PART B

Additional information about the entry

1. **Evidence of a significant contribution to the field of mental health on a local, state or national level.**

Growing the peer workforce is a policy objective of both the Commonwealth and State mental health policy. Whilst we have been active participants on the development and delivery of the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work, we understood that something more needed to be done to actively pursue growth in the peer workforce – and that we needed to model an innovative approach if anything was to change.

The contribution of Flourish Australia's *Why not a Peer Worker? Strategy* is significant, as it challenges organisational cultures and norms that otherwise militate against growing the peer workforce. It challenges and overturns myths and assumptions that Peer Workers are unreliable, cannot undertake and deliver significant and important supports to people with complex support needs.

In an environment of workforce challenges, accessing the significant and unique resources of the lived experience community to become peer workers is an important part of the overall workforce strategy for the mental health sector. The growing body of research about the efficacy of mental health peer work provides a strong rationale for pursuing the growth of the peer workforce, of embedding them in support teams, and reaping the benefits for both people with lived experience, organisational learning and development, and savings to acute care/hospital based services.

Through talking about our experience publically, nationally and internationally at mental health and work conferences we have raised the profile of mental health peer work and directly challenged other organisations to reflect on their own employment practices that may be failing to support growth and high professional standards in the peer workforce. Our work in growing the peer workforce has been recognised in the development of the Mental Health Commission of NSW's innovative online Peer Work Hub.

The national and international interest *Why not a Peer Worker? Strategy* has generated is notable. We have delivered papers at many conferences (see appendix) and published about it in our organisational magazine, Connections (Winter 2016):
https://www.flourishaustralia.org.au/connections-6-winter-2016.

We were recently invited to contribute to a special edition of the journal, *Mental Health and Social Inclusion* focussing on Peer Work alongside Professor Larry Davidson, and accepted to present a paper on the project at the Nottingham Recovery Conference late in 2017.

The *Why not a Peer Worker? Strategy* has led to Flourish Australia becoming the employer of the largest peer workforce in Australia.

2. Evidence of innovation and/or recognised best practice.

a. Importance of Peer Work

The positive impact of connection with peers has been shown to improve the continuum of care, provide positive role models of recovery and strengthen connections to community[i] and decrease hospital use. Chinman et al 2001[ii] showed a 50% reduction in rehospitalisation when accessing peer services compared to the general outpatient population; and a saving of over 300 bed days in the first 3 months of operation of a peer service was reported by Craig et al 2004[iii].

The Implementing recovery through Organisational Change (ImROC) program based in the United Kingdom recognises the important place of mental health peer work in as a best practice in mental health services (Repper & Carter 2011[iv]; Repper et al 2013[v]). The *Why not a Peer Worker? Strategy* demonstrates the best practice posited by ImROC.

Flourish Australia's *Why not a Peer Worker? Strategy* focussed organisaitonal thinking and resources to achieving such outcomes for people accessing it services.

b. Innovation

The *Why not a Peer Worker? Strategy* demonstrates the power of innovation and challenging organisational norms and practices. The innovative approach was founded upon a reflection of organisational values and commitment to the contribution of lived experience to mental health organisations. However, it also challenged assumptions around recruitment and the replacement of like for like. Conversations with managers led to consideration of the roles, responsibilities and competencies for front line positions and differences between what mental health workers and peer workers could do.

c. Lived Experience Leadership

Lived experience leadership underpinned the Why not peer worker? Strategy. Founded upon policy work undertaken by Janet Meagher AM, then General Manager, Inclusion, Valli Beattie, then Manager, Workforce Development and Peter Farrugia, Manager, Peer Workforce, it was carried to the next level and operationalised through the leadership of Fay Jackson, General Manager, Inclusion.

d. Co-design

True to the organisation's longstanding commitment to co-design, the development of this new approach was conceived and driven by people with lived experience. But it needed to include everyone, especially managers who were responsible for recruitment, team members who had to reflect on the value of Peer Work in their workplace and the supports they provided and Peer Workers themselves who worked with others to create a more holistic support team.

e. Continuous Improvement

The strategy was initiated first and foremost in order to continually improve the services Flourish Australia offers to people accessing our services. The decision was also made in order to model hope to people who access services and to our Flourish Australia staff and managers. A large number of Peer Workers also improve the

inclusivity and richness of our workplace, leads to building stronger communities, models exceptional service design and delivery to other services.

f. Employment opportunities
An added bonus is that people who have a personal lived experience of mental health issues and recovery are able to gain employment, however they must also be able to deliver high quality service and support to people accessing Flourish Australia.

