AWARD WINNING

panorama

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

Monthly Issue **November #103B**



TheMHS Conference 2026

Panorama Live on Stage!

Flowerdale in the Kitchen!

'It Took Guts!'
The Long Struggle for
Our Physical Health

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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, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.

Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 or
flourishaustralia.org.au

Chair: Judi Higgin
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:Tam, Manuel, Chevonne and Yati from Flowerdale after their presentation at TheMHS. Photo by Peter Farrugia

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Contributors include...

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W. 'Yati' S accesses Flourish Australia's Liverpool (Flowerdale) service

Contributions are welcome!





In Panorama November 2026

The Mental Health Services Conference (TheMHS) saw a considerable investment from Flourish Australia (a 'Platinum Sponsor') in terms of participants. 35 individuals presented to the international conference held in Sydney from 4-7 August 2026. It was so big that we have to divide the reports between this month, December and January.

Food is one thing everyone has in common and so it is natural to ask about whether food, cooking and eating can contribute to better mental health. The team from Flourish Australia's Liverpool (Flowerdale) service did just that in their presentation.

The topic of food is so important in relation to mental health that we have three articles in this issue and we will be following it up in future issues too. You will see why when you read the articles that delve into the connection between poor social connection and poor eating.

One of our TheMHS presentations was a sort of Panorama interview conducted live on stage between Tricia H of the Community Advisory Council and Warren Heggarty of Panorama. (See picture at left by PETER FARRUGIA).

This was a chance to show people outside of Flourish Australia how we go about developing our recovery stories. In this article we also briefly discuss four presentations from other organisations that were centred on lived experience.

We also include a historical story about the long struggle to recognise the physical health needs of people with mental health issues. We asked Janet Meagher AO to recount the story from the time of her important speech on topic in Parramatta in 1999.

In the December issue

We will bring you more from TheMHS including presentations by Mary O'Hagan and Grant J Everett, including Grant's call for lived experience and recovery to play a bigger role in the forensic health system.



FEEDING RECOVERY'S FLAME

Sharing Experience Over Food

By Chevonne Siva, Manuel C, Tam Nguyen and Yatis S



A team from Flourish Australia's Liverpool (Flowerdale) service presented at The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Conference on something you might at first think is unrelated to mental health recovery: food! We think you will discover, as you read the next three stories, that they were really onto something!

Evidence shows that communal meal preparation and sharing allows for improved mental health by creating a supportive environment that encourages the sharing of experiences (Marovelli 2019). At Liverpool (Flowerdale) service, our provision of food-focused groups has played an integral role in supporting the recovery and wellbeing of participants.

Frequent hospital admissions and lonely days spent at home are things of the past for many of the participants. Not only do food-focused groups foster enduring connections between participants, but they also allow for a sense of inclusion and hope for a fulfilled life beyond lived experiences of poor mental health.

Flowerdale hosts weekly BBQ and lunch groups that have been successful in maintaining engagement over the last four or five years. In line with Flourish Australia's Social Citizenship Framework (2025) the people who access our service gain a sense of purpose and opportunity to give back to their community. Time spent sharing a meal provides a safe space to hold meaningful conversations.

By presenting at TheMHS, we wanted the audience to hear directly from the people who benefit. Two of us (Manuel and Yati) shared our experiences in attending Flowerdale's food-focused groups, which has had a positive impact on our recovery journeys.

In January 2026, the four of us, Chevonne and Tam (staff) and Manuel and Yati took advantage of the support offered by Flourish Australia's Training Specialist Peter Farrugia and Panorama's Warren Heggarty in preparing an abstract that would excite the interest of the conference organisers.

Our presentation sought to convince the audience that something as simple as preparing and sharing a meal with others can create a significant impact in supporting the recovery and wellbeing of people experiencing mental health challenges (more on TheMHS on pages 8-9).

In his book The Good Kitchen, Danny McCubbin tells how he started up a FREE COMMUNITY KITCHEN in a poor town in Sicily

'Stopping for a decent lunch is central to a Sicilian's way of life. Family and friends gather around the table to talk, refuel and refresh... this reminds me of family meal time back when I was a kid in Australia. The TV was never on during dinner... and everyone at the table was encouraged to speak about their day' p. 17

