

AWARD WINNING

panorama

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

Monthly Issue **May 2026 #101B**

Sociable Self-Care

Starting a
"Commonplace Book"
...and other hobbies

Important Innovation:
Enter the Participants'
Portal!

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About us

Flourish Australia is committed to walking beside people with a lived experience of mental health issues as they progress along their recovery journeys. We passionately believe in mental health recovery, and are committed to providing the best possible support and encouragement to people so they can achieve their recovery goals. We offer this help across all 60+ of our services in New South Wales, Queensland and Australian Capital Territory.

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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COVER: Mazen shares the details of his positive recovery journey with Flourish Australia's Flowerdale service.
PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

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ABOVE: The Self Care group at Flourish Australia's Seven Hills service L-R: AJ, Tammy, Adam, and Feroza. Pictured next to the diversity notice board. **PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY.** More on page 4.

Contributors include...

Neil Fenelon is a professional photographer and a regular contributor to Panorama

Cassandra Williams is Flourish Australia's Change Lead

Fadzi Marasha is Flourish Australia's Outcomes and Improvement Lead.

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 May 2026

This month we look at self care. It may be true that in this world a lot of people care a little too MUCH about themselves, but our readers know that mental health issues can lead to self neglect. That is what we are battling here. We visit Flourish Australia's Seven Hills service to join

their self care group, and see how it works!

At Flourish Australia's Liverpool (Flowerdale) service we will meet Mazen (pictured left with support worker Tam) and hear his recovery story.

We also look at technology, and specifically two types of interaction that can improve your mental health AND improve how mental health services are delivered.

Cassandra Williams will show us the exciting new Participant Portal and Fadzi Marasha will tell us how "Consumer View" surveys work.

Everyone can benefit from having interests and hobbies. The problem is people today have substituted hobbies for doomscrolling through the above-ground sewer of social media.

Last month we saw how keeping a journal, or even an affirmation

journal, can help you. This month we jump to keeping a commonplace book. The fact is, many of the great minds of history kept a commonplace book. But you don't have to make it a mini encyclopedia, you can fill yours full of quotes from your favourite Romance novels, or Monty Python quotes, or Ricky Gervais' witticisms. When things get dark, you can whip it out and read your favourite quotes!

We like to keep up with modern trends, and this month we look at "Going No Contact." Abuse aside, is it really such a good idea to cut people out of your life completely?

Coming up in June Panorama...

Journaling doesn't have to be in words. What about a picture journal?

And how do we analyse your survey opinions to improve our services?

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

SOCIABLE SELF CARE AT SEVEN HILLS FOR BETTER MENTAL HEALTH

By KC



Some of us don't feel like we belong, but as Peer Worker AJ Ugsod says, we could not have reached this point in life WITHOUT being part of a community. It is true, though, that complex mental health issues can cause us to feel isolated. It may sound a little counterintuitive, but one of the keys to belonging in a community is self care! That's the aim of the Self Care group at Seven Hills NSW.

A study by Park and others (2023) found that a person's sense of community is linked with lowered symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. AJ says, "Caring for ourselves involves taking care of the connections that we have in our lives." And if you can't find a connection, maybe you can build one!

Panorama joined AJ, Adam, Feroza and Tammy for Week A of the two-week group cycle. Week A is where we discuss a Self-Care issue. When we leave the group, we will have some activities to try out during the week. Then in Week B, we come back and share what we experienced putting it into practice.

The group opened and closed with "grounding." This is where we deliberately make ourselves conscious of where we are and

what tasks we have before us, shutting off any distractions. Next up, we considered three questions about our places in the community (or communities).

We then shared our ideas on these questions. One thing that was really striking was how diverse the group was. We had very different personalities and backgrounds, but all came together to explore a common issue. That made us a community of our own!

Three of us shared another common interest: music. Tammy loves DJ-ing. Shopping and lunching with friends were popular too, as was meeting up at a coffee shop. These are common social activities, but complex mental health issues can rob us of their enjoyment unless we make a deliberate effort to participate.

Importantly, self-care involves not so much the question of "What can I get?" as "What can I give?" This is why hobbies are so important: when we have a common interest with others, it makes it easier to give and take.

To build social connections, you can start by looking for people who share the same interests. "That's why it's important to know yourself," says AJ, "your hobbies, interests, experiences, likes, dislikes, so you can find your people!"

