important skills. My daughter and I have a much closer

attachment now since we started staying here.

Kaia had her first birthday at the end of last November, and she's actually the oldest baby at the WCP at the moment. She definitely likes hanging out with the other babies!

"Exercise has always helped my mental health"

In October, the mothers started a fitness and self-care group for the good of our health and wellbeing. The fitness side of it included visiting a local gym together, and we were welcome to use the machines for free. The owners even gave us a tour of the whole gym, showed us how everything worked, and told us we could always ask them for help if we needed it. It was really nice of them to do that for us.

I used the stairmaster, and the leg press. I also used the treadmill, the exercise bike and the weights. This was great for me, as exercise has always helped my mental health, right back to when I was a child. My Dad enrolled me in Little Athletics at the age of six, and I kept at that until I was 16. I also played Soccer from the age of 11 until COVID hit. So exercise is really good for me, but I haven't done much of it since COVID, and especially since having Kaia.

It was good for me that I knew I could still enjoy working out and pushing myself physically.

Pamper

In addition to going to the gym as a group, a hairdressing salon donated pamper packages to the WCP, so we could all get our hair done. It took a few hours to finish my hairstyle and treatment, and Flourish Australia provided child-minding while I was out enjoying that. It was so great to have a few hours of pamper time to myself. Lots of the Mums did this, but we had separate appointment times.

Gratitude

I've been more than happy with Flourish Australia's services, really satisfied with what's been on offer, very grateful I've been able to do this program. I'm looking forward to what comes next!

Thanks so much to The Cutting Room salon in Riverstone, and Anytime Fitness Glendenning.

ABOVE: KC, pushing some serious weights. PHOTO FROM SIFA and WCP

**Flourish Australia
Women & Children's
Program**

Darug Country

1300 779 270 (option1)

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 traumatise 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."

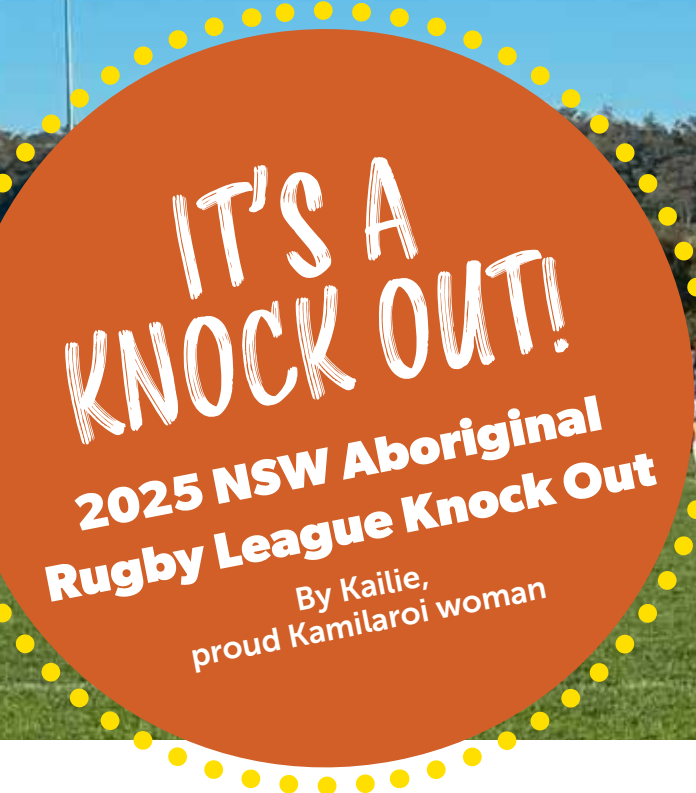
"Clinical treatment and peer work need to collaborate in a more holistic approach. Unfortunately, the clinical system is obsessed with getting rid of symptoms, but recovery is far more complex. I'm more focused on maintaining my relationships, doing productive things with my time, and feeling happy and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



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

Works Cited

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



INTERGENERATIONAL GREEN & GOLD

By Warren Heggarty

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 the articles for this issue. Let this serve as encouragement to really get the most out of Panorama's stories! Answers can be found on page 33.

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

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

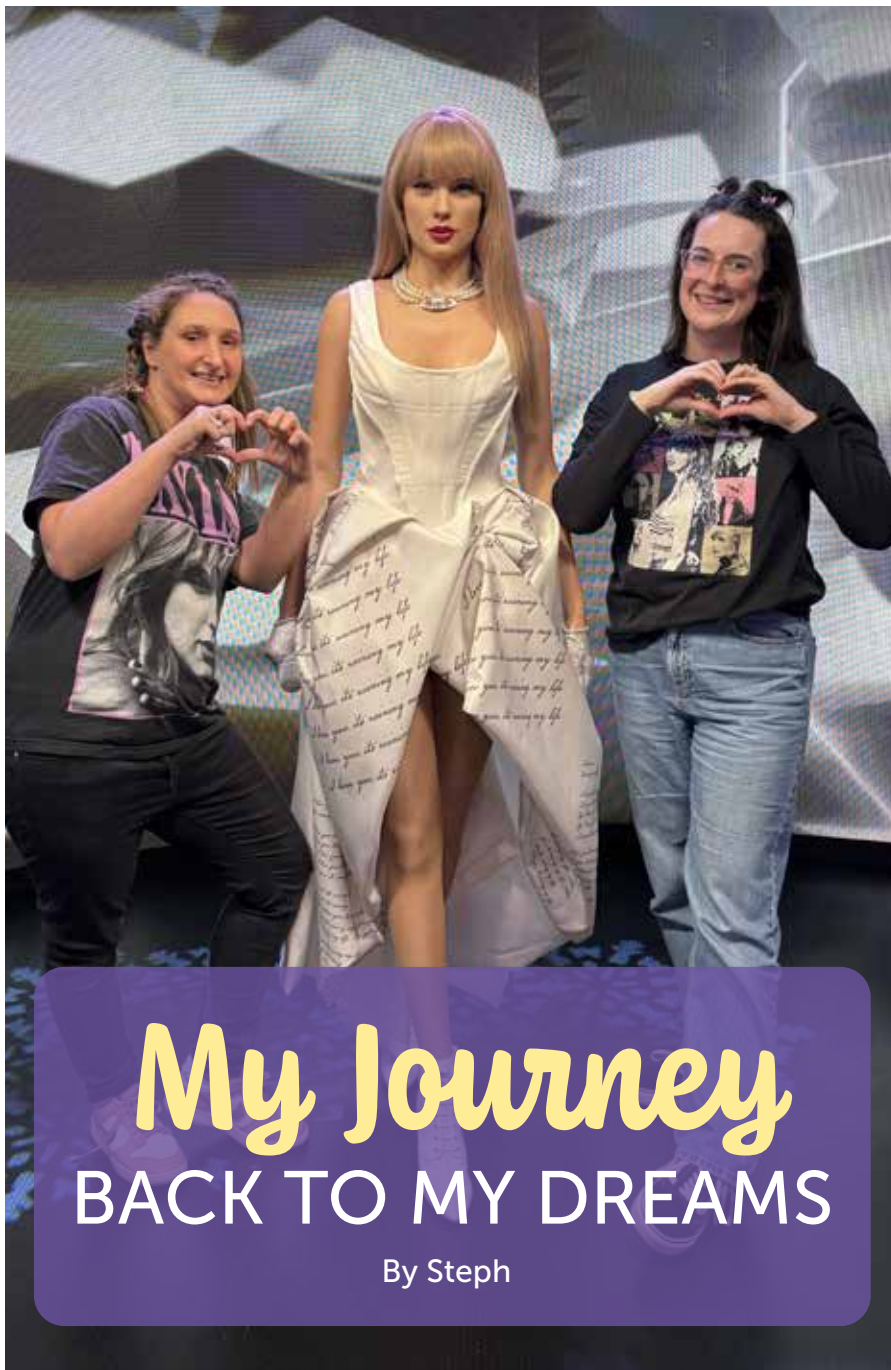
Down

- 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

Answers on page 33!