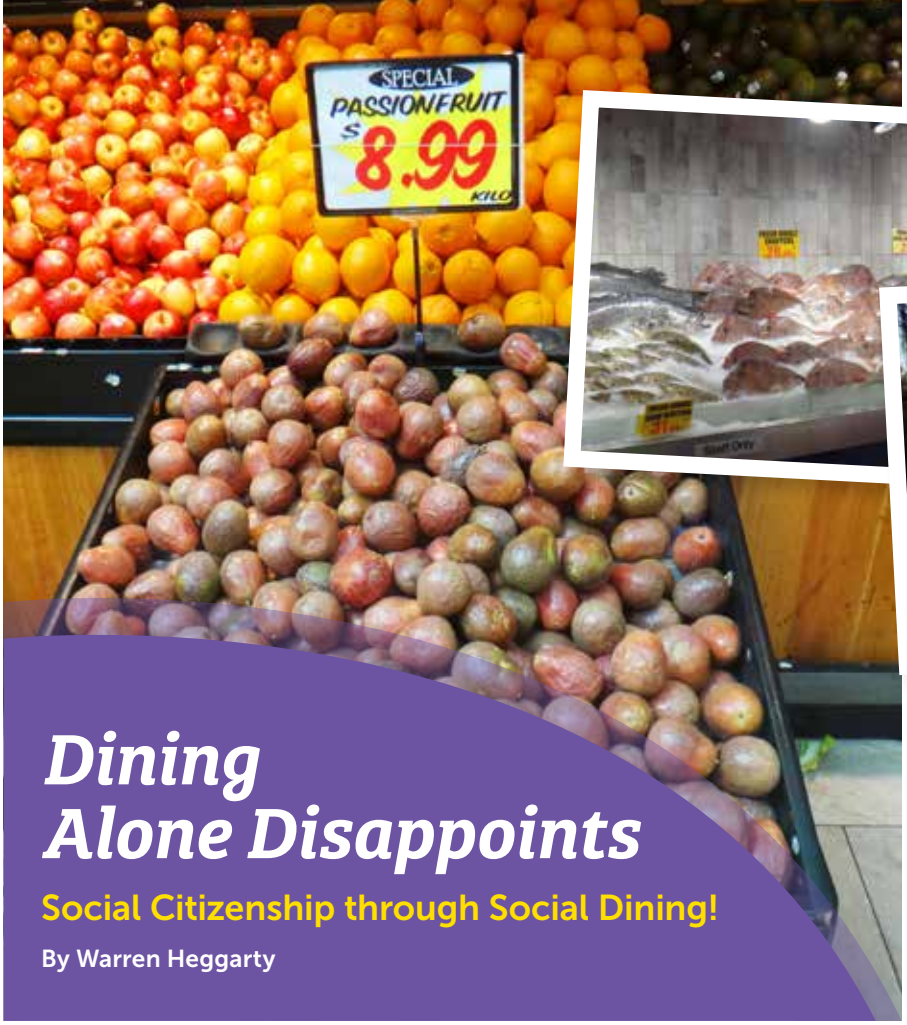
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1..Marovelli, B. (2019). Cooking and eating together in London: Food sharing initiatives as collective spaces of encounter, Geoforum, 99(1), 190-201.

2. Flourish Australia (2025). Social Citizenship Framework; A strategic framework for supporting people with lived experience of mental health challenges on their journey of recovery, cultivating and claiming their social citizenship.

ABOVE: Tam, Manuel, Chevonne and Yati having just given their presentation at TheMHS Conference, spreading the good news about sharing food!
PHOTO PETER FARRUGIA

"...food-focused groups foster enduring connections between participants."





Dining Alone Disappoints

Social Citizenship through Social Dining!

By Warren Heggarty

Loneliness is leading to malnutrition according to Jane Mussored, CEO of the Maggie Beer Foundation (Maggie Beer Foundation, n.d.). The Maggie Beer Foundation promotes better eating and nutrition in the aged care sector. There are a lot of parallels between the experience of old people and those living with disabilities or complex mental health issues.

'Dining alone sucks!' said Jane Mussored to Michael McLaren on radio 2GB on 28 July 2026. Some people who live alone get to the point where they lose motivation to prepare food. 5% of elderly people are malnourished, but this rises much higher among elderly people entering hospital.

In the interview, Jane and Michael discussed cases such as an old man who had lost his wife, and other cases where people have suddenly found themselves alone. With their routine gone and perhaps even a sense of hope lost, people begin to think as though there were 'no point' in putting the effort into feeding themselves properly.

Ironically, the market is geared towards convenience food. Local butcher shops have prepared cuts. Grocery stores have pre-sliced vegetables. The fact that there are so many 'prepared' food products to choose from in supermarkets suggests strongly that this problem could be linked to actual loneliness, especially when accompanied by a perceived lack of expertise. That is to say, some people convince themselves they cannot cook. Another thing that points to loneliness being the problem is that Meals on Wheels are available to many people in this situation.

Another problem is dietary advice. Most dietary advice is driven by companies selling products. The advice is linked to their particular product and there are LOTS of different products. So the 'advice' you hear is complex and contradictory. Over the years, expert advice seems to have shifted from fad to fad, or even moved in cycles. In the 1980s we were told that eggs were bad for us. But you will get scrambled eggs for breakfast in hospital. Do you really need to be an 'expert' to eat adequately?

So it appears there are two barriers to eating properly among aged people and presumably people with complex mental health issues. A lack of hope in the future caused by loneliness, and a perceived lack of expertise in the kitchen. Let's see if we can overcome those things. Let's bring back Social Dining!

To this end, Panorama would like to foster two things: visiting people at home, and hosting people at home for meals. It is true that you can dine socially by sharing a bag of chips while sitting on a park bench. However, we need to remember that one of the goals here is nutrition and that involves the preparation of a variety of foods.

We would like to hear from you, dear readers, about your home dining experiences. What recipes go over well? Do YOU have any regular meet-ups for meals, or backyard barbecues?

In the next Panorama (December) we will bring you a follow up story that may seem a little off-topic for food, but it is important preparation for Social Dining: "How to Make Your Home Welcoming to Visitors."