"Looking for people who share similar experiences with you can

be [another] gateway to finding your community."

AJ continued; "Ask yourself: How do I show up for others? Can I be reliable? Is there anything that I can do to help my brother or sister in this community to make their life even just a little better?"

One of the things the group agreed to do during the week was to notice ourselves and how we feel in our interactions with others. The Self is always a bit of a blind spot for most people. For example, if we carry a lot of anger from past trauma, other people might only see our anger, not the reason for it, and not the better parts of our personalities.

Now readers, while we are on the topic of self care, our next story looks at DRESSING UP for a BARGAIN PRICE.

ABOVE: Tammy "grounding herself" in the Self Care Group. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

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LET'S DRESS UP

And take a walk down the High Street

By Warren Heggarty

Dressing up, according to personal stylist Leah Nalepa, is not just about "adhering to societal norms or impressing others; it's about honouring ourselves and embracing the transformative power of clothing." Perhaps this realisation is why Dress for Success has had such an impact.

Recently, a new Dress for Success opened in Penrith NSW and a representative came along to talk to the members at Flourish Australia's Penrith Westclub. Their mission is to help unemployed and underemployed women achieve economic independence by providing no-fee programs, development tools and professional attire to thrive in work and life."

Dress for Success gives FREE professional styling advice, and they help you with job interviews, work placements, and internships too, as well as court appearances and other important life events.

Leah Nalepa lists the following reasons why dressing UP will UPLift your spirits and contribute to your mental well-being.

1. It boosts your confidence
2. It gives you a sense of professionalism
3. It fosters discipline, which they say is the key to freedom
4. Dressing like who you want to become one day helps you become that person one day
5. It commands respect and admiration from others
6. It can cultivate your own personal sense of style.

Perhaps you think you cannot afford to dress up. Are you sure? Dress for Success says, "All clothing is free of charge, and yours to keep. Our services are open to any woman who needs them."

But you can also pick up some very inexpensive clothing elsewhere. Panorama took a stroll around several thrift and Op Shop outlets (see stories in previous issues) and we saw some real bargains.

Take the dress pictured bottom right for \$3 from Penrith Anglicare Op Shop. A few doors down in the arcade at 444 High Street Penrith we found great stuff at Dress for



Success. Perhaps you can't find something in your size that fits. That's an excuse to keep shopping! There are lots of shops and lots of opportunities.

But charity is a two-way street. You can also DONATE, or if you are interested in volunteering, please go online. Book a styling session, get interview advice, and join their career hub online!

RIGHT, TOP: The window at Dress For Success in Penrith. **MIDDLE:** Some op-shops are really so well presented, why would you shop elsewhere? This is Angliicare, High Street Penrith, as is **BOTTOM:** What a bargain!
PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY



Thank you to Emily Peterson at Westclub for her help with this story. Check out the Dress for Success website here.

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PARTICIPANT PORTAL

If you access Flourish Australia's services, you can now access 'Flourish Connect'

By Cassandra Williams

The Participant Portal: we mentioned it was coming in August 2025's Panorama (A Different Way of Working, p.17) when we showcased the launch of the new Flourish Connect system. This means that people who are engaged with Flourish Australia services (and with programs which are a part of the Flourish Connect system) now have access to their own portal. What does this mean for you as a person who accesses Flourish Australia's services?



Features

Once you log into the Participant Portal you will see a menu on the screen just like the one above. You will be able to access and view a whole range of information related to your Flourish Australia supports.

My Supports & My Calendar

You will be able to have a view of all your completed and upcoming supports from a list view and a calendar view.

My Agreements, My Plans, My Outcome Measures, My Consents

These sections show you all of the items you have completed with your support workers, including your goals from individual recovery plans and your responses from any "outcome measuring" surveys that you have completed (see Fadzi's story "Customer Voice" on p.7 of this issue).

My Requests & My Feedback

These two areas are where you can send requests to your support team. You can place requests for changes in support, changes in your details, or to cancel an upcoming support. You can provide feedback in the form of compliments, complaints and suggestions. The manager will be advised when feedback comes in from the Participant Portal.

Questions

How will I know how to use the Portal?

We have a short training video as well as step-by-step instructions to help guide you on how to access and use the Portal. Flourish Australia staff will also be able to support you with the process if need be. You will require a mobile phone to be able to set up and use the participant portal, as it requires an authentication. Flourish Australia staff can support you to set this up.

Can anyone else access my portal?

