

AWARD WINNING

panorama

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

Monthly Issue April 2026 #101A



From Service
to Civilian:
A Tough Transition

Get Real About GYM

Tips on How to Keep
A Recovery Journal

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AUSTRALIA

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Where mental wellbeing thrives

About us

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

Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 (option1) or
flourishaustralia.org.au

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

About Panorama

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

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Contents

COVER: Kim holding a picture of her old life in the Australian Defence Force, Army. Photo by Neil Fenelon.

4 From Servicewoman to Civilian

7 Farewell Michael Appleton

8 Getting Real About GYM

10 Cooking on the Sunshine Coast

11 Community Advisory Council column

11 How to Deal With an Overwhelming Task

12 Keep a Journal for Recovery

13 The Silent Power of Affirmations

14 Say Yes to YES!

15 Women's Mental Load

16 Panorama's Puzzle Pages

18 "If you don't have a dream..."

19 Inclusive Employment Australia

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Contributions are welcome!

WE PROVIDE PRACTICAL

Care for Carers



Flourish Australia is committed to working closely with families and carers in their important role of supporting people close to them with a lived experience of a mental health issue.

Using a family inclusive approach, we work directly and in partnership with specialist organisations to provide support and education services for families and carers.

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

SCAN QR TO FIND OUT MORE





In Panorama April 2026

April 25 is ANZAC Day, and this year Panorama features a story by an Australian Defence Force, Army veteran Kim Thompson (on the cover), who accesses Flourish

Australia's Caboolture service. Kim details not only her own recovery story, but points out some of the issues facing military veterans in general. She touches on mental health recovery and the difficult transition to civilian life, providing practical ideas as to what could be done to solve these issues.

Our roving photographer took some great shots not only of Kim but of Heather (pictured left, with her Jack Russell, Violet), who accesses our Maitland NSW service. Heather discusses the process of finding employment, and following her dream of working with animals.

We go to Hervey Bay in Queensland to look at their cooking groups.

Reports that members of the younger generations, Z and Alpha, think that hobbies are "cringe" have just made us more determined to promote HOBBIES for mental wellness.

In this issue we look not just at journaling as a hobby, but the benefits of affirmation journaling. We also have a story from Kristen MacDonald who has written a book about the power of affirmations.

Coming up in May's Panorama...

If you have already tried journaling, why not try making a "commonplace book"? We'll show you how.

Plus, we are going to look at how Flourish Australia's Customer Voice can improve our service for YOU.

Spread Hope...
Your Mental Health Journey
will Inspire Others!



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

Don't worry if you're not a writer – that's where we jump in! At Panorama, every story is valued! We're constantly on the lookout for stories from those living with mental

health issues. But hey, family members and caregivers, your stories matter too! Not sure where to begin? Send us a message, we would love to hear from you!

Email: panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au
or Call: 1300 779 270



From Servicewoman to Civilian

Finding a place to belong

By Kim

What is it like for serving members and veterans of our defence forces, in terms of mental health? Here, in an expanded story following on from her appearance in "Courage" in Flourish Australia's Annual Report 2024-2025, Kim provides insights from her own lived experience. She also suggests some practical actions that might improve the transition to civilian life.

A Place To Belong - My First Steps With Flourish Australia

When Deb (Turner) from Flourish Australia first arrived at my home, I wasn't sure what to expect. Life had felt heavy for a long time, and the idea of starting something new, meeting someone new, came with its fair share of nerves. But Deb's warm smile and genuine presence immediately put me at ease. She didn't rush. She listened with kindness and without judgement. The first meeting at my home felt like a breath of fresh air.

The following Tuesday, I visited the Flourish Australia space for the first time. I'll never forget walking through these doors and being welcomed not just by one or two

people, but by everyone. Staff members paused what they were doing - turned away from their computers - to greet me. ME. It was such a small gesture, but one that left a big impression. For the first time in a long time, I felt seen.

What came next truly blew me away: an outdoor BBQ was about to start, filled with friendly faces, laughter and the preparation of sausages and onions on the grill. As I sat I was asked by one of the support workers a simple question:

"What do you enjoy doing in life?"

I was stunned. Not because the question was complicated, but because no one had asked me that for a long time. The question was asked with genuine curiosity,

as part of a conversation around planning a monthly calendar of activities and outings.

They were asking me about what I liked. About what made me happy. I didn't expect it. And I certainly didn't expect how much it would move me.

Flourish Australia isn't just a support service - it's a community that gently reminds you that your voice matters, that you matter. From Deb's heartfelt visit to the warm, welcoming BBQ, I felt something I hadn't in a while: Hope. The kind of hope that whispers, "Maybe I can rebuild, maybe there's still space for joy, and maybe, just maybe, I'll be allowed to flourish, too."

Ijaz, pictured on the next page, has since taken over as my key worker.

My Role in the Defence Force (Army)

I was honoured to be the first female in the Australian Defence Force, Army within Aviation Corps, a milestone I carry with immense pride to this day. It was a time of discipline, structure and breaking barriers. Being part of that pioneering moment wasn't just a job, it was history, and I was living it.

After several years, I transitioned into a different path within the Army, transferring to the Dental Corps. That shift brought with it another honour: I was awarded a placement to study at the University of Dentistry, Brisbane.

What a challenge that was! By day, I worked full time, and by night and weekends I studied relentlessly. I still remember preparing for intensive residential blocks, daily lectures, back to back exams and the pressure of standing along full-time students who had study as their only focus.

Looking back now, I often ask myself "How did I do it?" Truthfully, I'm still not sure! But when you come from a life of service, you learn that giving up simply isn't an option.

Eventually, injuries led to my medical discharge - a difficult and painful chapter.

Unexpectedly From Uniform To Dot Painting.

I was asked "What made me interested in dot painting?" Well, it's a bit of a winding road.

Before life changed, I used to paint often. Creativity was a part of me - a quiet escape, a way to express what words sometimes couldn't.

But everything shifted after I was medically discharged from the Defence Force, Army. My time in the Army came to an unexpected end due to severe injuries, and with it, so did the sense of art.