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.....



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 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 to 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 a 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.

1



2



3



4



After The Storm

The Living Well Photography Competition

By Michelle Elliott



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.

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."

The Magic of Meditation & Nature

By Titania



When I am feeling down, out, anxious and depressed, I do what I love: connecting with nature, forest bathing, bushwalking, being by the sea, swimming, or just walking by the shore if it's cold. I also love doing one of my favourite guided meditations.

When you feel depressed or anxious, I would recommend something uplifting that you enjoy. Do you get jazzed up with cooking, sports, reading, art, listening to your favourite music, or watching movies? As laughter is the best medicine, perhaps watching something funny on a streaming platform or on DVD?

For example, on a very hot day a while back, I was so depressed that I was really struggling to write. Intuitively, I knew the best way to deal with writer's block was to go to the beach to de-stress and reset. But I didn't think I had time, as the round trip would take about 3 hours. My intuition was adamant, so I went, and I'm happy to say I came back invigorated and inspired, and wrote until 11pm.

Being Meditative

I find online guided meditations a wonderful way to let go, even with something as loud, crowded and chaotic as the coming of the New Year, which I find too stressful for my neurodivergent senses. I happily spent last New Year's Eve in meditation, and I rang in 2025 by watching The Year of Pluto, a

documentary on the New Horizon's Pluto flyby in 2015 that I found on YouTube. I still consider Pluto a planet, none of this dwarf planet business!

Meditation soothes me and calms me down on trying, harrowing days. Toxic thoughts and beliefs such as "I'm not good enough and never will be" or "I don't deserve anything good in my life" are like food poisoning for the mind, as well as being untrue. It's much better to treat ourselves with kindness by practicing positive self-care and self-talk. I like to have my favourite toys with me when meditating. I never grew up :-)

My go-to online guided meditations for balance and calmness is the Great Meditation YouTube channel, as the host has a soothing voice. My favourites of hers are Letting Go, Stepping Into The Next Chapter Of Your Life, Your Next Chapter Awaits, Inner Peace: A Higher State Of Being, You Have A Bright Future and A Year Full Of Miracles.

Another YouTube meditation channel I love is Sara Raymond's The Mindful Movement. My faves of hers include Create Your Reality, Letting Go, Ease Overwhelm, Peace & Calm, Pure Joy, and Heal Past Pain. A third YouTube channel I recommend is Nicky Sutton, and my favourite meditation of hers is Inner Peace. I also adore Vishen Lakhiani, and his 6 Phase Meditation. I'd further recommend Tony Robbins' The Priming Exercise.

All these meditations can be found for free on YouTube.

The Benefits

My experience of meditation is that it reduces feelings of stress and anxiety, improves focus and attention, helps you manage gloomy, depressing feelings, increases your self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-worth, and increases positivity, compassion, patience and happiness. It helps you to relax, and enhances your quality of life and well-being. I've also read that meditation helps to lower blood-pressure, reduces physical pain, improves sleep, and supports heart health (UCDavis Health website).

Finally

I hope you discover peace as well, dear reader. Please know that you are special, and we each have a unique gift to bring to that proverbial Tuscan farmhouse table. Know that you are loved, and there is no judgement.

If you experience very intense depression, I would recommend calling crisis support like LifeLine on 13 11 14.

ABOVE: Is Titania having a nap? Nope! She's doing a guided meditation. PHOTO FROM TITANIA

Source: UCDavis Health website, "10 health benefits of meditation and how to focus on mindfulness." Scan QR code to learn more.



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."



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

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,

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)

NDIS

Support for you, your family,
and your carers.



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

AT FLOURISH AUSTRALIA we can assist you to:

Our NDIS services

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

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

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

We are here to help

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

📞 1300 779 270 ✉️ hello@flourishaustralia.org.au
🌐 www.flourishaustralia.org.au 📱 [f](#) [@](#) [X](#) [in](#) [v](#) Follow us @FlourishAus

Find out if you can access the NDIS

Think about your current needs, goals, and supports

Meet with your NDIS planner and get a plan

Decide which service providers you want support from

Put your plan into action



NDIS

Where mental wellbeing thrives

flourish foundation

A U S T R A L I A

For more information, visit
www.flourishaustralia.org.au/foundation

Every community
can flourish with
a strong foundation

flourish
foundation
AUSTRALIA

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

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

flourish[®]
AUSTRALIA

Where mental wellbeing thrives

Back On Track
Health Program

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

BELOW RIGHT: One of James' amazing dot paintings.

BELOW 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 ground-breaking 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.

Broken Hill, NSW

Ashley, Peer Worker from Flourish Australia at Broken Hill NSW, decided to raise funds for R U OK? Day, which will be used for researching mental health issues, including suicide prevention. But that's not all: many of the participants at this service joined in on the exercise to raise their own bit and get fit!

"R U OK? is all about helping to create a world where we're connected and protected from suicide," said Ashley. "Like so many others who walked, ran, wheeled or rode to help start more life-changing conversations, I was consistent in my walking for the whole month."

"I know that by inspiring people to take the time to ask 'Are you OK?' and really listening, we can help those struggling with life to feel connected and heard and supported long before they even think about suicide."

"The many donations made to my fundraising page will make it possible for R U OK? to provide free, essential resources to schools, workplaces, communities and families across Australia,

giving them the tools and confidence they need to spot the signs that someone is struggling, and to start a conversation that could change - or even save - their life."

"It all put a big smile on my face!"

Strength In Numbers

The photo above is of the participants from the Broken Hill service who were inspired by Ashley to clock K's, raise funds, or engage with what physical exercise fell within their abilities.

Left to right, we have:

Simone contributed funds because she has personally been touched by suicide. She continues to do everything in her power to support those who may be at risk of suicidality.

Antony clocked K's, motivated by the cause: "There can never be enough done for those experiencing suicidal ideation."

Brett clocked very significant steps to raise awareness, as well as to improve his health and wellbeing, as he is aware of the connection between good physical fitness and good mental health.

At the rear is Peer Worker **Ashley**. All up, Ash did 423 kilometres. "Thank you so much to everyone who sponsored me!"

In front is **Debra**. She experiences limited mobility, but she was so inspired by the cause that she raised awareness and got some steps in wherever it was possible.