No, other people are unable to view your Participant Portal account. The only time someone else would be able to access your Portal is if you share your username and password with others. This is something we recommend you do not do!

What do I do if I forget my username and password?

Not a problem! You can simply reset your password from the Portal when you go to the sign in page.

Do ALL programs have access to Participant Portal?

No, there are a few programs which are not included in Flourish Connect. If in doubt, check with your support worker.



ABOVE: The various parts of the Participant Portal lay everything out before you in one place!. PHOTOS BY: (LEFT) MIRCEA IANCU FROM PIXABAY, (RIGHT) PHI NGUYEN FROM PIXABAY

Talking Digital

CUSTOMER VOICE

How this survey works to improve services

By Fadzi Marasha

Last month in April we looked at **Your Experience of Service surveys, how they work and how they can help us provide better service. This month we are looking at a different survey called Customer Voice.**

The chief difference, perhaps, is that THIS survey is not anonymous. Just a reminder, too, that this article is addressed to the people who access Flourish Australia services. Surveys may work differently in other organisations.

Another difference is that while the YESCMO and YESPHN surveys have 40 and 22 questions respectively, Customer Voice has between 7 and 10.

Where the YESCMO and YESPHN Surveys are nationally based and produce comparisons between organisations, Customer Voice is internal. That means that only people within Flourish Australia are involved, and we can't use it to compare ourselves to other organisations.

What we CAN use it for is getting timely feedback on programs whenever a participant completes one, or every three months. As it is not anonymous, the Customer Voice survey results are referred to individual Managers so they can

take care of actual problems in "real time." This allows us to deal with emerging issues before they become conflagrations, meaning we can identify what specific things need to be done, assign someone the job of carrying it out, and then follow up to make sure the action has taken place. In some cases, of course, it may be necessary for the Manager to call the service user to reassure them that the issue is being dealt with.

An example might run like so: just say Mary gives feedback through Customer Voice that she was not allowed to go on an outing to the baby animal farm, even though all the other participants went, and so she thinks this is not fair. The Manager would be alerted and would investigate and get back to Mary.

"Mary, we have a note on your file that you are allergic to animal hair. As your support worker explained at the time, it would not have been safe for you to go to the baby animal farm."

So where the YES surveys are more long-term and more research oriented, looking at the big picture, Customer Voice can be used to initiate a faster resolution of problems.

Customer Voice is also integrated on Flourish Connect. Flourish Connect is our central database (see

Cassandra's article on Participant's Portals in page 6 of this issue). We developed it with reference to the Customer Relationship platform within Flourish Connect.

Another thing Flourish Australia is developing along these lines but have not yet implemented is a Carer Experience Survey. Naturally, as this is still under development, we can't say too much except that we hope that it is ready to go inside a year. This is being undertaken with help from the AMHOCN (Australian Mental Health Outcomes Classification Network).

You may have seen in earlier editions of Panorama that we are moving towards creating a Family, Carer and Kin Committee, as an adjunct to Flourish Australia's Community Advisory Council. We are working in the background to make sure that this new venture will be monitored for your feedback as well.

Next month, June, we are going to look at how we ANALYSE the data that comes in via our surveys, and how we can use this to improve our service and outcomes.

ABOVE: Customer Voice is the shortest survey with the quickest survey response time. IMAGE BY GERT ALTMANN FROM PIXABAY

Commonplace Books

YOUR OWN PRIVATE RECOVERY ENCYCLOPEDIA?

By Warren Heggarty

What if you had a magic book that contained ONLY things that inspired you, stories worth reading over and over, tips for mental health recovery, sayings that pick you up when you are down, ideas that were helpful to you and your aims? Such a book does exist, potentially. The catch is, YOU have to make it. It is called a Commonplace Book and in part two of our "Recovery on the Page" series, we explain how it comes together.

You have heard of "active listening" and how important that is. Well, in a way, keeping a Commonplace Book is "active reading."

Ruby Grainger, in her YouTube video "How (& Why) to start a Commonplace Book," says that a Commonplace Book helps you think, helps you research, helps you understand, and cultivates curiosity (Grainger, 2024). If you have a spare few minutes at the bus stop, whip out your Commonplace Book and read and reread things that interest you. It helps you memorise quotes, too!

Ruby numbers her pages and has an index at the front showing different categories. Quotes on page 10, Lessons I Have Learnt on page 20, Poems I Like on page 35, How to Change a Tap Washer on page 16... and so on.

