

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

panorama

Monthly Issue **January 2025 #96A**



**Make More of
Your Mindfulness**

**Planning for
"The Pause"**

**NEW Recovery
Games!**

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Where mental wellbeing thrives

About us

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

Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 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

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Contributors include...

Julie Florenz is a Manager at Flourish Australia

Lynda Hennessy ran a popular workshop at TheMHS. Lynda worked at South Eastern Sydney LHD for many years, and is Chairperson of SUPERCRO. She is now a happily retired Nanna.

Jayme Moreland is our Groups & Engagement Coordinator at Salisbury, SA

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: flourishaustralia.org.au/family-and-carers

SCAN QR TO FIND OUT MORE





IN PANORAMA JANUARY 2025

Here are some sunny smiles from Broken Hill to start the new Year. On the left, Maddison Lownds (DES Employment Coordinator, in red) and headspace staff are seen attending Flourish Australia's

stall at an **Employment Expo** in the Silver City last year.

This month we introduce Panorama's Recovery Games Page. Every third month (and every Quarterly print issue) we challenge your Recovery vocabulary.

Many mental health issues are chronic, or life long. For women, the combination of (peri-) **menopause and mental health issues** can be especially confusing. This month, **Julie Florenz*** shares her experience of this, and gives Panorama readers a few pointers.

Also in January we look at an art session at Flourish Australia's Marrickville service and visit Flourish Australia's Seven Hills service. There, we discover how they are **making the most of mindfulness**. Summer is now here and Jayme Moreland,

Support Coordinator from our Salisbury South Australia service, will address ways we can deal with two things we do NOT like about Summer: **Bushfires and Heatwaves**.

Ron Evans talks about how he manages his diabetes, and how it has actually led the former cook to experiment in the kitchen.

One of the great things about Panorama is that it gives us the opportunity to share ideas about recovery with one another. We hope you enjoy this month's offering, and don't forget: Keep Panorama as a part of your own recovery toolbox!

NEXT ISSUE (February 2025) We go to Young NSW to Rock For Recovery and Grant J Everett looks at your rights as a renter.

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



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

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

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

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

Conversations with Art and Music

Working the room with conversation cards

By Warren Heggarty



When Panorama visited Flourish Australia's Marrickville Service to look at people's preparations for the October 17 Buckingham House Art Show, we thought we would bring a set of conversation cards, just in case people were a bit shy. After Warren and Brian demonstrated how to use them, the conversation just didn't stop.

Support workers Natasha and Jess (who had joined us because she wanted to start up an art group of her own) warmed to the Conversation Cards very quickly. Around the room, the paints and coloured pencils were laid out. Some, like Jazmin, worked on elaborate designs, while Raymond practiced mindful colouring.

Ronan and Ron

Ronan was working on a painting of various forms of The Avengers in animal form, with the animal heads arranged in a circle. Ronan

obviously had a background in drawing and painting!

Ronan came first in Visual Arts in Year 7 at Sydney Boys' Selective High School. 'There seemed to be more interest in Music at school, but my Art Teacher encouraged me, so I followed that through until Year 12 and beyond.'

Ronan also does music and likes the idea of stretching himself by applying classical training to popular music. He plays guitar and piano and studied music at TAFE.

Ron, who opted for the colouring book today, used to have a go at the drums, and his former wife is a musician. Despite a generation gap, both Ron (64) and Ronan spoke about music while they worked, centering on a Fleetwood Mac Tribute band due to perform that evening.

The conversation turns to exercise. Ronan cites ping pong and yoga, while Ron was a hard hitter in cricket and a hard kicker in soccer. It was ice skating, however, that led to

Ron meeting his former wife at the once famous Canterbury Ice Rink so many years ago.

'I like the idea of Tai Chi,' says Ron, 'because it's about balance of body and soul. I think it is important, how you present yourself and how you develop rapport with others.'

Ronan puts it more bluntly: 'Humans need social interaction, or we go mad!'

Jazmin

When asked, 'What country would you most like to visit?', Jazmin quickly responded, 'Spain! I love the Spanish zest for life.'

Jazmin learned to speak Spanish and dance the Salsa while she lived in Ecuador for two and a half years. Her former husband was Ecuadorean.

'In Spain, they say I speak like a local!' says Jazmin, who has been a teacher.

The piece she intends to enter into the Buck House Art Show is a



panel bordered by gold leaf featuring a tree in a circle. The interlacing of the boughs of the tree echo symmetrically the roots. So the picture gives a feeling of stability.

And of course, everyone was very keen on showing off their finished works on October 17.

Would you like to know more? Check out "Manage You control, on page 14.

FAR LEFT: Jazmin Doyle. **LEFT:** Ronan working on his furry version of the Avengers, Support Workers Natasha and Jess. **PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY**

**Flourish Australia
Marrickville
Gadigal Country**

6a Rich Street
Marrickville NSW 2204

(02) 9393 9382

Weekday: 8am - 4pm





Make More of Your Mindfulness

SELF-CARE CHARGE UP AT SEVEN HILLS

By Warren Heggarty

Atmosphere: A Buddha. A collection of shells. Mood music. Artworks all around. Candles. Dim lights. And, of course, muffins!

Welcome to Mindfulness Group at Flourish Australia's Seven Hills service! Facilitator Fiona Arakelian has gone to a lot of trouble to ensure that this is not just a 'relaxation' or 'switching off' session, but that it presents mindfulness as:

'... a special kind of awareness of what is happening in the present, in your mind and body, and eternally, around you.'