Shantelle started her charity walk straight off the back of another walking fundraiser! "I enjoy taking part and raising awareness for those in need."

Pastor Bob (community member and advocate for suicide prevention) expressed his significant admiration and thanks for everyone who took part in the fundraiser.

Janine has an injury that makes walking difficult, but she donated funds to the cause as, "There is never enough that can be done for those impacted by suicide in one way or another."

Wanita walked and biked. "Too many people are affected by suicide, and this is a great cause."

LEFT: The Broken Hill team, clocking K's. Details in article. Photo provided by Ashley. **OPPOSITE RIGHT:** Ash Arnold, Peer Worker from Broken Hill.

**Flourish Australia
Broken Hill**

Wilyakali and Wiljali Country

Headspace, IEA, NDIS, HASI
231 Blende Street
Broken Hill NSW 2880
1300 779 270 (option1)

RECOVERY GAMES

Solutions

Scramble

- 1 Wellbeing
- 2 Resilient
- 3 Strength
- 4 Intention
- 5 Influential
- 6 Credibility
- 7 Pioneering
- 8 Advocacy

Panorama Crossword:

Across

- 1 Normalise
- 3 Intergenerational
- 5 Zumba
- 6 Network
- 8 Subsidised
- 9 Hospitalised
- 10 Ongoing

Down

- 2 Stigma
- 4 Intervention
- 7 Experience

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



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 Balrandald

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.

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



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

EARLY INTERVENTION, PROFOUND RESULTS

Giving Back to the Community With Peer Work

By Andrew Turtle



Andrew at Machu Pichu

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

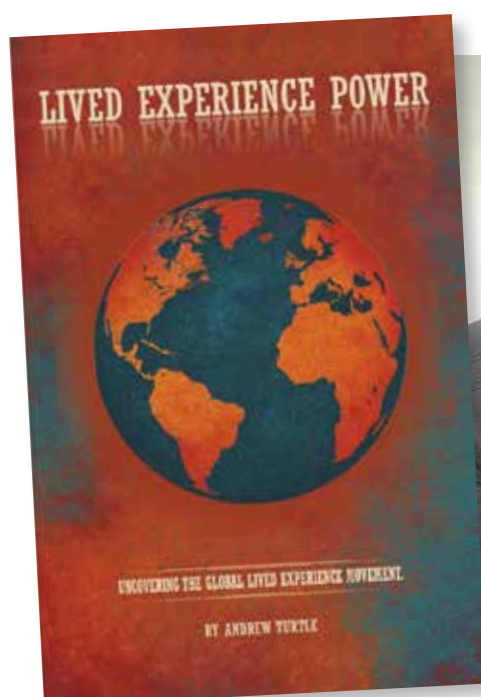
I've written several books about mental health recovery, the peer work movement, and my experience with them. They offer candid accounts of navigating the mental health system and emerging into purpose and leadership.

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.





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)





Feathers & Fur

An art show by Helen Fenner

By Grant J Everett

Helen Fenner is an artist who accesses services at Flourish Australia's Newcastle site, and she has appeared in Panorama a number of times, most recently in our 2024 Autumn Quarterly.

Helen first appeared in our pages while at art school, then again just a couple of years later when she had her own exhibition space at the Maitland Regional Art Gallery for a show called "Where The Seeds Grow," where she displayed 30 separate works. Some of her pieces then ran in the Newcastle Show Art Competition & Exhibition in 2024.

Her latest show was at Raymond Terrace Art Space Gallery (part of the Raymond Terrace Library), starting on September 27th and carrying on for almost all of October, Mental Health Month. The name

of the exhibition was 'Feathers And Fur.' Lisa, her support worker from Flourish Australia, helped Helen with the logistics of getting her art to where it needed to go.

Helen uses mixed media techniques in her art.

"I use decoupage and layering to build meaning and interest," Helen says, "to relate to the layers and meaning in life. I see where they can work together, and I like to be trying new ways of doing things in my art. I relate stitching to 'mending the soul.'"

"I want to create art that people can relate to. I find animals loving, kind, beautiful and without judgement. I grew up on a farm with various animals, so they've been a big part of my life.

This show all started with exploring

images of my relatives, and my own beloved dogs. "Let Freedom" is one of my favourites. The birds in this image represent freedom: the gate is open, and they are free to live. It's different, because I see 'freedom' as the main theme rather than the animal subject itself."

Just the other day, Helen showed several of her pieces in the art show held by Flourish Australia in Newcastle, and is planning to sell some of her works at the local markets. "I'd be happy to sell one!"

Helen's dream is to have an exhibition in a Sydney gallery, and with each successful art show she's working her way closer towards this goal.

ABOVE: Helen's displayed works.
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: "Love Birds", "Smelling The Lavender" and "Freedom".
PHOTOS BY HELEN FENNER

Welcoming the Gym into my life **and finding my safe space**

By Isabella Martin*

Do you find the idea of working out in a public place like a gym kind of "ick?" You're not alone! People of the feminine persuasion, and those of us lads who are not built like Jason Momoa, often feel this. But fear not! Isabella is both a gym sis AND a peer worker. She gets it because she overcame her reluctance. And so can you! - Editor*

As a woman I was afraid of gyms at first. Specifically, the free weights area was scary as that's where the biggest guys were. I was afraid of looking dumb with my form and small weights, and I was afraid of being harassed.

The reality is I can confidently say that across all the commercial gyms I've used, I've never been harassed, ogled, or made to feel small. I realised pretty quickly that the other people were only focusing on themselves!

Secondly, once I got good enough at understanding weightlifting and form, I realised that lots of people don't use "proper form" anyway!

Now I show up in whatever outfits I want, hair messy, chatting and dancing to my music. It's a home away from home. It was showing up repeatedly and getting that exposure that eventually turned the gym from a scary space to my treasured safe place.

In fact, I would like to recommend the gyms that I have tried and tested through NSW/ACT.

Plus Fitness Bankstown NSW A very "salt of the earth" feel. You can strike up a conversation with anyone, and everyone is always trying something new. Every bro/ sis will be happy to "spot you" for a lift.

Plus Fitness Peakhurst NSW This was my gym for five years. It is really big compared to others, so for equipment you get bang for buck. Everyone is friendly, but beware the after work afternoon rush! Because Plus Fitness is 24 hours, when my mental health was bad, this was a safe place around other people.

Plus Fitness Miranda NSW Another "bang for buck" two floor gym. I can't speak to the culture much, but it feels fancy and if you want to take progress pics, this is the place to go.

Gold's Gym Fishwyck near Canberra ACT The biggest selection of weights, equipment and machines specifically for body building I've ever seen. The membership is also the cheapest in ACT, as far as I can tell. You can chat and make friends here or stay on your own, all are accepted. And for those who can't stand crowds, it's a very quiet gym. Most machines are free even during the 5-7pm rush.

Stretch yourself further!

By the time I tried out all the above, and becoming a bit of an expert, I felt at home enough to go in for the ADVANCED stuff -and so can YOU!

