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Rural student Professional Experience Placement growth exceeds target for 2017.

During 2017 the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Programme (RHMT) student expansion project team was actively engaged in providing learning and teaching, social, accommodation and financial support to nursing and allied health students placed in rural areas of Tasmania. This support enabled the project to meet and exceed its targets for 2017. Nursing student supported placement weeks increased by 23% from 2016. Similarly, supported allied health student targets increased by 25%. This represents a total increase of 7% in nursing and 7% increase in allied health student numbers from 2016.

The increase in student numbers has inspired the project team to continue with quality learning and teaching support opportunities focusing on maintaining the increase in student numbers and ensuring students have a quality professional experience placement.

Typically, the quality of student placements provides impetus for students to return to employment in a rural environment. The subsequent employment of Whole of Community (WOC) facilitators to support students, supervisors and organisations, is integral to the successful placement of students in rural areas. The WOC facilitators are employed in Smithton, Queenstown, King Island, Flinders Island, St Helens, Meander Valley (Deloraine, Westbury and Longford), Oatlands, Campbell Town, New Norfolk and the Huon Region. The support provided by the WOC facilitators includes, but is not limited to, learning and teaching support, social support, and in the development of resources.

Accommodation and financial support continues to be made available to students undertaking rural and remote placements.



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Whole of Community Facilitator support: Queenstown

Marijke Schurer, the Whole of Community Facilitator at Queenstown, provides support to all students in her region. She recognises that a Queenstown student placement may be anxiety provoking due to the remote location. Consequently, she ensures all students are provided with opportunities for social networking and have sufficient information about the local community including access to shops, food and dining, recreational activities, places to visit and churches in the region. Marijke regularly invites all students to come together for lunch or a coffee. This is in addition to providing learning and teaching opportunities to the nursing students and ensures that students from other disciplines are involved whenever possible. Erin writes about her experience during her second year nursing placement at Queenstown:

“...I was very excited to be allocated to Queenstown... I couldn't have wished more for a [an] open, friendly and well supported placement. Our experience ... exceeded all expectations, exposing us to every possible opportunity and all aspect[s] of nursing in this beautiful community... every member of the hospital staff was extremely accommodating throughout our placement.”



> Photo from left to right: James Madden (nursing student), Jacqueline Lim (Intern at Ochre GP- Hub project), Marijke Schurer (WOC facilitator), Edith Lightfoot (5th year medical student and Erin Torn-Broers (nursing student)

News and activities

The Circular Head Aboriginal community's dementia education project.

Last year we reported on receiving a valuable Federal Government Department of Health - Dementia and Aged Care Services (DACs) grant to establish and evaluate an innovative dementia care education project with Aboriginal community members from Circular Head in rural Tasmania. The project team includes Dianne Baldock (Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation – CHAC), Lyn Goldberg and Andrea Price (Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre), Ha Hoang, Merylin Cross and Terry Cox (Centre for Rural Health).

The benefits of extensive community consultation and collaboration, coupled with respecting Aboriginal community expertise, has resulted in the project progressing superbly. In our grant proposal, we targeted 10 students. To date, 11 enthusiastic Aboriginal students have enrolled at the University of Tasmania to undertake studies in the Wicking Centre's online Bachelor of Dementia Care program. The students have concurrently enrolled and started their TasTAFE Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing, Home, and Community). This means that students will gain in-depth tertiary knowledge about dementia, together with practical, work-related and job-ready vocational training. Importantly, students are undertaking

these tertiary and vocation education pathways while maintaining connections to families and community.

The project has extensive student support mechanisms available. Dianne Baldock and the staff at CHAC have been crucial in promoting the project and recruiting students – with Dianne serving as Interim Project Officer as our recruiting for this position was delayed. Lyn Goldberg has been outstanding in developing relationships with students and helping them navigate through university enrolment. Students have access to tutoring support through TasTAFE, the Wicking Centre's Student Support staff, unit coordinators and Caleb Nichols-Mansell at the Riawunna Centre for Aboriginal Education at Cradle Coast. After hearing about the project, Anne Shepherd, the librarian in Smithton, has also offered individual and group tutoring support which is most welcome.

According to Dianne Baldock, (CHAC's Chief Executive Officer), students undertaking this program have added much vibrancy into the community. She writes,

"I am so overwhelmed with the enthusiasm of all these beautiful women that are stepping into a journey of a life time. Congratulations to each and every one of you."