According to Ruby, it ought to be HAND WRITTEN. Michael Steinberg

calls it a "paper technology." Tiwana, a young Australian blogger who is very comfortable with technology, insists that even the "digitally advanced" should handwrite it. She found it useful for her mental health by dividing it into the five senses and creating a "sensory bucket list" for each of them (Tiyana, 2025).

You need to get a sturdy notebook and spend a regular moment each day or week to write down things that you find edifying. For example, if you read a recovery story in Panorama and discover an idea for mental health that you think would work for you, or which inspires you, write it down by hand in your Commonplace Book.

Jared Henderson says, "A Commonplace Book is like a journal in which instead of collecting your own thoughts, you collect the thoughts of others." He says that, "By choosing to copy down a passage by hand (instead of highlighting or cutting and pasting), what you are saying is 'This idea is worth my time!'" (Henderson, 2023)

Using a Commonplace Book helps you with "synoptic thinking," which is being able to see how seemingly unconnected things are connected. This is a great help in the creative process.

Jared Henderson says that reading does not have to be "consumption" which you use up and discard. Keep the good bits and remember them in your Commonplace Book. Use these three steps:

1. **Read, watch, listen, observe**
2. **Capture it by writing it down**
3. **Reflect, think about what it means for you.**

To get the most out of it, make it a routine thing, as you would a journal, to have a regular time of day when you write up your pearls of wisdom in a Commonplace Book. It's your own private encyclopedia!

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ABOVE: You can organise the information in your Commonplace Book according to topics that are meaningful to you. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

**3 ACTIVITIES
4 RECOVERY**

**Next Month:
Using a
sketchbook**

BUILD BRIDGES OR BREAK CONTACT

The changing
views on family bonds

By Warren Heggarty



According to *The Women's Weekly*, "a growing number of people are turning their back on parents, siblings or grandparents whom they come to view as toxic and damaging." (Marinos, 2025) The popular term in use today is "going no contact." It's not a new thing. We used to call it "not speaking to" someone, but social media seems to have turned it into a trend. Jesse Van Amburg says it is "the subject of hundreds of thousands of videos on TikTok." (Van Amburg, 2024)

Does it fix anything? Does it make things worse? When might "going no contact" be beneficial or even essential? And could it sometimes be a mistake?

Van Amburg says going "no contact" is 'like a "break glass in case of emergency" option for truly toxic relationships.' She says that it is generally not the result of a single disagreement, but the result of multiple boundary violations and dangerous or abusive interactions.

At the extreme end of the spectrum, in the case of a dangerous or abusive partner, it may be a matter of life or death to cut all ties. We see many news reports of people, particularly

women and even children, who have been harmed or murdered by "ex-partners" who have a history of domestic violence or threats.

This is very different from a case where a teenager may cut ties with their parents because of disagreement on some matter, such as politics, education or views on lifestyle. It can be annoying to tolerate people whose views upset us, but if our response in every case is to cut them off, we may soon find ourselves with a new problem: loneliness.

There are consequences for "going no contact." If it means you escape abuse, it could be worth it. But as there is a lot of loss to deal with, including sometimes the additional loss of other people who associate with the person you have "cut off," think about the ramifications when it comes to family gatherings, funerals, illness and seasons like Christmas. It can become very complicated.

So it is a very big deal. But why is it apparently on the increase? Sarah Marinos refers to work by psychologist Joshua Coleman and says it is partly due to changing attitudes about what constitutes harm or neglect. Things we once accepted as part of family life are now seen as intolerable violations. Perhaps, too, people have become

oversensitive and too quick to take what seems "the easy way out."

So it is likely many cases of "going no contact" might be too extreme? Is it not better to light a candle than to "curse the darkness?" What are the alternatives?

Psychologists quoted by the *Women's Weekly* suggest owning YOUR part of the problem. Few conflicts are entirely one person's doing. "Own part of a problem, and it starts the conversation in a different place." However, you still need to stay true to yourself.

Except in cases where there is abuse and trauma, think about the consequences for the family of going "no contact." Explore other options. This might mean seeing each other less, or seeing one another always in the company of others. Think of the milestones in the future that might be damaged by estrangement.