Bibliography

Maggie Beer Foundation. (n.d.). Home Plate Project. Retrieved from Maggie Beer Foundation: https://maggiebeerfoundation.org.au

ABOVE: Pre-cut meats, pre-cut vegetables and even whole prepared meals are available in supermarkets. It makes cooking much easier. But perhaps it would be even better if we had someone to share it with. PHOTOS WARREN HEGGARTY

NO NEED TO BE MALNOURISHED



We can change our food habits

By Grant J Everett

People with mental health issues are more likely to also be in poor physical health, with a reduced life expectancy of up to 20 years. It is crucial for our wellness and longevity to have a good diet, but if somebody goes through a tough time, this may be expressed in poor eating habits where they aren't eating what their body needs. This is malnutrition.

If you're malnourished, your body only works at a fraction of its potential. The brain uses 25% of your energy, and without sufficient fuel your attention span and executive functions will suffer, making everything difficult. Malnutrition can also be exacerbated by gastrointestinal diseases, celiac disease, diabetes, lactose intolerance, and food allergies.

Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity are twice as common for people with mental health issues, and if you eat the wrong foods in the wrong amounts, you could potentially be overweight and malnourished at the same time!

A study (Tsai AC, Chou YT, Chang TL) found the prevalence of malnutrition stands at: 12.5% for bipolar disorder; 21.1% for schizophrenia; And a huge 55.6% for major depression

Lifestyle factors that can lead to malnutrition may include...

- Nutritious food being expensive
- Too much junk
- Not feeling confiden=t to cook
- A lack of nutritional knowledge
- Insufficient kitchen facilities

What Can Be Done?

While eating plans like The Mediterranean Diet are popular, there is no "correct" one-size-fits-all choice. Fruit, vegetables, fish, and whole grains are all good to have in your diet, though fruit can contain a lot of (natural) sugar. Lean protein, fibre, and water is a must, and you should limit red and processed meats and sweets. Omega-3 fatty acids, B vitamins, and Vitamin D are good for depression, anxiety, and mood disorders.

You can get a referral from your GP to see a dietitian for tailored advice. Dietitians can help you lose weight, suggest healthier versions of the foods you love, and show you how to make better choices with your grocery shopping.

You CAN Cook!

The best way to eat right is to cook it yourself, so it's ESSENTIAL that everyone knows the kitchen basics. And you don't need lots of equipment, amazing knife skills, or much money. Take chicken vegetable noodle soup: with a knife and a pot, you can whip up this Winter classic in under an hour. I made this the other week for six people, and it cost $30. We had some left over, and it keeps well in Tupperware.

Many Flourish Australia sites have cooking groups where you can learn new skills and enjoy good, nutritious food with friends. If you want to improve your kitchen prowess, why not talk to your support worker?

Sources:

National Library of Medicine, Assessment of Nutritional Status and Risk of Malnutrition Using Adapted Standard Tools in Patients with Mental Illness and in Need of Intensive Psychiatric Treatment; Food and mood: how do diet and nutrition affect mental wellbeing?

Tsai AC, Chou YT, Chang TL. Usefulness of the Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNA) in predicting the nutritional status of people with mental disorders in Taiwan. J Clin Nurs 2011; 20(3-4):341-350.

Medical Nutrition International Industry website; Nutritional Care and Mental Health

ABOVE: Seafood in a shop in suburban Sydney, some of it prepared. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY



SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP:

Means AUSTRALIAN Citizenship for Mary!

By Warren Heggarty

In Panorama over the past few years we have spoken a lot about Social Citizenship, but what about attaining actual Australian Citizenship? Recently, Mary A, who formerly accessed Flourish Australia's Penrith service did just that. She was successful in applying for citizenship.

Mary had already been thinking about it when she shared her recovery story with us in November 2025 Panorama (Summer Print Issue 'Independent Living: Aiming for Citizenship.') She told Panorama that her aims then were to become financially independent, to visit the Cook Islands and to become a citizen.

She reported at the time that her mental health was improving. When Panorama visited her again this year at her home near Penrith NSW, it was obvious that she had made even more progress!

In March 2026, with assistance from her support workers and her doctor, Mary took the plunge and completed the application for citizenship.

The process towards citizenship will be different depending on your personal circumstances. Mary's own journey was a little different from the usual. To give you a rough idea, though, the usual process for a New Zealander who is a resident is outlined on the Immigration Department website here:

https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/citizenship/become-a-citizen/permanent-resident#HowTo

Normally, you have to do an application form (and that will involve identity documents) followed in some cases by an interview or in others by assessment test. After this Citizenship Appointment you then have to wait for a decision from the Department of Home Affairs (Immigration).

If you are successful, the final step is the Citizenship Ceremony. Successful applicants usually get invited to attend a month before it happens. At the Ceremony you make a pledge of commitment and receive your certificate.

At last, in August 2026 Mary received her Citizenship Certificate signed by the Minister Tony Burke. Although she was resident in Australia from the age of 8, Mary had been born in New Zealand. We wanted to ask her why she had decided to become a citizen.

