

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

# panorama

Monthly Issue **November 2024 #95B**



**Making My Green  
Thumbs Into a Career**

---

**A Dungeon Master's  
Life Amounts to  
Many Things!**

---

**Tumut Triathlete  
Takes on Townsville**

**flourish**<sup>®</sup>  
AUSTRALIA

Where mental wellbeing thrives

**NDIS PROVIDER**  
— SINCE 2013 —



Where mental wellbeing thrives

### About us

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

### Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 or  
flourishaustralia.org.au

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

### About Panorama

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

### The faces behind Panorama...



Warren Heggarty



Grant Everett

### Subscriptions, questions, feedback, praise, curses?

You can ALWAYS email us at...  
panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au

Prefer snail mail?

Publications Officers, Quad 3, Level 3,  
Suite 3.01, 102 Bennelong Parkway, Sydney  
Olympic Park NSW 2127

### Disclaimer

Panorama's content is not intended as a substitute for the advice of any specialised or qualified professional. The views expressed herein are those of the authors, not necessarily of Flourish Australia, or any associated enterprises, their staff, management, employees, or service recipients

## Contents

**COVER:** Mary Aitena who accesses Flourish Australia's Penrith Service showing a portrait of a famous singer. Find out who on page 11!

**4** Team Recovery: with help from the Justice League

**6-7** A Dungeon Master's Life amounts to many things

**8-9** "Yarning" At The Women's & Children's Weaving Group

**9** World Indigenous Suicide Prevention conference

**10-11** Independent Living and Aiming for Citizenship!

**11** Tumut Triathlete Takes on Townsville

**12** Little Man: My Reason dor Getting Up in the Morning

**14** Making My Green Thumbs Into a Career

**15** Australia's National Kindness Day: Kindness Creates Community

### Contributors include...

**Paul Catania** Accesses Flourish Australia's Windsor service

**Paul Kleynjan** Accesses Flourish Australia's Penrith service

Thanks also to Sarah Schembri, Ruby Visocchi, Amanda Dixon, Peter Farrugia, Kara Lyons, Doris Kluge

Thanks to Sheriden, Larissa, Kaila, Kathleen and the other mums from the Women and Children's Program (WCP) who enjoyed the NAIDOC Week weaving group.

### Contributions are welcome!

#### Publications People

**Kylie Bolton**

Graphic Designer

**Grant J Everett**

Assistant Publications Officer

**Warren Heggarty**

Publications Officer

**Jasmin Moradides**

Development Projects Manager

**Peter Neilson**

Chief Development Officer

WE PROVIDE PRACTICAL

# Care for Carers

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

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

A list of helpful resources and Carer organisations for family and carers can be found on our website

SCAN QR TO FIND OUT MORE



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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

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

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



# SPREAD

# H

# PE

## Your Mental Health Journey Will Inspire Others!

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

Don't worry if you're not a writer – that's where we jump in! At Panorama, every story is valued! We're constantly on the lookout for stories from those living with mental health issues. But hey, family members and caregivers, your stories matter too! Not sure where to begin? Send us a message, we would love to hear from you!

Email: [panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au) or Call: 1300 779 270



# TEAM RECOVERY

## WITH HELP FROM THE JUSTICE LEAGUE!

By Paul Catania

ABOVE: Paul Catania  
OPPOSITE: Paul and his daughter Antonia  
PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL CATANIA

**Paul Catania had to quit the Air Force, a role he loved. Beset by illness and deaths in his family, it took several years before he was able to find a way forward again - with support from Flourish Australia.**

It was Thanksgiving 1977 when I came to Australia from Canada with my sister and my parents. They raised me as best they could. My Mum actually gave me two tips that I can recommend whenever you find yourself feeling anxious or depressed. Firstly, think of a good book you have read and go through the story in your mind. Secondly, think of a good song you know and play that in your mind.

I loved school, particularly Maths and English, not so much Science. I also loved Home Economics, probably because I love food! I went to Year 11 before entering the Air Force.

### In the Air Force

I thoroughly enjoyed my three years in the Air Force. However, my mother developed a serious medical problem which was worsening. The Air Force involves being away for long periods and I knew my father was not able to deal with it himself. So I had to make a very tough decision to resign from the Air Force to be more available to help my family. I was very disappointed, though if I had my time again, I would do the same. After that I worked in customer service.