We also desired to model to other services and workplaces in every field of industry that people with lived experience of mental health issues and recovery are capable of working in highly effective and professional manner, in full time positions, are a value add because of their ability to connect with people, their drive to go the extra lengths to achieve the desired outcomes, often creative and lateral thought processes, problem solving abilities, and their "you can do it. I'm here to support you. let's achieve this together" attitude. They give a workplace the leading edge.

This was not just a new policy, it was a fundamental change in thinking and practice. But now that work has been undertaken it has led to a change in organisational culture to become "the way we do things around here".

This approach to growing the peer workforce has gained attention nationally and internationally. We were recently invited to contribute to a special edition of the journal, *Mental Health and Social Inclusion* focussing on Peer Work, and accepted to present a paper on the project at the Nottingham Recovery Conference late in 2017.

3. **Evidence of participation of mental health consumers, in the planning, implementation and evaluation as relevant.**

Flourish Australia's development if the peer workforce is founded upon a history of employing Peer Workers in community businesses in one of our foundation member organisations, Psychiatric Rehabilitation Australia. In 2012, we published a Position Paper, *Embracing Inclusion: Employment of people with lived experience* written by three consumers employed by the organisation at the time – Janet Meagher AM, Valli Beattie and Peter Farrugia. This paper set out our strategic commitment to growing both the lived experience workforce and the peer workforce.

In addition, we published in 2014 our Recovery Action Framework which provides guidance about our recovery orientation across the organisation, through 8 Organisational accountabilities. The RAF provides a supportive framework for the development of the peer workforce and was co-produced with people who access Flourish Australia's services, staff with lived experience and other staff.

Based on that organisational commitment Fay Jackson, a leading mental health consumer, our General Manager, Inclusion and Deputy Mental Health Commissioner of NSW, led the development of the *Why not a Peer Worker? Strategy* Fay led discussions at the Senior Leadership Team level, with senior managers and managers, but was also assisted by the input of people with lived experience on staff who strongly supported this new approach and such a public commitment to making it happen.

After a great deal of experience in managing Peer Workers in mental health services and after conducting research both within Australia and internationally the Flourish Australia Inclusion team, took part in a number of crucial conversations about increasing our Peer Workforce. These conversations took place between individuals and within meetings at all levels of our service from the Board to the frontline staff. People accessing our services were also extensively consulted. These conversations and consultations led to a decision to substantially increase Flourish Australia's Peer Worker numbers and diversity.

Our Peer Workers are not an add on, they are fundamental to our work. Kathy is one of them:

> In 2012, Kathy was referred to Flourish Australia where her support worker asked her if she'd like to join the Pre-Employ program. After completing the course, Kathy was placed in a reception position where she started to mentor others in the computer skills she'd learnt. Growing in confidence and ability, Kathy successfully applied for and secured a full-time role, her first since her mental health issues had emerged.

> Today, Kathy is a Peer Worker at Flourish Australia in Surry Hills and Harris Park Community Businesses.

> *"When we have a new intake of employees at Harris Park, I'll always tell them I have a lived experience of a mental health issue and not to be frightened as you're not the only one"*
> **Kathy Te Nuku, Peer Worker, Flourish Australia**

> As a Peer Worker Kathy is an integral part of our team encouraging people who access our services to think about their recovery journey and where they want to head. Using her own lived experience purposefully Kathy provides important support and inspiration to people. This includes behaviours, recovery conversations; to help people think about their hopes and dreams, and how Flourish Australia can support them along the way.