This is how she describes it in the Mind Moves handout that accompanies the sessions. Mind Moves is divided into twelve weekly sessions. The handout allows participants to work on their mindfulness outside the weekly sessions. It has tips about managing stress, mindful eating, mindful

cooking, mindful moving, chair yoga, self-compassion, gratitude, having a motivation mojo, and incorporating mindfulness into EVERYTHING you do. This includes brushing your teeth and hair, while you're in the shower, making a cuppa, washing up, cleaning, ironing, riding public transport, being outdoors, ALL of these things and more can be opportunities to practice mindfulness. Tammy Irving, who originally tipped us off about this group, did some mindful Rubiks cube puzzle solving while the rest of us gathered about the big red table.

At the core of all of this is that your recovery journey will be better if you PRIORITISE and PLAN your self-care.

Today's session included a 'self-care charge up.' AJ Ugsod (Peer Worker) acted as scribe, writing up the ideas that came from the group as we went along, and there were plenty of suggestions.

Self-care includes the steps taken to prioritise your well-being and care for your mental and physical health. "Charging up" addresses the things that can deplete 'our reservoir of energy and emotional well-being. And if your battery is "flat," you are not in a good position to manage self-care.

The Mindfulness group is very welcoming, and people participate to the degree they feel able. All of the participants were asked if they wanted to share some 'self-care' items, and a few of us did so.

Bekk said, "You need a plan for when you are unwell. Sometimes there is not much you can do, but make sure you know who you can turn to for support."

Lisa said that she had recently had some success in controlling her personal budget. "I feel less stressed now," she reported, "and feel more freedom!"

Those of us who are subject to financial management by the Public Guardian can really benefit from developing a track record showing that they can work effectively within a budget. In this way, we can hope to regain control over our own money again.

Participants also shared some of their goals for the future.

Bekk said: "I want a job, and I'd like a dog. And I'd like to get my driving licence back!"

Lisa said, "I want to get a job in a supermarket. I want to be free of

***Mindfulness is a skill,
and like all skills,
it needs to be practiced.***

debt. And then maybe I'll want to save some money!"

So the participants here were specific about their goals and determined to reach them!

As usual, after the Self Care Charge Up, we looked at positive things in our lives.

Bekk said, "It's not just positive things you need. You need resilience to get through the bad days you are going to have!" She also reported that she found a free "cross training" exercise program she enjoys.

Fiona said that having regular dentist check-ups and doctor check-ups are positive things we can do to help us stay in control of our physical health. Also, there is spiritual self-care, which can take the form

of journaling, saying prayers, or practicing gratitude.

Lisa said that eating well, exercise and sleeping well are all important positive things we can do.

After this came the guided meditation with lights dimmed and sound provided by BRAIN FM! BRAIN FM is a website that provides music and other sonic backgrounds which (it claims) are scientifically proven to increase productivity. Today we did a body scan exercise, being mindful of our breath and relaxing each part of our body one by one.

All of the participants say they keep journals or scrap books that they have been building up week by week. Panorama noticed that the members of the group were very encouraging towards one another, recognising successes and showing support for their struggles. They all had their own views about mindfulness and its role in their lives.

ABOVE: AJ Ugsod and Fiona Arakelian with a diagram of the self care territory covered today. OPPOSITE: Setting the table sets the mood. STYLING BY FIONA ARAKELIAN. PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY



To get a copy of MIND MOVES from BRAIN FM, scan this QR Code.



Awesome Aphorisms and Fun Facts

And now here are some awesome aphorisms and fun facts from Fiona which you might like to experiment with scientifically to see how they work for you!

"Researchers have found that hot baths twice a week can help improve mood."

"Scientific studies link gratitude to many aspects of wellbeing. It has been linked to happiness, resilience, and good mental health."

"Comprehensive research reviews have shown that mindfulness-based programs help with symptoms of anxiety, depression and distress."

"Failure? Failure is growth! Embrace failures as valuable lessons. As we learn from experiences, we find it simpler to rise again and build our efforts to pursue our goals."

For people who access Flourish Australia's services Fiona recommends...

'Have a conversation with your keyworker using the PhysiCards to discuss your physical health.'

"Are you ready to work on our self-care plan? Have a yarn with your keyworker and see what can be added to your Individual Recovery Plan."



Flourish Australia Darug Country

Unit 9, 197 Prospect Hwy,
Seven Hills NSW 2147
(02) 9393 9290
Weekdays 8am - 8pm
Weekend 8am - 4:30pm

RECOVERY GAMES

Panorama's Puzzle Page

Our puzzle page aims not only to entertain and amuse, but to help you retain some of the new words dealing with mental health recovery. We have set out a crossword and a word-finder on the opposite page. On this page we have something special for Panorama.

In KEYWORDS we have some very long and jumbled words which we challenge you to unscramble. This month, all of the answers are to be found in Julie's story "Planning for the Pause". All you need to do is read it and it will become clear. Answers in FEBRUARY MONTHLY online.

Answers to these puzzles will appear in the FEBRUARY monthly online issue on the Flourish Australia website!