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Van Amburg, J. (2024, November 26). 6 Signs it's time to go 'no contact'. Retrieved from Wondermind: <https://www.wondermind.com/article/no-contact/>

ABOVE: Going 'no contact' has major consequences. IMAGE BY MARLON SOMMER FROM PIXABAY



TEAMWORK CONNECTIONS

By Warren Heggarty

During Mazen's time with Flourish Australia's Connector Hub program, he has been able to overcome the social isolation he experienced since he became unwell about 17 years ago. "I have been able to manage my thoughts, change my thinking and not dwell on tragic things." His support workers at Flourish Australia's Flowerdale Cottage, Liverpool NSW have also been able to back him in his application for NDIS funding.

Mazen wants to become more independent and more confident. "I'm a bit shy around people," he says. After finishing school, he worked as a process worker, spent three years sorting at Australia Post in Sydney, and then from 2007-2008 he worked in a chicken factory. Around this time, he started to become mentally unwell.

"I spent three weeks in hospital. They diagnosed me with schizoaffective disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder." He has been admitted to hospital three times, but not since 2022.

"Sometimes I worry about dangers, checking doors, checking cars that go by, checking the lights," he says. "But I have been on medication, and I find that this helps me a bit."

Mazen says that like many people, he is not naturally very sociable; however, being mentally unwell can lead to levels of personal isolation that are not healthy even for quiet people. "I sometimes find motivation to be hard," he says.

This is why during his time with Connection Hub at Flowerdale, Mazen has participated in activities like outings, the art group, movies, picnics, barbecues, walking and just talking with others. The outings have included walks around local Liverpool landmarks like the Casula Powerhouse precinct on the Georges River. He has also gone fishing at The Entrance and even fished from a lake in Blacktown. Another trip he liked was to the set of "Home and Away" at Palm Beach NSW. He also likes to go on family picnics.

Mazen likes watching Arabic movies with his family. He was born in Australia, though his parents came from overseas. "I can speak and read

in both Arabic and English," he says. "My brother is very understanding about my mental health issues. I think it was harder for my parents to understand what was happening. But they have been supportive."

"My brother plays guitar and sometimes I enjoy singing along with him," Mazen says, "and I like to do a bit of gardening, too."

Mazen feels that the support he received through the Connection Hub was essential, and he wanted to continue receiving support through the NDIS to keep on building hope for his future recovery.

It was not easy for Mazen to gain NDIS access, as the NDIA thought it would be more effective that he first try other treatment measures. This is not what Mazen wanted, and with his permission Flourish Australia supported him in making his own case. According to his support coordinator, Tam Nguyen, Mazen's successful journey shows the importance of everyone working together as a team, including his family, his psychiatrist, psychologist, and GP. "Over the past three years, we have advocated for Mazen and supported him to connect with his treating teams...and in April 2025 he was finally successful in gaining access to NDIS."

Now Mazen has the reassurance that he will continue to receive the support he needs to maintain wellness and go forward on his recovery journey.

A version of this story appeared in 'Courage' Flourish Australia's Annual Report 2024-2025

ABOVE: Mazen in the back yard at Flowerdale Cottage. PHOTO BY NEIL FENELON

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First Responders Consultation

By Cassandra Williams



Interactions between police and people experiencing a mental health crisis sometimes end badly. We need to have an approach that protects the public (and police) from danger, but does not do so at the expense of people who need mental health support.

During Mental Health Month 2025, BEING (a NSW Mental Health lived experience body) conducted a public online survey to address the question of "Alternatives To Police As First Responders In A Mental Health Crisis."

BEING had released a position statement in 2023 in which they pointed out that police are not adequately trained in mental health crisis work, and indeed had stopped a four day training course that ran until 2019.

Perhaps even more controversially, they cited a Beyond Blue report from 2019 which showed that "fewer than 14% of paramedics had received comprehensive training for mental health responses."

On 22 October 2025 BEING said, "We're delighted that the (NSW) Government has finally listened and opened up consultation with the community to gather information to inform a new model for responding to mental health callouts. This is the opportunity that we as consumers have been waiting for for so long."

Submissions were due to close on 16th November 2025. Panorama hopes to bring details of further developments in future issues. WH

One Small Scoot for a Woman One Giant Leap for (Wo)mankind

Michaela Benthaus, 33, an aerospace engineer from Germany, has become the first wheelchair user in space, according to Associated Press. She flew 105km up above Texas as a tourist in the New Shepherd space capsule operated by Blue Origin on 20 December 2025. The ten-minute flight included three minutes in zero gravity (video link at the bottom of this column).