> Kathy's empathy and understanding is evident in every interaction she has with Flourish Australia.

> *" I am very, very proud at how far I've come and am still eager to learn more so I am able to further support people with mental health issues as I've been there, and I know what it feels like and now I want to support others as much as I can"*
> **Kathy Te Nuku, Peer Worker, Flourish Australia**

> *"Initially the decision to become a Peer Worker with Flourish was to be able to extend my support worker role. The idea to be able to share my experiences with people whom access our services to be able to support them more in their recovery appeared to be more advantageous within the work involved in Peer Work. In becoming a Peer Worker, it appeared in a way that could extend my role in working for Flourish Australia and to in a better position to be able to support others in their recovery journey. The main 'good thing'*

about being a Peer Worker, is being able to relate in a way of shared experiences in living with mental illness. Another example of the advantage of Peer Work is I have found an unending wealth in my local team at HASI General of sometimes referring to my Peer knowledge to help and guide my other team members in also supporting people whom access our services."

Glenn Botfield Senior Peer Worker, Flourish Australia

4. Evidence of Partnerships and Linkages (collaboration for continuity between organisations).

Flourish Australia is a strong advocate for growing the mental health peer workforce. This has included numerous presentations to organisations and at conferences about how we have gone about doing so.

This includes being invited to contribute to a special edition of *Mental Health and Social Inclusion* (In Press, Vol 21(3)) specifically talking about the Why not a Peer Worker? Strategy.

Our work has been recognised by the Mental Health Commission of NSW who included our work on the Commission's Peer Work Hub. We have also discussed our approach with an NHS Trust in the United Kingdom and used it in our work building the capacity of other organisations, such as the Forensic Hospital at Malabar, and units in Hunter New England and Western Sydney LHDs, for the engagement of Peer Workers.

We have actively supported the development and delivery of the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work, through providing trainer time for courses run by the Mental Health Co-ordinating Council. We support Peer Workers to pursue the Certificate IV.

5. Verification and evaluation of the program's effectiveness
The verification of the effectiveness of the program is the significant growth in the number of peer workers employed. Due to the focus the policy placed on this issue across the organisation there was relatively rapid growth from 22 Peer Workers in 2014 to 145 in 2017. This growth has been through new positions being created through new funded programs, as well through staff, with seeking to have their front-line positions reclassified as a Peer Worker position, subject to the usual selection criteria.

The growth of the peer workforce has occurred across a geographically dispersed service network. Whilst policy and strategy has been set centrally, the work of implementing the policy has been the work of many senior managers and teams across NSW and South East Queensland. It is their commitment to the policy that has brought it to life, and ensured Peer Workers are integral parts of front line teams.

Importantly, effectiveness can also be measured by the people who seek to become Peer Workers. We constantly here from new Peer Workers that they are attracted to the organisation because of this policy.

The Why Not a Peer Worker? Strategy has helped front line services realise immeasurable benefits for all staff throughout the organisation. It has deepened our understanding of peer work and its contribution to our work and informed a review of a range of policies and systems. This has included supervision in the form of the My Plan utilising reflective practice, and Personal Support Plans incorporating reasonable adjustments for all staff. Why not a Peer Worker? has led to positive outcomes in the engagement of people accessing our services and their recovery journeys.
Aidan Conway, General Manager, Operations, Flourish Australia

Conclusion
The *Why Not a Peer Worker? Strategy* has been a whole-of-service and community collaboration promoting the importance of having people with a lived experience of a mental health issue.

When this project started Flourish Australia employed 22 Peer Workers, now we are the leading organisation of a successful and professional Peer Workforce within the Australian Mental Health sector. Peer Workers, managers, staff and people who access our services have had positive experiences and find that the strategy has enhance service delivery, and importantly, people's recovery and wellbeing.

Peer Workers have had a positive influence and add great value to Flourish Australia's operations, staff, people who access our services, families and carers. The *Why not a Peer Worker? Strategy* has had a far reaching, positive influence on other services across Australia and internationally - and the benefits have reached out to people who access our services, families and carers and the communities in which we work.