Suddenly, I was told the only thing I could do is "Bingo." Really?! That was hard to hear. I knew I needed more - something that sparked joy, something that helped me reconnect with who I was before the trauma, and who I might become.

So, I gave dot painting a go at the art group at Flourish Australia's Caboolture service.

At first, it felt funny using a stick as a paintbrush! It's a different kind of rhythm, one dot at a time. It was fun, it was calming. Suddenly I wasn't a former soldier or a female battling physical pain, I was a painter again, rediscovering colour, shape, and flow one dot at a time.

Sure, I still need a lot of practice. But

that's the beautiful thing about art - it's not about perfection, it's about expression, about being in the moment. And every dot I place is a small act of healing, a step forward in finding joy in unexpected places.

Dot painting may have started as an experiment, but it's become a meaningful part of my journey - a reminder that even after the storms, there's still room to create something beautiful.

My Experience Of Mental Health Issues In The Army And In Transition

Mental health issues, in my experience, are NOT handled well within the Defence Force while you are still serving. The system often falls short, especially when members are dealing with issues like harassment, bullying, early signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from deployments, the sudden loss of a mate, or even the emotional impact of a medical discharge.

A lot happens behind the scenes, and quickly. Rather than being supported, most Defence Force

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personnel displaying mental health symptoms are sent to a psychiatrist and ultimately discharged. In many cases, I don't think they need to be discharged at all. I think what they need is time: time to learn coping strategies, time to recover, time to feel human again after extreme or traumatic events. But the Defence Force has very little patience for that. Sadly, they often see these individuals as a "weak link."

Once discharged, things don't get any easier. There's another uphill battle, this time with the Department of Veteran Affairs. Trying to get recognition for mental health conditions related to service is a long, exhausting process. The very system designed to support us feels slow, disconnected, and at times dismissive.

We need change. We need to see our service personnel as people, not liabilities. With the right care, many of them could stay in service, or at the very least transition out with dignity and proper support. It shouldn't be this hard to heal.

Transition Support Is A Way Forward

Honestly, transition support before discharge would make an enormous difference. Speaking from experience, I felt abandoned when I left the Army. The sense of mateship, of being a part of something, vanished overnight. It was as if the family I belonged to suddenly disappeared, and I was left standing alone with no map, no compass, and no support.

I had to apply for a Medicare card, which was far more complicated and delayed than it should have been. Despite years of service and discipline, I had no rental history to show when applying for housing, no employer references to call. The military structure that held everything together gave me nothing to hold onto once I was discharged.

Those early days of transition were some of the toughest of my life. That's why I often think about becoming a transition support person. Not an advocate, because

advocates focus mostly on claims, like injuries or mental health claims. I'm searching for all kinds of connections, as when I'd stepped into civilian life it had left me feeling unprepared and unsupported. Looking back, I wish someone had arranged supportive contacts for me!

We all took an oath to serve our country, Australia. Whether we deployed or not, whether we served five years or twenty, male or female, it shouldn't matter. We trained to the highest standards, ready to protect Australia, and we all deserve that same level of care and dignity in return.

No one who served their country should feel discarded. Transition should be a bridge, not a cliff.

Asking For Help Is Hard

The past has no hold over me. Yesterday is the past. Today I am grateful. Tomorrow is a blessing.

I'll be honest: asking for help has never come easy for me. It's the Defence training, as independence is drilled into you, and needing help is too often seen as weakness. But the truth is, strength is KNOWING when to reach out.

Since leaving the Army, I haven't returned to work. But I have found something just as valuable - connection.

I hadn't even heard of Flourish Australia until recently. I only wish I'd known about them sooner. The team is remarkable - warm, genuine, and truly listening. The outings have completely changed my world. For the first time in years, I've ventured out of my home. I've visited art galleries, wandered by rivers, stood in awe at a waterfall, and taken in the pure peace of nature on scenic drives.

Each adventure with Flourish Australia reminds me that life still holds beauty. I take photos of every outing, not just as memories, but as reminders that no matter what, there are still doors waiting to open, still chapters to be written.

Finding Myself Again Through Healing And Hope

Due to multiple injuries I sustained during my service in the Australian Defence Force, I've had to let go



of many life long passions - scuba diving, sailing, painting, running, cycling and swimming. Letting those go has been heart breaking. They weren't just hobbies, they were a part of who I was.

What I've done since then is a different kind of work - the internal kind. I've committed myself to rehabilitation, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally. I've read countless books on how the mind works, learning about triggers and how to manage them. One of the most important tools I've taught myself is to sleep whenever I fall into a dark, deep hole. It sounds simple, but sometimes rest is the reset button I need. I also meditate, listen to music, and remind myself of this powerful truth.

To the Flourish Australia team, I have nothing but deep gratitude. You helped bring me back to life, you've helped me laugh again, talk again, and feel like ME again. Kim is back. The woman I lost so many years has found her way back home.

PREVIOUS PAGE, BOTTOM RIGHT: "What do you enjoy doing?" Kim (left) speaks to Deb Turner of Flourish Australia's Caboolture Qld service. **PREVIOUS PAGE, TOP LEFT:** Kathryn and Kim. **PHOTOS BY NEIL FENELON. THIS PAGE:** Kim's new support worker, Ijaz. **PHOTO BY KIM.**

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Farewell Michael Appleton

We can still hear the laughter

by Warren Heggarty

On 27 December 2025 we lost Michael Appleton, a pioneer of the 'consumer' or 'lived experience movement, known for his humour and his occasional role as Santa Claus.

'Michael had two clear goals in his life,' wrote close friend and former long term Flourish Australia Board member Paula Hanlon, 'The first was to make sure people entering the mental health system today would have a better experience than him. The second was to make six people smile and six people laugh every day. In his last days, I affirmed to him that he had achieved his goals and that we are very thankful for his time on this earth.'

Paula, who experienced mental health issues herself, told another tale of Michael in an article for Panorama Magazine 'From Blackwattle House to the Board: Pieces of My Recovery Puzzle' (Summer Quarterly 2024 page 37).

'In late 1993,' she said 'a man named Michael Appleton approached me to join the "Ryde Consumer Network." I did not know that the term "consumer" was connected to mental health and thought it had something to do with the shopping centre. I said "no" until late 1994 when I found out what the term "consumer" meant and what the group was that he was referring to.'

