

panorama

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

Miss Galaxy
International

Shikye
Smith

- *Affordable Housing
- *Getting a Drivers' Licence
- *SANE forums

Peer Support
Principles in a
Forensic
Hospital

Flourish Australia

About us

Flourish Australia is committed to walking alongside people with a lived experience of a mental health issue as they progress along their recovery journey. We passionately believe in mental health recovery. We are committed to providing the best possible support and encouragement for people to achieve their recovery goals across all of our 64 services in NSW and Southern Queensland.

Flourish Australia

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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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**To protect the privacy of the people who access our services, their families and carers, we sometimes used pseudonyms or first names only.*



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Flourish Australia supports people recovering from mental health issues to access employment.

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AUSTRALIA

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Email: jay.irsaj@richmondpra.org.au

Address: Unit 2, 22 Anne St, St Marys 2760



Now I don't need to get picked up anymore and I am able to drive myself.

No stopping Rod on the road to freedom and independence

Hi my name is Rodney; I would like to tell people about achieving my long term goal of getting my licence back.

It all started when I was in Ron Hemmings centre at Kenmore Hospital, three years ago. I began by practicing on the computer to be able to pass the test confidently. The first time I passed the online practice test I felt good, I kept practicing as many times as I could to make sure I passed more than I failed. I had support from my family, friends and Flourish Australia staff that encouraged me not to give up.

I attempted the learners' test three times and failed each time. When I failed, I felt bad that I wasn't able to complete it. I felt my illness was stopping me from achieving my goal; Flourish Australia staff kept encouraging me and reminding me about my goal.

I then practiced more on the computer and was able to build my confidence again and the *next* time I **passed**. This made me feel confident again.

I was supported to book driving lessons as it had been 13 years since I had held a licence and I felt I needed to be reminded about the road rules and keep my knowledge up-to-date. I completed five driving lessons before both I and the instructor were confident enough to book my test for my licence.

This scared me and made me very nervous. Before having the official test I had one last lesson with the instructor who kindly lent me his car to drive in. When I finished my test I was very excited and proud to hear that I had passed with 100%.

My next goal was to buy a car, which I was supported by family to do. It may not be the car of my dreams but it has helped me achieve independence and freedom. This made me feel good about myself to know that I was able to achieve my goal and even though it took many steps and hard work as well as some failures I did it in the end.

Now I don't need to get picked up anymore and I am able to drive myself.

When I look back on the three year process I feel that I shouldn't have worried as much and should have had more confidence in myself. Now when I look at my current long term goals I can see that they can be achieved if I work on them.

I am confident that my little goals will be easy to do compared to this. I am proud to say that my illness didn't stop me from getting my licence and buying a car to gain independence. I now encourage other peers who are also working towards achieving the same goal, that it can be done and to think that "if he can do it then so can I!"

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How to get YOUR licence

In NSW, you need to go through Roads and Maritime at www.rms.nsw.gov.au. Here you will find the Road Users Handbook which you can view online or download.

In Queensland go to the TMR (Transport and Main Roads dept.) www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Licensing

This flow chart shows the various stages of getting a licence in NSW only.



Master M's Story!

Master M's mum found out that asking for help IS the right thing to do... and that recovery, like all important things can take time.

Flourish Australia
80 Wynter Street TAREE
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1300 779 270

WARNING: this story refers to things that may distress readers. Remember, if you are struggling and need help you can ring LIFELINE 24 hours a day seven days a week on 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au

In July 2016, Master M entered the world. Master M is a miracle baby, two times over.

Master M's mum had given up on having her own children after multiple failed IVF treatments. She was told it was 'unlikely' that she would ever get pregnant because of her physical health. Over a long period she had gotten progressively more unwell, but no one had any answers why. This situation developed into a deep depression that compounded over time, and with each failed attempt at IVF.

His mum didn't know how to ask for help with how she felt. She had been raised with the belief that asking for help showed weakness and that she was strong enough to handle it on her own.

As the depression got worse, panic attacks began. With things spiralling out of control, Master M's mum decided that she didn't want to live like that anymore. She decided to end her life in 2006. Master M's mum survived because a neighbour happened to drop by shortly after and call an ambulance.

It was a long road to recovery for Master M's mum and along the way she discovered that asking for help was not a bad thing. Everyone needs help at times and it is a sign of strength to know your limits, set boundaries and to be able to recognise when things are getting bad.

In 2013, Master M's mum experienced six months of intense workplace bullying, her health was at its worst and

she had given up completely on having a child. Due to unforeseen circumstances, she lost her house in Melbourne and had to return 'back home' to family in Sydney because she couldn't work. This meant she had to leave all her friends and supports behind her. Upon arriving in Sydney, her car broke down...

It wasn't until January of 2014 that she finally got a diagnosis for her mysterious physical health symptoms and began treatment for it. But the mental strain of all those years of not knowing caught up with her and her ability to cope hit an all time low. She knew things were bad, so she went to the local hospital and asked for help.

Recognising that Sydney was not a healthy environment for her, she relocated to Taree. Eventually, Master M's mum was referred to Richmond PRA (now Flourish Australia).

Master M's mum started working with a support facilitator on the 8th July 2014. She found it very difficult to adjust to all the changes that had happened in the previous year. She tried really hard, completed a DBT [Dialectical Behaviour Therapy] program, went along to scrapbooking and art community events and with the help of her support facilitator was able to move all her belongings from Melbourne to Taree. She found accommodation at a local caravan park which led to renting a two-bedroom unit and began a return-to-work program.

On 4th December 2014, sitting down at the beach deciding whether to live or die, she evaluated everything that had happened. She came to terms with not ever having her own child and despite not really feeling up to it, she chose to live.

Master M's mum started playing hockey again and slowly developed a new support network and close friends. Her support facilitator went with her to new environments, supported her during a FairWork dispute, kept her grounded and was pivotal in supporting her during this time.

On 4th December 2015, Master M's mum completed her time with Flourish Australia. She had returned to work in her field of training, played her first year of hockey in 16 years, spent time with family and friends and was managing her daily life independently again. She also discovered she was nine weeks pregnant.

After 12 months of physical healing from her condition, the doctors believed she could attempt IVF again. This time, it was successful. Early July 2016, Master M was born. Healthy and beautiful, he completed the recovery. If not for Flourish Australia's program and support, Master M would not be here... and perhaps neither would his Mum.

Recovery takes time. The time is worth it.

The writer wishes to remain anonymous.

NOTE: Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) is a development of Cognitive (thinking) Behaviour Therapy that aims to address the needs of people who experience particularly intense feelings in reactions to certain life situations. DBT aims to help the person slowly build on their strengths to enable them to manage emotional trauma in a more effective way.

THANKS ALSO TO MICHELLE WISEMAN.



Miss Galaxy International says:

“It’s okay not to be okay!”

Shikye Alyce Smith speaks to Grant J Everett

Panorama magazine had the distinct pleasure of receiving a visit from Shikye Alyce Smith, the first ever Australian beauty queen to win the Miss Galaxy International pageant. As Shikye is going to use her position to raise awareness about mental health issues by serving as an ambassador for the [Flourish Learning Network](#) (you’ll hear a lot more about that in the future), we understandably had a lot to talk about!

SHIKYE: “My own experiences of mental illness began after I was robbed at knifepoint in Paris. As I wasn’t *physically* injured, I assumed that everything was fine. But then I’d be walking down the street and I’d be short of breath, and I’d go into cold sweats, and I’d be shaking and my muscles would go limp, and I had absolutely no idea what was happening. It was terrifying. And then I started becoming fixated on certain things, like flicking power points on and off for no reason. Many other little habits started to appear, too. At my worst, I couldn’t sleep until the sun came up, because I had this theory that people were making a tunnel into my apartment and they were going to come out of my closet and kidnap me in my sleep.

“I never said anything about this to anyone. I just kept on dealing with it on my own, day by day. But then I came home to Australia, and my mum immediately noticed a significant change in my behaviour. She said, “You need to go and talk to someone, otherwise you’re not going to be able to cope.” And I said “No, no it’s fine.” Once I finally took the plunge to get help, though, I figured out that the weird things happening in my body were panic attacks, which are a symptom of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It suddenly made sense, and I realised that there’s absolutely nothing wrong with not being okay. It’s okay not to be okay!

“I think we should all be taught the basics of what to look out for when it comes to mental health issues. One of the factors that made my experiences with PTSD difficult was that I had no knowledge of what this even was, let alone the details of what to watch for. Once you learn how to identify the nature of your issues, though, and you gain some techniques on how to combat them, your life can change for the better. I’ve managed to overcome my illness and gone on to great things, and I want

other people to do the same.

“One of the biggest reasons I didn’t get help earlier is because I thought it meant you were weak, that you were crazy, that something was wrong with you. I believed the stigma, and it didn’t help me at all. Once I realised I had a mental health issue, though, it made me want to speak out, to tell other people that it doesn’t define you, that it doesn’t make you any less of a person. As Miss Galaxy International, I’m in a good position to spread this message!”

Know you’re not alone

“I’ve posted things about mental health on my social media accounts. My family members have seen them, and while they thought it was great that I was brave enough to share this part of my life, they wanted me to “keep a little bit of me for me.” I get that. But at the same time I’m happy to share my story if it’s going to help others. After all, if somebody had explained exactly what was going on inside of me and reassured me that I’d be okay when I was going through the hard times, it would have been a huge help. And because I *didn’t* have that, I want others to have it even more. They need to know they’re not alone.”

Interstellar Beauty Queen

Miss Galaxy isn’t purely about pretty girls swanning about in ball gowns!

“Contestants are expected to fundraise for charity. Miss Galaxy Australia, for instance, is connected to the Make A Wish Foundation and Australia Zoo Wildlife Warriors. So I got into the community and worked for a greater cause, which is super rewarding. I think a lot of people don’t know how easy it is to give back. It doesn’t take much to volunteer and help out where you can, and it’s a lot of fun. You meet people from all different walks of life, and I’m all about that, I love seeing new faces. Miss Galaxy contestants are meant to be role models, to inspire the people around them.”

Being true to herself

“When I was going for the Miss Galaxy International title, my tactic was just being myself. I thought that if I pretended to be somebody else and I won, then I’d have to keep being that other person for the next year, and that

would send me up the wall. But if I was myself and I won, I just had to keep being me. So I took it all as it came, tried to stay calm, and did what I could to enjoy every moment because I knew how fast it would go and I just wanted to soak it all up while I could. When they announced I was the winner, though, I just crumbled.”

“I just want to show that I’m a normal girl from Fairfield. My mum was a single parent and she did whatever she could. I was provided with all that I needed so I could be the best that I could be. I think a lot of people look at others and feel that they haven’t had the same chances, the same opportunities. But normal, everyday people can achieve great things. Just being told that you can do great things can make all the difference. On the other hand, you don’t know what demons people are living with, and it can often be the people who appear the happiest who are privately fighting hardest behind closed doors. So before you think “I wish I was her, she has everything,” remember that this might just be the surface.”

Body image/Public eye

“I’m in the public eye a lot, but I keep it as real as I can both in person and on social media. I like to show me being me. But there is a limit to how laid back you can present yourself. At the end of the day being Miss Galaxy is a job, so you have to look professional and act the part. But I try and do that while still being me, so it’s not a façade.”

“Body image problems are a major deal for young women, though I don’t think many of them will actually admit to it. But we’re only human: there will *always* be something we want to change. For me, most of the pressure to look good comes from within myself. Obviously I want to portray myself in the best way that I can and do it in a healthy and positive way.”