As an important next step, we are currently recruiting a community-based

project officer to facilitate student learning and success, and to coordinate and liaise between community, education and health stakeholders. We are learning how important this Project Officer will be as the students address the differences and challenges between face-to-face and online learning.

The project has numerous flow-on benefits. For students, the project provides a culturally-safe, community-based environment with increased access and qualifications to higher education and health career pathways. The project builds on the Aboriginal community's capacity to provide appropriate care for family members living with dementia and develop strategies to decrease the risk of developing dementia.

The project marks an important first – a collaborative partnership involving the Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation, the Centre for Rural Health, the Wicking Centre and the Federal Government Department of Health. We look forward to evaluating the project and seeing it make a positive contribution to the health and well-being of Aboriginal people in this rural Tasmanian community.



Further information

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> Student accommodation

The Centre for Rural Health continues to respond to students' needs by assessing the demand for accommodation and associated services. As a consequence, an additional property has been leased in Huonville while a decision was made not to renew the lease on the

Zeehan property. Low demand and the relocation of health services to Queenstown were major factors.

The Huonville property is a modern two bedroom unit, with an open plan living area and two bathrooms. It is spacious with plenty of natural light

and a small but pleasant garden.

The roll-out of the NBN throughout rural Tasmania provides opportunities to improve internet services to students. The accommodation on Flinders Island and at Oatlands, Nubeena, Huonville and Swansea have

> New Staff



Belinda Jessup

Dr Belinda Jessup has recently joined the Centre for Rural Health as a researcher.

Dr Jessup is a qualified speech and language pathologist, having worked with the Department of Education in Tasmania for the past 17 years. She was awarded a PhD from the University of Queensland in 2008 after researching the identification and referral of kindergarten students with speech and

language impairment to school-based services in Tasmania. Her doctoral work has led to reforms in the local management of school-aged children, with the introduction of population-wide screening of kindergarten students to improve the early detection of children in need of speech pathology services.

She has research interests in facilitating early intervention and health workforce management. Dr Jessup is currently working on the new graduate workforce study.



Linda Jaffray

I am passionate about providing students with supported and learning-rich

placements in rural areas, in the hope this will encourage their return and retention as rural health practitioners.

I grew up on the North-West coast of Tasmania and returned to work here after obtaining my Bachelor of Social Work at the University of Tasmania in 1998. I worked for 12 years as a Specialist Palliative Care Social Worker. Between 2011 and 2018, I was employed as a researcher at the University of Tasmania's Rural Clinical School in Burnie. My research included electronic advanced care planning, barriers to health service access for remote communities and raising student aspirations for a rural health career through community engagement. I am currently completing a PhD exploring Mindfulness for Family Caregivers in Palliative Care.

I also provide clinical supervision to social work practitioners across diverse fields throughout the North-West and have tutored in the social work degree at the Cradle Coast Campus.



Elaine Bentley

I trained as a Registered Nurse in the UK in the early 1980s and undertook many

clinical roles from Accident and Emergency, community and respiratory specialist nurse to family planning and more recently as a nurse practitioner in general practice and lecturer in nursing with the University of Sheffield. I have lived and worked in Tasmania since 2008, mainly in rural areas, as a lecturer in nursing with the University of Tasmania, teaching across both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Most recently I coordinated large undergraduate Professional

Experience Placement units within the School of Health Sciences (Nursing) for second and third year nursing students across Tasmania and NSW. Although my teaching has been across all of the undergraduate nursing course, the majority of it has been in health and physical assessment, medication management, transition to becoming a registered nurse and preparation for practice.

During 2017 I was part of a research team looking at stroke services across hospitals in the NW Tasmania region. I also worked with City Mission to review access to healthcare for some of their clients. My daughter and her family live in Queensland so I love to visit there when I can.

recently been connected to the NBN, while the accommodation at Smithton has had multiple wireless internet access points installed throughout the property. A similar set-up is in progress for the accommodation at Latrobe. Furniture has been replaced at a number of properties.

The demand for accommodation increased substantially in 2017. A total of 395 students stayed a total of 1533 weeks which represents a 51% increase in students and a 72% increase in weeks of occupancy compared to 2016.