In fact, Michael had founded

the Ryde Consumer Network in November 1993 and was a founding member of the Northern Sydney District Consumer Network in February 1994. He worked for various Area Health Services for several years but maintained his voluntary work throughout. In a statement published by BEING on their website Being.org.au, Paula said 'I am one of those who developed under Michael's leadership' of the Ryde Consumer Network which boasted of 150 members.

Paula recalled in another article in the North Sydney Local Health District Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol newsletter that he had started volunteering in the area at Wicks Cottage in 1990. By 1991 he was invited to a meeting on the closure of Gladesville Hospital. The idea of closing the hospital was so that patients would receive services in the community. Michael, however, was not lulled into complacency. At the closure meeting he held out his hand on behalf of the 'community and said 'Where's our money?'

Nearly three decades later, in December 2019 Michael spoke at a solemn meeting on the grounds of this former mental hospital where he had once been a patient. With a major bushfire catastrophe in progress, the air was thick with smoke and the temperature around 40C. Michael gave the acknowledgement of 'lived experience' at the dedication of a section of Gladesville's grounds as a cemetery. That is because over 1229 people- patients- were buried in that field by Victoria Road. Only five of the graves had been marked. As the ceremony began, the wind suddenly swung to the south dropping the temperature and clearing the smoke. Today there is a wall with a list of names and a small museum which pays tribute.

This makes one wonder. Where would we be now without men like Michael Appleton who worked within his local community bit by bit. Each small step in his activist path counted towards great achievements in the long run. And a lot of laughter along the way.

ABOVE: Michael Appleton with his friend and colleague of decades, Paula Hanlon (previous Flourish Australia Board member). PHOTO COURTESY OF PAULA HANLON.

GETTING REAL ABOUT THE GYM

**It is what it is,
and that's OK!**

By Emily



I began going to the gym early last year as I was in the process of changing my lifestyle. I had previously worked as a chef, which was a physically demanding job, and as I transitioned into my passion (supporting people as a peer worker) I became less active and could feel the impact on my health and fitness levels. The challenge was that I have lived in intense fear of gyms for my entire life! But despite this I decided to start going in January 2025.

That first night I chose a time I thought it would be empty (10pm), but when I arrived I was horrified to see people still inside. I needed support, and so I started calling around. My mother was the first to answer, and I sat in the car on the phone with her for 20 minutes in a panic. I assumed that everyone was going to stare at me and judge me for being so unfit.

My mother assured me that no one would even really notice me, and she was right. I walked into the gym, head down and headphones on. I was shaking as I started using an elliptical or cross-trainer, which is a common gym device. I only stayed for 15 minutes, but I did it!

Neutral on balance

Since then, my experience at the gym has been neither positive nor negative: I go in, I do my thing, and I leave. I have headphones on and avoid eye contact with everyone, so I haven't made life-long friends, but I haven't had any negative interactions, either.

Overall, the neutral state of my gym experience is what I wanted from it.

I continued going 5-6 days a week, staying a little longer each time, and developed a routine. I thought I would learn to love the sweet endorphin reward of exercise, and that would provide the motivation to continue going. This was not

my path, though, as I've found that I still don't actually enjoy exercise itself, and I don't have the rush of good feelings, nor do I enjoy the burn in my muscles. What I do feel is relief and a little pride in myself for maintaining a routine that is good for my body.

What we often miss when we don't exercise is the feeling of energy being created in our bodies when we use it, as spending our energy tells our body to make more. I have found that I am definitely fitter, I feel a sense of pride in my continued dedication, and that going to the gym has influenced other habits in my life, such as encouraging me to eat healthier.

Worth is not Weight

I feel the fitness industry and related industries are currently running on an empty promise: "Just do this One Thing and weight magically falls off." This scheme is inherently damaging, for a few reasons.

EMILY GETS REAL ABOUT THE GYM:

My Goals:

To improve my health.

Firstly, I feel that the industry promotes the false idea that a person's weight equals a person's worth! It then insists that, "if this magical One Thing isn't working, it is your fault. After all, this One Thing has been "proven" to be "effective!"

Real physical health and wellbeing is a complicated mix of what we put in our bodies and what we use our bodies for. If weight loss is the goal, the solution is actually quite simple to understand: we need to put less calories into our body than we are using. That is it. There is no magic required.

To give an example of a current fad: drinking apple cider vinegar and fasting isn't a magic formula that "melts the weight off."

We also have to look at what we do over a period of time, as what we do in the course of a whole week may eclipse what we do on any given day. If we starve ourselves for five days of the week and then binge heavily for the other two, it's unlikely we will see any resulting weight loss or health benefits.

I have written papers on social media and girls' body image, and I would argue that social media is the most unhelpful thing for all body image issues. The quick-fire format of videos encourages people to sell lies and misconceptions to get the views they need.

There are some good ones out there that promote health and wellbeing, but for every one good video, there may be 17 that contain bad advice. The over-abundance of information makes health very confusing for some people, especially if they are living with an intellectual disability! The "get fit quick" schemes become an easy sell for someone who is struggling already, making it even more dangerous.

People need to explore what is best for their own bodies, what works for me may not work for you.

Don't run on an empty promise of magical results. Working out is a kind of neutral experience for some of us. The benefits are long term and outside the gym. **OPPOSITE:** Working out on an elliptical by Tanja Shaw from PIXABAY. **RIGHT:** "Angst" BY JOHN HAIN, "Apples" BY WICHEREK and "Support" BY MOHAMED HASSAN, ALL FROM PIXABAY



My Challenges:

I assumed that everyone was going to stare at me and judge me for being so unfit.