'It makes it easier for you to deal with the Government,' Mary said with a smile. In fact she had been on the phone to Centrelink right at the time we arrived to photograph her with her certificate. 'It will make my life easier, being a citizen. I would like to apply for more suitable, cheaper public housing that is maybe a little closer to where I work.'

Mary's job four days per week involved process work for a community business at Mount Druitt. She expressed a desire one day to increase her hours of paid work if possible, a good sign that her recovery is on track.

'Another reason to be a Citizen is so I can vote,' she added. We asked what would she say to others who might be thinking of taking Australian Citizenship. 'Go ahead and do it!' she says.

Thanks to Amanda Dixon of Flourish Australia Penrith for helping us keep up to date with Mary's goal to become Australian!

"It will make my life easier, being a citizen. I would like to apply for more suitable, cheaper public housing that is maybe a little closer to where I work."

ABOVE: Mary A. Proudly displays her certificate. Not everybody's citizenship journey is the same but Mary thinks it is well worth while. PHOTO WARREN HEGGARTY

Panorama Live on Stage

Tricia's 'risky' recovery story at TheMHS. With danger, opportunity and a free Chinese lesson!

By Tricia and Warren





Tricia H, a Flourish Australia employee at our Community Business in Marrickville and a member of the Community Advisory Council, wanted to enter the running for The Mental Health Services Conference 2026. She had an idea for a presentation to the largest international mental health gathering in the country, based on her own recovery story.

Flourish Australia people developed a total of 18 abstracts for presentation and Tricia's one was shortlisted in May. Then, only a week before the event, a presenter dropped out and Tricia got the call! At the last minute, it was decided that the way to present it was as a Panorama interview LIVE ON STAGE. This is where Warren Heggarty came in.

We (Tricia and Warren) snuck in and posted some signs behind the lectern before the show. Two large red Chinese characters. WEI and JI. As the four earlier other presenters got up and did their thing (see next page) we secretly hoped that the audience would begin to wonder what those characters meant and what they had to do with Lived Experience and recovery. Suddenly it was time for us to take the stage. What follows are edited highlights.

90 Minutes, 5 Presentations And A Question Panel

Tricia and Warren were grouped with four other LIVED EXPERIENCE themed presenters. An MC introduced the session and each speaker, Each presentation had 15 minutes. After all five had presented, all of the presenters gathered at a table for a 'panel discussion and question time. mediated by the MC. The others in this session were

Rachel Burns a young CEO of a lived experience startup. She spoke against 'toxic positivity' 'inspiration porn' and how 'stoicism shifts the onus onto consumers rather than the 'broken system.'

Leilani from New Zealand spoke about her peer run Māori recovery group.

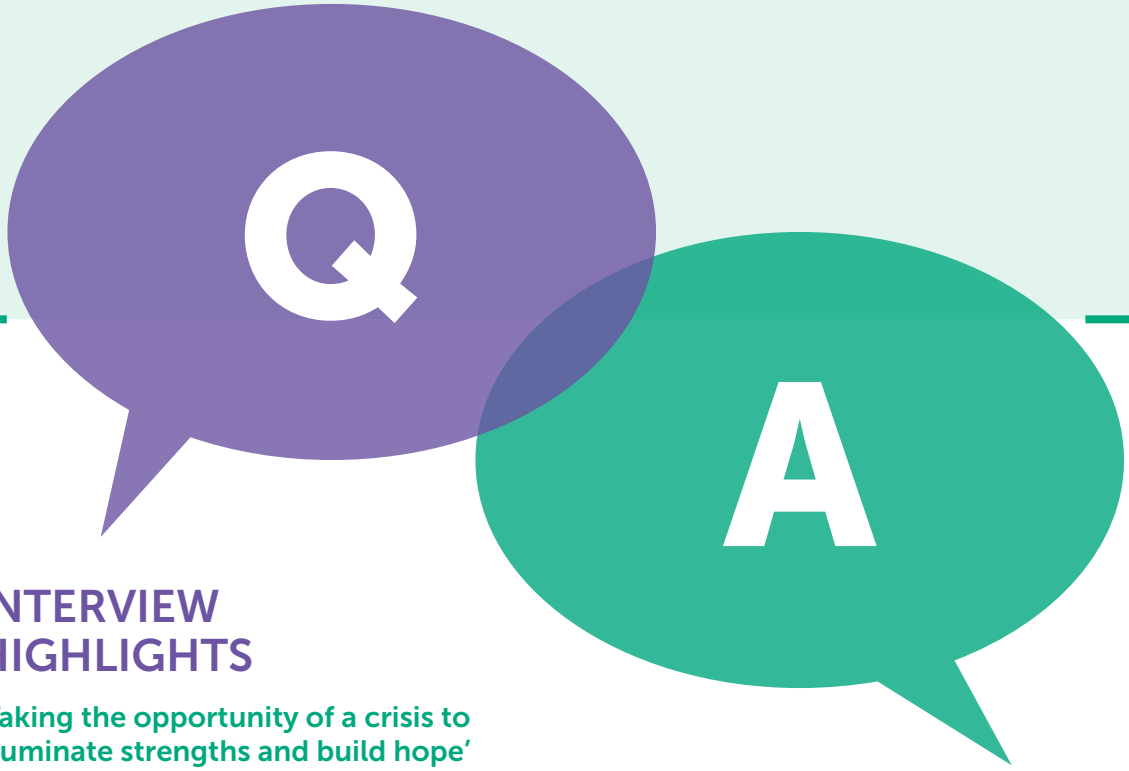
Viv Kissani spoke about Peach Tree in QLD, a peer operated perinatal wellness group. She says that Peer support has always existed, it's just that now we've started to recognise it!