Further information

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News and activities

> Welcome new practitioners

Health Practitioner Research Development Program 2018 (HPRDP)

The HPRDP in 2017 offered 16 practitioners the opportunity to work on a variety of research projects in the CRH. Overall, the program in 2017 was successful and feedback from practitioners has been exceedingly positive. One practitioner reported a great experience

...“I began with the hope that I would get the opportunity to formalise my researching skills and learn more about research methods... this has definitely happened.”

The skills outcomes that practitioners acquired were diverse, and included developing ethics applications, completing literature reviews and presenting research findings at local conferences. In addition to the research-related skills developed during their training, one practitioner reported extra benefits... “[my] confidence has grown out of these skills ... [this] has been most valuable”.

As the 2017 projects are now winding up, the CRH is now advertise for the 2018 HPRDP round.

For enquires regarding the 2018 program, please contact Katherine.Kent@utas.edu.au

Ashley Hoogester

Ashley is an accredited dietitian, working in private practice, Diabetes Tasmania and is now with the CRH on the practitioner program to gain research skills.



With eight years' experience, Ashley has worked both in Australia and in the United Kingdom in a variety of areas both inpatient and outpatient. Ashley has a passion for seeing lives transformed and better access to good nutritious food for all.

Ashley is working with Dr Katherine Kent in research and survey design. The survey explores the barriers or enablers, existing or perceived, to access fresh grown fruits and vegetables within Tasmania. The survey, once completed, will be piloted by key stakeholders before rolling out to the wider community. The results of this survey will help to guide policy for improving access to Tasmanian-grown fresh fruit and vegetables.

> More prevention for oral health issues needed

Dental health issues are the leading cause of preventable hospital admissions in Tasmania, and are linked to a number of diseases, including diabetes.

University of Tasmania Associate Professor of Oral Health, Len Crocombe says oral health issues were the number three cause of preventable hospital admissions around the country, but number one in Tasmania. Tasmanians are sicker, poorer and older than people on the mainland, and that rings true of oral health in adults.

Associate Professor Crocombe said links between oral health and general health were being found more and more. The strongest one is with diabetes. If you have your gums treated, your blood sugar level improves, if you have your blood sugar treated, your gum disease gets better. As your mouth is part of your body, if it's falling apart then it has a direct association with the rest of your body, and vice versa.

The Australian Medical Association, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Royal Flying Doctor Service and Healthy Tasmania said the state needed more government-led dental disease prevention.

Further, cardiovascular disease, rheumatic fever, kidney disease and other chronic illnesses are exacerbated by poor oral health.

Associate Professor Crocombe said the best thing people could do was brush their teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.



Further information

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> Pharmacy Careers Night



This last quarter I was out and about getting some amazing video footage with Darren, our very talented photographer at the Centre for Rural Health, from the pharmacies around Devonport for two Careers Nights held at Burnie on 6th March and Latrobe on 7th March. The footage was taken at Mersey Hospital, Mersey Pharmacy, Valley Rd Pharmacy and West Tamar Pharmacy. It was well edited by our talented admin officer Terri. Both Careers Nights were well attended and the pharmacy presentation was very successful. The footage will also be shown at a lecture I am giving to the third year Pharmacy students in April of this year. Many thanks to both Darren and Terri for their help on this project.

I have also been working with the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and other stakeholders on a project to showcase pharmacy ownership to early career pharmacists. The event is planned for later in the year. Plans are also underway for AgFest and it is hoped we will have a large cohort of Pharmacy students and pharmacists attending on the day.



Further information

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Publications

In 2017, a total of 81 publications were generated by CRH and RCS staff and students. Of these, 49 were international peer refereed journal articles, contributing to rural health research on both the national and an international scene.

A number of papers were published in Q1 (top quartile) journals. For example:

It is often assumed that body dissatisfaction affects girls more than boys. To test this hypothesis, associations between body dissatisfaction and quality of life impairment were examined in adolescent girls (n=1,135) and boys (n=531) attending secondary schools in Canberra. While girls reported higher levels of dissatisfaction than boys, equally strong associations between body dissatisfaction and quality of life impairment were observed for boys and girls in both physical and psycho-social domains. Exploring whether and to what extent similar findings would be observed in rural and regional areas would be of interest as this would have implications for health promotion programs. (Griffiths et al. 2017).