I know that drinking apple cider vinegar and fasting isn't a magic formula that "melts the weight off"



My Strengths:

I know that a person's weight DOES NOT equal a person's worth

I am definitely fitter, I feel a sense of pride in my continued dedication...going to the gym

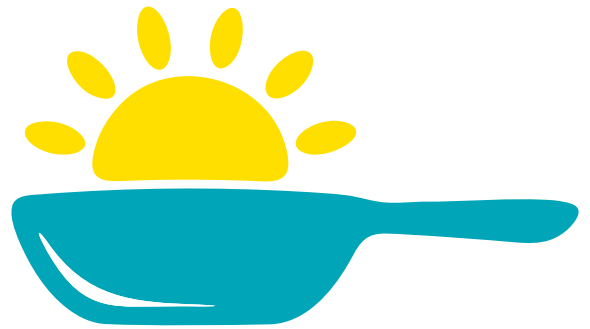


My Supports:

I would argue that social media is the most unhelpful thing for all body image issues

My mother assured me that no one would even really notice me, and she was right

Cooking on the Sunshine Coast



By Grant J Everett

Human company is as much a basic human need as food, and when you combine the two, you have a cause for celebration...especially when you did the cooking and serving and get to share it with your mates.

Phil Hinds, Flourish Australia's Groups and Engagement Coordinator with the Commonwealth Psychosocial Support program in Queensland, shared what's been happening on the Sunshine Coast.

"We have a cooking group on the Sunshine Coast that's been very successful," said Phil. "We meet at a community centre that has a commercial kitchen so everyone can prepare a meal, have a laugh, and enjoy eating together. There's been amazing feedback around improving outcomes for the people who access our services."

What People Want

Michelle and Billy have been co-facilitating the cooking group since July 2025.

"When Michelle and I were putting this group together, we wanted to focus on teaching practical employment skills," said Billy, who has a history in the food industry. "We centred it around food, as that's an easy way to get people interested! We created a safe space where people could ask questions and learn to cook in an engaging way. We started with '\$30 Under 30,' making meals in 30 minutes for less than \$30. We also found most people were interested in 'variation' meals, such as cooking a healthier version of a Big Mac (complete with special sauce) or a Guzman y Gomez burrito."

"Each group is 60 minutes of cooking and 30 minutes of eating together. Everyone enjoys the social

aspects of gathering for a meal, and attendance has grown, with up to 15 regulars cooking each week."

"We've recently added a spinning wheel," said Michelle. "Each week, everyone puts a recipe on the wheel, and spin it to decide what we make. Everyone gets the recipe at the end, with a shopping list tailored to feed one person. The meals can be customised for dietary requirements or allergies or just due to people's tastes."

Building Bridges

"Friendships have formed, and people are catching up in the community for beach walks and coffee. If somebody isn't doing too well or hasn't been seen for a while, their friends from the group will check in to make sure they're okay. There's a really good dynamic happening," Billy said.

Running it themselves

"We had a participant show us how to make her special eggplant lasagna, and since then we've been encouraging the group to present and lead themselves. Sharing something you love is great for your confidence and public speaking abilities. The group basically runs itself now, though we are still there to provide support."

Upskilling

"The group has learned about food safety, hygiene, allergies and sensitivities. We have one gentleman with many food intolerances, so he used to live on takeaway to be safe. It was a bit trial and error to find out what he should and shouldn't eat, but now he feels confident to make better choices, and his health has improved. He's interested in working in a kitchen, and continues to learn about his dietary restrictions."

"People are encouraged to branch out with what they eat. Some were

reluctant to try unfamiliar foods, but were usually glad they did. Expanding people's palates has been great!"

Sammie Approves

"My friendships with Lone and the other people in the group helped me feel so much better," said Sammie. "I was alone, and now I have all these friends. I'm particularly grateful that even when I cooked a very average dish, everyone still encouraged me. You guys are amazing, doing great work for people like me!"

Christmas

There was a large Christmas event with 15 people who were really keen to be there. For some, it was the very best place to celebrate the holidays. The group also ran a Christmas lunch class for three weeks, preparing a complete meal with a protein, a side, and a dessert. Roast lamb, then roast chicken, then crispy pork belly.

Final Thoughts

Cooking groups at Flourish Australia aren't just about an opportunity to learn practical skills, they're a chance to acquire greater confidence in social situations.

Thanks to Phil, Billy, and Michelle for their valuable input.



**Flourish Australia
Hervey Bay**

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COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL COLUMN

By Tricia and Jen of the Council

Report on Council Meeting of 17 December 2025:

One of the tasks undertaken by the Council is to review policy documents, such as the "People and Culture Strategic Workplace Plan 2025 to 2030." This policy document was presented to us for review by Tim Fong, General Manager of People and Culture.

It sounds like a very, shall we say, "dry" job, perhaps even tedious, you might think! However, we need to remember that a policy document guides everyone in their daily work for Flourish Australia. It will be the go-to document whenever staff members are unsure about a point. Because of this, it has to be accurate and its language has to be clear and unambiguous.

Another point is that Lived Experience Leadership is a key principle at Flourish Australia. As a body of people who have lived experience and are actually accessing Flourish Australia's services, the Community Advisory Council is in a position to ensure that important policy documents reflect this principle.

Another document which the Council is due to review is the Flourish Australia Employee Value Proposition (or EVP). We will also look at the Code of Conduct and Ethics policy which will be quite a large document indeed.

It is great that we have the opportunity to carry out these reviews and gain such valuable behind the scenes experience. Further along our recovery journeys this hands on experience will assist us in gaining employment.



HOW TO DEAL WITH AN OVERWHELMING TASK

The sort of work described in the Council column is common, and not even senior Managers get to escape it! As Tricia Hooi of the Council says, "This sort of work is draining even for people who do NOT have mental health challenges!"

How could we make it easier? Well, it would be nice if every document we dealt with was simple and easy and had pretty pictures and helpful diagrams. But that is not always possible. We need a method to help us take on mammoth tasks.

The first thing to do is to acknowledge the size of the task and set aside REALISTIC times to carry it out. If you have to attend a meeting, it helps if everyone does their homework and comes prepared with ideas.