The *Why not a Peer Worker? Strategy* has laid down a challenge for all other services and has positively started community conversations about employing people with a lived experience in all fields of employment.

Referees

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Appendix of Support Material

How Flourish Australia grew its Peer Workforce
Flourish Australia has a clearly stated organisational commitment, and organisational 'culture' that identifies our workforce as leaders in person-led recovery-oriented and strengths based support services. We have embedded the importance of the lived experience and the value of peer work through all levels of the organisation. Our journey into establishing and growing the peer workforce in the mental health sector commenced in 2002, well before many other organisations.

The growth and support of a peer workforce as a profession has taken considerable effort, including from experts who have a personal lived experience of a mental health issues and recovery who are mandated to challenge the organisation to eliminate stigma and discrimination and create opportunities for people with lived experience. Executives, managers and staff have been encouraged to think more laterally about what peer work means to them and what peer work can offer teams and people accessing their service. Our approach has been documented and relayed across the organisation in policies, procedures, discussions, publications equal pay and career advancement opportunities.

Flourish Australia agreed from the outset that the jobs for Peer Workers must always be 'real' jobs with realistic expectations and good employment conditions, be well supervised and provided quality opportunities for learning and development. Peer Workers enhance an organisation's service offering and can impel other disciplines to create more holistic and effective support programs.

Flourish Australia identified that the growth of their peer workforce seemed to be losing traction and a more concerted strategy was needed to invigorate efforts and drive their policy direction.

Why not a Peer Worker?
In May 2015, Flourish Australia instituted the affirmative action strategy that consisted of two main policies. The first was a strategy named "Why Not a Peer Worker?". The strategy affirmed that for every front-line position that became vacant before being advertised or filled, hiring managers must respond to the question; "Why Not a Peer Worker?". If there was no substantiated reason to not fill the position with a Peer Worker; the position was to be filled by a Peer Worker.

After much discussion and review we came to the conclusion that there are very few circumstances that would justify not appointing a Peer Worker to a position.

We acknowledge that managers must maintain the fidelity of a high-quality workforce and preserve the merit based recruitment selection. A fundamental failure point for any recruitment practice is not following this mandate. It was and is not enough that a person in a Peer Worker role has a lived experience, they must also have the capabilities of performing their duties and maintaining ethical conduct. This is no different to any other position.

Our approach to growing the peer workforce also included a second strategy that provided (and still provides) existing employees with a lived experience of a mental

health issue to apply for their existing position to be transformed into a peer work role.

Transforming current positions
The introduction of a "Transformation Peer Work" program proved to be an effective means of growing Flourish Australia's peer workforce. The same vigorous merit based recruitment process was applied as was applied through the "Why Not a Peer Worker?" Strategy. That is, existing employees did not transform to a Peer Worker role simply because they identified as having a lived experience of a mental health issue. They were required to demonstrate that they would be suitable for a peer work position by participating in a merit-based recruitment process that they were suitable for a Peer Worker role.

Involvement of managers
Ensuring that hiring managers have the correct information available about peer work was also important in overcoming resistance to growing a peer workforce. Flourish Australia developed a peer work 'myth busting' program bringing hiring managers together and provided the opportunity to dispel some of the peer workforce myths that would have otherwise stymied any chance of growing the peer workforce.

Senior managers were provided with assurances that peer work is subject to the same organisational policies and expectations that apply across the organisation. As the conversations proceeded, an echo of commonality developed.

Once a common understanding had been reached with regards to employment practices, the issue of what Peer Workers actually do was then addressed. Copies of non-clinical frontline staff position descriptions were reviewed with General Managers, Operations and Senior Managers.

As the positions description was being reviewed and compared, the group would discuss the duty or responsibility and if there were any impediments to Peer Workers carrying out those duties or responsibilities. It was found, that in "actual fact" there were no impediments to Peer Workers carrying out the work that another non-clinical staff were currently performing. Furthermore, the use of lived experience purposefully in every day work was recognized as a value-add.

The meeting adjourned with a renewed understanding of peer work and the ability to support, manage and grow the peer workforce.