Keywords about some women's health issues

Unscramble these words and find them in the story 'Preparing for the Pause'

1. **ISISTRENDOOOME**
A women's health issue
2. **SEXERICE**
Helps recovery every day
3. **ORANJUL**
Helps recovery every day in a different way!
4. **INMARE***
A medical device
5. **SOUPENEMA**
Once called 'the change of life'
6. **RIPE**
A prefix for 5
7. **CISSYDARPH***
A brilliant invention by Flourish Australia!
8. **PILSATE***
A specific system of 2 above



ENVISIONING 2050

Towards a better mental health system

Royal International Convention Centre - Brisbane
2 - 5 September, 2025



For information, questions or guidance, contact your local Flourish Australia service Manager or your Flourish Australia key worker about the opportunity to submit an abstract for consideration. Start now! The deadline with Flourish Australia for abstracts is the 10th of February, 2025.

This offer is open to Flourish Australia people only. People outside of Flourish Australia will need to submit abstracts directly to TheMHS by going to www.themhs.org. Scan the QR Code below to learn everything you need to know about creating and submitting an abstract to be a part of the Flourish Australia delegation.

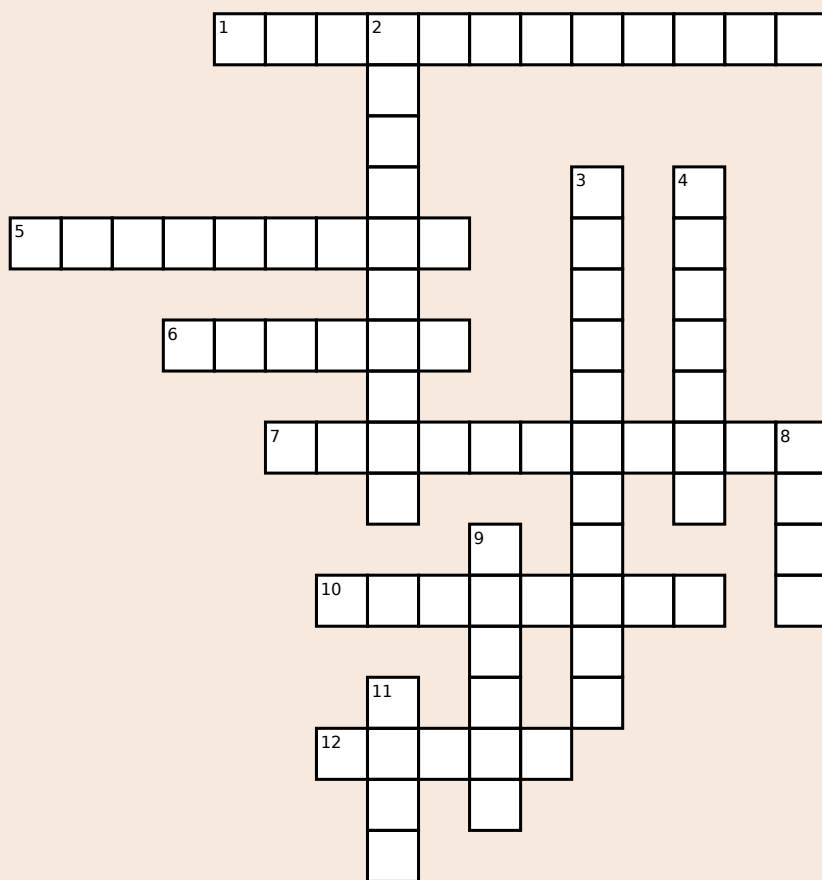
Could YOU present at TheMHS 2025?



Have you thought about presenting at TheMHS Brisbane 2025, the biggest mental health conference in the country, along with others from Flourish Australia?

Do you access Flourish Australia's services? OR are you an Employee of our Community Businesses? OR are you a Staff Member?

Panorama Crossword



Down:

- 2. A way to earn money (E)
- 3. Being around and interacting with people (S)
- 4. Things you enjoy doing (H)
- 8. Every road to recovery begins with a first ____ (S)
- 9. Seeing the world (T)
- 11. The road to recovery can sometimes be ____ (H)

Across:

- 1. Choosing how we live our lives (I)
- 5. Studying (S)
- 6. Goals we aspire to (D)
- 7. Paying attention to your own mind (M)
- 10. Keeps us fit and healthy (E)
- 12. Someone who looks after another (C)

Panorama Find-A-Word

- STUDYING
- RELAXATION
- MEDITATION
- EMPLOYMENT
- HOBBIES
- SOCIALISING
- PASSIONS
- SUPPORT
- POSITIVITY
- WRITING
- FRIENDSHIPS
- MUSIC
- CREATIVITY
- CONTRIBUTING

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



Planning for 'The Pause'

Perimenopause & Mental Health

By Julie Florenz

I had experienced anxiety and depression before, but I had never known anything like the level of anxiety that I experienced in perimenopause. Sometimes I could feel the anger and rage sitting on my chest; other times I felt incredible sadness and an inability to function. It was STAGGERING. My world was made very small and lonely.

I have a diagnosis of ADHD, and I am also neurodivergent. Terry Matlen says, "One little-known side effect of menopause and perimenopause is they make your ADHD symptoms harder to manage." (Matlen: 2023)

Because menopause is something EXPECTED and a normal part of the life cycle, you might expect that there is a lot of knowledge of the interaction of perimenopause and mental health issues out there, at least among doctors. Unfortunately, this not always so. On the opposite page, we will look at perimenopause and menopause in general. But now to continue my own story.

I told doctors that 'this depression I had is DIFFERENT from anything I had ever had before. But doctors, sometimes even specialists, don't know the full story. I ended up having a long diagnosis journey of three to five years before I developed a clear picture of what was happening to me.