Further information

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Dr Katherine Kent is working to establish better methods to more accurately assess polyphenol consumption. In order to establish a link between polyphenol intake and a health outcome, the first and most fundamental step is to accurately assess polyphenol intake. But this isn't a simple process as polyphenols are so numerous and diverse in the human diet. The aim of this review was to examine the available tools for determining dietary-derived polyphenol intakes. In this review, one quarter of studies (n = 39) reported total flavonoid intake with 27% reporting individual flavonoid compounds. Assessing multiple subclasses of polyphenols common and approximately 60% of studies relied on publicly accessible food composition data to estimate intake, with 33% using two or more databases. This review highlights the importance of publicly accessible composition databases for estimating polyphenol intake and provides a reference for tools available globally. (Probst et al. 2017).



Further information

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Staff also presented at conferences, produced papers and reports and worked with a range of health care providers to translate research findings into practical outcomes.

We produced:

- > 49 Referred journal articles
- > 19 Conference abstracts/ plenary presentations
- > 4 Reports
- > 9 Other research outputs

Publications

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Graduate Research

We welcomed a brand new year with some great news and research activities from our Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates at the Centre for Rural Health.

Candidate progress

Rowena MacKean has passed her thesis examination. Her thesis is entitled "Staying Connected: Peer-run community organisations and their contributions to older people's perceived health and well-being". Rowena's supervisors were Drs Peter Orpin and Jess Woodroffe (CRH's former academic staff). Rowena continues with her research activities and says, "I hope to get at least one article written for the academic journals and am already working with local service providers in Hobart to spread the word on the value of older people's peer-run groups. I hope to give a presentation at

the AAG conference in November. So – lots to do". Congratulations Rowena and supervisors!

Dr Jacki Goode and Sangeeta Khadka have passed their confirmation of candidature. Congratulations Jacki and Sangeeta.

Conference presentations

Melissa Kirschbaum and **Jacki Goode** shared their research in progress to the School of Health Sciences Research Seminar Series on 16 Feb 2018.

Melissa Kirschbaum had an abstract and **Ali Morse** a poster, accepted for presentation at the 6th Rural and Remote Health Scientific Symposium to be held in Canberra, 11-12 April 2018.

Publications

Dr Shah Khan and his supervisors (A/ Profs Len Crocombe, Tony Barnett and Dr Silvana Bettiol) have published a full paper in *Obesity Reviews* (IF: 7.995), entitled, "Is overweight/obesity a risk factor for periodontitis in young adults

and adolescents: a systematic review".

Shep Chidarikire and his supervisors (Dr Merylin Cross, Profs Isabel Skinner and Michelle Cleary) have published two papers, "Treatments for people living with schizophrenia in Sub-Saharan Africa: an adapted realist review" in *International Nursing Review* (IF: 1.55) and "Navigating Nuances of Language and Meaning: Challenges of Cross-Language Ethnography Involving Shona Speakers Living With Schizophrenia" in *Qualitative Health Research* (IF: 2.181).

Dr Jacki Goode has had her paper "Homeless adults' access to dental services and strategies to improve their oral health: A systematic literature review", accepted for publication in the *Australian Journal of Primary Health* (IF: 1.152).



Further information

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Projects

Strengthening Engagement of Migrant Students from diverse background in Pre-degree Programs/ Associate Degrees at UTAS

The Centre for Rural Health (CRH) and the University of Tasmania Student Retention and Success team has engaged in a collaboration with the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) Launceston, to strengthen the engagement of students from refugee backgrounds in pre and undergraduate degree programs at the University. The aims were to: a) evaluate the current support and engagement strategies offered by the University and MRC; b) identify potential additional approaches to support students from a refugee background, particularly those commencing and undertaking pre and undergraduate degrees at the University;

and c) evaluate the cultural training workshop offered by the MRC to University staff who are directly involved with students from a refugee background.

The project provided students with opportunities to engage positively in the evaluation process. Students reported developing a new sense of community and belongingness. The project developed valuable education delivery recommendations to enhance the learning outcomes of students from refugee backgrounds that will promote better retention and graduation rates at the University as well as future career opportunities. Cultural training outcomes were reported to increase university staff awareness and understanding of the frustrations and challenges of students from refugee background students, particularly with English language proficiency, insights into other cultures that value community and awareness of the sensitivities around asking personal questions.

The project outcome highlights mutual benefits. Future and commencing students from a refugee background and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students in general, will be better informed, engaged and supported. Research outcomes will be published nationally and internationally through journal publications and MRC staff involved in the project will be named as co-authors. The project increased the capacity of university staff to receive cultural training and support students in a more culturally safe manner.