Fishwyck ACT has a big powerlifting/strongman scene. Give it a try, as I've had nothing but good impressions. It is definitely a place to make friends and be part of a community. There are lots of groups where you will push yourself harder than you thought you could while others support you, outside your comfort zone. Some other venues include:

- Limitless Strength and Fitness
- Burley Strength
- Ultra Strength and Fitness

Why not develop yourself? Stretch your boundaries! Meet new friends! Welcome Gym into your life.

*Name changed for privacy

ABOVE: Are you intimidated by the thought of visiting a gym? You are not alone. But you can do it! Plus Fitness Peakhurst was one of Isabella's "treasured safe spaces."
PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY



(children are) more susceptible to behavioural issues and symptoms of ADHD, depression and anxiety, which inevitably manifest in classrooms, disrupting the learning environment... From subpar educational performance to brutal behaviour... there is more than enough evidence that children cannot control themselves with technology on their own." (Seo, 2024)

What should you do, if you are a teacher? Olga Sayer, an expert in educational neuroscience, gives three tips for successfully teaching Gen Alpha Students. These come from her book *Generation Alpha in the Classroom* (Galea & Sayer, 2025). Firstly, she suggests bite sized content. Children crave novelty and like frequent rewards (or "dopamine hits," if you like) so they will respond better to little chunks. Secondly, using a multimedia approach works, presumably for the same reason that you are frequently introducing novel methods in response to the short attention span of the children. Thirdly, she suggests that the advent of AI means we might need to rethink the role of teacher. She suggests they should be more in the vein of "facilitators" while children do their own exploration using AI (Sayers, 2025).

All of these tips, however, are accepting the damage as done and merely adapting to what appears to be a "disabling" of students. Sayers is describing how to deal with children who have difficulty paying attention, need frequent restimulation, and require constant rewards. Perhaps there is no cosmic law that says short attention spans or impatience or constantly craving rewards are bad things. However, there seem to be admirable qualities once found in most children which are now often missing, such as patience, focus, and the ability to interact politely with other humans.

Relativism

This view that Gen Alpha is missing something is discussed by Trish, a primary school teacher who runs a YouTube Channel "Teacher Therapy." (Teacher Therapy Trish, 2025). She says that this generation has suffered from a profound change in society's values. The things that made for a successful life last century are now muted, absent or

SAVING GEN ALPHA FROM 'FAST, FUN, EASY FAILURE.'

By Warren Heggarty

It is said that Generation Alpha (born between 2010 and 2025) is under-performing and misbehaving in school at an unprecedented level. Teachers, parents, students, society and the government all blame each other for the situation. Some blame COVID-19, and some blame digital technology...not that assigning blame usually fixes a problem. So what do we do?

Elizabeth McPherson, who is known by her handle Ms Mac on Tiktok, told Newsweek, "There's been a noticeable shift in student engagement and accountability. Many students today appear apathetic and disconnected from their own learning, and it's not simply a matter of motivation — it's systemic." (McFall, 2025)

Kristen Seo is more brutal. She says the lack of real person to person socialising in this digital era is to blame. 'Members of Gen Alpha are teenagers and younger and this is already a time of life when everybody goes through crucial mental and social development. If Ms Mac is right and we have a system that encourages apathy and disconnection, this will hamper young people's development. "Children will struggle to..." keep up with more difficult learning concepts as years go on, and an entire generation risks falling behind the complex world that preceding generations built."

"Gen Alpha's overuse of technology puts their fundamental educational development at stake... teacher job satisfaction rates are plummeting and more teachers are leaving the profession than ever before..."

contradicted. Shared morality has been replaced by moral relativism.

Parents, she says, tend to be "extremely permissive" so that children see no consequences for bad behaviour. Parents tend not to say "NO" or model discipline for children. The result is that students come to school expecting it to be "Fast, Fun and Easy!" Poor attention and poor focus are combined with extreme anti-authority beliefs. When they encounter difficulty, children have been taught to suppose that they "can't" do such and such because of a condition. Hardship itself has not been abolished. Only the confidence and drive to face it and overcome it.

None of this bodes well for the future mental health of Gen Alpha! But notice also that Trish does not cite the Internet or devices as the culprit. Children have adapted to the undisciplined "fast fun and easy" world of "digital" dopamine hits because parents and society as a whole have allowed them, even expected them to. The answer may yet lay with the children themselves - who will one day be the parents, the teachers and the society which has the power.

Bibliography

Galea, E., & Sayer, O. (2025). *Generation Alpha in the Classroom*. Oxford University Press.

McFall, M. R. (2025, May 25). *Generation Alpha. Technology. Education. Teachers*. Retrieved from Newsweek: <https://www.newsweek.com/generation-alphatechnology-education-teachers-2076269>

Sayers, O. (2025, October 21). *Here Are Three Top Tips For Teaching Generation Alpha*. Retrieved from Facebook video, Teaching with Oxford: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1135753795408461>

Seo, K. (2024, 11). *Digital Age Sets Gen Alpha up for Failure in the Classroom*. Retrieved from Emory Wheel: <https://www.emorywheel.com/article/2024/11/digital-age-sets-gen-alpha-up-for-failurein-classroom>

Teacher Therapy Trish. (2025, January). *Teachers Can't Fix Gen Alpha or Gen Z! Kids Can't Listen, Read Or Behave & It's Not Teachers' Fault* Retrieved from Teacher Therapy channel on You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4f8l0Qktb24>

ABOVE: Back in the day... the causes of Gen Alpha's educational challenges are complex. The solutions may well be difficult, but society's mental wellness depends on Gen Alpha living down its reputation. Above: A public school. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

Lead your own recovery WITH STANDARDS!

By Warren Heggarty

Personal standards are good things to have for the sake of our own integrity and the benefit of those around us. In a team situation, at work or in sport, standards need to be understood, agreed to and met by everyone.

Those of you who have done group projects will know all too well that a group of half a dozen people will usually have a couple of people who seem OK with letting others do all the work! It falls to the leader of the team to set the standard and ensure people live up to it.

In your own life and recovery journey, YOU are that leader. So you need to both set and live up to the standard you want to achieve. Leif Babin says: "When it comes to standards as a leader, it's not what you preach, it's what you tolerate...no matter what has been said or written, if substandard performance is accepted and no one is held accountable - if there are no consequences - that poor performance becomes the new standard." (Babin, 2018, p. 54)

William McRaven says that a good place to start setting standards is with small things. "Sometimes the simple act of making your bed can give you the lift you need to start your day and provide you the satisfaction to end it right." (McRaven, 2017, p. 9) Imagine this: if you have had a terrible day, one of those days where nothing seemed to go right, which would YOU rather come home to: a pile of mess, or a nice, neatly made bed?

By setting a small but high standard of neatness first thing in the morning, you will have a knock-on positive effect throughout the day.

But beware! "Standards" has an evil twin called "Perfectionism." Perfectionism "generally refers to the relentless pursuit of flawlessness and a high performance standard

accompanied by a critical self-evaluation." (ELD Psychologists, 2025)

Not all critical self-evaluation is bad; but sometimes our standards are unrealistic. You could say that there are two types of perfectionism. Firstly, there is the helpful (adaptive) kind. This is where you see mistakes as opportunities for learning and growth. If you want to learn a new craft, like drawing, you will need to critically evaluate your work to see how you could do it better. This leads to improvement.