The decline in my mental health came with my mother's death, which was quickly followed by my father passing away only a week after getting a diagnosis of multiple cancer tumours. Not long after that, aged only 45, my sister passed away.

This all came on top of the fact I had experienced unresolved trauma between the ages of 9 and 16. I was not coping and I needed help. It was very difficult for both myself and my partner. I was admitted to hospital and I told them about the abuse I had been through, it all hung out like a sort of brain dump. But the interactions I had with clinicians really did not help me. I was really not getting anywhere.

## Positive Change

Then I was referred to Flourish Australia at Windsor four and a half years ago.

Working with Flourish Australia was the biggest positive change in my life. They actually helped. They put me at the centre of things. "We will work with you," they said, and that is what they did. Not just the Support Workers, but also the Team Coordinators and Managers. They really know their stuff!

Two of the things that really help me when I am feeling unwell are MINDFULNESS, which I practice as often as I can, and BREATHING exercises. I find this helps me nine times out of ten. Just like my mother's tip of remembering the book or replaying the song, you are distracted from the negative thoughts and feelings and put in touch with something positive. *(We have an article called 'Make the Most of Mindfulness' coming up in December Panorama! Look out for it! - Ed)*

## Justice League

Positive things in my life include my partner and my three children and three grandchildren. For forty years (since I was very young indeed!) I have collected comics. My favourite ones are the Justice League, which includes Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. I often go to Kings Comics in Sydney on Clarence Street. In fact, I have a standing order there! I have also seen nearly all of the related movies.

Looking into the future, I can say that I am in a much better place. With support I have been able to find and work with a psychologist who fits my needs really well. I am going forward in leaps and bounds now, after 18 months with her. As soon as my body and concentration levels allow me, I would love to get back into paid work again!

Thanks to Sarah Schembri and Ruby Visocchi for their assistance with this story. Paul spoke to Warren Heggarty



### Flourish Australia

7/168-172 George St, Windsor NSW 2756

Darug Country

Phone: 1300 779 270

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

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

Where mental wellbeing thrives

Back On Track  
Health Program

# A Dungeon Master's Life...

## ...Amounts to Many Things!

By Paul Kleynjan



**I have just spent a weekend away in Newcastle running a Dungeons and Dragons event at Collector Con\*, right off the back of a holiday to New Zealand. These are two things I never thought I would ever say separately, let alone in the one sentence.**

I am exhausted. Both travelling and D&D (Dungeons and Dragons)\*\* have been lifelong passions. and it has been amazing being able to do both of these things again after many years of anxiety and depression.

Don't get me wrong, my anxiety was barely contained throughout both events. I am constantly in a state of high anxiety and/or depression. In fact, I was close to cancelling my plans and hiding in the corner of my room until it was all over. Fortunately, with the care and support of my amazing support coordinator Amanda Dixon at Flourish Australia and my NDIS

team, I didn't back down. I really got out there and returned to my passions. I am proud of myself, I think, but it has been a long road.

My life has not been an easy road to navigate. The ups and downs are numerous. I backpacked the world throughout my twenties, with a couple of trips in my late 30s and early 40s. I had travelled up and down the Australian east coast and visited 23 other countries. I've put myself into some hairy situations and gotten back out of them by just playing dumb Aussie. Since then, my anxiety took over and there was no way I'd expect to travel again. Now I can add the 24th to the list – New Zealand.

To give you a brief history, I failed my HSC; completely due to time away from high school for a medical issue. My then English teacher told my mother and the principal that I would never amount to anything. Consequently, I tried to commit suicide in year 12.

### Head-On

A few years later, a head on vehicle collision put me through three years of muscle rehabilitation and destroyed about five years of memory of that period. I also had to deal with undiagnosed PTSD (it was not so much of a thing in the 80s and early 90s). After this, my first ever employer showed me the door as he told my brother I would never amount to anything.

So I went off to spend my days trying to amount to something. So I set off to see the world, picking up job skills between travels to help me gain employment overseas – fitness instructor, massage therapist, security guard, barista, bartender and make-up artist – to name a few. In fact, most of my life since then meant working three or four jobs at a time in order to earn the money and life experience to prove I could amount to something.

It also helped that on my return to Australian life, I won a money prize

## I regularly run D&D events at pop culture conventions. They are as scary as hell and I panic in the crowds...but I turn up each time.

that allowed me to pay off travel, car and student debts.