The project team would like to extend a big thank to the PVC Community, Partnerships and Regional Development office for making this community engagement project possible.



Further information

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Projects

> **Social Attention and Communication Study – Revised (SACS-R)**

The Social Attention and Communication Study (SACS) surveillance tool, developed and researched over the past 10 years in Australia by the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre at La Trobe University, investigates the social attention and communication in children aged 11 to 30 months.

The Tasmanian arm of this research project, the SACS-R, using a revised version of the SACS tool, is a partnership between the CRH, the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre at La Trobe University, the Tasmanian Health Service (THS), the Autism Cooperative Research Centre and St Giles.

To date, the Child Health and Parenting Service (CHaPS) nurses at the THS have completed around 6,750 SACS-R consultations within their routine 12, 18 and 24 month Child Health Checks. Around one-half of these were undertaken in the South of the state, and around one-half were 12-month consultations.

Children who are being identified as 'at-risk' on the SACS-R are being referred to a community organisation (St Giles) for a comprehensive developmental assessment. Thus far, diagnostic assessment undertaken on all children presenting at-risk on the SACS-R has demonstrated the potential for accurate, early diagnosis of ASD.

The roll-out of the SACS-R state-wide in Tasmania has equipped CHaPS nurses with the SACS-R knowledge to give them confidence to communicate and refer children for further assessment.

The study aims to conclude mid-2018.



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> **Resettlement Experiences of Former Refugees in Launceston: A Focus-Groups Study**

A team of investigators from the Centre for Rural Health (CRH) and School of Social Sciences at the University of Tasmania, and the School of Medicine at Western Sydney University (WSU), is running a study working with the former refugees in Launceston, Tasmania.

The study, which is a collaboration with the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC), Launceston, will involve a series of focus groups with former refugee community members in Launceston, including adults and youth from a range of backgrounds, as well as with key service providers. The focus groups will explore the resettlement experiences of former refugees in Launceston, focusing on key aspects of this experience, both positive and negative, as delineated by study participants.

The study will make an important contribution to the currently limited

evidence base concerning the experiences of former refugees who have resettled in rural and regional areas of Australia and will inform the conduct of local, culturally sensitive health promotion programs. It will also provide a voice for the study participants and a platform for future research collaboration between MRC and the University.

Investigators on this study include Jonathan Mond, Laura Smith, Tamara Reynish, Ha Hoang and Stuart Auckland, from CRH, Chona Hannah from the University's School of Health Sciences, Kim McLeod from the University's School of Social Sciences, and Shameran Slew-Younan from the School of Medicine at WSU.



Further information

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> **Inter-professional learning workshop**

Twenty eight participants, including the Whole of Community (WOC) facilitators and professionals from other disciplines attended an inter-professional learning (IPL) workshop held in mid-February, 2018. Susan Waller, Senior Lecturer from Monash University, who has a depth of knowledge in this field, facilitated this workshop. The workshop provided many learning opportunities and a plethora of resources for participants to take away. It is envisaged this workshop will provide a foundational knowledge base for all WOC facilitators in enabling IPL activities in their region. All participants provided positive evaluation on this workshop.



> Presenter Susan Waller and inter-professional workshop participants

> **Evaluation of Healthy and Resilient Communities project**

The Centre for Rural Health, Tasmania, was commissioned by Rural Alive and Well Inc (RAW) to conduct an evaluation of Rural Alive and Well's Healthy and Resilient Communities program (HaRC) in four rural Tasmanian communities. The HaRC program is one of three mental health and suicide prevention programs delivered to rural Tasmanian communities by RAW. The goal of the program is to enhance mental health and well-being community protective factors such as coping capacity, resilience and connectedness, to better equip rural Tasmanian communities to react to challenging life experiences. The programs approach supports current suicide prevention policy frameworks such as LifeSpan, which acknowledge the importance of empowering and supporting individuals, families and communities to recognise and respond to suicidal behaviours and their impacts.

The evaluation of the HaRC program is an important step in understanding the changes needed in moving towards an

effective community-based model of suicide prevention that takes account of the ways that rural and remote communities function.

The evaluation applied a mixed methods approach in the collection of data relating to perceptions of community strength, preparedness and resilience in responding to a traumatic event such as an incident of suicide in the community. Survey and focus group data was collected from each of the four target evaluation sites, namely Bothwell, Huonville, George Town and the Tasman Peninsula.