However, some people take mistakes as negative personal judgments. This is unhelpful (maladaptive) perfectionism. In this case, your high standards may work AGAINST you by discouraging you into thinking, "I'm just not good enough." Unrelenting standards can also be discouraging to the people around you. We need to find a balance where we can maintain good standards while remembering "self-compassion."

Bibliography

Babin, L. (2018). *No Bad Teams, Only Bad Leaders*. In J. Willink, & L. Babin, *Extreme Ownership* (pp. 41-62). McMillan.

ELD Psychologists. (2025). *Balancing High Standards With Self Compassion; A Guide For Perfectionists*. Retrieved from ELD Psychologists: <https://www.eldpsychology.com.au/blog/guide-for-perfectionists>

McRaven, W. H. (2017). *Make Your Bed; Little Things That Can Change Your Life... And Maybe The World*. Michael Joseph.





Vale Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO

Former NSW Governor and Patron of Our Organisation

By Sasha Elisha, Team Coordinator

We were saddened by news of the passing of Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO, the 37th Governor of New South Wales. 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.

She is seen above in 2013 cutting the ribbon at the opening of Figtree Conference Centre, a successful community business operated by Flourish Australia until the pandemic of 2020. On the left is the late John Hall AM, our then Chair, and in the background is our then-CEO Pam Rutledge AM. To Dame Marie's left are Peer Worker Rebecca Tsang and Figtree employee, the late Keith Christensen.

Panorama of June 2013 noted: "Her Excellency was approachable, down-to-earth and utterly charming. She had the wonderful gift of making anybody she spoke

with feel important. (In her speech before the opening of Figtree) she recalled the time in 2001 when she had been offered the role of NSW Governor, by then-Premier Bob Carr. As a psychiatrist, she confessed to the audience, she wondered at the time whether she had been "imagining" it all.

That she should be so surprised to be offered the role of Governor speaks to her humility. She quipped to a University magazine in 2015 that, "I wondered what I had done to have drawn attention to me." In fact, 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.

Born in Narrandera in the Murrumbidgee valley of NSW to Lebanese migrant parents, she was taught to work hard and to value education for its own sake, something she recommended we ALL do. In 1956 she followed in

her uncle's footsteps to become a Medical Doctor, later taking an interest in psychiatry. Not long after graduating, she married Australian Rugby Union legend Nicholas Shehadie, who later became Lord Mayor of Sydney. They had three children together during their 61 year marriage. Sir Nicholas passed away in 2018.

In June 2014, she was appointed a Dame of the Order of Australia in recognition of her public service and her advocacy for mental health and marginalised communities. She often visited remote communities in Central Australia, the Kimberley and Arnhem Land before becoming a senior consultant for the Aboriginal Medical Services of Redfern and Kempsey.

We honour her life and service to the people of New South Wales. Her tenure as Governor was marked by dignity, compassion, and a deep respect for public and community service, leaving a legacy of service above self. We extend our sincere condolences to her family, friends, and all who mourn her passing.

Sources include ABC News, Panorama #48, Grant J Everett. Photo by Neil Fenelon



Farewell Dr Andy Campbell Former Director and Chair RFNSW

By Warren Heggarty

We were sorry to hear of the passing of Dr Andy Campbell. He was formerly Chairman of Richmond Fellowship of NSW (RFNSW), a predecessor organisation of Flourish Australia, serving on the Board for 30 years. He was also a founding member of TheMHS (The Mental Health Services) Learning Network in 1991.

Recalling the beginnings of RFNSW in his foreword to "The History of Richmond Fellowship of New South Wales and the People Who Made it Happen," Andy recalled the environment in 1970: "If you had a lived experience, chances were you struggled through alone. Unemployment and soul-destroying institutional care and homelessness were the outcomes for many."

The situation we have today is far better for people with lived experience thanks to the leadership

of Dr Andy Campbell and another former Flourish Australia Chair, John Hall AM, who passed away earlier in 2025.

Andy, a psychiatrist, worked as a clinical consultant to residents of RFNSW's Glebe House. He recognised that people with "severe mental health issues" could learn to adapt in a community setting that provided stable accommodation and social networks.

In those early days in the 1970s and 1980s, the struggle was mighty. "We were like a plane," Andy said. "We had to keep flying forward to stay in the air, and we nearly crashed many times. It was always about survival, fighting for funding and hoping for money to come through in a timely manner. We had to take a lot of risks." Those risks are still paying off!

Andy became the Medical Superintendent at Rozelle Hospital, and from here he sounded out some influential figures who "could bring

"He was ... a big believer in taking time to find the strengths of individuals with mental health issues, to find what they were good at as part of a personalised recovery journey."

-The History of the RFNSW

expertise and muscle to RFNSW's Board." Professor (later Dame) Marie Bashir, former Governor of NSW, was one strong advocate. Another was influential lawyer Greg James, later a King's Counsel and NSW Supreme Court Judge.

Crucially, around this time the RFNSW Board recognised that consumer representation was needed, and this led in 1986 to resident Simon Champ being employed.

In a way, the shortage of funding had an unforeseen benefit. It was necessary for residents to become involved in the maintenance and upkeep of the grounds at Glebe House, and this aligned with the ethos of Richmond Fellowship anyway!

Community care simply had to be better funded. As Andy said, "We totaled up the cost of savings of community care against hospital care, and then factored in the social advantages and reduction in admissions." The case for allocating funds to NGOs like RFNSW on this logic was hard to refute.

Earlier this year, at Flourish Australia's 70th Anniversary celebration at NSW Government House, our CEO Mark Orr AM recalled and honoured the work of those change-makers who helped pave the way for the mental health recovery approach that we provide today. Dr Andy Campbell was one of them, and we are grateful for his contribution. We will also continue his legacy.

Picture from TheMHS Instagram. Quotes are taken from "The History of Richmond Fellowship of New South Wales and the People Who Made it Happen" (2015)

LET THE SUPERBEAST REVEAL ITSELF!

By Warren Heggarty

“Despair can be lonely, but beyond it, the sweetest things are the ones you don’t even know of yet - but only if you are willing to find them,” - David Hall

To mark the International Day of People with a Disability, Royal Rehabilitation Centre at Ryde NSW welcomed wheelchair tennis great David Hall OAM PLY, the author of new autobiography “SUPERBEAST.”

It is more than just a sports saga, and more than just a recovery story. Much more! While David says that he wrote the book to entertain rather than carry any heavy message, the message will be found in the story for those who need it.

In conversation with Channel Seven’s Taylor Aiken, David shared stories about his recovery and his career. Let’s briefly recap a few of his achievements: Six Paralympic medals, including one gold before his home crowd in Sydney 2000. Nine Australian Open titles, Seven British Opens, Eight Japan Opens, Eight US Opens.

While world number one in wheelchair tennis, David was selected as the first torch-bearer for the Sydney Paralympics, an experience which he described as

“surreal.” He recalled receiving the torch from Prime Minister Howard, and then took it forward in the Canberra mist. “You almost don’t want it to end,” David recalled, wanting to go slower to make the moment last as long as possible before passing the torch over to marathon great Rob de Castella.