Terri and Nicholas from Outcare in Western Australia spoke about START, an exercise in 'therapeutic jurisprudence' which takes a peer work approach to offenders and successfully helps people avoid jail if they stick with the program.

So many great people working hard in the Lived Experience field! (Read more on TheMHS, page 4)

ABOVE TOP: Tricia H (left) in 'Teacher' mode with interviewer Warren Heggarty (right). They took a Panorama recovery story interview to the stage at TheMHS. PHOTO BY PETER FARRUGIA.

ABOVE BOTTOM: Tricia and Warren flanked by supporters Peter Farrugia (Flourish Australia's Training Specialist) and Laura Bowring (Employment support specialist) PHOTO BY LAURA BOWRING



INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS

'Taking the opportunity of a crisis to illuminate strengths and build hope'

WARREN Today we are going to show you an interview for Panorama live on stage! It will be about recovery, but it will also be a bit of a Chinese lesson.

TRICIA These characters WEI and JI together mean 'Crisis'. Individually they are 'Danger' and 'Opportunity.' I went through a crisis with my mental health. It was a time of danger, but I was able to find opportunities to grow and develop.

W So we often look at mental health crises as purely negative, but are you saying that they can contain the seeds of opportunity as well?

TRICIA: Before the mental health crisis I learned piano and became a Fellow of Trinity College London. Then I was a teacher for many years. Then came a period of darkness, seemingly without hope. And following that, recovery.

W I have interviewed many people for Panorama who have similar experiences. How did you see the light again, where did you recapture a sense of hope?

T I had support and I was able to draw upon my strengths. My parents came out to Australia from Malaysia to look after me. They dropped everything to do this- and I now support them in their old age. I volunteer, making music for the aged care home, and I bring my children along. We make music as a family. Another strength is that I speak four languages. I was already highly qualified, but I went to TAFE to upskill in Business and Information Technology. This course was very challenging for me but I persevered and completed it after nine years. It makes me feel good when I am able to bond with aged care residents and bring a smile to their faces and lighten their day. So I am going to do another course, Cert IV Leisure and Health related to recreation in aged care settings. Another strength I have is Ballroom Dancing. Music, volunteering, dancing are all active strengths that provide me hope for a better future.

W You had a combination of two main things: firstly the support of others. Secondly determination within yourself. People will say that it is easier said than done. Perhaps this is true, but others may think it is impossible to recover. They will say you must be super human!

T No! Recovery is hard but it is for everyone. Persevere at your own pace, even if it is slow. Keep going forward. Step by step!

W That sounds like something Winston Churchill said "If you find yourself marching through hell, keep going." But sometimes surely it all becomes too much!

T Difficulty and frustration are part of EVERYONE's life not just people with mental health issues. You can't avoid hardship. In Chinese we talk of the Circle of life: Sheng, Lao, Bin, Si. Birth, Old-Age, Sickness and Death. There is another saying my parents tell me in Cantonese: M DA DONG GA, DA SAI GA! If you can't succeed going East, try going West.

W What you have said contains a similar message to the hundreds of people I have interviewed for Panorama Sometimes in a hopeless situation you need to borrow other people's sense of hope. That is why support from other people is important. Ultimately to make use of that hope you need to draw on your own strength.



RECIPE: HOMESTYLE BAKED MAC & CHEESE

By Grant J Everett

Homestyle Baked Mac & Cheese is cheap and easy and quick to make, but you'll have a tough time finding people who don't like it! Perfect for dinner, or for any bring-a-plate functions you may attend.

INGREDIENTS

- 500g bag of macaroni
- Tablespoon of salt
- 50g of butter (use measurement line on butter block)
- ¼ cup of flour (any kind)
- 3 cups milk (any kind)
- 2 ½ cups of 2 different kinds of shredded cheese (try types called "sharp" or "aged" or "vintage" or "strong")
- A teaspoon of nutmeg
- A teaspoon of ground pepper
- ¼ cup of breadcrumbs (bags of them can be frozen for later use)
- Tablespoon of Italian herbs
- Cooking oil (liquid or spray)

METHOD

1. Set oven to 200°C
2. Fill pot with boiling water, add macaroni, add salt, and place pot on a hotplate on high. Cook pasta 2 minutes less than the packet says. Drain.
3. In another saucepan, melt butter. Once melted, add flour and stir until there's no white remaining.
4. Add milk ½ cup at a time, stirring for 30 seconds after each addition.
5. Add ⅔ of your cheese, stir through until melted.
6. Add the nutmeg and pepper, stir them in. You've just made bechamel sauce!
7. Oil your baking dish, combine your bechamel and your pasta and fill the dish with it.
8. Place remaining cheese on top, and sprinkle on the breadcrumbs. Finally, season with Italian herbs.
9. Bake at 200°C for 20 minutes, or until top is golden and crispy.
10. For best results, allow it to sit for 10 minutes.
11. Serve with boiled broccoli or carrots or whatever side veg you like. Every sort of vegetable tastes good with Mac & Cheese!