Matching a program intervention to the community's level of preparedness enhances the likelihood of achieving successful outcomes. Findings from the evaluation revealed significant differences in levels of community preparedness or readiness as measured through the domains of: Leadership, community climate, community knowledge of the issue, available

resources and knowledge of efforts.

The evaluation findings highlighted the importance of building collaborations with locally based community networks and basing the collaboration around strengthening the capacity of the networks to support the program stages including the design, implementation and evaluation stages.

The evaluation was conducted over a six-month period (May to November 2017) with the support of funding from the Ian Potter Foundation. Outcomes from the evaluation will be used to refine the HaRC program, including the selection of new HaRC sites. Findings from the study will also contribute to the recently announced National Suicide Prevention trial of which Tasmania is one of 12 study sites across Australia.



Further information

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> **Whole of Community Facilitator information session**

In mid-February 2018, nine Whole of Community (WOC) Facilitators from around the state, two Fieldwork Coordinators and two Lead Facilitators were able to come together to receive an update on the project and to share and network with each other. There were opportunities for participants to discuss each other's roles and identify their support requirements. All participants were informed of student pre-placement compliance requirements, and of the University's legal obligations related to student placements.

The day was followed by a social dinner, which provided everyone an opportunity to unwind after a full day and informally network with each other.



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> WOC facilitator information session participants group discussion

Grants and research

Recruitment and Employment of Recent Nursing and Allied Health Graduates across Tasmania: Opportunities, Barriers and Pathways

The higher education sector has seen rapid growth over the past decade in terms of the number of institutions offering accredited training courses for nursing and allied health professionals. As a result, there are record numbers of nursing and allied health graduates currently entering the health workforce. This influx of professional skill has raised new concerns that the supply-demand equilibrium may be faltering, with the increase in skilled labour resulting in fewer job opportunities. In particular, this impacts directly on the ability of recent graduates in some disciplines to obtain employment, given their lack of experience and need for supervision and support during their transition to work.

In recognition of the long standing difficulties recruiting health professionals to rural and remote areas and the current potential oversupply of skilled graduates, the Centre for Rural Health is aiming to explore job opportunities across Tasmania specifically for recently graduated nursing and allied health professionals. The study will focus on identifying the number and type of job opportunities available for recent graduates, and the pathways graduates have found successful to gain employment. The project also aims to explore the barriers and enablers employers perceive to the employment of recent graduates, together with the knowledge of final year Health students about

possible avenues to employment post-graduation.

The study is being conducted throughout 2018 and will aim to recruit employers of nursing and allied health professionals, recent nursing and allied health graduates, and final year students in nursing and allied health-related degrees from across Tasmania. The findings of the study will provide much needed information for policy makers, health services and universities on the supply-demand balance of health graduates and opportunities to enhance graduate employability.



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> Bowel cancer project – Grant awarded

Cancer Council Tasmania presented the 2018 Small Grants for cancer research at the Cancer Council Tasmania offices in Sandy Bay on Thursday 22 March.

One of the grants this year is an innovative project – an Australian first – to raise the participation levels of Tasmanians undertaking the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program, by Launceston researcher Dr Simone Lee.

Dr Lee is conducting a trial with GPs, prompting them to encourage patients to undergo the bowel cancer screening test.

When the patient comes in to see their GP, there will be a 'pop-up' reminder on their file, Dr Lee said. Research shows that GP endorsement is a key predictor for bowel cancer screening uptake, but GPs have told us that they don't know when their patients receive a free home test kit in the mail. Our

focus is to try and increase the rates of bowel cancer screening for people receiving their test kits aged 50, 60 and 70. If the results look promising in a small number of Tasmanian practices, we would look to expand the project statewide.

Dr Lee said the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program has been shown to save lives.

But a population screening program really only works best when large numbers of people take part.

If found early, nine out of 10 cases of bowel cancer can be successfully treated. Unfortunately, only four in 10 Australians (39%) who receive a free National Bowel Cancer Screening kit

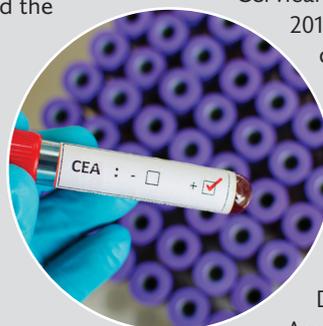
take part in the screening program.

Compared to other national screening programs such as BreastScreen (54.4%; 2012-2013) and the National Cervical Screening Program (57.8%; 2013-14), these rates are considerably low.