David had once been a runner too; and he had run with the torch for the 1982 Commonwealth Games. A few years after that, however, he lost both legs, and nearly his life, when hit by a car. David remembers vividly the lead up to the accident that changed his life. “It’s incredible, because a lot of people banish trauma to the back of their mind. They just don’t want to think about it.”

David doesn’t remember everything as he was not conscious the whole time, but with the help of research, he manages to go into detail of the accident and its aftermath in his book. As a 16-year-old being told that one leg had to be amputated before being told that the other one had to be removed too, he could not have imagined what big things lay ahead.

Get Over “Why Me?” And Let Other People In

Of course, all of that is revealed in the book, but we got a strong foretaste of it in David’s author talk at Royal Rehab Ryde. Responding to questions from the audience, he revealed two important lessons from his trauma. “Firstly, get through the WHY ME phase as quickly as you can. That was the hardest part. Angry at the world, angry at myself. That anger is just self-destructive.”

The second lesson was that even though in the aftermath of trauma, “you don’t want to let other people in.” With the benefit of hindsight he would have “let people in earlier!”

It was after David’s second amputation that he began rehabilitation in earnest. A few days after the operation, thoroughly worn out, he found himself doing what he called a very light workout. But it got the adrenaline going just enough for him to feel convinced that, “If I go all in, I’ll get there!” He wanted to go back home, get back to work, and get a car. “Rehab was going to help me achieve these things.”

And quite a bit more!

During his recovery, David read in a local newspaper about a local wheelchair tennis player named Terry Mason. Having met and watched him play, David was deeply impressed and decided he too needed to get into that sport. Again, he was all in, and it was a total commitment. A few of his early role models, such as Errol Hyde, were present at the book launch!

Very early in David's career, there was a chance encounter with another Australian sporting legend, Dawn Fraser. She was hosing the lawn in a holiday house right next door to where David was strengthening himself by going up and down the yard over and over in his wheelchair. Out of curiosity, she asked him what he was training for, and then encouraged him to keep going and aim for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics! It turns out Dawn was a good judge of potential!

Life Is Lived Now

In an earlier interview with Daniel Lane from the NSW Institute of Sport, David revealed a lesson in what we would call mindfulness. He recalled working with NSWIS Sports Psychologist Jocelyn Penna who helped him to realise that in many ways the past and the future can be burdens that distract us from what is happening right now. When we are "in the moment" we focus on what we must do NOW. In this way, without being conscious of it, we are adding our best effort to our legacy and paving the way to our best possible future.

Following the Sydney 2000 Paralympics, at the pinnacle of his career, there was one thing that David still wanted really badly: winning a second Paralympic Gold Medal in Athens. With a Bronze from Atlanta (1996) and a Gold from Sydney (2000), he had two medals. But two Gold medals was such a rare achievement that he confessed he might have given up 50 other titles to get them! Imagine his disappointment upon losing. Yet still, his career totals were 1,026 wins to only 200 losses!

Do Some Every Day!

Andre Agassi's tennis memoir "Open" was an inspiration, but after retirement, David wanted to write his autobiography himself - there was no shadow writer involved! After four years of pottering, he decided to get it done employing his tried and tested method: going all in, committing to writing something every single day until all 430 pages were finished!

Perhaps David is a little different from the rest of us and he does admit to having a "lot of chutzpah" which helped in his recovery. After all he used to listen to heavy metal band SLAYER on his Walkman to calm himself down before matches. When he was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame, those tapes were put on display in the ITHOF Museum! No doubt it had an impact on Slayer sales!

Speaking of metal music greats, the name "SUPERBEAST" comes from Rob Zombie. David's one-time coach dubbed him "SUPERBEAST," and he returned the compliment by naming his coach "Zombie."

Humility With Chutzpah

Tony Stavely, Chair of the Rehab Hospitals Group, made some closing remarks thanking David for lending his support to the Rehab. Tony mentioned that after all his achievements David still displayed "humility in spades," and had "a real sense of community service." Let that be another life lesson that we can all glean from his talk!

BTW, David and his partner Lesly Page both attended a Buckingham House tennis day in Prince Alfred Park. Some Panorama readers may recall the story from 2010.

SUPERBEAST, "one of the great sport sagas," is available on Amazon.

*OAM= Order of Australia Medal.
PLY- 'Paralympian' awarded by International Paralympic Committee

Reference

"David Hall: From SUPERBEAST Server To Super Best Seller," Daniel Lane NSWIS Media, October 20th, 2025

www.nswis.com.au/Newsroom

ABOVE: Taylor Aiken speaks to David Hall before an enraptured audience at Ryde Rehab PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY.

OPPOSITE: David spreads the word on FACEBOOK.





Global Mental Health Congress

BARCELOS, PORTUGAL

By Julie Millard AM and Mark Orr AM

Australia's presence at the Global Congress included Flourish Australia's CEO Mark Orr AM and our good friend Julie Millard AM. They spoke of Social Citizenship and Women in Leadership, while host city Barcelos was the first of a new Network of European Mental Health Cities.

The municipality and city of Barcelos in the North of Portugal lies on the Camino de Santiago, an early trek of Christians across Europe to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostella (Santiago being the Spanish name of Saint James, a Catholic saint). Pilgrims walk the routes (there are several paths up to 800 kilometres long) for their spiritual growth, and for a chance to have their sins forgiven. Blue and gold signs of the scallop shell, signifying and providing direction on the pathway, are everywhere. Completion of the pilgrimage gives a great sense of accomplishment – and you even get a certificate!

Set beside the fast-flowing Cávado River, and crossed by the iconic Medieval bridge, Ponte de Barcelos, Barcelos is an old city, established in the ninth Century, and due to the Camino and the number of pilgrims passing through the area in the tenth century, grew significantly. At the last census, the city of Barcelos

has 26,042 inhabitants, while the municipality has 116,959 inhabitants across an area of 378.90 square kilometres.

Barcelos has the honour of being the first World Mental Health City. An initiative of the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH), this title signifies a commitment of the local government and community to addressing mental health across the city, with a network of 70 organisations participating, led by the local municipal government. Barcelos is also famous for the Rooster of Barcelos (Galo de Barcelos). It is Portugal's beloved folk symbol representing justice, faith, and good luck.

So, it was no surprise that the local municipal government partnered with the WFMH to host the 2025 World Congress on Mental Health, titled, "Mental Health and Social Sustainability: A Whole Society and Community-Based Approach."

For more information, scan this QR code:



Oceania Region

We attended the congress, presented papers, and networked with people working in mental health from across the world, being joined by colleagues from Perth and Brisbane. Julie, as a Board member and former Regional Vice President Oceania of the WFMH, was a keynote speaker and presented on "World Federation for Mental Health and the Oceania Region - A Whole of Community Approach to Mental Health." She spoke about the history of the WFMH and the advocacy work being done since 2003 in the Pacific region by Regional Vice Presidents.