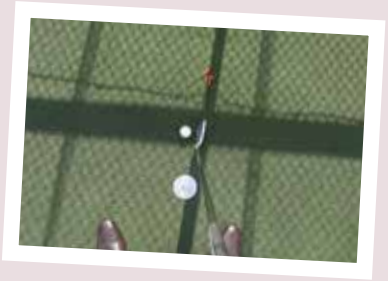
EQUIPMENT

- Large oven-safe baking dish
- 2 saucepans or pots
- Grater to grate cheese (if it's a block)
- Wooden spoon to stir
- Measuring cups
- Teaspoon measure
- Collander to drain pasta

ABOVE: A creamy pasta filling topped with a delicious baked cheese top is the perfect combination.
PHOTO ADOBESTOCK

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Hey Swingers! Visit Your Local Park and Use The Free Facilities!



I make sure I go for a walk every single day and while on those walks I notice things. Things like FACILITIES which my taxes and council rates pay for. Many of these facilities are fabulous and I really should make more use of them. And so too, if I may be so bold, should YOU.

For example, I noticed a fellow with a golf club and being curious I followed - at a discreet distance - to a cage. A golf practice cage. In that cage, you can practice your swing to your heart's content FOR FREE.

I was once a weekly golfer, until things went haywire. I had not played a round 1994. So I grabbed a club and a ball and on my next walk I began practicing my swing. I am now gathering enough confidence to make a return to the course!

Honestly, it's not just golf. I saw an old fellow about 100 years old having a go at the parallel bars. I saw a little kid on one of those outdoor exercise machines. I saw a skateboarder doing things that looked ... dangerous. And its all free. Well, actually WE ALL PAID FOR IT. So why not USE it? WH

PHOTO WARREN HEGGARTY

NEW BOOK REVIEW

'Girlhood Translated' by Suzanne Garfinkle-Crowell



Simon and Schuster $39.95

THE TYRANNY OF WELLNESS?

New York Psychiatrist Garfinkle-Crowell had begun noticing that among her well to do clientele, the young females were very fluent in the language of psychiatry (OCD, ADHD, anxiety, depression) while being unable to talk about their feelings.

She says that girls are shaping their own identities in the language of therapy and coming almost to 'fetishise' mental health diagnoses. But she does not blame her own profession of psychiatry. Instead, she blames 'tyranny of wellness culture.'

One gets the impression that girls are under a lot of pressure these days to be more and do more and to attain perfection while sucking up their feelings. Well-intended mental health campaigns have had the unintended consequence of encouraging distress to be seen as disease.

A diagnosis may give a person the feeling that they are part of a community of mentally unwell peers: with slogans like 'Slay-DHD' and 'Go Anxiety Girlies!'

More young people than ever are in therapy, yet they are not getting any happier. This book calls for us urgently to look beyond the terminology and the labels and to support girls in establishing agency. WH

Quotes are taken from a review by Laura Hackett in THE TIMES, and the Penguin website.

RECOVERY GAMES
Solutions

Scramble

1. Chairing
2. Rebuilding
3. Dancing
4. Socialising
5. Illawarra
6. Attending
7. Organise
8. Conversation
9. Literacy

Panorama Crossword:

Down

1 Foundational
4 Blind
5 Charlotte
7 Anonymous
9 Ballet
12 Indigenous

Across

2 Wollongong
3 Rainbow
6 Chair
8 Childrens
10 Literary
11 Winter

Panorama Find-A-Word

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



EMPLOYMENT EXPOSITION EXPOSE!

Our Inclusive Employment staff out and about

They say it's not WHAT you know but WHO you know that gets you a job. Some people find that discouraging, but here is one way of meeting the right people: Attend an EXPO.

Flourish Australia's Inclusive Employment staff are seen here being VERY enthusiastic at two employment expos. Above we have the Western Sydney Careers Expo and below is the Disability Employment Expo. f you have never been to an EXPO it provides you with direct contact to two very important types of people.

Firstly, people who can help you get a job. Secondly, people who are looking for people to work for them. They gather in the one place waiting for you to come and ask questions! How convenient!

So keep your eyes and ears open and don't be shy! WH

TOP: Laura Bowring, Amy Galea, Elyssa green, Julie Duong, Ahmed Abdalla, Emaid Mustapha, Lauren Mooy. BOTTOM Laura, Frankie Motilal, Boris Borisov, Julie, Jessie Bihler, Sahar Farahbakhsh and Andy Tran at the Disability Employment Expo. PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIE DUONG



RELAX! AI HAS NOT DELETED ALL OUR JOBS... YET

News Stories Show a Complex Picture

There is a lot in the news about how AI is supposedly replacing workers, but remember that 'the news' does tend to exaggerate the negative. A bit.

For example, one day we read that morale was low at a cosmetics retailer because AI was supposedly replacing humankind in the back office. Who would have thought cosmetics would be affected?