“I want to go around to different schools, as I think something as simple as sharing my story and the struggles I’ve faced would be helpful.”

Shikye is a triple threat in the entertainment world, as she can dance, act and sing. Following in the footsteps of her Nan, a Tivoli dancer who toured Australia, Shikye has been dancing since age 3, and the highlight of her career was performing at the world famous

Moulin Rouge in Paris for two solid years. It took Shikye a month to learn the show: an exhausting combination of splits, turns and leaps, as well as the famous can-can. Performing twice a night, six days a week, can understandably take a toll. Thankfully, she loves it.

Music Art and Dance

“Music and art: there’s just something special about them. And you often find that people with a mental health issue can be very creative. Of course, no matter who you are, any form of art or performance requires practise. The only difference between an amateur and a master is time and effort.”

“When it comes to dancing, a lot of kids see it as their safe haven. When they’re dancing and moving, they feel free. They can do what they want to do and not get judged. They can just let their creative juices run wild.”

Shikye hates conventional forms of exercise, so she works out in ways that don’t *feel* like exercise. She recommends something fun like Zumba where you jump around and listen to great high-energy music.

“Before you know it, you’re knackered and you’ve burnt a tonne of calories without even noticing it. Compared to jumping on a treadmill or going for a run, it’s easy. Fun is the key. And exercise like dancing releases all those feelgood chemicals.”

Shikye has put decades of work into getting to where she is. She may be beautiful, intelligent and well spoken, but that doesn’t mean that Shikye just hovered after winning the genetic lottery. Who she is today is the result of effort and time. Practise, practise, practise! One of the biggest reasons she’s gone so far is that rather than saying “I can’t,” Shikye simply identified what she needed to do to be able to say “I can.”

Want to know more
about the Flourish
Learning Network? Call
Kim Jones on
(02) 9393 9023
kim.jones@flourishaustralia.
org.au



Meredith* came to Flourish Australia's PreEmploy Program in 2016 because she wanted to explore the idea of returning to work. Here she discovered the power of peer work!

Patricia: My Peer Worker

By Meredith

I first met Patricia, my peer worker, at my PreEmploy interview in March 2016. What first struck me about her is that she not only seemed capable and efficient in her job but was also very easy to talk to. She was not pushy in any way and hence made me feel relaxed in all our exchanges. During our next meeting for the PreEmploy screening process, I was able to share with her the personal challenges which I needed to overcome so that I could be able to work in an office environment. It was a relief to find someone I could trust and confide in about my previous work challenges as it was something I seldom talked about with many people.

I was eventually accepted into the PreEmploy program which made me very happy. During our first classroom training session, Patricia gave us a presentation about people skills which she delivered in a very interesting and professional manner. I admired her confidence and public speaking skills. For those of you who are not familiar yet, a Peer Worker is a person who has a lived experience of mental health issues and is trained to walk alongside other people with a mental health challenge who are

seeking assistance and support in their own recovery journey.

I had never met a Peer Worker before I came to Flourish Australia and did not even know such people existed. Yet the experience I've had with Patricia my Peer Worker has been such a positive and enjoyable one! For the first time I had someone who was caring who understood my work fears and challenges especially in the office environment. As a result, I have been able to find tools and ways I can better manage my potential problems at work. The wonderful thing is that if I gain a position in open employment in the future, I am still able to chat to Patricia if the need arises. It is beneficial to have a non-judgemental listening ear who can help me over any "humps" that may emerge.

If you are interested in becoming a Peer Worker read on to discover how Patricia got into her role. This is what she shared with me in our interview;

Meredith: How long have you been a Peer Worker?

Patricia: Just under two and a half years

M: What made you become a Peer Worker?

P: The passion for encouraging people to explore their many skills and talents.

M: What does the training process involve and how have you found it?

P: Fundamental training Involves Certificate IV in Peer Work. Peer Workers

Here is a picture of Patricia's favourite flower the 'Hibiscus'. It reflects the beautiful personality that she shows to those who seek her help and assistance. Source of Image: <https://pixabay.com/en/hibiscus-close-blossom-bloom-374844/> (Pixabay – Free Images)

are also offered training in Intentional Peer Support and Mental Health First Aid. Mental Health First Aid provides you with the tools required for responding to someone effectively during a crisis.

M: How far on the recovery journey does one need to be, to become a peer worker?

P: Far enough to be able to recognise how valuable your lived experience is, and how it suitably qualifies you for a role as a Peer Worker. As with any other workplace, your co-workers may also have a lived experience of a mental health issue. So with this in mind we are all partaking in a journey

M: What are the major duties in your role?

P: Administration, to adhere to funding requirements, intake interviews, research, delivering recovery groups, mentoring, providing emotional and general support to people who access our services. Empowering people through 'person led recovery'.

M: How did you come in contact with Flourish Australia?

P: Through a referral from an allied health professional who specialised in dramatic arts. I then began to participate in a Day to Day Living (D2DL) program. Eventually I progressed to facilitating D2DL groups through a supported employment program and loved every minute of it.

M: What is the most rewarding part of your job?

P: Hearing from someone, that they have achieved what they first believed they couldn't achieve.

M: What is the most challenging part of your job?

P: Managing the administrative side of things.

Well there you have it. I say three cheers for Patricia our Peer Worker at Flourish Australia who plays such a vital role in the wellbeing of so many individuals at Flourish Australia. You may get to work with a peer worker like Patricia to assist you in your own recovery journey!

**Meredith is the author's 'pen-name'*

If you are interested in returning to open employment please call Clare on (02) 9393 9000 or email clare.evans@flourishaustralia.org.au

Flourish Australia

Country Recovery

By Martina from Moree

Nowadays I feel well for the first time. I have learned that being in relationships that are controlling can make you unwell. By giving me support when I needed it, the people at Flourish Australia have helped me gain a sense of hope for the future.

I have also learned to be very aware and mindful of the signs that you are becoming unwell. When this happens, you need to be proactive and get help straight away. This can save you going to hospital.

The family background

Many, many members of my family had mental health issues. Family on my mother's side were in and out of hospital on a regular basis. It was on my father's side too, but none of this was ever spoken of in our family.

I was the eldest of five children. My mother was very controlling and had mental health issues of her own. She strongly believed that her way was the right way. If any of the children misbehaved she would scream, flog and humiliate us. We were terrified of her.

My father didn't stand up for the children. As the eldest, I was often put in charge of the others when mum was busy, and this is where I discovered my nurturing nature.

I had been an A grade, model student, but from 15 years of age everything changed: I wagged school, started smoking, didn't care about things, and this just continued.

When I turned 17 I started working in a bank, against my mother's wishes.

The marriage

Later, I found myself with young children of my own, but in a controlling marriage. My husband was not sympathetic to the situation and I hated living and wanted to die.

My mum spoke to my husband and told him this was serious, and that he couldn't brush it aside. She rang the women's hospital in Sydney and made an appointment for me. It was here



that I was told I had major post natal depression and furthermore I'd had depression most of my life. A psychiatrist then diagnosed me with bipolar disorder.

It was like a light bulb had been switched on and as I read about it, I began to see the pattern throughout my own life.

For the next few years I travelled from the country to the city to see my psychiatrist, and learn more.

In my mid thirties, my marriage broke up. I realised all of my partners had been controlling in either a verbal or physically abusive way. I suppose I didn't know love any other way.

My last hospital inpatient stay was in 2012 for depression. Prior to this I would have episodes of depression lasting most of the year and my last episode of mania was in 2010.

The recovery journey

The last time I was discharged from the hospital inpatient unit I became involved with the Community Mental Health Team in Moree.

I joined Flourish Australia in 2013, and I feel this, in combination with a change to a better medication helped me find further traction in my recovery.

One of my first recovery goals was increasing socialisation. Even though I sometimes didn't feel like it, I knew I had to make the effort, because it makes a difference and really picks you up!

Awareness

I've grown very aware through my recovery. I know what my triggers are: stress and pressure, physical illness, negative relationships, overcommitting to things.

From time to time I still experience things like sleep disturbance, no appetite, becoming clumsy, having tremors and lack of concentration as well as emotional lows. But at least I see it coming now.

The main things that helps alleviate the downward spiral for me are healthy relationships, medication, music and reading. My faith in God has also had a significant positive impact on me.

*As told to Claire Gillan
Photo by Jim Booth*

**Flourish Australia
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You need a holiday!

From Poppet Head to the Hot Glass Gallery at West Wyalong

Flourish Australia
Noel Hogan Centre,
13-15 Kurrajong
Avenue Leeton
NSW 2705

5/26 Ulong Street
Griffith NSW 2680

1300 779 270

Flourish Australia's services run regular field trips as part of their monthly calendars of activities. These calendars are put together by the people who access our services together with the staff. Here is a peek at one such outing from the Leeton and Griffith services.

One of the first things the Leeton/Griffith people visited on their West Wyalong outing was the Poppet Head. In case you don't know what a poppet head is, that's a picture of it at bottom left. It's part of a mine. Mining is part of the history of West Wyalong and there are even some old miner's huts still there like the one pictured above.

We were able to enjoy West Wyalong's Wetlands Walk where we learned plenty

of new things about how different trees and plants are used.

We visited the Exclusive Hot Glass Gallery with unique handcrafted glass creations. All the glass is hand made on the premises by Elaine Marshall, Glass Artist.

We had some lunch at one of the local bakeries. While eating and reflecting on what we had done so far, we were surprised to find that we were running out of time, and there was so much more to see! So we broke up into two groups as some people wanted to see the op shops and second hand shops and other people wanted to do the West Wyalong Heritage walk.

In October, West Wyalong held an **India**

In the West Festival. Did you know that India and Australia have ties dating back to the 1792? The British settlers in the young NSW colony were starving but were rescued by a supply ship dispatched from Kolkata (Calcutta) in India. Seven years later, Australia made its first export: Coal from Newcastle to India. By 1840 a ship was leaving Sydney for India roughly every four days, which is better than the rail service from Sydney to West Wyalong!

The group enjoyed their day out learning about another town's history. So much so that we plan to return to West Wyalong to finish off our mission, do a bit of sight- seeing and also visit the nearby Lake Cowal gold mines. *Reported by Glen Birmingham*





Bathurst & back by bus

Do you love going on holidays? Exploring new places, seeing unfamiliar sights, trying the local cuisine, alternating between fun and relaxation as much as you want? It's something that everyone needs to do now and again to recharge our batteries and recover from our busy lives.

Just as they've done for the last six years, three of our Day 2 Day Living Centres - Penrith, Blacktown and the Richmond - offer the people who access our services a chance to go on a long trek, have fun and unwind in new surroundings. The participants decided that their destination for 2016 was going to be Bathurst and Jenolan Caves. A total of seventeen people who access our services made the long, four-and-a-half-hour trip to Bathurst (including stops). The bus trippers had plenty of chances to stop, grab a refreshment and stretch their legs, and thankfully the trip was lots of fun. Like every year, Peter Cochrane went above and beyond the call of duty by driving for the entire trip.



Their itinerary was planned out in advance. The group took a drive all the way to Lithgow, stopping for lunch along the way, then headed to Jenolan Cabins for a total of four days and three nights. These charming little houses are on the edge of Blue Mountains Wilderness, and offer amazing views of the mountains,

Kanangra Boyd National Park and the Jenolan Caves Reserve. As these environmentally-sensitive log cabins were pretty remote, it was a good opportunity to get back to the simple life: no Internet, no Foxtel and no mobile phones. However, the great views and peace and quiet were a nice change. Each cabin had four bunks and a queen bed, and had to be booked in advance. As the name indicates, Jenolan Cabins is only a ten minute drive to Jenolan Caves, making it an attractive choice for people who intend on visiting the caves affordably. In addition to Jenolan Caves, they also took a trip to Oberon (which is around half an hour from Jenolan Caves).