Julie's talk highlighted the previous challenges of distance, costs of travel, isolation, and slow communication options prior to technology. Today's challenges include economic instability, climate changes and extreme weather events, technology barriers, and food insecurity - all with an impact on the mental health of people living in Pacific island nations. The resilience, adaptability, interconnectedness of families and communities and the traditional cultures, however, continue to support people's

mental health. It is understood that a sustainable future requires every strategy to be rooted in the spiritual, familial, and cultural protocols of a community, based on its unique history, and led by its own people.

European Network of Mental Health Cities

A highlight of the conference was the launch of the European Network of Mental Health Cities, building on the success of Barcelos, and establishing a group of 12 cities across Europe similarly committed to addressing mental health in local communities. It made us wonder whether something like that might be possible in Australia.

Social Citizenship

Mark's presentation, "A Place For Everyone: Social Citizenship and the Importance of Communities," described the co-design of Flourish Australia's Social Citizenship Framework. This included how a Social Citizenship Think Tank was established, bringing together people accessing services as well as staff, and how the Think Tank engaged with specific groups such as First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, LGBTIAQ+ communities, young people, and people who have experience of the criminal justice system.

The framework explored what it means for community resources such as sporting clubs, art classes, faith communities, schools and TAFEs, to be part of a person's mental health recovery toolkit, and the role they play in creating supportive, connected communities which facilitate recovery - and which also challenge mental health stigma and discrimination. As part of the process, guiding principles of Listening, Partnering and Engaging were developed, and the 5 Rs – Rights, Relationships, Roles, Responsibilities and Resources - were supplemented with a sixth R for Roots, recognising the importance of people's culture and where they come from.

Women Leaders

Julie's second talk, "Women Leaders of the World Federation for Mental Health," a focus on social sustainability, celebrated the

contribution of women leaders within the WFMH. Having been a Board member for eight years and the Chair of the Women's Mental Health Section, Julie took the opportunity to describe women's contributions to the Federation. The well-known cultural anthropologist Dr Margaret Mead was the President from 1957-1958, with the American activist and heiress Beverly B Long holding the position from 1995-1997. Julie challenged why there had only been 8 women Presidents of WFMH out of a potential 32 Presidents since its establishment in 1948. More recently, this has changed with more women elected as President: Dr Ingrid Daniels (2019-2021) from South Africa, Professor Sabine Bährer-Kohler (2026-2027) from Switzerland, and Silvia Raggi from Argentina, who is the next President (2028-2029). It is important to note that in addition to Julie's long contribution, Australia's own Janet Meagher AM, a well-known lived experience leader and advocate, was on the Board of the WFMH as a Board Member at Large and held the position of Secretary between 1996 and 2005.

Banda da Galo and Portuguese cakes

One of the surprises of the conference was the conference dinner, at a reception hall about a thirty minute drive from Barcelos. On arrival we were greeted by the Banda do Galo, a band of about 20 people playing instruments whilst dressed in red pants and yellow tunics, with a chicken head as a hat. It was quite fun. Later in the evening, members of the local community performed traditional folk dances for the audience.

Following the conference we headed to Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, for a few days' rest, sightseeing and to eat too many Portuguese cakes (especially Julie). Mark headed back to Australia, and Julie travelled 12,000 kilometres to South Africa to present at the 7th Global Mental Health Summit in Cape Town.

RIGHT, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Banda do Galo. Mark Orr AM, CEO of Flourish Australia, with Julie Millard AM in Barcelos. Too many of these Portuguese cakes kept Julie going all the way to South Africa! The Rooster is on our side! PHOTOS BY JULIE MILLARD



COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL PAGES

By Tricia and Jen of the Council (Additional reporting from Warren)

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



Council. He is "ecstatic" to be in the role, and is very much looking forward to it. Panorama readers first met Paul in the Summer 2024-25 Quarterly issue. In the story "Team Recovery: With Help From The Justice League," Paul revealed his background with the Air Force and said that accessing Flourish Australia was "the biggest positive change in my life."

Rebecca has only recently joined us. We thought she was awesome, and her active use of lived experience made her highly qualified for the role. She was part of a team from headspace that presented two items at last year's TheMHS Conference (see story in Summer 2025-26 Quarterly Panorama).

We hope to announce another new Council member in our next report.

We also welcomed Mat Tipping, Flourish Australia's new Lived Experience Practice Lead, who was introduced to us by Lisa Gott (Executive Director, Lived Experience Leadership).

Housing & Accommodation

This is a great area of interest for Flourish Australia and the Council. Susan McCarthy (Chief Operating

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 in the Community Advisory council, please consider joining us.

Firstly, if you are accessing Flourish Australia's services, see the ad on the next page (bottom)

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 34 for all that you need to know).

Now here is a rundown of our big meeting of the year 2025, which was held in person at Buckingham House in Surry Hills NSW on 20th November.

New Co-Chairs and new people

Paul (Seven Hills) and Rebecca (Youth Reference Group, Castle Hill/Parramatta headspace) were both elected as Co-Chairs of the Community Advisory Council.

Paul, of course, has already been with us as a member of the

Officer) reported that 80 people are accessing services through Supported Independent Living and the Women and Young Children Youth Program in Queensland, as well as at Tamworth NSW. Under the Community Visitors Scheme, official independent visitors drop in to meet the residents to see how they are going. Pathway to Community Living is another great program in Newcastle and Sydney, serving 220 people.

Creative Arts Travelling Show

Inspired by the recent Buckingham House Art show, the Council came up with the idea of a creative arts travelling show which might include not just paintings, but music (above) and poetry. This idea is still in its infancy, but we wonder: what do Panorama readers think? Send feedback to: Panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au

Information

The Council wants to improve the way information is propagated and distributed throughout Flourish Australia. There are a lot of great ideas and events (such as the Art Show) and we want to make sure that EVERYONE gets to hear about them all in a timely fashion.

NDIS feedback

The Ministry of Health, MMHA and the University of NSW were looking for advice and feedback on NDIS changes. Karen spoke to us on their behalf, and we gave her our ideas about preventing people from "falling through the cracks." One of the major features of some mental health diagnoses is that they are episodic. This means a person's ability to "function" (as per the rules of the NDIS) can change through cycles over time. A person might be well for a time and seem to not need support, but they will likely become unwell again and require support in the future. We think that the episodic nature of psychosocial disability needs to be managed more appropriately.



Policy & Values

We had such a packed meeting on November 20th that we had to postpone a full discussion on a number of things until later in December 2025. But don't worry, we will report them all in the next available issue of Panorama (That's April 2026 online or Winter

in hard copy). This includes discussion on Family Carers and Kin, Ethical Decision Making, and the organisational values of Flourish Australia.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Kelly from the 2024 Annual Report with the Mosaic at Surry Hills. **PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON.** ABOVE: Tricia and Jen of the Council. **PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY**

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:

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 at council@flourishaustralia.org.au

Please note:

This is not available to staff, volunteers or students.

panorama

100TH

Quarterly Issue

1st Issue

100th Issue

1996 - 2026

The pages of Panorama have been graced by hundreds of amazing people with powerful stories.