The anger I felt was so bad that it pushed people out of my life. I was also troubled by migraines up to 24 days out of every month. And on top of that was the pain of endometriosis, which runs in my family.

In February 2024, I had surgery to try to remove the endometriosis. I thought, "This will fix it, at last something is going to help." To my very great disappointment, the operation was not fully successful, and although I have less of a problem with "endo" it is still painfully present.

I had been working so hard to be well, I had done everything I was supposed to do and yet the surgery result was so disappointing that I began to think "Maybe it is

something else?" I certainly still did not feel like me

It was suggested that a "Mirena" might improve my mood. This is a type of intra-uterine device which releases progesterone slowly over several years (Wood). I had to overcome a deep scepticism of this, but I did try it. Surprisingly, three days after I began to use it on 4th July I began to feel better.

There were a number of other things that helped me on the long "diagnosis journey" and my recovery. Such as...

SUPPORT A friend encouraged me to find doctors who I could trust and who would listen to me. She helped me make appointments and would check on me afterwards. Knowing I wasn't alone made it easier to be an advocate for my health.

JOURNALING I kept a journal of symptoms focusing on migraine pain, enabling me to track a reduction in migraine attacks from 24 a month to 14 a month. I have kept a written record of what DID work and what DID NOT.

PHYSICARDS Inspired by Flourish Australia's Back on Track Health PhysiCards, I began to plan my doctor appointments. I would go through the cards and sort them into the three piles showing what my priorities were. As I have ADHD, I find prioritising difficult, but this was very helpful and I strongly recommend it.

WEIGHT BEARING EXERCISES

I work out 3-5 times a week, focusing on weight lifting and a Pilates Reformer machine. Weight-bearing exercises, like these, are great for supporting bone health during perimenopause and menopause. I also pay close attention to avoiding added sugars and processed foods. You don't even need to go to the gym to do weight training - try filling a backpack with canned food and walking around with it for a simple at-home workout!

After this experience, reaching Menopause, the actual entry into "old age," is looking really attractive to me. No more migraines, I hope!

Above: Julie Florenz sorts the PhysiCards
PHOTO WARREN HEGGARTY



More Information About Perimenopause and Mental Health

By Julie Florenz

Many complex mental health issues persist throughout the lifespan, including menopause. This comes with physical and psychological symptoms of its own. Having pre-existing mental health issues, however, can add a layer of confusion. There is a danger of “diagnostic overshadowing” where a doctor blames all of the problems on one cause and ignores the others. Women need to make ourselves aware of how to navigate this complex situation.

First, some definitions. “Menopause” is technically the first anniversary of your last period. Perimenopause is the period of five to ten years prior to that where the reproductive system “winds down.”

We know that women in the ten-year Perimenopausal period can be prone to new mental health issues - or flare ups of existing ones. Some women with no lived experience can be blindsided by the sudden onset if severe depression in middle age. How can women protect themselves? If issues do emerge, what practical steps can they take?

MANAGE STRESS Practice mindfulness, meditation, or regular exercise like Pilates to reduce stress and improve mood.

STAY CONNECTED Lean on friends, support groups, or a therapist to avoid isolation and maintain emotional well-being.

ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF

Prioritise your needs by seeking medical support, adjusting your lifestyle, and making healthy choices like eating well, limiting processed foods, and maintaining a sleep routine.

Psychiatrist Jayashri Kulkarni, told ABC News that about that half of women around menopause might develop some mental health issues ranging from “brain fog” to depression, anxiety and memory problems. Kulkarni also says, “There is a high rate of suicide in women aged 45-54 years (coinciding with perimenopause). This may be related to the biological changes associated with menopause. Perimenopausal depression may present with symptoms that differ from those of typical depression.” (Kulkarni) This was certainly my experience.

If you develop severe depression with suicidal ideation at ANY age, you need support. If you develop such problems around menopause, it should not be dismissed as “just part of the menopause.” Ultimately, you need support.

According to Mary Claire Haver, “Much of the lack of treatment for menopausal symptoms is a result of the inadequately designed, evaluated and reported results of research conducted by the 2002 Women’s Health Initiative, which created panic among patients and physicians alike.” The message was that hormone therapy posed more risks than benefits for all women. (Haver, 2023)

Sophie Behrman and Clair Crockett wrote in the British Journal of Psychiatry Bulletin calling for clinicians to be “proactive” in asking questions of women in this situation. (Behrman & Crockett, 2023) Better still, women will be best served if they can advocate for themselves.

ABOVE: These women are dedicated to weight bearing exercise which is why they have stuffed their backpacks with several kilos of groceries. IMAGE BY SILVIA FROM PIXABAY

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Scan this QR Code to see Flourish Australia's Back On Track Health PhysiCards

LET'S DO LUNCH WITH MATT CARUANA

By Warren Heggarty with Doris Chen

The "Let's do Lunch" webinar is a highlight of Mental Health Month at Flourish Australia. 2024's theme, "Let's Talk About It," encourages open conversations about mental health. As our guest presenter, we were proud to welcome Matt Caruana, a renowned athlete and a mental health advocate and ambassador for Lifeline Australia.

Imagine being in your prime, with everything to look forward to when life is interrupted by a catastrophic injury. At 16, Matt survived a seven-story fall that completely severed his spinal cord and left him paraplegic. Instead of giving in to despair, he used this experience to fuel his personal growth and advocacy.