That was until I had a heart attack at 32. Too much stress, way too much junk food and lack of sleep contributed a lot to my growing anxiety. I left Sydney to work in the tropics until I was healthy and then, you guessed it, I came back and went right back to juggling multiple job roles. Only this time, I became an actor and classically trained singer. I mean, why would I settle down to one thing when I could add the extra stress of more new ventures, right? I felt like I had to work, to amount to something, and subsequently, to be so busy that I didn't have time to be anxious. It didn't stop me from self-sabotage when it came to auditions, talking myself out of chances, or thinking about ways to remove myself from the equation. However, none of that would matter, because I had a second accident where I was knocked onto two wheels from the side, in front of oncoming traffic and luckily landed safely in the opposite gutter. Life number three gone!

## Surviving & Seeking Help

Surviving all of that, I moved around a lot to different areas of Sydney, struggling and becoming more and more introverted, anxious and depressed. When, much later, my friends realised I was preparing suicide attempt number two, they made me seek help and I started seeing a psychologist.

We made a list of the things I've always wanted to do, which is hard when you've already done more than most people. We agreed that university was a good start, so I enrolled through a mature adult program. I gained a Bachelor of Arts in Primary Teaching, but my body was already starting to become more and more painful at that stage.

I was doing power training at the gym and at first I thought I had hurt

my back. Nope, it was the onset of the fibromyalgia.

I did rather well at uni, receiving distinctions and high distinctions in each module. So, rather than be a cranky teacher in a room full of small children, I thought it would be better to do a Masters of Research in Social and Cultural Analysis. I loved university. I met my partner there and she has helped me a lot. However, a Master's degree isn't easy, and I was an absolute wreck by the end of it.

The degree took everything from me and exacerbated my chronic pain as well as my mental health. It was roughly around this point when I heard about NDIS. I was already receiving disability payments at this point and feeling shame about it. I went to a disability expo and the people there told me to apply. At first I was denied, which made me wonder where I belonged in the world, but I contacted disability advocacy and they fought tooth and nail for the funding and got me what I needed.

Much later, after the pandemic, when everyone's funds were reduced for not using them the previous year (because we were all locked inside, because of COVID), I contacted disability advocacy again, supported by Amanda from Flourish Australia and won back my funding.

Now, I regularly run D&D events at pop culture conventions. They are as scary as hell and I panic in the crowds and avoid people in general in case they bump into me and set my fibromyalgia off, but I turn up each time, with my care support, coordinated by Flourish Australia, and have built a multi table event with a group of dedicated volunteers who help me all the way.

They are all aware of my difficulties but D&D is for those of us who are a bit different, so I love the environment. I also have now travelled overseas again for the first time in 14 years!

I couldn't do all this without Amanda, my partner Kerryn, and all the support available to me.

\*Collector Con(vention) is a regular travelling pop culture event for gamers, collectors and cos(tume) players.

\*\* Dungeons & Dragons is a fantasy tabletop game in which the players form an adventuring party who explore fantasy worlds together as they embark on epic quests.

BELOW & OPPOSITE: Paul in action at Collector Con. INSET BELOW: Paul at Hobbiton NZ. PHOTO COURTESY PAUL KLEYNJAN

**Flourish Australia**  
Darug Country  
232 Derby Street  
Penrith 2570  
Phone: 1300 779 270





## “Yarning” at the Women & Children’s Weaving Group

By Grant J Everett

**For NAIDOC Week 2024, Flourish Australia’s Women and Children’s Program commenced a weaving program. As several of the mums from the WCP are First Nations people, these seven days hold special significance.**

The weaving group was a gentle, meditative activity, providing the weavers with an opportunity to feel more connected as a community and developing their sense of belonging, which can do wonders for your mental health. It was also a good opportunity to share recovery conversations.

Finishing a work in progress provides a feeling of success and accomplishment, but the main mental health benefits come from focusing on the process of creating. Like with anything artsy or crafty, weaving causes your brain to release

dopamine, a natural anti-depressant. You could even weave with your favourite music or tv show playing in the background.

“Weaving is one of the most complex and sophisticated examples of First Nations technology and culture,” said Kelly Allen, Parenting Support Worker at the WCP. “It produces objects of beauty, and the process itself has deep cultural significance. Weaving is a way to share knowledge, connect to people and country, invite mindfulness, and much more.”

The colourful material the weavers used is raffia, an eco-friendly, sustainable fibre made from palm fronds. Kelly reached out to Spotlight explaining the WCP service and the weaving group they were running, and Spotlight generously forwarded a \$100 voucher, which was used to purchase the majority of the resources.