Flourish Australia's staff like to live up to high expectations, as demonstrated here by former support worker Adele Salter, shown conquering Mt Kosciuszko in *Panorama's 64th issue*, back in *June 2017*. What's more, we understand that after reaching the roof of Australia, she successfully returned to sea level again where she'd raised \$700 for RUOK! Now that is community spirit! Photo by Adele Salter.

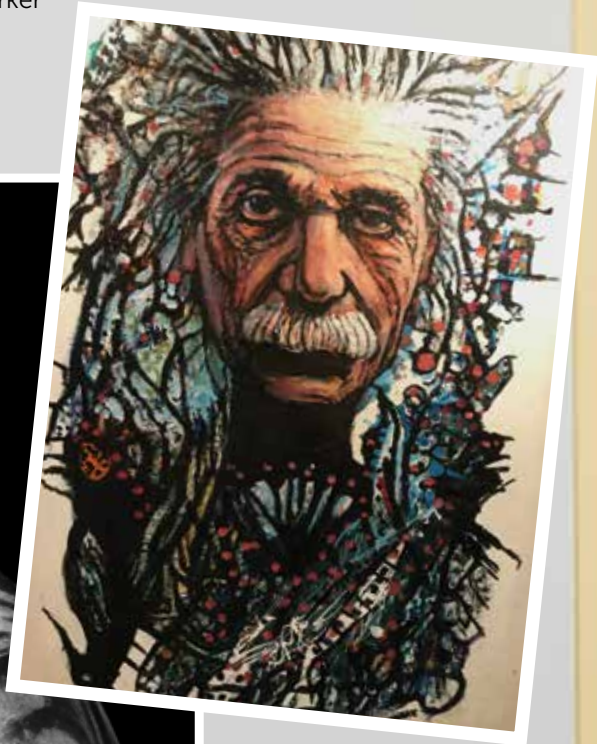




The Panorama team is celebrating 100 print issues! Let's look at a few memorable cover images from the past.

LEFT (#75 March 2020).

Remember Social Distancing? Not the best recipe for mental health, but we got through it with humour, as demonstrated by Hervey Bay Qld staff. **BELOW, RIGHT:** Albert Einstein (**#83 December 2021**) in a spectacular painting by the artist Abdul Youghon who accessed Flourish Australia's Penrith service. **BELOW, LEFT::** An Aboriginal Youth (**#88B February 2023**), photographed by Danny Dalton, formerly an Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Worker with Flourish Australia.



LEFT: Who wasn't moved by the story of Taylor and her son Choppy (**#92C March 2024**) who attended Flourish Australia's Women and Children's Program? Her Emotional Wellbeing worker from Flourish Australia is on the right (photo by Neil Fenelon).

BELOW, LEFT: Flourish Australia positioned itself as a service where all people are welcome. We are so keen that in 2018 we even drove the truck down to the Rainbow on the Plains Festival in remote Hay in NSW to prove it! **BELOW, MIDDLE:** Staff members Alison Perizi and Melanie Noble at Flourish Australia's Mental Health Month Picnic Day October 2016, where the theme was "Moving for Mental Health" (photo by Mohammed Alkhub).



ABOVE: Before Flourish Australia, we were RichmondPRA, and before that we were two companies, Richmond Fellowship of NSW and PRA. From 2012 Panorama began to serve a much larger audience. The flyer from 2009 (BELOW) shows that the annual Picnic Day goes back a long way.

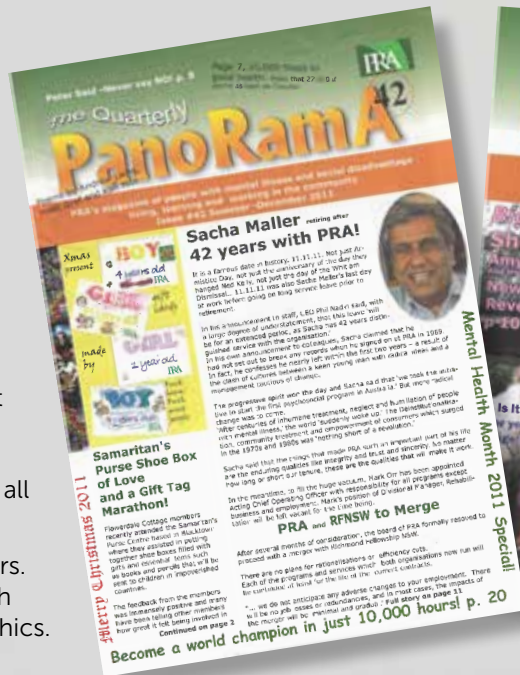
Panorama has always greatly valued and promoted the inclusion and value of people with a lived experience. A forerunner of today's Community Advisory Council was the Employees Advisory Committee, which gave a voice to Flourish Australia's Community Business employees. **LEFT** is the 2013 lineup of the EAC: Seated are Gerry C (retired) and Malcolm W. Standing, from left to right, are Sue P, a Warwick Farm member, Greg E, the late Keith Christiansen, Janet Meagher AM (then Director), Peter Farrugia, then-Peer Workforce Manager Pam Rutledge AM, then-CEO John F, Mark A, Louise D, and Alan S.



Panorama back in the PRA Days (1996 to 2012)

FAR, RIGHT: It could be Panorama's most portentous cover! It was *issue 42* back in *December 2011*, and the late Sacha Maller, pioneering Chief Operating Officer of PRA, had just clocked up 42 years of service. Coincidence? Furthermore, on 11.11.11 he announced his retirement. Another coincidence? And look at the news breaking at the bottom of the page: PRA and RFNSW to merge! Another coincidence? Yet all of this duly came to pass.

RIGHT: One of our favourite covers. Dave the Horse makes friends with "Kelly" Ka Lai from BuckPrint Graphics.



Panorama Archives

mental health recovery



prattle: the world's most exclusive socially inclusive social page.

PRA's very own football genius Peter Tos chosen Head coach of Australian Gridiron Team. See P 20



Page 28

PanoRamA Summer, December 2009

BuckPrint Graphics

From 2008 to 2012, Panorama was run out of PRA's community business BuckPrint Graphics, downstairs from Buckingham House. The supported employees were co-opted into the production of Panorama, making it a truly "consumer-led" enterprise from top to bottom. Managers Peter Tos and Ian Kerr, together with employees like Kelly (above) Hammo, Dorothy, Daria and Chris L (who took really good photographs), to name a few, all pitched in. Gradually, the writing disappeared from the front page and we went full colour.

Tom Webb Moulton

RIGHT: In the early days, PanoRamA contained the letters PRA in it. So too did the name of its BACK PAGE called "PRAttle," which was billed as "The World's Most Exclusive Socially Inclusive Social Page." Here in issue #34 December 2009 we find a commemoration of "Doomsday" from the 23rd of September 2009, when the South East coast of Australia was blanketed in orange dust. We thought it was a great way to celebrate Tom Webb Moulton's birthday! Teddy Boy Tom had a regular column in Panorama up until he passed away 2011, aged 70. As Tom had cerebral palsy, he used to dictate his stories to a "ghost writer." This arrangement was particularly apposite for the final Instalment: "Teddy Boy Tom Goes to Heaven."

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