The following day we read a story about court reporting, a job that people said was ripe for replacement by AI. In fact, court reporting is an example of how LIMITED AI can be. AI cannot record gestures or facial expressions or ask witnesses to kindly repeat words in their testimony that were unclear.

Another limit of AI is the massive cost, of data centres in terms of money, power and water usage. A major software company is reported to have been unable to afford to run the AI suite it had spent the previous year building!

These anecdotes are all based on stories published in Newspapers in Winter 2026 - WH



INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT

Apprenticeship and Rural and Remote Opportunities

People once assumed that the road to success led to the city via university. Things have changed and people today are showing more appreciation for the trades. We recently found a couple of great stories in The Indigenous Business Review #13 (August 2026) that illustrate this - one from the suburbs and one from a remote location.

The first story was about Tyson, a proud Wiradjuri man who in his own words was once heading toward 'getting incarcerated.' Then he took on a plumbing apprenticeship from the Koori Job Ready program. He found it really suited him, so much so that today he owns the plumbing business Allpro Solutions in Liverpool NSW. They work on storm and rainwater systems and the company employs NINE Indigenous apprentices! And yes, Tyson eventually did get a uni education as well.

The other story is about Karlka Nyiyaparli Aboriginal Corporation (KNAC) which partnered with Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) in a three year program to 'support pastoral development, Indigenous employment and new market-led opportunities in the Pilbara' in Western Australia. Here, KNAC manages three vast cattle stations and one of the ideas they are looking at is 'Nyiyaparli branded beef that tells the story of Country, Culture and Community.'

You may have encountered a similar meat marketing method used by one producer in the Riverina of NSW whose ads sell not just meat but a back story round a campfire with a harmonica.

Training for young workers includes horsemanship, stockmanship and cattle handling. The program is co-designed with local indigenous people and includes developing mentors to build capability in 'regenerative stockmanship.' WH

Sources

Harley, Reece (2026) 'Connecting to Country' in The Indigenous Business Review #13 August 2026 pp.20-21

Harley, Reece (2026) 'Apprenticeship Path to Success' in The Indigenous Business Review #13 August 2026 p.23



COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL COLUMN

With Tricia H from the Council

This column refers to the Council Meeting which happened on 8th July 2026.

Today's meeting welcomed new Chair of the Flourish Australia Board Judi Higgin and board member Megan Still.

Judi has only just taken over the role from Prof Elizabeth More AM. You can read all about her ten year (so far) relationship with Flourish Australia and the Council in October Panorama. Mozzy, our past Co-Chair also looks back on her ten years in that article!

CEO Mark Orr AM updated us about the National Mental Health Coordinating Council's work on Anxiety and Psychosocial Health and he also addressed matters relating to the Federal Minister, The Hon Mark Butler.

We also discussed the process of the closure of some of our Flourish Australia services, made necessary by recent contract changes. There will be further updates at our next meeting in August,

Training Specialist Peter Farrugia spoke to us about the five week BE WELL program which comes to us through Flinders University in South Australia. I had the opportunity along with three others to attend a "taster" of the program just before this meeting. I can report that it 'tastes' very very well!

The Council has been considering and reviewing Flourish Australia's corporate values! One concept that was given voice today was that we need to make sure that we always earn the trust and respect of the people who access our services and other stakeholders,

There are plans to review our Individual Recovery Plans format so that we can draw improved data from them. So we will be looking at several aspects of the IRPs:

- Completion
- Alignment with aims and values
- Reviewing process
- Integration of data
- Learning from them

We will meet Fadzi Marasha, Flourish Australia's Outcomes and Improvements Lead at the next meeting to follow up.

There was also more discussion of the (at the time) proposed changes to the NDIS. By the time you read this, the result will be known.

STOP PRESS: We now know that the legislation was passed in late August- Time Travelling Editor



The Battle for Our Physical Health

Panorama talks to Janet Meagher AO

This year, two events drew our attention to the importance of the struggle that has taken place on behalf of the physical wellbeing of people living with a mental health issue. The first was when Jade Ryall, formerly long term Program Manager of Back On Track Health, left Flourish Australia to enter academic life and to work on Country with Aboriginal people. The second was the elevation to Officer of the Order of Australia of Janet Meagher in the King's Birthday Honours. Panorama spoke to Janet about the struggle which has left us in a better place as a society.

Let's go back to the end of the last century and look at public health. It is over a decade since the Richmond Report of 1983 that led to the "de-institutionalisation" of many mental health patients. The story of how recovery and lived experience became important guiding concepts is told elsewhere, but let's not neglect the parallel battle for our physical wellbeing.

In the general community conditions like smoking, obesity and diabetes are seen often as "lifestyle issues." Public Health messaging about "lifestyle issues" may get through to people whose lives are at the top end of Maslow's pyramid. But Janet Meagher recognised that this is not the case with people who have complex mental health issues, people who are barely able to enjoy the bottom two levels of Maslow's pyramid. For such people, support is needed, and in the realm of physical health, this was seriously neglected.

Speaking of the mental health consumer movement, Janet said, "We were successful in getting the message out to the general public. There were lots of conferences, doctors went to the conferences, and doctors passed the message on to the people. Now it has become more like common knowledge that you need to look after your physical health and avoid the problems caused by medication side effects.