Ms Benthaus, who is super fit and sporty, had a spinal cord injury while mountain bike riding seven years ago, and cannot walk. The capsule itself required very little modification to allow Ms Benthaus to fly with five other passengers. However, modifications were needed on the ground.

Ms Benthaus, who did not take the wheelchair along, was naturally over the moon. Her experience underscored the fact that wheelchair users still have to get around so many inconveniences here on planet earth.

"I figured out how inaccessible our world still is, and sometimes how socially excluding a wheelchair can be even though no one is actively excluding you."

Her background includes a graduate trainee program with the European Space Agency, during which she had experienced weightlessness in test flights. Sponsored by a retired Space X executive, she said, "I really hope it's opening up for people like me, like I hope I'm only the start." WH

Scan here to learn more:



Liberty Swings A "Weeeee" Lesson in Fun



'RESTRICTED AREA!' said the sign. Wait a minute! A restricted area in the playground of a local park? What is going on here? In a fenced-off zone of the playground at Olds Park, Mortdale NSW, there is a large yellow contraption in a weather shelter with signs warning you may be off limits! Naturally, Panorama was curious...

It turned out to be a swing built for people with physical disabilities. This isn't just a safety seat. Such special seats and harnesses are available, but when you think about it, being harnessed and strapped in could actually make you feel MORE vulnerable.

No, this is not the same thing: it's a whole electrically powered, key operated swing which can accommodate not just your body, but your whole wheelchair and any other apparatus you need to have with you. Even better, the liberty swing is an Australian made product that is used as far away as the USA!

WH PHOTO
By WARREN
HEGGARTY

Scan here to see
the swing in action:



Leisure for Pleasure

Personal Branding? You need a hobby!

By Warren Heggarty

People tell us that the mental health of recent generations continues to deteriorate. We are also told that young people spend more and more of their free time passively scrolling through social media. We also find that "Generations Z and Alpha" find hobbies and interests to be "cringe." Could we reverse the generational decline in mental health by pushing back with hobbies? In fact, now that Gen Alpha is banned from social media, maybe we have no choice but to BRING BACK LEISURE FOR PLEASURE.

Personal Branding?

One sign that we might have fallen too far under the spell of technology is the idea of "personal branding." People have always maintained a public image, and this image constantly falls short of reality. Social media, however, has enabled us to "curate" our image in a manner similar to company branding.

Online Influencer "ImuRgency" suggests that this is akin to "performing" ourselves, and he says it "limits ourselves as people." The manipulation of how we want people to see us, and of our reputation, causes a

lot of stress through social media. ImuRgency is not just talking about people like himself who are entrepreneurs who need to monetise their posts. "All my friends say it's stressful to post online no matter who we are!"

Personal branding distorts our personality, but it becomes our identity. Instead of "I like writing," the message becomes "I'm a writer." It puts pressure on yourself to be what you supposedly already are.

Fear of "cringe"

Ashley Embers laments the passing of the days when you could ask people, "What do you like to do, what is your hobby?" Today, she says, EVERYTHING is ironic. "You don't want to enjoy something in case you look cringe."

Gen Z life has become an endless doom-scroll seeking instant gratification from Copy & Paste personalities. This culture actively discourages passion, experimentation and vulnerability. People still do things to "pass the time," but no longer get anything done during their average six hours and 38 minutes before the screen. Fear of boredom has made us boring.

ImuRgency confessed, "I took up running, which I like, because I began to realise that when I wasn't



working or doing my daily routine, I had nothing to do!... I used to watch TV for fun, but when I became a reviewer it became DIFFERENT." He found he wasn't engaging in anything for his own fulfilment because, "it was all a public act."

In this constant surveillance society where everything is being recorded all the time, people have become afraid to let loose and be themselves. The convenience of meeting new friends online is completely thwarted. "Let's face it, you could have been BESTIES, but you can't because you are both lying!"

A hobby is, "an activity done regularly in one's leisure time for pleasure," according to the Oxford English Dictionary. It is something that can "bring joy to our lives" alone or in company. There are many sports and past-times that fit this description, and Panorama can assure you that the people who do them do not think they are cringe. In future articles, we hope to convince you!