One of the things NASA discovered during astronaut training is that most people seem to need to recharge themselves after a maximum ninety minutes

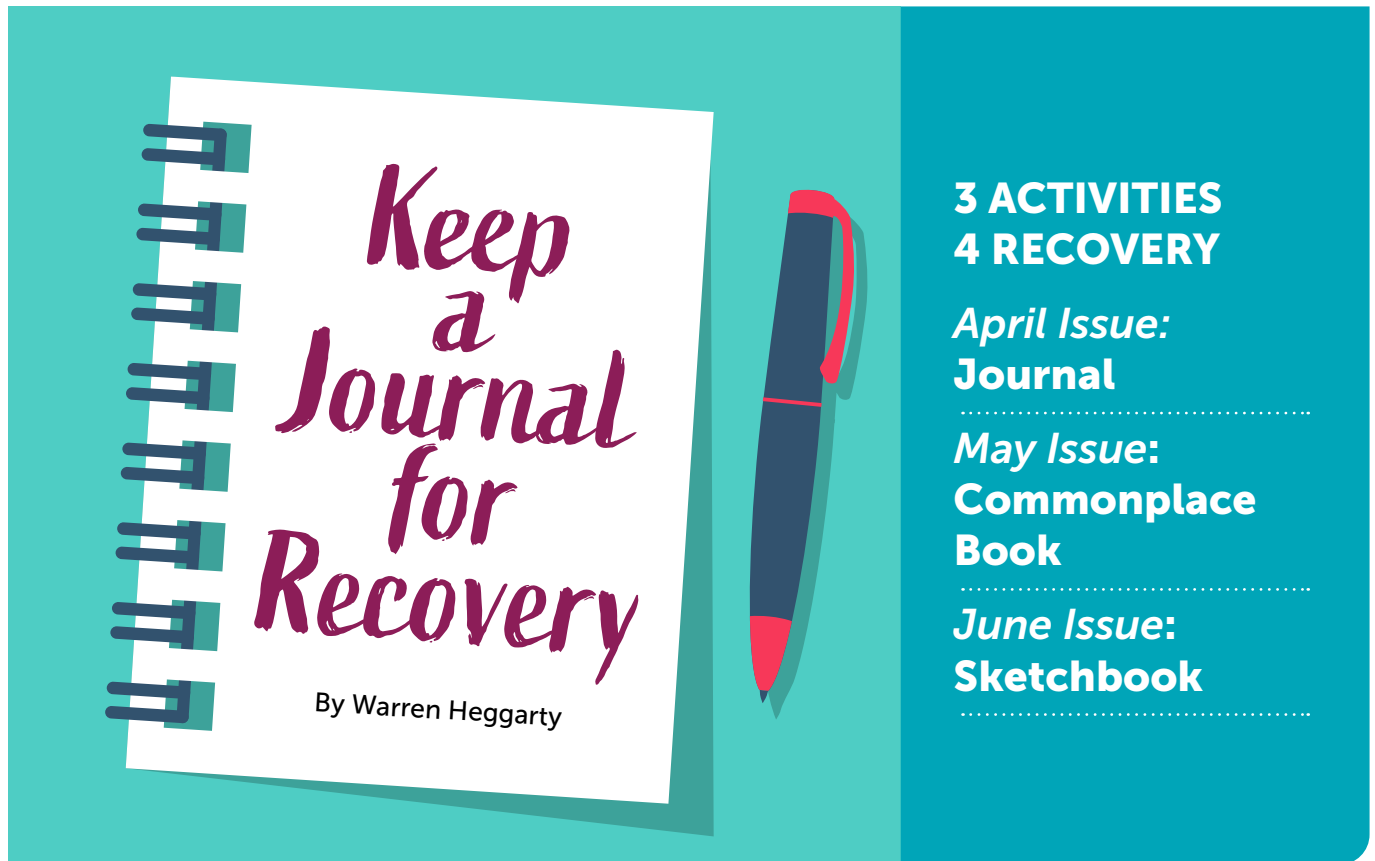
of intense work. So if it is going to take two hours, having a 15 minute break in the middle will help you. During the break, you should rest or do something unrelated to the main task.

"Take it one oil barrel at a time!" is a line from Brian Tracy in his book on personal efficiency, "Eat That Frog." It hints at one technique to handle a really big, overwhelming job. It refers to a car rally across the trackless Sahara desert.

Flat, featureless land is difficult to navigate, but the organisers had a plan. They placed oil barrels a few kilometres apart – so that whenever you approached one of them, you could see the next one popping up in the distance. Make it your job to get to the NEXT oil barrel, and when you get there, your next step will be clear.

Most big tasks divide naturally into parts. Big books have chapters. Read one chapter at a time. Big journeys have stages. Take a rest break every now and then. Remember, though, if you take a break that is too long, you will struggle to get motivated to go back to it. Momentum is important. WH

ABOVE: Some studies - including Astronaut Training - show that we need to take a break every ninety minutes or so when we are working intensely. This enables us to "recharge our batteries." We become less efficient if we work for too long without taking a break. PHOTO FROM NASA THROUGH HD HISTORY



3 ACTIVITIES 4 RECOVERY

April Issue:
Journal

May Issue:
**Commonplace
Book**

June Issue:
Sketchbook

Ana Juma says, "Mental health is not something you HAVE, it is something you PRACTICE." Here, we will look at the practice of "journaling for recovery." What sort of material could go into your journal? Or how about keeping an AFFIRMATION JOURNAL? On the next page, Kristen MacDonald talks about how affirmations changed her life.

If good mental health requires intentional practice, as Ana Juma suggests, then journaling is one type of practice you could adopt. Many journal keepers recommend that you keep a handwritten journal using pen and paper in preference to a digital one. However, digital will do the trick, and some might even prefer to record an audio journal.

But wait, what if you hate writing? Arjie-Aike de Haas says (rather dryly): "As a dyslexic...I have always been naturally sceptical towards the idea of reducing stress by writing." But he decided to give it a go anyhow, so if you don't naturally gravitate towards writing, perhaps Mr de Haas' method will work for you? He actually bases it on the thought records used in Cognitive

Behavioural Therapy.

Find out more on his YouTube "A Simple Mental Health Journal for Self-Awareness and Balanced Thoughts."

So what should you PUT in your journal? Ana Juma suggests there are three ingredients: What you think, what you feel, and what you do. She also suggests three ways of organising this content in her YouTube video "How to Start Journaling for Mental Health."