**What did you like about the weaving group?**

“I love that the weaving group was non-judgemental even when I was struggling,” Larissa





"It was relaxing and something that I've never done before," Katelyn

"I loved that we were all together casually having a chat, and Kathleen was so patient," Sheriden

"I loved the community and the connection that the group offered while creating something," Kaila

"The women who taught me to weave said to not jump in too quickly to fix other people's work," said Kathleen, Facilitator of the weaving group. "It's best to let them try a few options to learn how to keep going themselves. When they are finished, the mums can look back at those spots, and see that they were meant to be there because it's a part of their journey. The mums all made beautiful things, even when they struggled at times making it."

All up, the weaving program ran for 8 weeks, and proved very popular. As you can see in the photos, everyone was keen to finish their projects!



ABOVE: Mums from the Women and Children's Program. BELOW (L,R): Sheriden enjoying herself, and one of the mum's works-in-progress  
PHOTOS BY GRANT J EVERETT



## World Indigenous Suicide Prevention Conference Seneca 2024

**In July the 2024 World Indigenous Suicide Prevention Conference was hosted by the Seneca Nation at Niagara Falls, New York, USA. Indigenous presenters came from around the world including Australia, New Zealand Aotearoa, USA and Canada. The theme was 'Reclaiming indigenous resiliency and hope.' Check the website [thewispc.com](http://thewispc.com)**

The preamble says, '...the Seneca Nation hopes that the conference will be an opportunity for our sister nations to gather from across the world to share cultural-based approaches focused on combatting suicide.'

The focus was upon

- Protective factors through building identity, resilience, and culture;
- Reducing suicide risks; Life promotion
- Sharing stories and knowledge and wise practices...

Some of the topics included

- An indigenous perspective on overcoming adversity and suicide prevention;'
- 'Decolonising public health; 'Correlation of mental health and chronic disease;'
- 'Care for indigenous military veterans;'
- 'therapeutic counselling for indigenous children;'
- 'Utilizing traditional Maori Healing Methodologies;'

- 'Community controlled suicide prevention programs.'

Presenters from Australia included:

- Academic and rural firefighter Michael Craig (Bundjalung-Darokinjun-Guringai);
- Boxer and 2018 National Mental Health prize winner Joe Williams (Wiradjuri/Wolgalu);
- Gaaya Dhuwi / Proud Spirit's Dean Baylis (Goomeroi) and Rachel Fishlock (Yuin), among others.

By the way you can see a short video of Mark Nannup of WA speaking to Aunty TJ on her tiktok channel @auntytj. Aunty TJ (Tjalaminu Mia) invites viewers to 'Get your weekly dose of Aboriginal mental health support.' She has quite a few tiktoks about cultural healing and how to stay calm, focused and strong.

The Next World Indigenous Suicide Prevention Conference will be in New Zealand Aotearoa next year. WH

**Above: The seal of the Seneca Nation of Indians on the lands of which the WISPC 2024 was held.**



# Independent Living

## And aiming for Citizenship

By Warren Heggarty

**Mary Aiteina is excited to be accepted into the 2025 Program with WE ARE STUDIOS. This is an arts studio led by people living with disability. Mary has already completed two visual arts courses at Community College and is currently engaged in a third! "From where she has come to where she is now has been such a long way!" says Amanda, Mary's support worker at Flourish Australia Penrith.**

Mary lives in a Supported Independent Living residence in the outskirts of Sydney. She was born in New Zealand and came to Australia with her parents and two sisters about forty years ago. One of the things she would like to achieve soon is to become an Australian citizen.

Some years ago she experienced voices and was diagnosed with schizophrenia. She spent six months in a psychiatric unit.

Mary also looked after her late father Nooroa when he was ailing between 2000 and 2014. This was a very stressful time, but Mary says, "I was happy to care for him and to learn new things. I learned how to be patient. I learned about caring, I learned about making food for people, about medicine and showering. I did his shopping and bought his clothes. I learned to be grateful!"

Mary is a kind hearted lady and at one time she was providing help to homeless people on the streets, including inviting people to stay with her. Unfortunately some of the people she helped took advantage of her and exploited her charitable nature. The medication she takes sometimes makes her very sleepy - a problem a lot of our readers will be able to sympathise with.

Because Mary is very modest, Panorama asked Amanda a few questions so that Mary did not have to brag about herself!