Narelle Passlow had an unexpected duty: as she was the only person in the group who knew how to light a fire in a slow-combustion fireplace, she was the designated Fire Lighter during their three night stay. This was very important, as it was very, very cold.

The group had a lot of cave tours to choose from, but decided on The Chifley due to the fact it was the most relaxed and the most accessible. They enjoyed the one-hour tour, and hope to go back

for more in future.

For only \$400 a head (food, transport and their entry to Jenolan Caves included), it doesn't get much better. Two big factors in keeping costs down was getting a group rate and booking everything well in advance. A lot of the participants are already saving for next year! If you want to take part, the next trip is in October 2017.

As always, everyone had a fabulous time. Next year it's hoped that Flowerdale, our Liverpool D2DL program, will take part, too. The more the merrier! *Reported by Narelle Passlow and Grant J Everett.*

Flourish Australia services
at Blacktown, Penrith
Richmond (Hawkesbury),
Bathurst

1300 779 270

Some other highlights included...

- * Touring the Mt Panorama Motor museum
- * Doing a lap around Mt Panorama
- * Visiting the Mineral and Fossil Museum
- * Checking out some very smart animals at the Bathurst Sheep and Cattle Show
- * Buying old-fashioned sweets at the Little Hartley Lolly Shop
- * Having a BBQ with the Bathurst branch of Flourish Australia





Guildford affordable housing project

By Grant J Everett

One of the greatest elements of independence is to live in your own home, a place where *you* are the boss. However, when you combine a state-wide shortage of properties, rising rental prices, and the very real threat of having to move out at the drop of a hat, finding (and keeping) your own place can be difficult and stressful. Renting a decent home seems to be something that's moving further and further out of reach for many of us, even for people who are employed.

Expanding our scope

Flourish Australia wanted to do something about this issue. So, it was decided that our organisation would dip its toe into the real estate market by building an affordable block of apartments in Guildford. Guildford was chosen because it's situated midway between Parramatta and Liverpool, an area that contains a lot of people on low incomes, making it an ideal location for people who work, and it's also a good option because the local property prices are pretty reasonable for Western Sydney.

It's important to note that although Flourish Australia deals predominantly with people who have a lived experience of mental health issues, our Guildford flats will be available to tenants outside of this scope, too.

Flourish Australia maintenance crews will be looking after the Guildford apartment block by mowing the lawns, cleaning the hallways and windows, and keeping the gardens in good shape.

That means you don't need to have a mental health issue or any other sort of preexisting connection with Flourish Australia if you want to move into one of these apartments.

Due to the nature of our organisation, this project isn't motivated by profit: the Guildford development has always revolved around the core idea of offering affordable housing solutions for people who are having trouble making ends meet.

Offering choice

A definite positive to our apartment block is that it has three unit sizes to cater for different budgets and space needs. All up, there will be 19 two-bedroom units, 16 one-bedroom units, and 6 studio apartments. The two-bedroom and one-bedroom apartments will have their own underground parking.

Figuring out exactly who gets to live in these flats will be a task for Community Housing Limited, a not-for-profit

organisation that delivers affordable housing to some of the most vulnerable people in our community (people who are homeless, people with disability, single parents, and so on). Any administrative details

such as leasing paperwork and other documentation will be looked after by a Community Housing Provider.

As these flats will be private rental properties, getting one will require the same process as renting anywhere else: you'll need references, proof of income paperwork, 100 points of ID, and you'll need to pay a bond (which is usually equivalent to four weeks of rent) up front. In case you aren't familiar with renting privately, tenants are usually expected to sign a 12-month lease at the start. If you're a good tenant, then your chances of extending this lease will also be good.

Responsibilities

Renting a home involves certain responsibilities, and they'll all be clearly spelled out. Breaking the rules of your rental agreement can lead to eviction, so it's very important that you know what's expected of you. Like any other flats, tenants cannot keep pets (except in some circumstances, such as guide dogs) and won't be allowed to smoke inside, either. You'll also need to make sure you don't damage anything, such as the walls, doors, windows, carpet, or fixtures like taps or sinks, or you'll have to pay for repairs out of your bond. These flats will all be inspected every few months to make sure they are being appropriately cared for, but there will be lots of notice to ensure your home looks its best for the inspection.

A measured decision

It goes without saying that there's a lot more to building an apartment block than simply whacking together some bricks! Due to the large scale of the Guildford project, we had to make sure the entire Flourish Australia board and senior leadership team was on board before a single tradie loaded up his ute. Nowadays, it's reached the point where any additional decisions are handled by a small team of upper management. We've examined every step, but progress has been steady.

The Guildford project should be finished in the first quarter of 2017, with its first residents moving in a couple of months after that. The outcome of this project will have a huge impact on what we can offer the wider community. So while it's far too early to be making any educated guesses, everyone is very excited by this new venture and we hope it's the first of many worthwhile examples of community development.

Each Issue covers a new CANSAS theme!

March 2017

ACTION

This month's theme:
CANSAS # 9

Psychological Distress

1. Accommodation. 2. Food. 3. Looking after the home. 4. Self care. 5. Daytime activities. 6. Physical health. 7. Psychotic symptoms. 8. Information on condition and treatment. **9. Psychological distress.** 10. Safety to self. 11. Safety to Others. 12. Alcohol. 13. Street Drugs. 14. Company. 15. Intimate relationships. 16. Sexual expression. 17. Childcare. 18. Basic Education. 19. Telephone. 20. Transport. **21. Money.** 22. Benefits. (Plus other special topics from time to time)

Slaying the dragons of Negative Self-Talk and Negative Thinking

by Meredith

Negative thinking or negative self-talk can be among the biggest barriers we face when embarking on the road to recovery. It can be like a little ghost sitting on our shoulder constantly whispering lies, discouragement and irrational thoughts into our ear, every time we try to do something. Negative self talk can originate from many experiences such as:-

- a) Negative things that have been said to us by others
- b) Experiences of difficulties in important relationships, or traumatic life events
- c) Constantly comparing ourselves unfavourably with others, or to impossible ideals (like fashion models)
- d) Internalising social stigma associated with mental health issues.

If we persist with these types of negative thinking patterns, it can have enormous impact on our lives. For instance it can:-

- a) Make us less physically healthy

- b) Make it more difficult for us to succeed in a job
- c) Lower our quality of life
- d) Contribute to depression
- e) Make it harder to build or maintain relationships

Let's look in more detail at certain types of negative self talk. We will see if we can find ways of counteracting their toxic effect with a rational comeback!

Filtering

This involves looking at only one part of a situation to the exclusion of everything else.

Example: I feel down because I had to quit my job

Questionable underlying belief: My feelings depend entirely on whether I am still working for that company or not and whether I have employment.

Rational comeback: I am now free from a job I was miserable in. This is a great opportunity to look for a job more suitable for me!

Polarising

This is where a person perceives everything at the extremes, either black or white with no grey in between. It also leads to mood swings. Things are all great or all horrible and there is no middle ground.

Example: I have mental health issues, so I will never be able to live a normal life and be happy like other people.

Questionable underlying belief: My happiness solely depends on whether I have a mental illness diagnosis or not.

Rational Comeback: Even though I have a mental health diagnosis, I can still do

things that make me happy like going to the beach or doing some artwork. As I recover it will be possible for me to get closer to my goals.

Overgeneralising

This is where a person reaches a broad, generalised conclusion based on just one piece of evidence.

Example: I went out with a man who was unfaithful to me. All men are unfaithful

Questionable underlying belief: If one man is unfaithful, therefore all men are unfaithful.

Rational comeback: the world is full of people who do good things and people who sometimes do bad things. Each person is different. I have to take each person as they come . It is incorrect to assume that all men are the same.

Mind Reading

This is when a person bases assumptions and conclusions on their "ability" to



know (or THINK they know) other people's thoughts.

Example: My workmate Georgina seems very silent and has a very mean and angry look about her today. I must have done or said something to upset her.

Questionable underlying belief: When people look mean angry or upset it must be due to something I did or I said

Rational comeback: Just because Georgina is in a negative mood today does not mean it has anything to do with me. She could be feeling sick or have concerns or troubles outside of work.

Possible action: I could ask Georgina what is the matter and find out for sure

if it was to do with me!

Catastrophising

This is where a person always expects the worst in every scenario. The accompanying story is a description of how one actual person got so carried away by his own tendency to catastrophise that he began to fear death.

Personalising

When a person interprets everything in ways that reflect on themselves.

Example: My supervisor has been very stressed out lately. It must be because of

problems related to managing me and my fellow colleagues.

Questionable underlying belief:

Whenever my supervisor is highly stressed it must be caused by me in some way.

Rational comeback: My supervisor has many responsibilities and stresses at home, too. I am not aware of there being any problem with me, so the problem is likely to have other origins.

Control Fallacies

This is when a person feels their life

Slaying the Dragons...
Continued on page 19

'That went well,' said the surgeon of the endoscopy and other testes. But then he added 'How are your nerves?' Wayne's stomach was surgically completely normal! No sign of any tumours.

'You drink a fair bit don't you?' said the surgeon, referring to blood tests that showed he had alcoholic liver damage. This damage actually had no symptoms and was only discovered because of his other concerns.

All of Wayne's doctors advised him to give up drinking straight away. Strangely, although he had been beside himself with anxiety over his 'imaginary' cancer, the news that he had alcoholic liver disease did not alarm him at all!

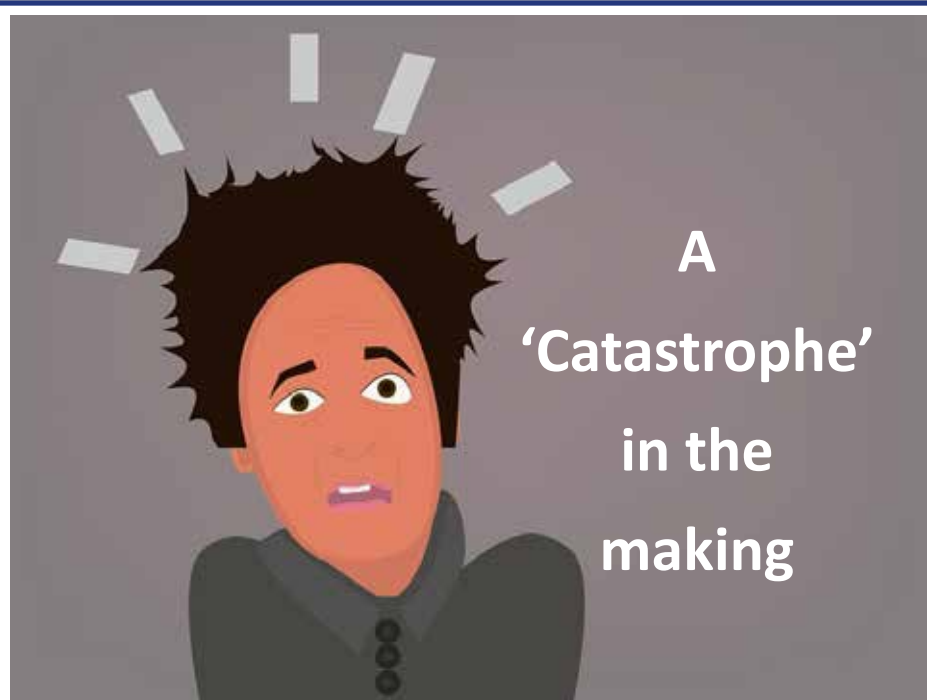
Wayne's real battle was alcoholism, and it took another **six years** before he stopped drinking! His priorities were obviously out of order.