ABOVE: Whether it was playing cards or playing hedgehog croquet using a flamingo, Alice Liddel was able to keep well through her amazing hobbies. IMAGE AFTER SIR JOHN TENNIEL

BUILD BORING HABITS & REALLY BELONG

By Warren Heggarty

The very people who influence us on social media are starting to spread the message: "You need to ditch the device and embrace boredom, and only then can you cultivate belonging and connection." Earlier this issue, Panorama looked at the hazards of getting carried away with "personal branding." Now we need to look at how to zone out and embrace the "Way of the Monks." Well, at least for PART of the day!

Influencer "Ashy" dares people to take a 15 minute walk every morning without their phone. The idea is to prepare yourself to do something which has become very uncomfortable these days: do things from start to finish, without diversion, without interruption.

Personal efficiency expert Brian Tracy says that if you want to get done the things you REALLY want to get done, you must focus patiently. "Make every minute count. Work steadily and continually without diversion or distraction." To do this,

you need to plan and prepare your activity in advance, and keep focused on your most important priorities. How easy is it to say, "Tomorrow, I'm going to clean my flat," only to be distracted by shiny social media posts before you even get out of bed.

However, if you start with an "unplugged" morning walk, your mind will be thinking about doing the housework - and the weather, and the bird-song, and many other things. You do not need a device to decide how to fill your day!

But I hate boring things!

Don't be tempted to bring your ear buds on your morning walk. People who have phones in their ears, sunglasses on and a hoodie pulled over their heads may look fashionable, but how are you going to connect or belong or be part of what's happening if you are not even aware of it?

Another influencer "Art of Anna" has a similar boring start to her day. She describes her music free morning ramble as a "sensory walk." Her morning routine starts with a ginger tea (she finds coffee is too strong) before going for a sensory walk. "It really resets my nervous system!"

Is sensory walking some new thing? How much does it cost, and where can we subscribe?

"It's FREE!" Art of Anna says. "You just leave the flat in the morning and walk around without any ear buds or device."

Before you ask, "How on Earth can you do that?" keep in mind that getting used to the absence of constant stimulation from your devices means returning to normal. This will enable you to concentrate on the task at hand, and pursue both hobbies and paid work more fully.

Best of all, it sets the stage for deeper listening. Who hates it when people are typing messages to a third party while you try to talk to them? People like it when we pay attention to them.

If devices rule your routine, your life will be one constant series of interruptions. To get valuable things done, you need to redevelop the self discipline to stick with the main game.

ABOVE: On your daily "sensory walk" without ear buds or a device to distract you, you will notice the serrated edges on the leaves of that succulent plant, the large red inflorescences, and the row of cypress pines along the side fence. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY.

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL COLUMN

With Tricia and Jen
of the Council

At the 4th of February
2026 Council meeting we
welcomed a new member,
Brian from Tamworth.

The Council discussed the proposal to change the pay cycle for supported employees who work in Flourish Australia's community businesses. This means that pay would come through on the same day of the week, Thursday, but would align with pension day. There was some discussion as to whether this changeover could in any way impact people's eligibility for the Disability Support payment, caused by the additional payment during the "cut-over" period. Chief Finance Officer Megan Hancock responded to this. Also there to answer questions were General Manager People and Culture Tim Fong, and Payroll and Reporting Manager Rebecca Enright.

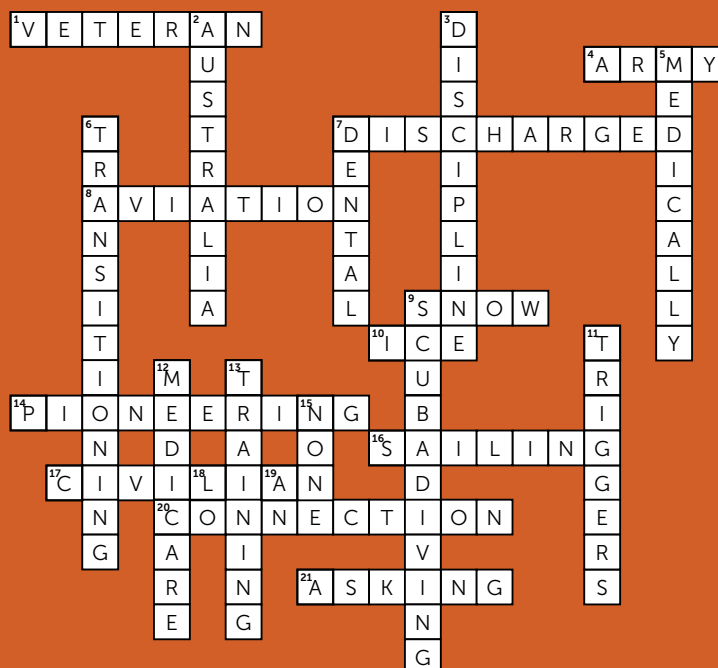
Another matter we discussed was the use of terminology within Flourish Australia. The Council noted that labelling mental health issues as "complex" sounds very clinical. Yet Flourish Australia markets itself on being a leader in "complex" mental health recovery. Using terms like mental health "issues, challenges, and problems" to describe a person could be seen as having a "negative" reflection on them.