Supporting Transformational Change
The process that led to the adoption and implementation of the overarching Why Not a Peer Worker? Strategy coupled with the Transformation Peer Worker Strategy was carefully planned and managed over a 12-month period. They were underpinned by Executive sponsorship and a solid foundation of supporting policies and procedures. The key supporting policies for these strategies were Flourish Australia's Embracing Inclusion Policy and the Recovery Action Framework (RAF).

The *Embracing Inclusion: Employment of People with Lived Experience* Policy affirms our commitment to employing people with lived experience of a mental health issue, describes how we will support people at work and confirms the importance of

growing our Peer Workforce. The policy describes Flourish Australia's experience in actively pursuing the employment of people with lived experience of a mental health issue and sets clear goals. *Embracing Inclusion* sets out how we will achieve clear goals and a commitment from the organisation on how to get there.

Following on from the *Embracing Inclusion* policy, Flourish Australia's *Recovery Action Framework* (RAF) was co-developed with people with lived experience and staff, endorsed by our Board and then implemented.

Our work was inspired by the UK Centre for Mental Health's Implementing Recovery through Organisation Change (ImROC) program and particularly its 'Ten Organisational Challenges' (Shepherd, Boardman & Burns 2010). However, we added a slightly different focus a developed 8 Organisational Accountabilities.

The Why Not a Peer Worker? Strategy and Transformation Peer Worker Strategy were extremely successful in growing Flourish Australia's peer workforce over a relatively short period of time. The strategies resulted in the added benefit of hiring managers reflecting on and developing a greater understanding of peer work. These strategies became an important aspect of the required transformational change process needed to develop a collegiate culture that recognises the significant contribution that peer work brings to people with a lived experience of a mental health issue.

Conference presentations

TheMHS Conference Canberra, August 2015	Symposia "Why not a Peer Worker? Part 1: The meaning, purpose, philosophy and ethos	Pamela Rutledge, Fay Jackson, Janet Ford, Matthew Salen, Michael Macokatic, Eric Richards
TheMHS Conference Canberra, August 2015	Symposia Why not a Peer Worker?" Part 2: The practical tools, processes, documents and outcomes to supporting Peer workers & other workers with lived experience on their career path.	Pamela Rutledge, Michael Macokatic, Fay Jackson, Janet Ford, Aidan Conway, Matthew Salen, Debra Gibbons, Kim Cattell, Glenda Meyers
TheMHS Conference Auckland, August 2016	Why not a Peer Worker – Values, authenticity, attitudes & heart shown through leadership & peer work	Fay Jackson, Kim Jones
TheMHS Conference Auckland, August 2016	Why not a Peer Worker: One year on	Fay Jackson
17 International MH Conference Sea World Gold Coast August, 2016	"Why not a Peer Worker?"- The proof that growing a large, responsible, professional and high quality peer workforce is possible and desirable.	Fay Jackson, Kim Jones

World Federation MH Conference Cairns, October 2016	Why not a Peer Worker – successfully reaching people through lived experience and recovery	Fay Jackson
Asia Pacific International Mental Health Conference Brisbane, October 2016	From Policy to Action: Growing the Peer Workforce	Mark Orr

References

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[ii] Chinman, M.J., Weingarten, R., Stayner, D. & Davidson, L., 2001, Chronicity reconsidered. Improving person-environment fit through a consumer run service. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 37, 215-229.

[iii] Craig, T. K., Garety, P., Power, P., Rahaman, N., Colbert, S., Fornells-Ambrojo, M., & Dunn, G. ,2004, The Lambeth Early Onset (LEO) Team: randomised controlled trial of the effectiveness of specialised care for early psychosis. *British Medical Journal*, 329, 1067.

[iv] Repper, J. & Carter, T., 2011, A review of the literature on peer support in mental health services. *Journal of Mental Health*, vol. 20, 392-411.