Over the past ten years Amanda has watched Mary's recovery journey.

"There is a great contrast between where she was and where she is now," says Amanda.

Firstly, for the past three and a half years she has been working in Mount Druitt doing packing, filling, weighing and so forth. "I also go to church at St Stephen's in the main street of Penrith." She has done three mainstream art classes at Community College: Drawing, Watercolour painting and Drawing on Canvas.

Through her involvement with WE ARE STUDIOS she will be learning to be an artist, not just doing art therapy!

"Every day," says Mary, "I am grateful that I work and have a home and get looked after."

Ana from Dynamic (shown on the right of the picture) is a SIL worker who comes to Mary's place every day to provide support. Amanda says Mary is a good example of cooperation between the various NGOs like Dynamic, Flourish Australia and Endeavour working

together. All have learned a lot from one another.

One of Mary's goals is to become an Australian Citizen and Amanda has supporting her in this quest. Mary is also keen to go overseas and visit the Cook Islands. "In preparation for this, she has stayed in short term accommodation to see how she goes before a real holiday!" says Amanda.

Other goals include becoming financially independent of Public Guardianship. Originally, when Mary identified getting off the public guardian as a goal, Amanda said to Mary. "If you are sure this is the path you want to take, then it is not enough to act responsibly, but to show the Public Guardian that you have the capacity to so."

"When her father passed away," Amanda said, "Mary saved up to buy a memorial plaque with her own money."

Because of the medication, Mary has not had problems with voices, however the side effects provide challenges. These include not

only sleepiness, but metabolic syndrome. Mary recognises it is important to get exercise.

Not only does she love drawing and painting, Mary loves music. Our cover photo shows her with a portrait of Whitney Houston. It makes you want to start singing that song that we all love: 'Ayayay will always love you-ou-ou-ou!' She also loves movies (like The Other Side of Heaven). One day, Mary hopes to develop her artistic skills so as to be able to do people's portraits for a living.

Amanda says that when the NDIS works, it does great things, and brings great outcomes, But it takes TIME for the results to show. Another longer term goal of Mary's is to move from SIL to Public Housing.

Panorama is really keen on bringing you updates on Mary's story in future. Watch this space!

**OPPOSITE: Mary with some of her artwork. BELOW: Mary (left) and Support Worker Ana from Dynamic (right) in Mary's living room and Some of Mary's artworks. PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY**



## Tumut Triathlete takes on Townsville

**Kerrie Gentle, a Peer Worker at Flourish Australia's Tumut service, participated in the World Triathlon Multisport World Championships in Townsville Queensland from the 20th of August 2024.**

Kerrie competed in the Cross Triathlon Event (one of eight world championship events) against athletes from Canada, France, Great Britain, New Zealand and the USA.

Triathlon developed in the 1970s and demonstrates prowess across three different competitions in one. The most familiar form of Triathlon consists of Running, Swimming and Cycling, and includes the transition times between each leg.

This was the first time the championships have been held Down Under, with 3,000 competitors representing more than 40 countries over 12 days.

Panorama readers have met Kerrie before in the December 2019 issue (Penny pushes herself to the limit in the Tumut Fun Run by Penny Basset and Grant J Everett p32-33). Kerrie coordinated the fun run and organised sponsorships and for the funds raised to go to Active Farmers.

**In the next Panorama, we will be talking to Kerrie about mental health and physical activity. WH**



**Flourish Australia  
Darug Country  
232 Derby Street  
Penrith NSW 2570  
Phone: 1300 779 270**



**LEFT:** Jess and her son.  
**OPPOSITE:** The Women and Children's Program has LOTS to keep the kids entertained and engaged.  
**PHOTOS BY GRANT J EVERETT**

## *Little Man:* **My Reason for Getting Up in the Morning**

By Jess

**Having my son to look after has grounded me again, giving me someone to focus all my attention and affection on, and he's what motivates me to get up in the morning and keep going. He's my little blessing and my saviour. Before having him, I struggled with anxiety and depression for a very long time, and had one failed relationship after another. I often felt down in the dumps and even suicidal.**

My son experiences severe separation anxiety, so I can't be out of sight for even a couple of minutes, even to get his bottle from the other room. He will scream at the top of his lungs all the way to hyperventilation, and even start choking. I've tried putting him in a cot with toys, but he can't self-soothe. The more he cried and screamed, the worse my depression and anxiety got.