The reason Wayne came out of this is that he (eventually) took ACTION about his unreasonable fears.

1. Made an appointment for a trained surgeon to look into his stomach and take a video of it to confirm the actual truth
2. He gave up drinking so his diseased liver could heal and regenerate.

While talking to me, Wayne was able to share in hindsight that it would have been helpful to have chosen a safe person to talk to about his anxieties who could help him overcome them sooner. Someone like a Peer Worker. Instead he chose to live with his debilitating delusion for over three months .

By Meredith



From a very young age, Wayne was often anxious, thinking the worst of every situation. He also tended to avoid ACTION upon problems, which emphasised his sense of helpless victimhood.

Aged 32, Wayne had been constipated from new blood pressure medication and began feeling a 'twinge' in his stomach. After a couple of weeks, he clearly recalls suddenly thinking to himself "I'm going to die of stomach cancer". He also recalled feeling as though he 'deserved' to die.

This was despite there being no evidence of any serious disorder. The next day his brother-in-law saw him and commented "You've lost weight". Wayne took this as a sign he was wasting away from cancer.

Wayne's GP told him it was probably reflux and told him to take antacid. His psychiatrist told him it was only a one in a million chance that it was anything serious like cancer. Wayne however felt it was 'obvious' that he was the one in a million. He even began to make preparations in anticipation of increasing illness and death, tying up his affairs and clearing out his desk at work.

Despite all this, he still heard another voice telling him that he was being silly and over-reacting. Wayne didn't know what to believe, but thought that believing the worst was safest.

It came to the crunch two months later when Wayne, with some encouragement from his family, worked up the courage to have a series of hospital tests to find out the truth.

Panorama Employment

Panorama's Disability Employment Service Bulletin for Ostara

Call Ostara on 1300 334 497



Feeling valued

By Bo from Tamworth

I've always enjoyed cars and wanted to work in the vehicle industry, but in 2003, I became unwell. I found it hard to concentrate and my memory was poor. I was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

It was in 2004, I became aware of Flourish Australia (then known as RichmondPRA) through HASI (Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative) in Tamworth.

I'd been homeless for a while and Terry from MINOA (Men in Need of Accommodation) signed me up. It

meant I could be off the street, and in a clean, warm bed. This meant everything to me.

I've made quite a few friends, and had a few challenges along the way. One big challenge has been the staff at Flourish Australia understanding me and my needs, and me trusting them. We worked through this by getting together and trying to solve problems by talking and going out for lunch - I started to feel better.

Once we got through that, they supported me by getting me involved in activities with other people. They also support me in the HASI program. I started to enjoy being around other people, plus support

workers also talked with me about strategies that could help me deal with issues. This particularly helped when I was sick and in Banksia Mental Health Unit.

When I was young I moved from Tamworth to Queensland and then back to Tamworth. I wanted to be a spray painter or a panel beater, and I'm still interested in those industries.

What I'm really happy about now is going to work each week at Tamworth City Toyota. I wash cars there on Thursday, and then I'm at Tamworth City Prestige on Fridays. I'm now hoping I can get the profession I wanted – maybe car detailing is the next step.

After a few months at Toyota, I'm just starting to feel good about it all. It's really great to feel valued, and being paid each week is just that - I can even buy things that I couldn't before.

Rachael at Best Employment (a community based disability employment service in Tamworth), and Deslee at Flourish Australia have really helped me to gain a sense of achievement. Those are feelings I haven't felt for a long time.

During this time, I've learnt to be patient with people who are supporting me. I am learning about being responsible for what I do. My ultimate goal is to one day be fully independent and graduate from the HASI General program.

*As told to Keegan Hayden
Photo By Jim Booth*

**Flourish Australia
129 Marius Street
Tamworth NSW
1300 779 270**

Flourish Australia

What employers are looking for



Automotive Trades

Who doesn't like cars? After reading Bo's story on the previous page, we thought there might be a few readers interested in following a similar career path.

So, we looked through some actual advertisements for people in the fields of panel beating, spray painting, vehicle detailing and automotive general hand to see what employers are looking for. This might give you an idea of what to focus on if you are thinking of working in this area.

Panel Beater

A family run business with 'the most current technology available' advertised for a panel beater. The advertisement emphasises personal qualities which might provide an opportunity for someone who does not have a lot of experience:

Personal qualities that you might possess already

- A. Works well in a team environment
- B. Able to work with minimal supervision
- C. Reliable and hardworking
- D. Focused on the customer
- E. A strong work ethic and pride in your work
- F. A stable employment history:

(Don't let this one put you off. This might not sound like your past, but if you can

demonstrate A to E, stability may well be in your future –Editor).

Experience and qualifications you might need to gain for this employer

- G. Heavy vehicle smash experience
- H. Car-O-Liner experience an advantage

(We found this site that explains what a Car-O-Liner is and what sort of qualifications you need to use one www.car-o-liner-us.com)

Experienced Panel Beater/Spray Painter

In an advertisement for another family owned accident repair business, they put more emphasis on the tasks you will be performing, but they emphasise a high level of autonomy. This suggests they are looking for someone who knows the ropes fairly well:

DUTIES: Removing and repairing damaged panels, cutting and joining structural parts using specialist equipment, grinding and sanding surfaces, realigning damaged frames using a measuring system.

If you want to prepare for employment, you need to find out what employers are looking for. Look through job ads in the field you are interested in and note down the various qualities and qualifications as we have done here. Then work at attaining them one by one. That'll keep you busy!

Personal qualities that you might possess already: A, B and E above, plus:

- I. Good communication skills
- J. Qualifications as a panel beater

(There are lots of courses and apprenticeships available. Look at this site run by the NSW Business Chamber www.apprenticeshipcareers.com.au or look up TAFE in your state)

Prestige Panel Beater

A prestige auto company advertised for an apprentice to work on posh cars. The

advertisement lists the duties similar to the previous job, so they are looking for someone who might already have some grasp of what panel beaters do.

Personal qualities include B, D, E, F, I and

- K. High level of personal commitment and attention to detail
- L. Professional presentation [just because you are a tradie does not mean you can't be well presented, at least at the beginning of your shift!]

Vehicle Detailer and General Hand

A family owned company (can you see a pattern developing here?) with 30 years of fast, friendly quality service is looking for a detailer and general hand. Duties will include ordering cleaning materials, cleaning the workshop, maintaining and servicing equipment.

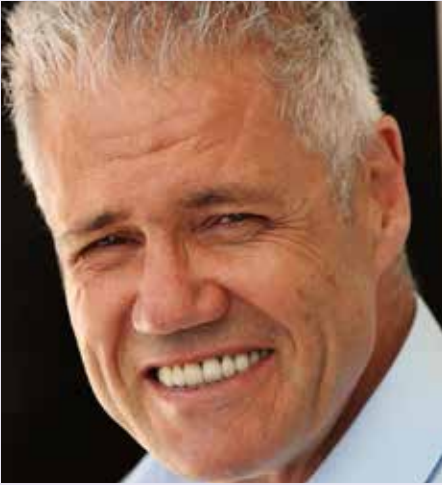
Personal Qualities include A, C and E above plus:

- M. Can-do attitude
- N. Work under pressure at times

In another ad for a detailer/general hand, (yes, family owned), they include the following tasks which are probably fairly standard in this sort of work: Washing cars, applying leather treatment, applying paint protection products, moving the cars around the yard and giving customers lifts.

Like working on machines? See our article on Aaron the diesel mechanic in March 2016 Panorama.

The screenshot shows a 'Detachable four page supplement' from Panorama Employment. It features a blue header with contact information for Call Ostarra (1300 334 497) and the issue number (#1 2016). The main article is titled 'Aaron's Apprenticeship' and describes a young man who is a resident at RichmondPFA's Greenleaf Cottages. The ad lists his duties, including diagnosing, overhauling, repairing, and maintaining heavy vehicles, and performing mechanical repairs. It also mentions that he is a diesel mechanic/truck mechanic. The ad includes a photo of Aaron and a testimonial from him. The bottom of the ad has the date 'March 2016' and the page number 'Page 15'.



Upskilling

Flourish Australia has been bringing in external teachers to help our workers earn real qualifications in the hopes of providing a better tomorrow. **WAYNE PETERSEN**, founder of the Academy of Workplace Learning, spoke about these classes.

Which Flourish Australia locations have you taught at so far?

I've been training workers at the West Ryde, Harris Park and Marrickville branches since May 2015. A total of 47 people started the Warehouse Operations Certificate III course, but these traineeships take two years so none of them have completed it yet. Before this I used to teach a Certificate IV in Mental Health (non-clinical) to Flourish Australia peer workers.

Historically, how is the graduation rate of your students?

I've helped students to complete 400 traineeships over the last decade, and we are very proud of our 100% graduation rate. Our figures are so high because of the extensive work we put into designing our training material and by ensuring that all our potential students have the competency required to graduate. We also spend three face-to-face hours with our participants each week to be sure that they understand (and complete) their assessments. Note that our graduation figures don't include any participants who leave the organisation or become sick and are unable to complete it (around 15%).

Have you worked with many other non-government organisations?

I have run classes for organisations such as New Horizons, Cerebral Palsy Alliance,

The Intellectual Disability Foundation of St George, Ozanam Industries, Centacare, DSA, Castlereagh Industries, Civic Industries, Multitask, Catholic Care and Thorndale Industries, and we have successfully completed two rounds of traineeships with the House With No Steps.

Are your graduates moving onto bigger and better things?

One success story involves a class from **The House With No Steps**. We ran traineeships for ten participants at their Minchinbury Packaging ADE. From this class, six participants gained the skills, qualifications and confidence to find open employment elsewhere. Of the remaining four students, one became a forklift driver, two were promoted to supervisors, and the final member of the class was happy to just keep doing his original job.

Are mature age students easier to teach than younger students?

There's a big difference between childhood learning and adult learning, as adults will only learn what they're interested in. This means I have to make the training engaging, exciting and enjoyable to ensure the class doesn't zone out. Thankfully, feedback tells us we are hitting our targets. It's nice to know I'm not putting anybody to sleep!

The Academy's core mission is to train people from the disability and mental health sectors. Any particular reason for this?

My personal history plays a big part in this. For starters, my Poppy had an acquired brain injury, and my mum always taught us to love people who were different and to not be scared of them. Also, my younger brother had autism, and I was his primary carer for most of his life. In addition to that, my wife Lorraine and I have a 39-year-old son who lives with schizophrenia. I also managed to recover from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after experiencing trauma as a child.

What process do you have to go through in running a course at one of Flourish Australia's community businesses?

First, somebody from the Academy will talk with the manager about the suitability of running one of our courses. From there we need to know if the employees have any interest in taking part, so the

supervisors will speak with them to check. After that we'll present an information session and provide Expression of Interest (EOI) paperwork to anyone who wants to take part. Finally, we'll assess the language and literacy skills of all our potential students to ensure they are competent enough to complete the traineeship.

Who pays the teacher?

The federal government has incentivised Flourish Australia with wage support for this purpose. So long as a student remains an employee of Flourish Australia during their training, then the organisation will continue to receive enough government funding to cover all costs. The students and the organisation are not out of pocket for the training; in fact, the organisation will often achieve a healthy profit from the training. On that subject, we believe that our classes will be funded by the National Disability Insurance Scheme when it rolls out.