One of Matt's mentors, Keith Sagers, suggested he take up wheelchair basketball. It didn't seem ideal, "a twenty-one year old training with twelve year-olds," but Matt discovered it was fun, and it helped him by increasing his mental wellness and decreasing his degree of disability. Even though his spine was beyond repair, Matt as a whole was capable of moving forward.

"If I hadn't chosen to have conversations about mental health and to support myself in terms of recovery, to be honest I don't think I'd be here anymore."

Matt says that when you support a person facing serious challenges, it is important to show you care. One way you can do that is by noticing things about the other person and



reflecting them. For example, if you notice an outgoing person becoming quiet or irritable.

Matt says he has received support from all quarters, men, women, and even kids! (Seems those twelve year olds were good value after all!) Matt recalls that he was given a guitar in hospital (the two broken wrists didn't help) and he really focused on developing that skill as well as doing his physio.

In February 2024, Matt proudly represented Australia with the Emerging Rollers in a wheelchair basketball tournament against Japan. As a player for the Manly Wheel Eagles and a previous ambassador for Basketball NSW, Matt promotes diversity and inclusion, ensuring everyone has a place on the court.

Matt also holds the Guinness World Record for the most towel pull-ups in one minute, proving that personal challenges can be overcome through determination.

"Through my partnership with 'Transform Hope Thru Action,' we have a vision for humanity that

is centred around two words: Community, Unity."

"Since the Let's Do Lunch webinar, I've transitioned from Wheelchair Basketball to Para Climbing as my main sport, and I'm honoured to say that I was nominated to join the Australian Para Climbing Team for 2025. Through my involvement in the sport, I'd like to highlight how nothing is out of reach when the only way is up."

Matt's journey is featured in John Brogden's 2024 book "Profiles in Hope." This story serves as a powerful reminder of the strength of the human spirit, and offers inspiration to those facing adversity.

Matt's presentation was wrapped up by a 20 minute question and answer session facilitated by Flourish Australia's Chief Operating Officer Susan McCarthy.

ABOVE: Matt Caruana working out with Ekso, the 'exoskeleton' device. PHOTOS BY LIFELINE AUSTRALIA

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Workshopping Dreams Unleashing Creativity at TheMHS

By Lynda Hennessy (as told to Grant J Everett)

I attended TheMHS Conference 2024 to run a workshop called “No Suppression - A Group of Creatives at Macquarie Hospital Finding Common Ground and Celebrating Difference” with Paula Hanlon, a director of Flourish Australia, and Judith Nicholas.

This workshop was based on the work I’ve done with the No Suppression creative group since Paula Hanlon and Linda Mizzi founded it 13 years ago. We had 90 minutes, which was plenty of time, and because we had a really good turnout, we could run multiple groups at once. It’s really hard to get a workshop approved at TheMHS, so I was glad it turned out so good.

Paula ran a poetry table, where she asked people to write a few lines, and then put their contributions together into one big poem. It sounded as though they were having fun with it. Judith’s group did journaling.

My part of the workshop involved The Deck of Dreams, something we created at No Suppression by asking people to paint their dreams and write some words to go with them. We had these masterpieces printed onto cards, and ended up with 52 of them, a whole deck. They’re just beautiful. The printer did a fantastic job.

For my Dream workshop, I spread all the cards on the table, and asked people to select one that might relate to their own dreams, and explain why they picked that card. People were free to take more than one, and one girl ended up with four.

We had some good feedback at the end. A number of people said this workshop was the highlight of the entire conference!

Expression, Not Suppression

At No Suppression we meet on the first Saturday of the month to sing songs, read poetry, and we even have a few stand-up comedians.

We’ve been allocated a nice room at Macquarie Hospital with access to a kitchen. We used to meet at Cornucopia at Gladesville Hospital, which has since closed down, to perform songs and plays in the café there.

We’ve received awards for our work with No Suppression, and just last year we were nominated for a state award. The recognition was nice! They served us a lovely dinner, and we had some amazing photos taken.

The Alliance

I checked out a few talks at TheMHS. One of the most exciting was a presentation from the new Mental Health Consumer Alliance, the national peak body for consumers (called “the Alliance” for short). They’re going to employ a consumer worker in each state, and I hope they’ll be fighting for the consumer movement.

Priscilla Brice, the CEO of Being, was recently appointed as the CEO of the Alliance about a year ago now.

There is also a peak body for carers called Carers Peak, and I think it’s overdue for peer workers to have some sort of board or committee.

Integrated Care: A Reality?

The highlight of the conference for me was a seminar about an integrated care pilot at Hornsby Hospital that aims to bring the health sectors together for people in crisis, so your GP, psychiatrist, psychologist, and mental health workers can speed things up to deal with issues on the day, particularly if a person is in distress. It’s amazing stuff, and we need to support this pilot.

Afterwards, I said to the presenter, psychiatrist Dr Paul Fung, “This is the sort of service I’ve been looking for since 1994 when I first got unwell.” After all these years, something I’ve been campaigning for may finally be happening.

Scan this QR Code to visit the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance website.





MANAGE YOUR DIABETES

ENJOYING POPCORN & CAPPUCCINOS

By Warren Heggarty

On a visit to the optometrist, Ron discovered that he had thin cataracts on his eyes. It was not a serious problem and it has been caught before it got worse, but it is one of the things that you might need to look out for if you have diabetes.