Firstly, there is "brainstorming," also called "clustering" or "mind mapping." Start with a key word, and then by way of "free association," let it all hang out - your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Reflect on what you see or hear. Write, "I notice that..." "I am aware that..." "I've seen a pattern where..."

Secondly, there is "expressive writing" in the manner described by James Pennebaker (Google him). This is where you write about the thoughts and emotions that relate to significant events in your life.

Thirdly, there is what she calls "Positive Affect Journaling." We have evolved," Ana Juma says, "to monitor the world negatively as

a way of keeping alert to danger. To break this natural focus on the negative, write things like "I am grateful for..." "The best moment of my day was..." or describe one act of kindness from your day.

Another thing you can journal, which are somewhat related to Positive Affect Journaling, are Affirmations. In "A Guide to Affirmations and How to Use Them," Tchiki Davis writing in Psychology Today gives us a few guidelines, including how to start an affirmation journal. She also warns us not to expect "magic," but to focus on small improvements over time.

Tchiki recommends strengthening your affirmations by describing the ways that you demonstrate them. For example, if you write "I am full of love," you could add "I care for my cat" or "I am respectful to older people" or "I want the best even for people I don't like."

On the next page we meet a reader, Kristen MacDonald, who has gotten so much out of affirmations that she wants to share the method with others.

ABOVE: Record thoughts, emotions and actions. Use an affirmation journal to develop a bias towards the positive. IMAGE FROM PIXABAY

After being silent for so long, something I never dreamed happened: positive phrases began to flow from me, which started to form into affirmations. These words changed my life. Writing and reading affirmations not only helped my recovery back to who I was, but I became a different version of me: stronger and more courageous than my old self. .

These affirmations helped me so much that in late 2022 I published my very first book of affirmations: "Reflection in the Mirror – You Are Enough." My book contained 50 affirmations with illustrations throughout, dealing with topics relating to the struggles and challenges I had faced throughout my life. It also talks about having the right mindset, maintaining positivity, my beliefs, my confidence, my self-worth, and the words that have healed my inner soul.

Writing many affirmations and reading them daily, slowly giving me back my confidence and belief in myself, giving me back my voice, reminding me of the courage and strength I have within, slowly shining the way to a brighter and better future.

This little book of affirmations is now helping many students by being available in school libraries as well as public libraries.

I can tell you from my experience that you can have a life after bullying and you can chase your dreams, even the impossible ones.

ABOVE: Some of Kristen's personal favourite affirmations. Kristen's BOOK OF AFFIRMATIONS Reflection in the Mirror; you are Enough' (2022) available through inhousebookstore.com.au

3 ACTIVITIES
4 RECOVERY

Next Month:
Keep a
Commonplace
Book!

.....



The Silent Power of Affirmations

Reminding you of your courage and strength

By Kristen MacDonald

In life, we travel down different paths, and we often won't know where they will lead us. Sometimes, these paths will bring many struggles and challenges.

I have faced many challenges in my life on these bumpy paths, and one of the worst was being bullied. The words that put me down, belittled me, words said that made fun of me, said I was a goodie-two-shoes, a square, words cutting deep, each day seeming to start and end the same, feeling alone, feeling silenced. Bullying felt endless, like trying to climb a mountain every day, never actually being able to reach the top, to step off and reach for the clouds.

Life was a constant struggle that followed me into my school years, my relationships, my first marriage,

further silencing my voice, further taking away my confidence, my whole inner self, who I was. Flyaway words would leave an invisible scar on my skin, be a constant reminder, leading me down a dark hole towards rock bottom.

Rock bottom isn't a place you want to be in. You feel lost, your confidence is shattered, your mindset is nothing, your voice is silenced, and you start to wonder if you are ever going to be free from this deep, dark hole.

Being one who never gives up, always keeps going, putting one foot in front of the other, I found the courage and strength within, and believing in myself set me free.

After a long road to recovery, it was time to seek help and to start believing in my dreams once more.



Say Yes to YES!

How taking part in the YES survey helps us all

By Fadzi Marasha

People who access Flourish Australia services: We need you to have your say, so we can make our services better! This is the first of three articles about the surveys used by Flourish Australia. To start off, we look at YES (or “Your Experience of Service”) in its two forms. Next month (May) we will look at our internal survey called Customer Voice. In June we will look at how the data you provide through these surveys is analysed to benefit us all.

Your Experience of Service comes in two varieties. Naturally, they were co-designed with people who have a lived experience of mental health issues. Both are anonymous, meaning your personal views remain private!

The first is YESCMO, which is a nationwide survey for “Community Managed Organisations” such as Flourish Australia. YESCMO has 40 questions and is good for measuring how participants experience our services in the long term. It also produces information that ranks various organisations against each other, adding a competitive edge to it all.

One of the most important things it measures is the “Net Promoter Score.” This is where people are asked how ready they would be to recommend Flourish Australia’s services to other people. Obviously if people are willing to recommend us, then it shows we are doing a good job.

The other type of YES survey is better for participants who are involved for shorter periods. For example, some special programs (like Commonwealth Psychosocial Support) might only run for six months. This is a relatively short time, so the shorter YESPHN is better for this purpose. It is funded by the Primary Health Networks, hence the name. It has 22 questions.

Traditionally, these surveys were offered to people in paper form. While this can still happen, we now tend to do things digitally. Our data tells us that these days, most people have a phone number with email capability. So most people can access a digital device, even if it is a device at the service they access, by scanning a QR code, for example. This cuts down on paperwork and physical handling.

What if you DON’T have digital access? Don’t worry, we can still offer you the paper version!

An important advantage of the digital survey approach is that you don’t have to fill out a questionnaire at the service. This may be intimidating if you have criticisms to make; but we want to KNOW those criticisms. So with the digital method, you can do it when and where you are ready, without bias or influence from people around you. It gives you more control.

We have found so far that there is a very high response rate doing it this way. We can send an SMS to your phone, but just as a head’s up, it will be shown as coming from FlourishAus because our whole name won’t fit! We will send reminders on the 7th and 14th day after the first one.

We would love to hear back from you about our service, so talk to your support worker. Next month, in May, Panorama will look at “Customer Voice,” another voluntary survey in which you CAN record your name.