What are your future plans?

We have expanded our scope to offer more course options, such as a Certificate I in Vocational Pathways, a bridging course that would be very useful for anybody who needs to build on some basic skills before tackling a more advanced certificate. We've also been putting together courses for traineeships for Flourish Australia peer workers that operate with a similar funding method as the current traineeships.

Interested in taking a big step towards your dreams? See your manager about contacting the Academy of Workplace Learning!

academyowl.com.au

1300 189 417

Sources:

www.abc.net.au/news/2014-04-12/tafe-apprenticeships-to-curb-dropout-rate/5386038

"NSW TAFE program aims to reduce high apprenticeship dropout rate," by Mohamed Taha and Allan Clarke, 8th of July 2014

www.ade.org.au/what-are-ades

VET-FEE HELP

Protect yourself from crooked dealers in higher education

By Warren Heggarty

Under the VET FEE-HELP loans system of funding vocational education, unscrupulous providers used high pressure tactics and inducements to sign people up to courses. Often the people were living on welfare and unable to carry the cost of the education. Worse, it seemed that many people were not even completing the courses that were leaving them out of pocket. Some who were signed up were not even aware they were enrolled.

According to a report in The Australian newspaper, the old system ‘ransacked more than \$6 billion from the public purse in four years.’

The federal Education minister Simon Birmingham described it as a ‘monumental disaster’ and has announced that a new system would be introduced from January 2017.

Under this new scheme there will be limits set on loans, providers will need to prove their good faith, and only courses that align with industry demand will be eligible for VET Student Loans. Barriers to new providers entering the market will be set much higher to stop those who are not genuine.

The moral of the story is that you have to be very careful what you sign up

for. Even though the government has rejigged the VET system, you cannot put blind faith in all the bugs having been removed.

And because many cases are still before the courts, it is not possible for Panorama to give you a list of the dodgy colleges. However, bear in mind the rules shown in the green box.

Panorama also asked the Department of Education and Training what Flourish Australia staff can do if one of the people who access our services gets into difficulty with the student loan set up. For example, if they have been taken advantage of while acutely unwell. You should advise the person to gather as much information as possible and pass this on to the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training VET FEE HELP. But there is no guarantee that the Department would be able to help, so again: Beware!

Some previous reports

- Some agents and brokers have allegedly been passing on people’s Tax File Numbers to multiple providers.
- The government continued to provide funding to \$140 million over three years to a private college despite the fact that students enrolled in it saw immediately that it was a scam.
- An instructor who worked for one private college testified to the Federal Court that ‘not a single student from one cohort of 80 studying on line’ ever responded to her emails.
- ‘A woman fined \$120,000 for fabricating 11 bogus qualifications in aged and disability care used them to trick the training regulator into setting up her own private training college.’
- One report claimed that the VET FEE-HELP loans scheme ‘has created massive wealth for several private college owners...’

According to Rick Morton of the Australian The ‘rush to get training certificates for the family day care sector, which has been seriously rorted by more than \$1 billion, was fuelled by the \$6 billion fraud of the vocational education sector in a symbiotic raid on government funds.’

Information taken from reports by Julie Hare, Kylar Loussikian, Rick Morton and Natasha Bitá of the Australian Newspaper and Eric Bagshaw and Kelsey Munro of the Sydney Morning Herald throughout 2015 and 2016.

Living with mental health issues? Looking for a job? Ostara can help!

1300 334 497

Our Disability Employment Service (DES) locations are as follows:

Ostara Liverpool
Suite 5, Level 2,
224 George Street
LIVERPOOL NSW 2170,
PH 9393 9360
Fax 9602 9727
liverpooledes@flourishaustralia.org.au

Ostara Caringbah
Level 2, Suite 205
304-318 Kingsway
Caringbah NSW 2229
PH 9393 9134
Fax 9531 7612
caringbahdes@flourishaustralia.org.au

Ostara Redfern
Suite 204, Level 2
140 Redfern St
Redfern NSW 2016
PH 9393 9220
FAX 9698 7121
redferndes@flourishaustralia.org.au

Ostara Armidale
First Floor Office 26,
188-192 Beardy Street,
Armidale NSW 2350
PH 0423 566 623
Fax 6771 3812
armidaledes@flourishaustralia.org.au

Panorama Employment

Flourish Australia Employment Services
General Manager: Marty Golding,
Program Manager, Disability Employment Services: Julie Duong. Panorama Employment is a regular supplement of Panorama magazine, Contact Warren. Heggarty@flourishaustralia.org.au, Grant.Everett@flourishaustralia.org.au. (02) 9393 9021, 5 Figtree Drive, Sydney Olympic Park 2127.
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- The workplace can be a great source of free training.
- VET- FEE HELP is a LOAN. Loans have to be repaid.
- Be especially careful of agents and brokers. Don't deal with anyone offering "free" merchandise
- Don't give your tax file number to anyone unless you are sure of their credentials.

Slaying the dragons...
Continued from page 14

is totally controlled by a force outside themselves or that they are somehow magically responsible for everything.

Example: My little toddler fell off the monkey bars and broke his arm. It's all my fault as his mother. I should have been looking more closely to what he was doing.

Questionable underlying belief: Whenever my child gets hurt it is because I was not looking out for him properly. It's because I am a bad mother

Rational Comeback: it is part of normal human development that toddlers are very hard to supervise and also accident prone. I can only do my best. Accidents do happen. Life is not perfect.

Fallacy of Fairness

This is when a person judges other people's actions by what is and what isn't fair. The problem is, everyone has a different view of fairness so everyone is bound to feel hurt or wronged somewhere along the line.

Example: If my husband really cared about my wellness he'd take on more responsibility with the house and kids

Questionable underlying belief: How much my husband cares about my wellness is defined by the amount of housework he takes on.

Rational Comeback: My husband does a lot of other things that show how much he cares about my wellness: he's attentive and tender toward me, he reads to me in bed and does all the yard work. He also works very hard at his job (which pays my doctor's bills). I can talk to him about feeling overburdened by the housework and all the demands the kids make on me. If we work together, we might find some solutions.

Emotional Reasoning

This is the mistaken belief that everything you **feel** must necessarily be true

Example: I feel stupid therefore I must be stupid

Questionable underlying belief: My subjective feelings always reflect

objective reality.

Rational comeback: Feelings can change even if facts stay the same. No one is entirely "smart" or entirely "stupid". We are all a mixture of qualities. Sometimes I make poor choices but that's just part of being human. We LEARN from our mistakes.

Fallacy of Change

This is the assumption that other people will change to suit you if you pressure them enough. The illusion is that happiness depends on bringing about these changes. Co-dependency relies heavily on this fallacy.

Example: If my mother would only stop bossing me around I would probably feel more comfortable with her

Questionable underlying belief: The quality of my relationship with my mother depends on her changing her behaviour.

Rational Comeback: It is very unlikely that I can (or even should) change my mother's behaviour towards me. What I CAN do is learn to be assertive with her and change how I relate to her.

Global Labelling

This involves making a broad judgement on very little evidence

Example: Hans comes from Bavaria. He has no sense of humour. Therefore Bavarians have no sense of humour.

Questionable underlying beliefs:

It's accurate to judge all people in a particular group by one member of that group. Also, my idea of a good sense of humour applies to all nationalities.

Rational Comeback: Maybe Hans is different from other Bavarians. If I met more Bavarians I might think differently. Anyway, maybe Bavarians have a different idea of what is funny or not funny.

Blaming

Bad things that happen are always someone else's fault.

Example: The cause of my depression must be due to how my family treated me when I was a child

Questionable underlying belief: There is always a causal effect or someone to blame when bad things happen to me. Hence whenever I suffer from problems like depression or low self esteem it must be due to my family.

Rational comeback: It's true that I grew up in a dysfunctional family, but my depression can be due to many other factors in my environment. It is also possible that my own unchallenged beliefs and behaviour might be contributing. In any case, blaming doesn't aid recovery.

Shoulds

This is where a person operates from a rigid set of rules about how everyone (including the self) should act.

Example: As a married woman I should



OUT and ABOUT Flourish Australia

June and Jennifer can smell something cooking in the Kitchen at Flourish Australia Derby Street Penrith, courtesy of Fred on his student placement.

Slaying the dragons is continued on page 20

Slaying the dragons...
Continued from page 19

never feel attracted to another man apart from my husband

Questionable underlying belief: My feelings should always conform to a rigid set of rules

Rational Comeback: I'm as subject to a wide range of emotions as any other human being. It is not wrong to have feelings. However, I have a choice as to how I act on those feelings. So I will choose not to act in a way that may be detrimental to my family.

Being Right

This is where you continually need to justify your point of view or way of behaving. This makes it impossible to listen to a new perspective.

Band Member 1: I'm discouraged because people are complaining about our music.

Band Member 2: Perhaps the style is too rocky

Band Member 1: It's certainly not too rocky! How can anyone say that? I think you're just trying to be too critical and putting our band down!

Heaven's Reward Fallacy

If you always do the right thing you will eventually be rewarded (even if doing the right thing means ignoring your own needs).

Example: If I ever I do the wrong thing, however small it may be, God is going to punish me.

Questionable underlying belief: My actions are a direct cause of the bad or good things that will happen to me.

Rational Comeback: I must use common-sense to ensure I cater for my own well being and survival.

As you can see there are many ways one can think negatively. These thoughts can affect our emotions and eventually our actions. Try to pinpoint any that you may be practicing. Perhaps you can record your thoughts in a journal. Write down the event, negative thought then try to rethink it and give a more positive, rational comeback. You could try writing these 'comebacks' on an affirmation card and read it every morning. It may be difficult at first but with practice it can become easier.

Wishing you all the best in your recovery journey against negative self talk.

Flourish Australia is a leading not-for-profit organisation providing community based support and employment services for people living with a mental health issue.

As a social enterprise of Flourish Australia, Figtree Conference Centre provides outstanding event facilities and delivers positive social outcomes through the provision of training and employment opportunities to break the cycle of unemployment and isolation so often experienced by people with lived experience of mental illness.

Being employed gives people a sense of purpose and goes a long way to improving their wellbeing.

Each employee is trained and mentored in events and catering management. Vocational services give employees tailored training, mentorship and direction along with access to TAFE courses.

The ability to interact with others, achieve goals and make a productive contribution provides a boost for participants' self-esteem, helping them with their recovery journey.

Located in Sydney Olympic Park, Figtree is a purpose-built conference facility, which can be tailored to suit your individual event requirements.

Our versatile, open-plan venue is flooded with natural light, has state-of-the-art, integrated IT and audio visual facilities, free on-site parking and full access for people with a disability.

Figtree is easily accessible by public transport and is located within walking distance to hotels, restaurants and entertainment venues within the Sydney Olympic Park precinct.

We have a range of delicious menu options to cater for any event or budget and a separate, open-plan art gallery for exhibitions, displays, trade shows or cocktail functions.

To discuss your event or meeting needs, please email:

figtree@flourishaustralia.org.au

or phone

0420 505 907 or 02 9393 9000



Trans Aged Care

Story by Edwina Keelan, photo by Edwina Keelan

I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of this land where this story takes place. We walk on this land lightly. And I would like to acknowledge Laurel Walter from The Gender Centre over 55's group for her participation and input into the development of this piece of writing

-Edwina



April May* is a mature-aged Transgendered Australian Woman who was born male but has lived for many years as a woman after going through the sex change process in the 1980's. She also has a lived experience of mental health issues. April is a very colourful and cheerful person to talk to, and there is a lot of real fun and laughter whenever she is around.