Ron, 64, who accesses Flourish Australia's Buckingham House service, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes about six years ago. 'I have a daily routine that I follow to keep my blood sugars in balanced.'

'In the morning, at lunch and at night I have insulin. Sometimes I am wayward and leave out lunch. Then for overnight, I take a slow acting form of insulin that keeps me going until morning.'

'I don't miss out on treats. I love popcorn. All popcorn is, is little kernels of corn that have been popped open. So there is nothing much too them. Of course, if you add butter and salt, it might be a different story!'

Ron showed Panorama an App that

he has on his phone which can measure blood sugar level. Ideally, Ron should balance his medication (insulin) with his eating so that his blood sugar remains relatively constant. This is how it would be if he did not have diabetes.

In reality, his sugar levels go up and down a bit. He showed us a 'sine wave' which recorded the levels over few days.

'There is an upper limit and a lower limit. As long as I keep that curving line between the limits, it is OK even if it wiggles a bit.'

'For example, if my sugar level drops below 6, I could get the shakes. I get sweaty and shaky and start to lose balance.'

We asked what happens then. 'Well I have a cappuccino contingency. I find that having a cappuccino restores the sugar to a better level and I'm usually right after that.'

Well, that's a great reason to have a coffee! But by the same token, too MUCH sugar is also a problem. The ideal is a balance between sugar and insulin.

What can people do to manage their diabetes- or even prevent it in some cases?

'I found the biggest benefit for me was quitting alcohol, I also quit any other chemicals as well, because I found that they all tended to give me more trouble than benefit! Once I had given it all up I never looked back!'

We asked if it was hard to manage controlling your food intake so rigorously. How do you do it? Do you have hobbies to divert your attention.'

'Well, apart from my experience with car detailing and vehicle restorations, I'm also a cook' says Ron. 'I worked for years as a kitchen hand and a cook. The way I look at it having diabetes means that I get to experiment with dishes. Plus I have a dietitian who helps by guiding me what to eat and what not to eat.'

'having diabetes means that I get to experiment with dishes'

ABOVE: Ron relies on having a good daily routine but also gets support from clinicians and, of course, Flourish Australia PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

Back On Track Health



The Editor of Diabetic Living (Are publications) Alix Davis says. "Every five minutes another Aussie is diagnosed with diabetes. When the shock subsides, they need to be empowered to manage -or reverse- diabetes. We inspire them to do just that.' Diabetes is even MORE common among people with mental health issues than the general public.

Alix Davis mentions 'reversing' diabetes. How do you achieve a remission of Type 2 diabetes? According to Diabetes Australia "The most common ways people have achieved remission is by achieving substantial weight loss following very intensive dietary changes....." Although most people do not achieve actual remission, the attempt brings its own rewards.

To people who use Flourish Australia's PhysioCards, you can find links to sources of expert information on the backs of the cards! (you can find their address of Diabetes Australia on the back of the Diabetes PhysioCard by the way)

Ron's story on the opposite page demonstrates how using PhysioCards might benefit you!

From his story we can see that Ron had three three main health concerns

#26 Eyesight
#15 Diabetes
#24 Alcohol (until he quit)

And indirectly you could include #13 Diet and Nutrition. These four things are all related to one another through diabetes.

According to the Kiziltoprak et al in the World Journal of Diabetes, diabetes causes a wide range of eye problems and Ron's problem, cataract, is the most common of them. If untreated, blindness can result but fortunately treatment for cataracts is now common, effective and inexpensive.

Every person is different and so Ron's treatment routine will be made to suit him. One thing that really suited him was getting rid of alcohol from his diet. And as we have seen he takes a positive view of

his dietary restrictions, seeing them as an invitation to experiment.

Other people living with metabolic syndrome, of which diabetes is one component, may refer to other PhysioCards. They might find they have questions about #My energy levels; #My Legs #My Feet, #My weight and some other things as well. Now if you have the appetite for more personal stories, the following QR code will lead you to the Diabetes Australia web site.



Scan this QR Code to see Flourish Australia's Back On Track Health PhysioCards

Sources: Kiziltoprak, Hasan et al (2019) "Cataract in Diabetes Mellitus" World Journal of Diabetes, Mar 15; 10(3): 140–153.

BE PREPARED! HAVE A PLAN!

Stay informed about bushfires

By Jayme Moreland

In 2019 and 2020, Panorama ran stories on how our lives are effected by bushfires, by smoke haze and by severe heat. Some parts of the country have had cooler and wetter Summers than usual since then, and that makes it more likely there will be a return to a "normal" blazing Summer.

People living in rural and remote areas are most at risk of bushfires, but people living in urban-fringe areas (where suburbia meets bush land) can be affected, too. Being prepared, having a plan and staying informed can prevent or minimise damage to property and injury or loss of life. Let's go through the risk elements we need to be wary of...

Embers

Embers can be just as, if not more destructive, than an actual fire. An ember is a glowing fragment from a fire, the remnants of a tree or grass that is still hot or "glowing." Embers are small and light, so they can be picked up by wind and blown several kilometres ahead of the main bushfire, to create new fires.

A bushfire can still be a risk to people living in the suburbs (where people may not consider a bushfire to be a problem) as embers can fly

into leaf-filled gutters, gardens, or gaps in the roof where there is an abundance of flammable material.