ABOVE: Flourish Australia uses YOUR feedback to improve our service to you. We encourage you to take the YES survey. Image by Dung Quach from PIXABAY

Women's Mental Load

INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY
8 MARCH 2026

By Warren Heggarty



International Women's Day was on 8 March 2026. Ashleigh Austen in The Australian Women's Weekly raised the prospect that women have a greater mental load than men in the household (Austen, 2025).

The concept of "mental load" is not a new one, but interest in it began surging in 2017 with the publication of the French graphic novel *Fallait Demander* (or *You Should Have Asked* in English) by Emma. So what is it?

Getting chores done is not just physical effort. There is overall responsibility, planning, remembering and REMINDING. If Dwayne's job is mowing the lawn, it often falls to Dawn to REMIND Dwayne. It may also be Dawn who worries about how long the grass is getting, whether Dwayne has repaired the mower after it broke down last time, whether he has enough fuel to get the job done, and little things like that!

According to Leila Costil, "The mental load is defined as a discrete category of family work, which entails the planning, scheduling, and remembering of domestic chores and events." Psychologist Dr Morgan Cutlip says it is "the seemingly never-ending to-do

list we constantly carry around in our heads." These physical, mental and emotional tasks all overlap. Dr Cutlip says of women, "We've been socialised to self-sacrifice, (that's) being a good mum..." (See the story "Prioritise your Health" by Natalie of the Community Advisory Council in October 2025 *Panorama Online*, page 15 for more about this).

If we take overall responsibility for getting things done, it contributes to our mental load, even if we are not doing the chore ourselves. People living with anxiety disorders often worry about an increasing number of things simultaneously without being able to "let go." To function well, we all need to be able to "put down" the excess baggage we carry around.

If we don't do this, too great a mental load can cause resentment and a feeling of being taken for granted (Dawn sees Dwayne as lazy, Dwayne sees Dawn as nagging). When people are running on adrenalin, too, it is difficult to switch off. You feel like you are ON all the time. Because you are!

According to Ashleigh Austen, research by the team of Dr Leah Ruppener of the University of Melbourne shows that women carry 71 per cent of this mental load in the home. This might not look so bad if her main work was "home duties." However, women are

mostly also in paid work these days, and so that 71 per cent begins to look very unreasonable.'

Make no mistake, men DO have a lot on their mind, chiefly about jobs and money. Women's sleep, however, seems to suffer more "worrying about other members of the household (Costil, 2024)."

The expression "owning a chore" does not just mean physically doing it: it means handling the emotional and cognitive side of it as well. Dwayne thinks he is a top bloke doing all the work he does, but it is Dawn who has to worry about it. Dawn needs to let go and Dwayne needs to take hold and own his chores. Sharing responsibility, not just chores, is the key to this. Also, APPRECIATING the invisible effort Dawn makes will help too. And remember, the "enemy here" is neither Dwayne or Dawn, it is unappreciated "mental load."

Bibliography

Austen, A. (2025, December). Time to Share the Load. *The Australian Women's Weekly*, pp. 132-133.

Costil, L. (2024). You should have asked: The mental load in relationships. Retrieved from SciencesPo 'Women in Business': <https://www.sciencespo.fr/women-in-business/en/news/you-should-have-asked-the-mental-load-in-relationships/>

ABOVE: Ugh, it's nearly home time! IMAGE BY TYLI JURA FROM PIXABAY

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 articles in this April 2026 edition. Let this serve as encouragement to really get the most out of Panorama's stories! Answers will be published in May 2026 monthly online issue. Enjoy!

Panorama Find-A-Word and Find-A-Phrase!

Taken from 'Keep a MH journal' and 'Silent Power of Affirmations'

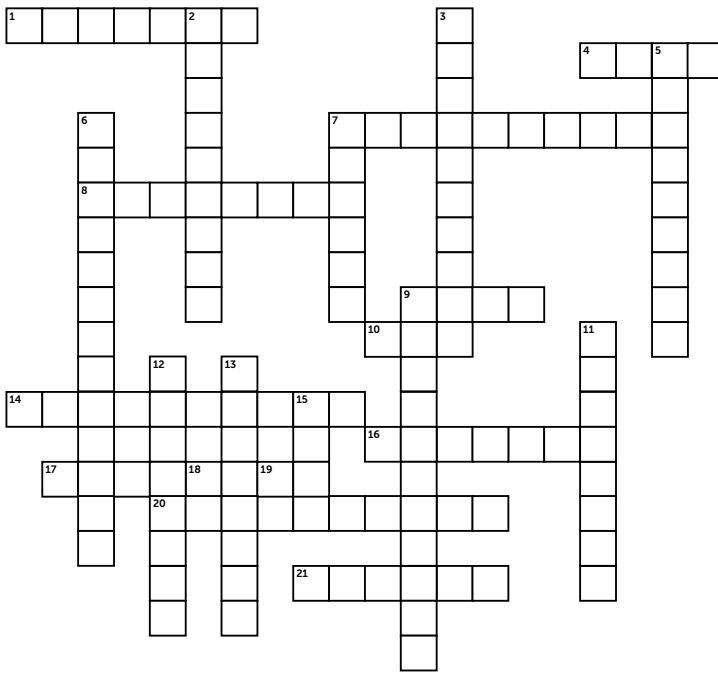
C	L	O	U	D	S	B	A	N	L	A	A	B	U	L	L	Y	I	N	G
H	E	T	R	A	V	E	L	A	M	F	N	S	E	L	F	G	B	C	R
A	C	W	O	R	D	S	N	O	D	F	P	B	A	N	O	R	L	A	A
L	N	H	E	A	L	R	T	I	N	I	N	A	B	O	A	I	G	A	T
L	E	N	A	N	U	T	F	B	H	R	A	N	D	V	M	N	A	N	E
E	D	V	A	O	O	F	B	S	A	M	N	I	E	B	I	R	A	N	F
N	I	O	J	B	E	A	N	B	A	A	E	R	N	T	E	N	A	N	U
G	F	I	K	R	F	O	C	U	S	T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

- AFFIRMATION
- BEHAVIOUR
- BELIEF
- BRAVERY
- BULLYING
- CHALLENGES
- CLIMBAMOUNTAIN
- CLOUDS
- COGNITIVE
- CONFIDENCE
- COURAGE
- DIFFERENT
- FOAM
- GOODIETWOSHOES
- GRATEFUL
- HEAL
- INVISIBLE
- JOURNAL
- KINDNESS
- LONGROAD
- MARRIAGE
- MONITOR
- REACHTHETOP
- RELATIONSHIP
- ROCKBOTTOM
- SELF
- STRENGTH
- TRAVEL
- VERSION
- VOICE
- WORDS
- WRITING

Answers in Panorama May 2026!