[v] Repper, J. (with contributions from Aldridge, M., Gilfoyle, S., Gillard, S., Perkins, R. & Rennison, J.), 2013, Peer Support Workers: Theory and practice. ImROC Briefing viewed 19/4/17 at https://imroc.org/resources/5-peer-support-workers-theory-practice/

What You Should Consider Before Becoming A Peer Worker

Please note: This document should be read in conjunction with the Peer Worker position descriptions.

Before applying for a Peer Worker position you need to be very considerate of the fact that being a Peer Worker means that you will be innately drawing on your lived experience in the every day duties of your work. You will be expected to walk beside people who are trying to recover and build a respectful, professional, appropriate relationship with them that is based around conversations which will draw on your experiences and emotions. This may be very challenging at times but if you are the right person for the position you will find it very rewarding.

Your openness about having a lived experience of mental health issues is not limited to only one on one conversation with people accessing the service but is expected to be evident when speaking with staff, managers, committees, and external stakeholders.

The conversations you have with people about having a lived experience may be crucial to individuals embarking on their journey of recovery. Your lived experience conversations may also be crucial to another member of staff having understanding of a persons situation or the way they may be working which might affect the people either positively or negatively. Your conversations with staff and managers will also need to model good reasons for why designated Peer positions are so important.

You need to be prepared that when you are socializing people will ask you what you do for a living and when you tell them "I am a Peer Worker" this may open up conversations with those people about their mental health or that of someone they know. This can be very overwhelming at times and you will need to be able to manage these situations so that your own stress levels and mental health are not compromised. You need to be comfortable with sharing that you have a lived experience with others outside of Flourish Australia.

You also need to consider that if you decide to change jobs or careers your resume will indicate that you have a lived experience of mental health issues. You need to consider how you might feel about this in the future. Rest assured that if you worked well with Flourish Australia and you decide you would like to apply for another position we would only be strengths focused and not discuss your lived experience with a future employer unless you wanted us to do so.

You also need to be aware that although the very fact that you have a lived experience of mental health issues is essential to you being appointed to this position, you will be required to work professionally, with a strong work ethic and making the needs of the people you support a priority. If your mental health does become fragile we undertake to support you as best we can, in the ways you need and to honour our ethos of helping people to stay supported and employed. However we do expect you to do the best you can at all times in maintaining your mental health, physical health and to work in a manner that upholds and promotes the respected and positive reputation of the peer workforce as being professional and dependable. If you do this you will feel valued and respected by Flourish Australia.

We would also request that you write/fill in a Personal Situation Plan that you would share with your manager in order for you and your manager to have an understanding and agreement of what your rights and responsibilities are and the rights and responsibilities of your manager should your mental health begin to cause you difficulties. We will support you to stay in work as far as possible. We have a great deal of understanding and support for our staff with a lived experience of mental health issues.

You also need to consider that this is a position that will require you to take formal training in peer support, even if you have other relevant tertiary qualifications.

It is also important that Peer Workers in the course of performing the role <u>do not</u>:

- Discuss clinical issues such as medication with the people they support and refer this conversation to an appropriate clinician or support service after receiving permission from the person.
- Make decisions about a person's physical health. If concerned you **will** report these concerns to a manager, doctor or other clinician, paramedic or first aid officer.
- Use their lived experience to make others feel that their experience is less important than the Peer Worker.
- Will not engage in negative reciprocity such as enmeshment with another peer in a way which promotes victimhood, over dependence, negative behaviour.

Peer Workers do by definition use their lived experience openly, appropriately and effectively to build professional relationships with the people they support that share similar lived experiences. Peer Workers will also use their lived experience to inform and contribute to staff learning, service understanding, and delivering person-led, strengths, ability and possibility focused, recovery based language, documentation and actions. They will use their lived experience to work as advocates on

an individual and systemic level as required. The positive reciprocity that builds between peer workers will be respected and supported.

If you have decided to apply we wish you success and if you would like to ask questions before writing your application please speak to the person listed as your contact person.

I would like to reassure you that if you choose to develop your career as a Peer Worker, Flourish Australia would use every resource at our disposal to ensure you succeed and that you become an important and invaluable team member.

Fay Jackson
General Manager, Inclusion