"But it took guts," she added. "We were challenged over it. We had many fights over it. And those who disagreed with our message would say to us 'you will be responsible for the damage caused if you keep spreading this message.'"

Early in this battle, Janet gave a speech entitled "The Emperor's New Clothes" at Parramatta Town Hall on 6 February 1999. Here she exposed the long-ignored fact that certain medications prescribed to people with mental health issues were actually ruining their physical health. Not only that, but the medical profession and manufacturers seemed to think that the trade off of physical health for mental stability was a fair deal. This was the status quo - the invisible clothing that shrouded the pharmaceutical manufacturers and the medical profession from responsibility.

Many medical practitioners work to help this problem. However, Professor Tim Lambert of ccCHiP at Concord Hospital once said that the 25 or so year deficit in life expectancy suffered by people with serious mental health issues was a case of professional neglect. People living in such continual (physical) ill health is avoidable. People dying as young as they have been is avoidable.

The audience at the Parramatta speech included later Flourish Australia Board Member Paula Hanlon and NSW Director of Mental Health

Alcohol and other Drugs Dr Beverly Raphael. The latter was sufficiently moved by the speech that she said, "We're going to try to do this!"

"It didn't look so good that here I was, being obese yet making the case I was making," said Janet. She did not remain "obese" because with the threat of diabetes, she decided to lead by example and shed the weight she needed to shed in order to stay healthy.

Metabolic syndrome, as it is sometimes called, is that set of disorders that came to be accepted as collateral damage with drugs that were given to people to control mental illness. But it caused changes not only to the body, but to the self-esteem. For example, one very commonly prescribed drug not only leads to weight gain but sexual dysfunction and long-term dependence due to a serious withdrawal syndrome.

NOTE: Never just stop taking your medication without discussing your concerns with a doctor. All medicines have side effects. Talk to your doctor about how the side effects weigh up against the benefits. Ask what strategies can help overcome the side effects.

It was not long before Janet took this message internationally, meeting at Vienna's Hilton Hotel from 28 to 30 September 2004 to draw up a consensus statement regarding metabolic syndrome and mental illnesses.

Back home, as a senior executive of PRA (now Flourish Australia) Janet worked on this issue with Phil Nadin, Sacha Maller, Julie Millard and others. She convened a forum on Iatrogenic disease and mental illness held in Redfern which brought together experts in related fields, including Prof Ian Watson, a physician experienced in service to highly disadvantaged and homeless people. From this, PRA with the assistance of Julie Millard AM, developed the BOTH (Back on Track Health) program which sought to raise awareness and stimulate action among the people accessing (PRA's) Flourish Australia's services. Led by Ms Jade Ryall over 15 years, the program has now been embedded into regular service provision within Flourish Australia so that physical health is seen as a necessary part of mental health recovery.

Today, due in large part to Janet's work, we can see that the wider community is now more aware of the inseparability of mental and physical health.

The establishment of the Equally Well organisation, which promotes and monitors the physical health of people living with mental health issues, shows that wider society does now recognise the need to reverse the damage done by the neglect of their physical health. Furthermore, by Equally Well's assessment, the statistics have improved. When Janet addressed the "Fair Go" Rally at Parramatta Town Hall she spoke of lifespans shortened by 25 to 30 years due to iatrogenic disease. This figure, although still high, is now greatly reduced, and some estimates are as low as 11 years.

In 2012 there was an inquest into early deaths from disease associated with metabolic syndrome at a group home in Marrickville NSW. Giving evidence, the treating psychiatrist expressed the opinion that the physical health of the patients was not his responsibility. Such a claim today would be considered outrageous.

Whereas there tended to be great "diagnostic overshadowing" 20 years ago - where doctors would ignore physical problems as unavoidable side-effects, or even see them as "psychosomatic," today, medical practitioners are more aware of their responsibilities to the whole person.

That work continues. Flourish Australia has built on the foundations of Back On Track Health through PhysiCards, a co-designed tool that helps people identify physical health concerns and bring them into conversations with health professionals. A randomised controlled trial with the University of Newcastle, supported by the Heart Foundation, confirmed the effectiveness of PhysiCards in helping people recognise health concerns and start proactive conversations about their health. But our work now goes further. Live Well and Flourish, developed in partnership with the University of Newcastle, is helping staff build physical health conversations into everyday support, covering areas such as smoking, nutrition, alcohol use and physical activity. Through Community in Motion, we are also supporting physical activity and exercise as part of recovery, backed by research into the role community-managed organisations and exercise can play in addressing early mortality. Together, these initiatives carry forward the battle Janet and others began decades ago: making sure physical health is not treated as separate from mental health, but as an essential part of living well and recovery.

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OPPOSITE: Janet Meagher AO, veteran campaigner for the rights of people with mental health issues PHOTO FLOURISH AUSTRALIA ARCHIVES. BELOW: Our State Patron, Her Excellency The Hon Margaret Beasley AC KC confers Flourish Australia Life Membership upon Janet Meagher. PHOTO NEIL FENELON



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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

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3. Meet with your NDIS planner and get a plan
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