I started to struggle more and more, and I reached the point where I knew I couldn't keep doing this on my own. My support network includes some close friends I've known since childhood, but they couldn't be expected to be there every minute of every day. I also have my Dad, but he's remarried with kids and a career, so he's pretty busy with his own life. But he will call to check and see how things are.

I'm very stubborn, just like my grandmother who raised me, and I don't like admitting I want help. But I am glad I sought help with Flourish Australia Women and Children's Program.

I believe my grandmother who passed away five years ago sent my son to me. She was always hands down my number one support person, and always pushed me to be all I could be. Today would actually be her birthday if she was still here, so today is a challenging one.

### **Support from the Women and Children's Program**

My son and I have been living at Flourish Australia's WCP for two months, and little man has already started walking. He's good with the other kids, too.

The Flourish Australia staff are supporting me to work on my anxiety and depression by encouraging me to connect with my emotions in a healthier way, and this has helped me to grow closer to my son. I've felt scared to fully let my walls down with him, as I have a major fear of getting too close to anyone. It leaves me feeling so vulnerable that forming new relationships, even friendships, is very difficult. However, I'm a very social person, as I didn't have much of that growing up, so it's been great mixing with the other mums. Making new friends is hard for me, but it's also good, as it means I'm not sitting alone in my head with my thoughts.

While it's still early days with learning to manage my anxiety, I know I need to remind myself that I'm NOT failing at being a mum, and I am doing a good job. Sometimes I feel like I'm not good enough, that I'll never be good enough, that I'd be better off out of everyone's way. But I know that's not true. I am fine with being a single mum, I don't need to co-parent, or be told how to raise my kid. I am happy to do what needs to be done.

I don't want to make the mistakes my grandparents made raising me. They used a lot of parenting techniques we don't use these days. Growing up, if you misbehaved, you'd get a smacked bottom, and I got a LOT of those.

### Future plans

I'm looking at getting back into the workforce. I've just started my son at daycare on Mondays and Fridays, and he loves it! I don't even get a sad look or anything, yet I still can't leave him alone for two minutes.

I've mostly done hospitality work. I studied hospitality from year 7 up to year 12, then I went to TAFE when I was 19 to do a chef course. Unfortunately, things were very difficult financially at that point, and I had to make the choice between study fees and travel, or paying rent. And rent ended up being more important.

My grandfather always pushed me to follow my dreams. When I finished high school, there was a café up for sale in a small town, and I couldn't believe it when my grandfather offered to buy it for me as a graduation gift. I appreciated the thought of course, but I couldn't accept. I'd only just graduated, and I wasn't ready or qualified to run my own business. I also wanted to achieve things on my own merit, not have them handed to me.

I currently have a social housing property, but it's unfit to live in. I was 5 and a half months pregnant when I was told the house was unlivable, and it's been an uphill battle getting this sorted out. I'm waiting on a transfer.

### Always

I've always wanted children and been good with kids. I've babysat

them since I was 10 years old, including children with Down syndrome and autism.

When my sister was pregnant at 18, I knew due to her disabilities that she would need support to take care of a child. My older sister had many challenging conditions, and all the bullying she faced at school, she came home and took it out on me. She was a ticking time bomb, and all it took was one word to set her off. At times it felt like my family failed me because they were so focused on her because of her disability. I can't afford to let the mistakes of others affect my future, though.

I was willing to raise her child outside of school hours and have my grandparents look after it while I was in class. There was no way I would allow that child to go into the system, and that's just as true with my own son.

### Advice

My advice to people experiencing depression and anxiety is to not hide it. Seek support. Reach out to those around you.

**Flourish Australia Blacktown  
Women and Children's Program**  
*Darug Country*  
PO Box 64, Doonside  
NSW 2767  
Phone (02) 9393 9333





# Making My Green Thumbs Into a Career

By Brian Townsend

**I recently completed a 9-week Horticulture Certificate at Tamworth TAFE, as I like doing physical work outdoors. During my studies I had a Flourish Australia worker, Tim, visit from my local service every Tuesday to make sure I was doing all right with my TAFE work. I was fine with all the practical stuff, but I did need a little bit of support with some of the theory work.**

I'm doing a job search right now to look for part-time employment. My support worker Taylor is helping me with this. I actually just had a fitness test to see if I was ready to go back to work, so everything is on track.

## Home

I started accessing services at Flourish Australia Tamworth when I first moved into the local area. I'd heard good things through word of mouth, and I've been going to their centre ever since for all their programs.