April is currently participating in ACON's (Aids Council of New South Wales) Aged Care Volunteer Program which provides outreach to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex people in Aged Care facilities, respite, hospitals and private homes. The volunteers are also now going out to remote communities as well.

"It's about helping aged trans women

and men stay in touch with their community." April explains. "Later, we are going to visit some more people at a hospital and a nursing home. All we do is just call in to see how they are and see if they need company. We don't aim to make pests of ourselves! We just want to let them know that we are here for them, an ear to listen or a shoulder to cry on."

"I have a TAFE qualification in aged care nursing, and I am qualified to work in that role in people's homes," April says, "but this particular volunteer role relies more on social skills."

That's good news, as chatting and making social connections are what April does best!

"I want to get back into the work force

and be of use to the community," April adds. "You can get so lost in the stuff of everyday."

"There are so many ageing Trans women and men, and a lot of them are becoming isolated. The big fear about being separated and isolated is the onset of depression, or even suicide. Keeping up a connection keeps people alive and involved."

April says there is especially a need for this kind of service in remote communities, and she visited one person recently who was overwhelmed with tears to see her because no one else ever visited!

**April is not her real name and was omitted by the writer for privacy reasons.*

Some stories really do need to be told!

Panorama is where we read about people's recovery journeys. If you have a recovery story, no matter how modest it may seem to you, it is sure to strike a chord with a reader. Who knows, your story could start another person's recovery journey.

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warren.heggarty@flourishaustralia.org.au



The Forensic Hospital, Malabar, NSW, is a high security, 135 bed mental health facility for male, female, adult and adolescent forensic and correctional patients and a limited number of high risk civil consumers.

Coming Together for Recovery

Peer support principles come to the Forensic system

Peer support can benefit people with mental health issues who are in prisons or who are staying in secure settings like the Forensic Hospital at Malabar NSW. Flourish Australia has been working with Justice Health to make it all happen.

The Together for Recovery project is an initiative of Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network that aims to improve consumer participation in a high secure mental health facility in NSW.

The people who will benefit include:

- Persons found not guilty of an offence by reason of mental health issues, or who are unfit to plead because of mental health issues. Some people use the term 'forensic patient.'
- Inmates of prisons who develop mental health issues while in custody
- Other people with mental health issues who are considered to require 'a high secure environment' by the justice system.

This is a very challenging project because in custody, personal choice can clash with public safety .

On the one hand, people in the forensic hospital have the same right as anyone to support for their recovery from mental health issues. On the other hand, the justice system has to manage the possible risk to the community.

A person who is in custody may well see support for their mental health issues as something forced upon them.

How do we encourage a person to take greater control over their lives when they are in custody? How can such people become empowered to participate in the community when they are deliberately separated from that community during their time in custody? How do we achieve this without putting the public at risk?

This is a very challenging project because in custody, personal choice can clash with public safety .

Because these sorts of questions need to be addressed, the project so far has involved the Consumer Consultants working with , Senior Management, Policy and Procedure and Clinical Governance committees.

Consumer Consultants Peter and Patricia operate as peer workers within Flourish Australia, but at the Forensic Hospital their roles at the moment are a little

different.

They advise management and clinical staff about how a person with lived experience might experience situations within the system, and about how to improve that experience. They do not advocate on behalf of individual patients, unless the issue may have broader application.

Adapted from a presentation given by Mark Orr and Peer Consultants Peter and Patricia on 24th August 2016

Moving On Group

Reported by Consumer Consultant Patricia

I have been facilitating a Moving On group which is aimed at providing a sense of 'hope' to people who have been referred to a medium security unit. Peter and I initially shared ideas and developed the 15 week pilot program together. I tend to use ice breakers to get people warmed up for a session. One of these included having people sing or recite a favourite line of a song to the group. The Moving On group is going to be run again this term on a wider basis.

A highlight of last year was just before Christmas when I joined a handful of staff and patient volunteers to visit the courtyards of each ward singing Christmas carols. We sang carols including the Aussie version of the jingle bells song (which is so funny) and Silent Night amongst a few others. One of the people (patients) sang a solo to the others in one of the wards. It was a very touching experience.

Read more reports on peer support principles in the forensic system in the next issue of Panorama, June 2017

panorama

Readers' Surveys: 7 Quick Questions About Panorama

Recently, we have been distributing survey forms to as many of our readers as possible so that we can find out what YOU want to see in Panorama.

One clear message we have already received is that many people who access Flourish Australia's services are not able to get hold of a copy of Panorama. This became very apparent when we surveyed people attending recovery forums in rural areas and found that some people don't get to see Panorama at all. We are working on ways of improving this situation, but in the meantime, if you have been missing out on Panorama, make sure you ask the staff in the Flourish Australia service which you attend. They will be happy to help you out.

Only five years ago, Panorama was set up for an organisation which was only about one third the size it is now. Rapid growth has meant that even though we are producing more Panoramas than ever before, it is sometimes a bit of a stretch.

Part of the aim in collecting the data is to make sure we work out the right number to provide to each service of Flourish Australia. We also want to reach services outside of Flourish Australia.

In short, we have gone from twenty sites to over sixty sites and there are several thousand people to cover.

Also because Panorama is currently a quarterly magazine, it can be a long wait between issues and this has been compounding the problem.

If you are having problems getting hold of a Panorama magazine, call us on (02) 9393 9021 or email us at:

Warren.Heggarty@flourishaustralia.org.au

Thank you

To those people who have taken the trouble to complete one of the surveys, thank you for your time and your ideas. You have not only provided valuable feedback, but you have given us even more ideas to improve the magazine and to help us to expand our online operation (and possibly other media as well).

So why don't we just print more Panoramas more frequently?

This is what we want to do, but we don't want to do it at the expense of other services that we provide. Especially as Panorama has no cover charge, we need to find ways of covering the cost that don't affect all those other services.

This leads us to one of the controversial topics which appeared in the four page survey you might have seen in our December issue.

Advertising

Not surprisingly, the question of whether we should take paid advertising has perplexed some readers. We would like to reassure you that the management of Flourish Australia and their predecessors have always been right behind Panorama (including financially) as an integral part of our overall services.

Another area of concern is whether we would run advertising that conflicted with our overall recovery ethos and non-clinical emphasis. We don't think it is appropriate, therefore, to advertise pharmaceuticals, for example. Whatever appears in Panorama, including advertising, has to be about recovery.

So what were we thinking of? To give you an idea, consider our current sponsors. Over the years, we have

encountered a number of businesses (you might be able to think of a few yourself) who have been generous in their support of Flourish Australia's activities. Advertising in Panorama would be an additional way for such good corporate citizens to help us out.

We also recognise that our readers are consumers. Not just in the now-superseded sense of "consumers of mental health services," but consumers of all kinds of products. A large percentage of our readers are on very low incomes, true, but for many of you that need not be a permanent situation.

People living with mental health issues DO have buying power as demonstrated by the story on page 4 of this issue where Rod got himself a car. This is an example of how consumption can be a part of recovery.

As editor, my aim in exploring the possibility of paid advertising is to expand Panorama's size, frequency, coverage and quality; and also to recognise that the people who access our services at Flourish Australia have buying power like everyone else.

Panorama is ITSELF an advertisement for the work of Flourish Australia and its people. We hope that people who are looking for recovery services will hear about our Flourish Australia through the stories in Panorama.

When the surveys have been tallied up we will report back to you. In the meantime, if you would like to give feedback about advertising or any other topic regarding Panorama, please don't hesitate to do so by contacting the editor at the address below.

**Warren Heggarty,
Publications Officer,
Flourish Australia,
5 Figtree Drive, Sydney
Olympic Park, 2127**



Supporting the supporters

According to Carers Australia, "the chances are that you personally are a carer, need a carer or know a carer." 12% of the population, or 2.8 million people are carers. Many people who live with mental health issues of their own are also carers for others!

Carers are people who are either on the carers pension or provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who are frail, aged, or live with a disability, mental health issues, or chronic illness. This includes people who have addictions to alcohol and other drugs.

It has often been said that carers save

the community an enormous amount of money, or that carers are an 'integral part of the health system.' It may be that the actions of carers take pressure off the health system but it is impossible to put a dollar value on it. What carers do often goes far beyond what professionals are able or even permitted to do.

Carers often sacrifice their own time, money, careers and sometimes even well being to take on this role.

Think also of the anxiety experienced by a carer for someone who has a drug or alcohol problem, or who might be thinking of harming themselves or even ending their life.

Caring may include help and support in any of the daily activities of the person being cared for. It may include physical and personal care and assistance such as dressing, lifting, showering, feeding or providing transport. Think of this example: purchasing a portable air conditioner for a sick family member to make them more comfortable in convalescence is part of the caring process.

Commonly, carers are responsible for the management of medications. Carers provide emotional, social or financial support. Caring may also involve helping the person they are caring for to be organised, reminding them to attend appointments and dealing with emergencies.

In the case of some illnesses or disabilities, the demands placed upon carers are truly onerous. Think of those caring for aged relatives in the late stages of dementia, or for children with multiple disabilities needing round the clock care.

Caring is so important that Panorama is going to devote regular articles to it from now on. If you are a carer and have a story you would like to share with Panorama readers, please don't hesitate to contact us on 02 9393 9021.



Carers' Week in Broken Hill

For Carers' week 2016, Flourish Australia Broken Hill organised a brand new event called **Pamper, Pots and Paint** in conjunction with Lifeline Connect at Broken Hill. Funded by CarersNSW in conjunction with Flourish Australia the event was held in the Lifeline Connect office, which is where the local carers of Broken Hill tend to congregate regularly.

This was a golden chance for these selfless carers to do something for themselves and their own wellbeing, to be able to take time to enjoy some new

company, feel special, chat, laugh, be creative and partake in a delicious lunch.

Flourish Australia's community arts coordinator, Jane Miller, helped run the arty side of the day. She liaised with Marilyn, a volunteer from Lifeline Connect, to hold a fun class where would-be-artists could paint pots and tiles. All the tiles that were decorated on the day will be used to brighten up a wall at Lifeline Connect's Broken Hill office that honours Carers Week 2016.

This was just the beginning. In order to ensure that next year's Pamper, Pots and Paint event is even better, the participants were provided with feedback forms. There were lots of positive comments on the good company and yummy food, and overall everything was reported to be great.

The participants were also asked about how they felt before the day's activities as well as after. **Generally, the guests reported that they went from feeling average at the start to excellent by the end. Mission accomplished!** It's

a fact that carers make an enormous contribution to our many communities, and the role they play is valued at over \$60 billion a year, or more than \$1 billion a week (according to Carers Australia).

Want to learn something about carer respite and other kinds of support? You can call the Carer Line between 9am and 5pm, or visit the Carers Australia website at any time.

1800 242 636

www.carersaustralia.com.au

Want to know more about Carers Week so you can get involved in Spring next year?

www.carersweek.com.au

(Photos provided by Andrew Kelly)

Flourish Australia
BROKEN HILL
142 Argent Street
Broken Hill NSW 2800
02 9393 9515

Flourish Australia



Mental health gets royal support

Grant J Everett

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry want to change the way we talk about mental health issues. The trio of royals are asking people to recognise that mental health problems can be experienced by anyone, and the sooner we reach out to help a friend or a loved one who is in difficulty, the better.

For instance, the Duke has gone on record as saying that mental health was “not a dirty word” and “we all have mental health like we do physical health, good or ill”.