Panorama Crossword

Crossword clues refer mostly to words in
'From Servicewoman to Civilian'



Down

2. Our Country
3. You'll get plenty of this in the Army
5. The manner in which Kim was discharged from the Defence Force
6. Changing from the military to the civilian life
7. Another of the corps in which Kim served (teeth)
9. One of the aquatic activities Kim had to give up due to her injury
11. Things that can set off emotional reactions
12. You need to get one of these cards when you leave the Defence Force, Army.
13. They give this to you in the Army, starting with the basic.
15. You know the old saying: Sometimes it's "Buckley's chance" or this.
18. A Biblical exclamation. Behold!
19. The indefinite article before an initial vowel doing this.

Across

1. Someone who served in the armed forces.
4. One of the three branches of our Defence Force.
7. Relieved of further duty
8. One of the corps Kim served in (planes)
9. A form of frozen water
10. Another form of frozen water
14. Establishing yourself where no one or few have gone before
16. One of the aquatic activities Kim had to give up following her injury
17. Anyone who is not in the Defence Force
20. One of the valuable things Kim found at Flourish Australia
21. When help is needed, some people find it hard

Panorama Word Scramble

Words from the story
"Getting REAL about the GYM"

1. An unhealthy way of consuming:
IBENG.....
2. A type of trainer found in a gym:
SOCRS
3. Another type of trainer found in a gym:
LILLIEPACT.....
4. Portable speakers:
SHAPEONEHD
5. Natural painkillers:
PONDShINER.....
6. Recipe:
MAFLOUR
7. A well educated person:
CLUETALENTIL
8. Plenty:
UBANDANEC.....
9. This is against the laws of physics:
CIGAM
10. Needed for movement:
MESSCUL
11. Regular:
TUNEROI



*“If you
don’t have
a dream..”*

**How will you have a
dream come true?**

by Heather

Bullying made Heather lose sight of her dreams, but with courage and support, she got back on track again.

While at school I had a dream of becoming a vet, and I’d bring my stuffed animal toys in to “Show and Tell” to prove it. But I was bullied quite a lot and left in Year Nine because of it. Then I asked myself whether it was realistic for me to work with animals. I decided, no, that was never going to happen. And so that is how I ended up working in fast food.

Again, I was bullied. The Manager did not seem very concerned about staff welfare, even refusing us toilet breaks. “You are here to work, not take toilet breaks.” One day, during a nine hour shift, I had a mishap that required a change of clothes. That was humiliating enough, but then I was fired. This led me to fall into a severe depression. I lost hope, I stopped eating. I stayed in bed.

Fortunately, since 2022, I have had the support of Flourish Australia’s Disability Employment Service (since renamed Inclusive Employment Australia, see bottom of following

page - Ed) at Maitland. Flourish Australia has been the most incredible place. It isn’t just another “job-net” outlet.

When you experience bullying, you HAVE TO TALK to SOMEONE, or it will fester and you might lose hope. There is such a huge power in hope. Talking can be scary, but being scared is a completely OK emotion to have if it can be used to urge you to keep fighting.

I could not have had a better consultant than Sean. He helped me to see that sometimes you have to fight for things, and at the end of each storm comes the rainbow. Sean would encourage me to visit my GP and my therapist and support me to keep on top of things.

Best of all, talking to Sean about my employment interests and priorities rekindled the dream that I had previously given up on. Why not work with animals?

My Mother has worked with cat rescue, and I have always had animals around me, including wildlife. Mum taught me to feed the wild Kookaburras with worms.

At the moment I have a one-and-a-half-year-old Jack Russell called Violet at home, a nine-month-old dachshund called Sadie, and a four-year-old Kelpie Border-Collie cross called Benji.

I decided the first thing to do was to work on my mental health, then continue my education through TAFE, and finally find a job working with animals. I am now working on a Cert III at Kurri Kurri TAFE, and I love it. Through this course I have met my two best friends, Ash & Cassi.

Another door that opened for me was at the RSPCA animal shelter. I persisted, and now I spend my Tuesday mornings with cats doing health checks, feeding and changing the litter. The best part is in the afternoons when I help “socialise” the cats for adoption.

I plan to expand my volunteering to include dogs and pocket pets (like guinea pigs). My friend is doing a Cert IV in Vet Nursing, and while I know I’d have to take it one step at a time, I would really love to do that Cert IV, too!

Also, I appeared in a short film



Inclusive Employment Australia

Flourish Australia is now working in partnership with Inclusive Employment Australia. Our role in inclusive employment has expanded enormously, and we have been in the process of recruiting and training new staff, as well as bringing our former DES staff into the new system. So here is just a little peek at some of our new staff, picture from left to right are Courtney Grube (Peer Worker), and Employment Co-Ordinators Natasha Tran and Kathryn Broadhurst.



Finding careers for people with disability

promoting volunteer week advertising on Facebook.

It is OK to have a dream! Take the reins and don't settle for less. You are worth so much more than a bully would realise.

Look at me now! I'm in the Animal Care industry!

ABOVE, OPPOSITE: Heather, her husband Cory, their three dogs, and some sights around Maitland. PHOTOS BY NEIL FENELON.

Flourish Australia Maitland

Wonnarua Country

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MAITLAND 2320

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

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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.

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Think about your current needs, goals, and supports



Meet with your NDIS planner and get a plan



Decide which service providers you want support from



Put your plan into action



SCAN QR TO
FIND OUT MORE



Where mental wellbeing thrives

NDIS