I find the art group particularly satisfying, calming and relaxing. It helps me to focus, it eases the mind, and helps me to think more

clearly. I'm currently working on a nice painting of a bottlebrush tree and a golden wattle on canvas. If you live with a mental health issue, I'd recommend doing something creative.

Another highlight is when the Flourish Australia staff take us out for trips on a Saturday. Sometimes it will only be a couple of people, sometimes a whole busload. We go out to the bush, to different tourist places, you name it we've been there! We've seen all the local sights.

In addition to attending the Flourish Australia day-to-day living centre, I'm also living in Flourish Australia supported accommodation. This two-storey block of units houses 20 residents who all have a similar situation with mental health issues. Support is on offer 24 hours a day if any of us ever need it, and the Flourish Australia staff are always good to talk if anything is troubling me...not that anything is bothering me! Life is good at the moment.

I'm happy living here for now, but in the long run, I want to move back to Dubbo. I grew up in Narromine, about a thirty-minute drive west of Dubbo. It's pretty remote, but I've got family in the area, and we phone

each other and see each other regularly. I've got lots of relatives, and when I move back to Dubbo, I'll see them all.

Thankfully, in Dubbo I'll still be able to get visits from my Flourish Australia support workers.

## What works for me

If you're struggling, always talk to someone. What happens when you put too much air in the balloon? It pops. Our heads are the same way! In my past experience, if I let anything build up, it can be easy to lose control. But that's part of my old life, I have a new life now. It's never too late to turn things around.

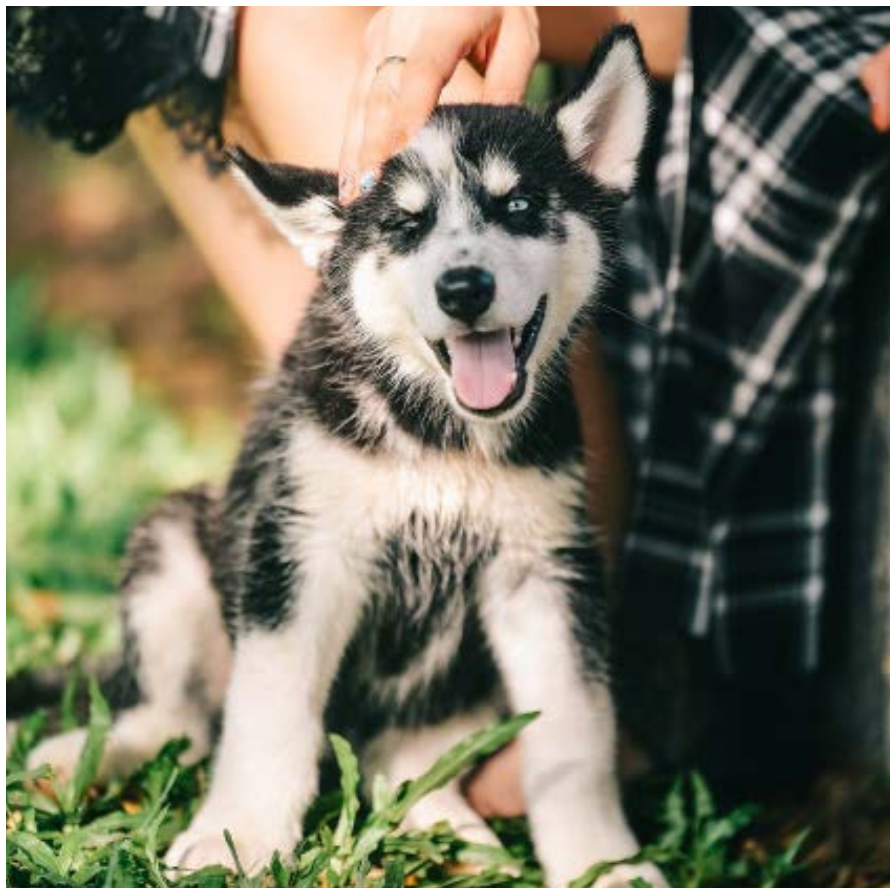
**ABOVE: Brian Townsend PHOTO BY KELLIE WARD**

**Flourish Australia  
Tamworth O'Connell St**

*Kamilaroi and Gomeroi  
Country*

**HASI+**

**7 O'Connell Street  
Tamworth NSW 2340**



## Australia's National Kindness Day 6th of November

### *Kindness Creates Community*

By Grant J Everett

**Loneliness and isolation can have a terrible effect on a person's wellbeing. In 2022, around 15% of Australians reported experiencing social isolation and/or loneliness, with young people aged 15–24 more likely to go through this.**

Thankfully, our local communities provide plenty of options to connect with new, like-minded friends... such as Flourish Australia's many day-to-day living centres! So during National Kindness Day on the 6th of November, don't doubt the impact a smile, a compliment or a kind gesture could have on another person. It costs nothing to be nice!