Smoke

Bushfire smoke can be blown many kilometres (including interstate!) and can cause eye irritation and respiratory issues. Bushfire smoke can also contain burnt toxic material, so inhaling it should be avoided. Staying inside and keeping doors and windows closed can help to minimise smoke entering your home. If necessary, consider wearing a mask (P2/N95) or other cloth mask or face covering you have available to reduce inhaling the smoke if you are affected by it.

Radiant heat

Radiant heat is the heat felt from a fire, and it can start new fires in combustible material before the flames reach it. Trees, plants and grasses are flammable and contribute to the spread of a bushfire. However, some plants can help slow a fire from spreading or reduce damage to your home: these plants store more water than others, and this either prevents them from burning or slows the rate of fire spread. They can also absorb the radiant heat from a bushfire or capture embers, preventing them from impacting and burning your home and other structures.

More information on the types on these types of plants can be found on the following websites:

Fire
Resistant
Plants,
Australian
Plants
Society



Why
Choose Native
Plants?
State Flora
website.



Know the signs: the Australian Fire Danger Rating System

The Australian Fire Danger Rating System provides a nationally consistent and simplified system of four main rating levels. These levels provide advice on what action to take during the fire danger season. The Australian Fire Danger Rating System does not show the likelihood of a fire starting, but rather the risk and level of action to take should one occur in that area.

The four main levels are:

- Moderate (Green): Plan and prepare
- High (Yellow): Prepare to act
- Extreme (Orange): Take action now to protect your life and property.
- Catastrophic (Red): For your survival, leave bushfire risk areas.
- A fifth White bar indicates no rating for days where no proactive action is required. This does not suggest a fire cannot happen, but it's likely to have little impact on the community if it does.

Knowing the fire danger rating for your area can help to inform your level of preparedness. More information on the Australian Fire Danger Rating System can be found on their website:

<https://afdrs.com.au/>

ABOVE: Radiant heat can cause new fires to break out before the visible flames make contact. PHOTO BY TIM OWERS, TUMUT NSW (2020) OPPOSITE: Windblown embers can ignite leaves and other flammable substances far away from the fire front. This was Nowra NSW around New Year 2020 PHOTO BY ADAM MUIR

PREPARATION TIPS:



Create a Bushfire Survival Plan. If you live with other people, involve them in the creation of the plan. Contact your local fire and emergency service organisation for more information on creating a Bushfire Survival (or evacuation) Plan.

Reduce or remove flammable material (anything that can catch alight and spread a fire) such as grass (particularly if it is long and dry) and other vegetation within 20 metres of your houses/ structures (sheds).

Trim tree branches that are overhanging the house/ structures.

Clean gutters of leaves and other material that embers may ignite.

Trim branches away from houses and other structures.

Secure any flammable liquids (petrol cans, aerosols) and don't store them in the open.

If available, check if your home and contents (and other asset) insurance covers fire, including bushfire.

Seal areas where embers may enter the structure (such as eaves and under-floor areas and roof ridge cap, gutter line and fascia boards).

Ensure emergency services can access your property. If you live in a rural or remote area, Firefighters

may need to drive onto your property to fight the fire. Fire trucks require 4.5-metre-wide driveways/ trails to safely access a property. Trees and shrubs may need to be trimmed.

Prepare for mains power and water outages, as they can occur when bushfires damage infrastructure, or if service providers proactively turn off power to prevent downed power lines from starting a bushfire. Power outages can last for a long period of time, from hours to days in regional and remote areas. Mains water can also be isolated.

Minimise the number of times you open a fridge or freezer during a power outage. Keeping it closed will help to keep food cooler for longer, preventing it from spoiling.

If you have a laptop or other mobile device (tablet) and your mobile phone can connect to it, it could become a last resort battery charger for your mobile phone.

Have activities that don't require power to keep you occupied, such as reading books,

Keep windows covered (blinds or curtains drawn) to reduce the Summer heat warming up the house.

If you require medical devices to live, such as CPAP, BiPAP or home dialysis, have a plan for moving

to another place that has power or obtain an alternative power source (generator) for equipment. If necessary, contact your GP or local health service for advice.

Mains water may not be available during a bushfire. Have a supply of drinking water available, enough for each person with you, to last for several days.

Roof mounted sprinkler systems in bushfire risk areas with an independent water system (not using mains water) can reduce the radiant heat from a bushfire and prevent embers taking hold. Contact an irrigation specialist or local fire and emergency service organisation for more information on appropriate and recommended sprinkler systems, pumps and independent water supply.

And finally, if you are travelling through areas of high bushfire risk, knowing bushfire safer places and having a plan can help you be better prepared in an emergency. Before undertaking your journey, notify one or more people when you will leave, what time you're expected to arrive at your intended destination, and the route you will take. Keep them updated regularly with your current location and any changes to your intended arrival time. Ask them to check in with you if you don't notify them when you have arrived at your destination on time.

FEELING HOT! HOT! HOT!

Preparing for extreme heat

By Jayme Moreland

Sunshine, warm days, beach trips – Summer is here! But severe heatwaves can pose a health risk to many of us. Preparing for extreme heat can help to make the summer months more comfortable.

Hot temperatures during the day do not make a heatwave alone. Overnight temperatures are a significant contributing factor. If overnight temperatures cool, it allows people to recover from the high daytime temperatures. If the daytime temperature is high and the night temperature remains high, you don't get a break from it. The Bureau of Meteorology has a formula for heatwaves that considers not only temperature, but the number of days and the average temperature at a location. The tiring effects of heatwaves on people can last for several days after temperatures have dropped.