“The more we all talk about this, the more collectively as a society we can do to support one another. But not seeking help at those times when it all seems too much, or we are depressed or anxious, can impact the rest of our lives. Put simply, the three of us want to make asking for help no longer a big deal.”

“Personally, in my work at the air ambulance, I see how colleagues and families help each other through traumatic moments.”

“The three of us have learnt a lot in the past few months as we met people.”

“The more we talk about mental health, the more normal the topic becomes, and the more we feel able to open up and seek support.”

Kate was on the same page as her hus-

band.

“All of us know someone who has been through difficult emotional times, and we know how hard it can be to see a way forward. William, Harry and I feel it is our duty to do what we can, with your help, to shine a spotlight on emotional well-being and highlight the support that is out there to prevent or manage the pain at difficult times.”

Kate spoke about how people often keep their problems hidden because they’re too scared to admit they are struggling.

“This fear of judgment stops people from getting the help they need, which can destroy families and end lives.”

“We all have mental health like we do physical health, good or ill.”

-Prince William

Harry spoke passionately about the value of teaching everybody about mental health first aid.

“It’s not rocket science, but most of us don’t know what to do if a friend or family member is suffer-

ing. Having some basic knowledge, and having the confidence to act on your knowledge, can make a huge difference to those around us. We don’t want prejudice and fear to stand in the way of people getting the help they need to cope with life.”

Sources:

www.headstogether.org.uk/

“World Mental Health Day: Make asking for help no big deal, urge Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry,” The Telegraph, 10th of October 2016

www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/10/duke-and-duchess-of-cambridge-to-ride-on-london-eye-with-prince/

“Very royal tourists! William, Kate and Harry will take a spin on the London Eye as part of their engagements to mark World Mental Health Day,” Siofra Brennan, Daily Mail, 5th of October

www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3823001/Kate-William-Harry-visit-London-Eye-World-Mental-Health-Day.html

Open Employment for Perry

It is really great when a person who accesses our services leaves us!

Seriously, that is the measure of our success at Flourish Australia that a person embarks upon their recovery journey and forges a future for themselves, leaving us behind.

One person who achieved this recently is Perry Grayson who used to work in a supported employment role at Prestige Packing Co Marrickville.

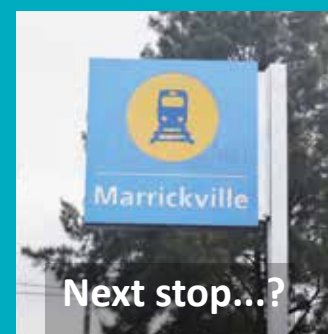
When he obtained employment on the open market, Perry sent the following note to us via Peer Worker Alma at Marrickville.

‘Before I started working at Flourish Australia Marrickville I was a mess. I could barely get out of bed in the morning. I thought I’d never be work-ready again. But Flourish Australia gave me a positive, friendly atmosphere and the motivation to get out of the house and interact with other people. I made some friends among staff and other workers.

‘Working at Flourish Australia gave me the recovery-based support to return to the workforce. I enjoyed working in a team with others like me to get jobs done. I think it’s safe to say that I wouldn’t be ready to work in open employment if it wasn’t for Flourish Australia.

‘Thanks for all of your help and positive vibes!’

Thanks for that Perry. It would be really great if all of the people who access our services could one day take this step!



Next stop...?

SANE Forums

a guide for new users

by Grant J Everett

The SANE Forums are a safe, respectful place where anybody over the age of 18 can get involved in anonymous peer-to-peer discussions about mental health. These forums allow participants to tell their stories and serve as a source of support during the hard times. They provide an opportunity to support others during the rough times of their journeys. In just a few years the SANE Forums have become a thriving community where members look out for each other online, form mutually beneficial friendships and reaffirm that we definitely aren't alone on the path to recovery. And while the core focus of the forum is on mental health, you don't need to have any sort of diagnosis if you want to get involved. Anonymity is a very important part of the Forum process, as SANE wants all members to feel as though they can share their personal experiences without the worry of being identified.

If the SANE Forums served as your first point of contact with the mental health system, you'd be off to a good start. For starters, simply knowing that you aren't the only one going through a particular hardship can be wonderfully affirming, and feeling that people understand your struggles is so very encouraging. You can learn new techniques that have worked for other people or be pointed in the direction of individuals and organisations who may be in a position to help you, or you may simply feel as though you are being heard! Most of all, these forums are a great opportunity for people with similar experiences to connect up and share valuable life advice. In fact, a peer-to-peer forum like this one actually has some advantages over what the medical model has to offer: it's free, it's

available day or night, you can take part in it anonymously, and you don't need to make an appointment or have a referral. Since the forums were first launched, a very caring and supportive culture has developed in this online community, and new faces are always welcome.

In addition to being divided into many diverse "threads", or subjects, all the existing posts are split between two core forums: one is for people with a lived experience of mental health issues, appropriately called **Lived Experience**, and the other is targeted towards people who care for - or otherwise support - a loved one, called **Carers**. Some of the threads include Our Experience & Stories, Looking After Our Wellbeing, Enjoying Time With Others, and Something's Not Right. As the SANE Forums have been running for some time now (since May 2014) there is a considerable stockpile of existing discussion topics that cover just about everything you'd need to know about mental health. For instance, do you want to learn how look after yourself? How to maintain your own mental wellbeing? How you can spend your time with other people in healthy ways?

Although anybody is able to jump in and read any of the existing threads without restrictions, to get the most out of the Forums you need to become a member. Once you register a profile you can contribute to the discussions as opposed to just reading them. Thankfully, creating a profile is quick and easy: all you need to bring with you is an email address, and you can get one of those from various sources such as Gmail. To register your profile you have to choose a login name (not your real name), pick which forum you want to contribute to, choose a password, provide a valid email address, and give them your postcode. So, to be clear, you don't have to provide any sensitive information (bank details, mother's maiden name) in order to sign up. In addition to choosing a unique username, each member of the SANE Forums need to have an Avatar picture to represent them (NOT a photo of yourself). You can upload an image of your choice, such as your favourite cartoon character or mythological creature, or choose one of the pictures

provided by SANE. After filling out the online form and confirming your email address, you'll be ready to go!

The best way to learn more about the SANE Forums for yourself is to jump in and get involved. If this is your first time on the site, then the Lived Experience Forum has a section specifically used for new users to say hi and share a little bit about themselves. It's as simple as typing in a bit about yourself and hitting post.

If you've got something specific you'd like to raise and there's no existing thread on the subject, then you can always start a new discussion topic. A good length for a post is up to 200 or 300 words, or 1 to 4 paragraphs. Shorter is better, as longer posts don't tend to get as many replies. It's also a good idea to be clear about why you're posting this new thread and what you are hoping will come of it. If you need advice from the community about a particular issue, then make sure that you ask your questions clearly. If you're just sharing your thoughts, it can be helpful to say so.

The SANE Forum is one of the largest of its kind in Australia. It reaches people across all states and territories, and is provided by 48 different organisational websites (including Flourish Australia). To date, more than 224,000 unique visitors have checked out the forums, and over 6,880 members have registered and actively participated.

Everything in moderation

If you haven't heard of a "moderator" before, it's somebody who actively keeps track of what's happening on a forum to ensure that it runs as intended. To carry this out, half of a moderator's job is making sure that everybody obeys the rules and behaves in a civil manner, and the rest of their time is spent helping the forum to run smoothly. Moderators stay behind the scenes and rarely enter the online conversation unless something distressing arises, such as strong swearing, or if they notice that somebody is in acute distress and needs immediate support. They might also contribute to the discussion if they feel

flourishaustralia.saneforums.org

their opinion will be helpful.

The SANE Forums have enlisted a total of five Flourish Australia staff members to work as moderators. They work from Monday to Friday, contributing around 10 hours of work a week, but the SANE Forums are kept in working order by well over 30 moderators across the country. Between them, these dedicated helpers are able to moderate the Forums 24-hours a day, all year round. Mind Australia, Mental Illness Fellowship Queensland, PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia) and Turning Point have also provided moderators for this cause.

So what is a moderator's job on the SANE Forums, exactly? First off, the moderators are encouraged to be a part of the conversations. While the majority of discussions that happen in the SANE Forums are between community members - and that's the way it should be! - moderators also provide welcome advice, encouragement and support. They will also look out for any members who seem to be going through a tough time. The aim is to let the community lead the conversations, but to provide support where it's necessary.

Secondly, there is an extensive Duty of Care framework in place for any posts from members that breach the community guidelines, such as illegal or discriminatory comments. There are

also specific procedures for taking care of members when they share about self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

Other common moderator tasks include:



- Asking open-ended questions in threads in order to encourage conversation amongst members
- Building relationships with (and between) members, ensuring that nobody feels alone or unheard
- Being themselves! Taking part in the discussions helps to build a rapport with the members
- Modelling desired behaviour
- Responding to help-seeking posts with respect and support
- Having fun! Many posts can have a heavy tone, so bringing some lightheartedness at appropriate times is encouraged

IMPORTANT: SANE Forums are peer-to-peer support services, which means that the information that's provided is designed to complement, not replace, the services offered by health care professionals. SANE Forums are NOT crisis support or professional counselling, so if you or someone you know is in crisis and needs urgent help, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Emergency on 000.

About SANE


Flourish Australia has partnered with many other not-for-profit non-government organisations over the years, and SANE Australia is one of our allies. We have a lot in common: for starters, our shared mission is to support Australians affected by mental health issues to lead better lives, and to constantly advocate for a clearer public understanding of mental health. SANE is composed of many different initiatives that deal with the many ways that mental health issues can have an impact on the community. For example: the **SANE Speakers** program provides an opportunity for people with a lived experience to contribute their unique voices to SANE's work with corporate, government and non-government organisations, the media, and the broader community, as well as providing feedback on the development of new information resources. This program has an impact on advocacy and research. **StigmaWatch**, on the other hand, works to improve the representation of mental illness and suicide in the media.

Lived Experience Forum

Scribe   0 | Logout | Help

Search the Forum



turn on suggestions 

Seek support. Make connections. Share your experience.

The Lived Experience Forum is a safe, anonymous community for people living with mental illness, moderated 24/7 by mental health professionals.

These forums do not provide crisis counselling. If you need urgent help, call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or in an emergency call 000.

Upcoming events & featured discussions



[The NDIS
Lived Experience
How to access services?](#)

[New here? Introduce yourself
Lived Experience](#)

[New Forums Feature: Notifications!
Lived Experience](#)



The Honourable Kelly Vincent, Member of the South Australian Legislative Council, started her political career with a Facebook campaign. Since then she's been fighting for those of us who live with disability.

PANORAMA: How many People with Disability are there in Australian politics?

HON KELLY VINCENT: Two, including me. Rob Pyne, member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, is the other. Given that almost one in five Australians have a disability, it seems very likely that others may have "invisible" conditions such as hearing or vision loss (which are very common as we age).

Why don't people with disabilities have more representation in government?

Politics, as a profession, has become a bastion of stale, male, pale representation. People with Disabilities are not the only cohort of our population missing from parliament.

Do you think that some politicians have a lived experience of mental health issues, but they keep it quiet?

Yes, statistics of the general population would suggest that some politicians have mental illness. Whether they keep it quiet due to fear of stigma or for political reasons, only those affected would know.

What will change when people with disabilities have more representation?

If people from any marginalised group are represented in parliament, it allows that group to have more say in our

political process. If PwD had more political power then I don't think we would be fighting for our human rights on a daily basis. If more PwD were involved in the overall workforce and community, the personal contact and interaction they have with others could be a powerful method of changing attitudes towards, and misconceptions about, People with Disabilities.