### Why We Need To Be Kind

Loneliness and social isolation were concerns before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, but their effects have only been exacerbated

in subsequent years. By 2022, social isolation and loneliness were being described as some of the most pressing public health priorities in Australia.

Social isolation and loneliness can cause psychological distress, speeds the onset of dementia, encourages harmful behaviours, and affects your overall satisfaction with life, as well as leading to high blood pressure, impaired immune function, and even premature death.

On the flipside, having frequent, quality social contact is associated with better overall health, as is becoming an active member of your community, caring for others, or performing some kind of paid or volunteer work.

Contrary to popular belief, being in a relationship does NOT guarantee protection from loneliness, particularly for women.

### Online

The role of social media in isolation and loneliness has been discussed for as long as Facebook has existed. See "Addressing the Pitfalls of Social Media" article on page 11 of Panorama's September 2024 issue to read more.

Long story short, depending on how it's used, the relationship between social media and loneliness and isolation can work for some and not for others, though it's clear social media should not be used as a complete replacement for in-person relationships.

### Fur Children

Pets can play an integral part in reducing feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

Pets increase their owner's sense of purpose and meaning, and serve as a protective factor against suicide. Having a pet in your life increases the opportunity to get to know your neighbours by encouraging social interactions. They reduce stress and regulate emotions, which is particularly beneficial during times of crisis. Pets also provide a source of comfort with their warmth and presence, offering a distraction whenever their owners may need it.

Mark West (who will be sharing his recovery story in our very next issue!) gets a lot out of caring for his dog, Ella.

"I spend a lot of time with Ella," Mark said. "Knowing that I need to feed her in the morning gets me out of bed, and I tend to stay up, rather than going back to sleep like I used to. I walk her regularly, and I also take Ella to training classes on Sunday mornings. Soon I'll be taking Ella to perform in a competition. I've also met other dog trainers through this."

So if you feel alone, perhaps ask yourself: how much is that doggy (or kitty) in the window?

### SOURCE:

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/topic-areas/social-isolation-and-loneliness>

**ABOVE:** Fur friends provide an endless source of kindness **PHOTO BY LeP-huong0401 PIXABAY**

# Employment Support

Opportunities to work, learn, and pursue your employment goals.

## Available roles

We will work with you to find a job that fits your needs. Examples of supported employment roles that we have helped people find include the following:



Commercial and Home Cleaning



Packaging Solutions



Mail Delivery Solutions



Ground and Garden Maintenance



Digital Scanning and Secure Document Management



Fleet Vehicle Cleaning

“Having work to go to gets me out of the house every day and motivates me to take better care of myself.

*Julie-Ann, Tamworth*

## We are here to support you

Flourish Australia walks alongside people with complex mental health issues to get back on track and reconnect with the community to live contributing, flourishing lives.

If finding work is one of your recovery goals, we will support you in finding a job that is fair and rewarding. As an Australian Disability Enterprise, we:

- Help people find work
- Meet strict service standards
- Encourage people to achieve their employment goals
- Provide on-the-job training and support

## Come talk to us:

We will help you achieve your employment goals.

📞 1300 779 270 ✉️ [hello@flourishaustralia.org.au](mailto:hello@flourishaustralia.org.au)

🌐 [www.flourishaustralia.org.au](http://www.flourishaustralia.org.au)

📱 Follow us @FlourishAus

We have a range of training and employment opportunities through several programs including:

- DES (Disability Employment Services)
- Supported employment through the NDIS, DECoS, and other government funding
- DECoS (Disability Employment Continuity of Support)
- Support through mental health contracts, including CLS, CPS, and HASI

We have an extensive history of helping people meet their employment aspirations, including transitioning to open employment, receiving support in the workplace, connecting with their community, and more.



Where mental wellbeing thrives

Employment Services



SCAN QR TO FIND OUT MORE