Extreme heat can cause people to experience heat stress/heatstroke, and can impact infrastructure, utilities (power supply) and public transport.

Australia has a national warning system with three heatwave intensity levels: Low Intensity heatwaves are frequent in Summer and most people can cope. In Severe heatwaves, vulnerable people with medical conditions may be at risk. In rare Extreme heatwaves, anyone, even healthy people, can be at risk if they are not

careful, especially outdoor workers or people who are homeless.

Here are some of the things you can do to keep comfortable and safe during extreme heat.

- Be informed on temperature forecasts and warnings issued by the Bureau of Meteorology
- If you need to go out, do it early in the morning to avoid the hottest part of the day.
- Cool where you live by using curtains, blinds, air conditioning, fans, or using a spray bottle with cold water in it.
- Stay hydrated with water. Avoid alcohol and energy drinks, which can dehydrate you further.
- Check on pets and bring them inside if possible, or ensure they have water and shade or a cool place to rest.
- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing, a hat with a brim and sunscreen when outside.
- If you are unable to stay cool at home, consider visiting places with air-conditioning such as libraries, community centres, or shopping centres.
- Check in with neighbours, friends and family and provide support if able.

Power outages can occur during times of extreme heat, from excessive power demand or damage from bushfires. In rural areas they can extend for days. See the article "Be Prepared: Have

A Plan" in this issue for tips about how to deal with power outages.

Other Summer risks

During Summer, creeks and waterways can become dry with the heat drying and reducing surrounding grass and scrub. Summer rains can produce flash floods from sudden downpours where the water cannot soak into the soil quick enough. If flash flooding may be a risk in your area, consider creating an emergency/evacuation plan to a safer place, so you are prepared when it does occur.

During Winter or periods of rainfall, trees absorb water and swell. During Summer, trees dry and this can cause tree branches to crack and fall with little notice. Seeking shade under a tree may seem like the best option to stay cool, but there is potential for significant injury or death from resting or camping under trees during Summer.

Extreme heat can be a health risk, but with a little preparation, staying informed of the weather and extreme heat forecast, Summer can be an enjoyable time of the year.

PICTURE: Dolls Point NSW; If you are lucky enough to be near cool water, remember to protect yourself from sunburn! PHOTO WARREN HEGGARTY



TAYLOR BY CANDLELIGHT A SHOW TO PLEASE EVERYONE?

By Warren Heggarty

You need to get out more, right? Don't we all. Yet without even trying we can find 1001 reasons NOT to bother. So how about doing something impossible? First, we take two people, one a Swiftie and the other a Classical music buff, and send them into The City to find a show to please them both. And next, we take three blind people to watch a play about 20,000 people acquiring a serious disability on orders of the Emperor!

Ladies and Gentlemen, presenting the Phoenix Collective String Quartet in "Taylor Swift by Candlelight" at the Sydney Masonic centre, 4th October 2024. Both Annabella (a Swiftie) and Miles (who prefers Bartok) had a good time. Annabella recognised every song, and bopped along through more than twenty of Taylor's masterpieces.

Miles was intrigued by how the material was successfully adapted to this new medium. One problem was that pop vocal lines rendered on strings - without words - can sound a bit samey. As one of the quartet members herself admitted after the show, "Some songs go better than others in the new medium."

The Audience lapped it up! The candlelight made for a VERY romantic setting, but that didn't stop a fair measure of delighted screaming for encores. You could also have your picture taken in a special candlelight grotto. Miles thought he saw a lady go down on her knee and propose to another lady before the photographer.

Plan Carefully

Annabella and Miles travelled from the Western Suburbs to catch the 8:30pm show. Fortunately, Annabella has an app developed for people with disabilities that came in rather

handy. Although the concert was only 75 minutes long, finishing by 9:45pm, they knew they'd only just make it to the last bus of the evening.

Unfortunately, their bus had to be diverted because of an emergency operation, and the driver forgot to tell the passengers. Miles is lucky to have full vision, but Annabella knew about the diversion because of her app! Fortunately, Miles and Annabella were able to swap anecdotes about storms in the meantime, as both of them are avid storm chasers.

Money is a real obstacle to nights out, don't we know it? The tickets for this concert ranged from \$62 to \$100. Fortunately, both Annabella and Miles are in open employment. However, if you are on a pension and can't afford shows like this, try the Conservatorium of music in Sydney, which has lunchtime concerts for a "gold coin donation." They are well worth while.

Action you can hear!

Another show that Annabella saw was a play at the Riverside Theatre in Parramatta. She went with a couple of vision impaired friends and found that not only did they get front row, but there was audio description as well. Yes, some theatres have a person off-stage who organises a description of the ACTION on stage, which if you cannot see, is sometimes difficult to catch. Annabella says a lot of theatres will organise this if you ask.

The play, called "Guards at the Taj" was written by Rajiv Joseph and directed by Bali Padda. It was based on the myth that once construction of the Taj Mahal was complete, the Emperor Shah Jahan ordered that all 20,000 people who built this Wonder of the World, would be mutilated so that they could never build anything more beautiful. That sounds a bit grim, but Annabella reports that it was actually full of humour.

Now it's your turn. Tell us about your nights out at the footy or movies or wherever. Tell us, the good bits, the bad bits, and the transport successes and failures. Because we all need to get out more!

ABOVE: The Phoenix Collective String Quartet in action. PHOTO BY WARREN HEGGARTY

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