What other factors do you believe are responsible for the lack of people with disabilities becoming politicians?

There are financial barriers. In South Australia it costs \$3,000 per candidate to run for Parliament. It may also be that politics is not a career choice that is being discussed with young people - whether or not they have a disability.

What are the odds of more people with disabilities climbing the ranks in politics?

The workforce is currently trying to diversify itself, but "diversity" tends to refer to gender and multiculturalism more than disability. If diversifying the workforce includes increasing the number of people with disabilities, then it may filter through to the world of politics.

What would you suggest to somebody who wants to get involved with politics?

Join a political party. Turn up, dress as well as you can, get your name known, read a lot, fundraise. But don't get typecast as a token person with a disability: be serious, get taken seriously, and learn the written and unwritten rules. Take an interest in your community, write letters to newspapers, start online petitions, get along to council meetings as an observer, ask questions.

How did you break into politics?

My political journey began when I started a campaign to advocate for a new wheelchair. I was 20, and still using the same wheelchair I'd had since I was 10. It was way too small and it was causing me problems.

Although Disability SA were fully aware of my need for a new chair, I had been waiting more than 18 months and I just got fed up. So I set up a campaign on Facebook, and all of a sudden people from all over Australia and the world were interested – including local ABC Adelaide radio.

I became a regular on morning radio, telling ABC listeners the latest update in my wait for my wheelchair. It was through this wheelchair campaign - where I was not only advocating for my own rights,

but also for the rights of my peers - that I was approached by **Dignity for Disability** to stand as a candidate at the March 2010 South Australian election.

In unexpected circumstances I was elected to the Legislative Council, becoming something of an "accidental politician".

How has the experience of being a politician been so far?

Amazing. I am up for re-election in 2018, and the time since I was first elected in 2010 has gone so quickly. It's a very busy life, but I seem to be suited to it.

How will your work in politics bring about lasting change?

I think I have made a difference by showing that a young woman with a disability can be an MP. Australia also has a National Disability Insurance Scheme now, and I personally take credit for ensuring that South Australia has a Disability Justice Plan.

I have a constituent workload that is studded with examples where people have been given a better, fairer deal due to my advocacy. The education system in South Australia has been the subject of a parliamentary committee which I moved for and chaired.

We are currently looking at issues of elder abuse with another committee, and I also put up the terms of reference for a committee on co-morbidities. These are issues where our society has not been doing well, and through my work we have been able to shine a light and examine what is going wrong.

I hope that my push to have universal design principles (see Panorama's article 'Design with disability in mind' in March 2016) enshrined in state planning law will be the beginning of long lasting change in our built environment.

Making sure that Auslan interpreters are included in emergency services announcements is an ongoing battle in South Australia, once we get that right I am sure that will lead to a lasting change. I do know that the next wheelchair user that comes to work in parliament house will have a much easier time getting in and out of the building and getting to accessible facilities due to the renovations that had to be undertaken when I was elected. I've really put my stamp on the place in that way!

vincent.office@parliament.sa.gov.au

kellyvincentmlc.com

BACK ON TRACK HEALTH Your Physical Health

brought to you by Jade Ryall, program manager, B.O.T.H.



What's happening in health and beauty at the local level with Flourish Australia?

Dental Health Promotion at Five Dock

OK everybody, first let's have a quick quiz first:

1. Describe one factor in good oral health
2. List two signs of poor oral health
3. Identify a healthier alternative to regular soft drink
4. Name one effect that smoking has on teeth
5. Who would you go to for help if you have a problem with your oral health

Flourish Five Dock hosted a Dental Health Workshop in Spring 2016. Five people who participate in the BH-HASI (Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative) program went to Five Dock office to take part.

Everyone got a gift back which included a dental pack (tooth brush, tooth paste, mouth wash and floss), fact sheets on food and dental health and a fact sheet illustrating the best way to clean your teeth.

The workshop included a video presentation, a slide show, demonstrations, and opportunities to interact.

At the end of the workshop, participants had a quiz with five questions to see

what messages had taken hold. People noted that the most important things they had learnt were

- The effects that sugary drinks and poor diet can have on your teeth
- The importance of brushing your teeth twice a day (in the old days it used to be THREE times a day!)
- How to go about visiting a dentist

Some of the things that people discussed were

- Wanting to reduce their sugar intake
- Brushing their teeth more often

To evaluate how pleased the people were with the workshop and whether it met their expectations, a ballot was held using happy faces and sad faces. Fortunately, there were no sad faces in the ballot box!

Finally, people were asked what kind of health promotion they would like to take part in next. The two most popular answers were **Weight Loss** or **Women's and Men's Health**.

BACK ON TRACK HEALTH Recommended health screening tests

- Self-checking (skin, teeth, breasts)
- Skin exams
- Dental checkups
- Testicle checks
- Pap tests
- Pregnancy
- Blood pressure
- Blood tests
- Obesity tests
- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Diabetes
- Breast cancer
- Prostate cancer
- Bowel cancer
- Eye health
- Bone density
- STIs (if sexually active)



Supporting Mental Health & Wellbeing



Expand your repertoire: Join a CoP today

Communities of Practice share an interest or passion for something they do and want to learn how to do it better as they interact regularly with each other. For information on how to start a new community of practice, contact

**Janet Ford, Professional Practice Manager,
02 9393 9003, janet.ford@flourishaustralia.org.au**

Communities of Practice currently operating within Flourish Australia

Physical Health: contact Jade Ryall at Olympic Park on 02 9393 9007
Peer Workforce: contact Debra Gibbons at Hervey Bay 02 9393 9560
Supporting Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander People and Communities: contact Jade Ryall at Olympic Park on 02 9393 9007



Annual General Meeting 2016

By Grant J Everett

The first Annual General Meeting since we launched our new name Flourish Australia was held on 16th November. The event was live-streamed across NSW for anyone who couldn't make it in person. After Uncle Ray Davison did the Welcome to Country, and Paula Hanlon (bottom right) acknowledged Consumers Past, the proceedings began.

"For people with lived experience, the supports available today are immeasurably greater than those offered to our peers in the past. We have a focus on the individuals' needs, the potential for growth, and having a rich and full life, to be able to achieve our dreams, our goals, and have ambitions that previous times would not have encouraged."

-Paula Hanlon

"Rather than giving orders, we walk beside the people who access our services, and offer them support and encouragement. Thank you for your strength, wisdom, and the inspiration you provide. This year has been another one of significant change and reform in the mental health sector."

-Pamela Rutledge

Every year, we have some of the inspirational people who access our services tell their story at the AGM. A participant at New Outlook, Melanie Declouett (pictured at left with CEO Pam Rutledge) has been involved with our organisation for the last two years, and she was good enough to share her recovery journey with us. Her future plans are to be a peer worker, and an advocate for mental health.

"Throwing myself at every opportunity that has been offered to me by Flourish Australia has been crucial to my recovery. I'm a newbie to the mental health journey, having only become unwell five years ago. And one strategy that has worked for me has been to replace all the negative symptoms of my mental illness by filling my days with so much that the ruminating, anxiety, depression and mania has become just a distant memory. It's easy to stay well when you're a part of a supportive, powerful group like Flourish Australia, rather than as a stigmatised minority. I would like to show the medical professionals that we are unique and individual humans who should be treated with respect, compassion and understanding, and not treated as our diagnosis or the label we have been given."

-Melanie Declouett

Alastair McEwin is the disability discrimination commissioner, representing the Australian Human Rights Commission. He has a background in arts, law and business, and has occupied many elite roles. As somebody with a hearing impairment, Alastair has experienced exclusion and stigma firsthand. However, he had some inspiring stories of inclusion and empowerment.

2017 is the year when the NDIS is fully rolled out. Alastair's views on it are very clear:

"The NDIS is life changing. For thousands of years, people with disabilities have been told to accept what they're given, to just take what they're given, and be grateful. So the

NDIS is an enormous opportunity for people with disabilities to be empowered."

-Alastair McEwin

As time goes on, employers aren't saying "can't can't can't" as much, and tend to be saying "How can we make this work?" However, Alastair gave another example about a guy who'd nailed a job interview and was promptly offered the job, but the moment that the employer found out he had bipolar disorder the job was snapped away.

Alastair was also very encouraged by our emphasis on peer support.

Michael Macokatic, one of our Senior Peer Workers from the Hunter region, did his very best Johnny Cash impersonation, starting with Ring of Fire and finishing with Folsom Prison Blues, the song that Johnny Cash used to blow away Sam Phillips from Sun Records in 1954. Michael and his band perform at clubs and pubs around the Hunter region.

I wonder who will be performing at the next, 2017 AGM. There's one way to find out and that's to be there.

Want to see the 2016 AGM for yourself? Check out the livestream here:

livestream.com/weddinglive-sydney/flourish-au

www.flourishaustralia.org.au/sites/default/files/AnnualReport2016_0.pdf



Flourish Australia

“Brushes with Life 2017”

Art workshops + exhibition

A celebration of hopes and dreams and good mental health! Throughout the year, the Taree branch of Flourish Australia provides FREE art workshops every month. Materials, instruction and light refreshments are all provided for no cost, and no artistic experience is required!

Artists are also welcome to take part in the **Brushes with Life** exhibition in October, too, for the chance to win acclaim and prizes.

Contact Flourish Australia to book your place in the workshops or the exhibition, or if you need more details.

1300 779 270

Where?

Uniting Church Hall, Main Street, Cundletown

When?

First Thursday of the month, 10am to 2pm

Workshops are held on the 2nd of March, 6th of April, 4th of May, 1st of June, 6th of July, 3rd of August, 7th of September, 2nd of November and 7th of December. As the **Brushes with Life** exhibition is held in October, the workshop does not run that month.

Panorama Online is live!

All the staff at the publications department (both of us) are very proud to announce the official launch of **Panorama Online Magazine!** We've cherry-picked the best consumer recovery stories, watershed events and other seminal articles to live on in digital form. Our clean, easy-to-use, attractive website will keep our finest material in circulation for many years to come, and this is truly the start of a new era for our magazine. The issues we deal with will continue to be hot topics for the foreseeable future, and **Panorama Magazine** will continue to be there for all the people who access our services tomorrow, just like yesterday.



flourish
AUSTRALIA

Supporting Mental Health & Wellbeing



Learn While You Work

- ★ *Are you living with mental health issues?*
- ★ *Would you like to get back to work but feel unsure about where to start?*

If you are on a disability support pension or live in an NDIS rollout area, you may be eligible for supported employment at one of Flourish Australia's Community Businesses.

As a community business employee you will have access to vocational training and recovery groups so you can build your skills and experience, while furthering your mental health recovery journey.

**You can even do tertiary qualifications onsite, including:
Cert. 3 in Warehouse Operations and Cert. 3 in Horticulture.**

We can also support you to access other courses at TAFE and Community Colleges.

When you feel you are ready to enter the open workforce, we are here to support you with the transition.

★★★**NEWSFLASH**★★★

Flourish Australia is a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider. We can answer your NDIS questions and support you to access our services. Contact us to find out more: 02 9393 9000



At Flourish Australia Community Businesses we currently have supported jobs available in:

Packing and Light Assembly at Marrickville or Harris Park.

Property maintenance, lawn mowing and professional and specialised cleaning services at St Marys, Warwick Farm and Marrickville.

Contact Us to find out more!

Phone: 02 9393 9000
Email: clare.evans@flourishaustralia.org.au
Web: flourishaustralia.org.au