On the other hand, why should people be ashamed of saying they have mental health issues? Acknowledging them is a part of an individual's recovery. Also, the journey of recovery is where we often display strengths such as resilience.

RECOVERY GAMES

Solutions

Crossword



Find-A-Word



Word Scramble

1. BEING
2. CROSS
3. ELLIPTICAL
4. HEADPHONES
5. ENDORPHINES
6. FORMULA
7. INTELLECTUAL
8. ABUNDANCE
9. MAGIC
10. MUSCLES
11. ROUTINE

Adaptive Sport Blind and Low Vision Tennis

Blind and Low Vision Tennis tournaments began in Australia about four years ago, and they are growing fast. It was showcased at the 2026 Australian Open.

The ABC's Sarah Kreig profiled Maddy Kelly, 13 whose vision deteriorated from age 11 due to genetic illness. Maddy kept at it, and now holds two National BLV Tennis titles! Maddy sees the world through a "glitter jar," but has still become a national tennis Champion.

BLV Tennis allows adaptations for four different levels of vision. These include a larger ball which rattles, a smaller court, and an allowance for more than one bounce. Maddy's Mum told ABC that BLV has given them a supportive community. "It's not about her vision impairment, but her tennis!"

In 2002, Australian Open Tennis became the first Grand Slam to include wheelchair tennis, and to feature it on centre court. In 2023 BLV exhibition matches were included for the first time.

We live in fortunate times. Adaptive sports are real sports, and you can participate at all levels from "having a hit" on the weekend to playing a Grand Slam tournament. WH

Learn more about BLV Tennis and Inclusive Tennis:



Lived Experience On Community Radio

"It's really important that people with a disability hear stories told with a lens of lived experience... a lot of (community radio) stations are stepping up to do that, and it's fantastic to see." So said Reece Kinnane, Director of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia. (Lange, 2025)

8CCC Radio based in Alice Springs NT does exactly this with five shows currently presented by people with disability. The station is actually a National Disability Insurance Scheme provider. Sports, Anime, Rock music, Country music and Interviews are all featured in shows presented by people with various disabilities.

Nearly 5.3 million Australians tune into community radio across the country every week. Not all shows are hosted voluntarily: some are paid roles. And while the talk shows may be about every day subjects, you get the perspective of a person living with a disability which can give the topic a fresh angle.

2RPH in Sydney presents printed material in audio accessible form. In other words, they have over 180 (mostly volunteer) readers who present newspaper and magazine articles and books. At the time of writing they were reading an "Economist" article about Vladimir Putin, a half hour of poetry and a feature on death and dying, and a reading of the letters pages from some of the big newspapers. WH

Bibliography

Lange, E. (2025, December 4). Radio Presenter with disability thrive at 8CCC in Alice Springs. Retrieved from ABC Alice Springs: www.abc.net.au



Working From Home: Are There MH Benefits?

Does "working from home" have mental health benefits, aside from avoiding the daily commute? According to a recent report: 'Yes' and 'No.'

Researchers at the University of Melbourne analysed 20 years of data involving 16,000 people to conclude that work from home and flexible hybrid working has mental health benefits for women. Specifically, women who were "already living with mental health issues." (Cooper, 2025)

Co-author Mr Jan Kabatek told ABC news that, "the wellbeing of Australians who had 'satisfactory levels of mental health' was not significantly affected by work arrangements or daily commute." Australian women already living with a mental health issue benefited most with a "partial office/on-site presence".

The mental health of Australian men was not significantly impacted by working from home, although the reduction in commuting times was seen as positive.

WH Photos WH

Cooper, Luke. (2025, December 5). 'Impacts of working from home on mental health tracked in study of 16,000 Australians.' Retrieved from ABC News: 106096688



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

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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



Where mental wellbeing thrives

NDIS