In Tasmania, less than half (44%) of the 65,379 eligible Tasmanians invited to take part in the 2014-2015 program chose to participate.

Dr Lee is working with Associate Professor Jan Radford, who is also a GP.

"Encouraging patients to participate in the bowel cancer screening program may be the input GPs can offer to lift screening rates," Dr Radford said.



> **Implementing Autism Early Intervention in Mainstream Early Childhood Education and Care Centres**

The University of Tasmania has been contracted by St Giles to undertake this autism early intervention project as part of a wider suite of research funded by the Department of Social Services. The project is a collaboration between the St Giles operated North-West Tasmania Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre (ASELCC) in Burnie, and the University of Tasmania's School of Health Sciences, School of Architecture and Design, Rural Clinical School (RCS) and the Centre for Rural Health (CRH). The project also involves Early Childhood Education and Care Centres (ECECs) linked to the NW Tasmania ASELCC.

The project leader is Dr Damhnat McCann, Registered Nurse and Senior



> **Project team members**

Lecturer, School of Health Sciences. Other members of the team include:

- Kathryn Fordyce, General Manager of the NW Tasmania ASELCC and the Developmental Assessment team at St Giles
- Dr Ceridwen Owen, Deputy Head of School, School of Architecture and Design
- Dr Lyndsay Quarmby, Clinical Psychologist and Lecturer Rural Allied Health, CRH
- Dr Merylin Cross, Registered Nurse and Senior Lecturer, CRH
- Ms Colleen Cheek, Registered Nurse and Research Fellow RCS

- Dr Miranda Stephens, Lecturer in Clinical Psychology, RCS
- Dr Penny Allen, Research Fellow, RCS
- Wendy Roberts, Research Assistant
- Karen Hearne, Project Co-ordinator

Across Australia there are six ASELCCs funded to provide autism-specific early learning and care (long day care). The NW Tasmania ASELCC is the only centre providing intervention to children with autism or autism-like symptoms in regional and remote communities via a hub and spokes service delivery model. Children receive autism-specific early intervention from childcare educators at their local mainstream ECEC supported by specialist staff at the ASELCC hub.

There is increasing demand for ASELCC support in other Tasmanian towns and a recognition of the need to establish service models that can deliver early intervention to children with autism outside of major centres and specialist services. A hub and spokes model providing early intervention via ECECs may be well suited in the rural and regional context.

This project aims to explore the operational and organisational factors that influence the effective provision of autism early intervention in mainstream ECECs under a hub and spokes model. To date, we have reviewed the current literature and used this to guide our development of a tool that can be used to assess the readiness of mainstream ECECs to deliver early intervention. Staff in mainstream ECECs have also used photo interviews to identify barriers and enablers to providing early intervention.

"GPs are visited by 85% of Australians every year so contact is frequent.

"GPs often try to offer or recommend preventive health activities at the same time patients consult for other problems. Sometimes patients present for purely preventive health check-ups but this is, unfortunately, uncommon.

"This project will see if a prompt from the patient's electronic health record aimed at the GP can lead to increased uptake of bowel cancer screening. It's a simple idea, though not simple to research, that requires proper testing."

Associate Professor Radford also acknowledged the assistance of the George Town Medical Centre in the initial design of the project.

The project team includes, Dr Simone Lee, A/Prof Tony Barnett, Vincent Versace, Madeleine Gardiner, Katherine Kent, Jon Mond, Jan Radford, Gail Ward, Anton Forsyth and Anne Todd.



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Grants and research

Community campaign delivers DIGnity in rural Tasmania

The University of Tasmania's Centre for Rural Health is leading a community-based project that is helping reduce isolation and improve health and well-being. DIGnity is a successful community garden initiative providing residents in the State's South-East with opportunities to engage in positive social interaction, gentle exercise and healthy eating.

DIGNity builds on the existing health benefits of community gardens, but makes them more inclusive and accessible for all people. The DIGNity team supports people living at home with dementia, who are from residential aged care or

socially isolated for any reason, to join in with their local community. The gardens offer onsite professional support and are staffed by an occupational therapist, mental health counsellor, fibre artist, social researcher, garden coordinators and many volunteers. Community members of all ages can participate in various activities which include connecting with nature, meeting new people, basket-weaving or helping make a shared lunch using harvested ingredients. The name DIGNity was inspired from the concept 'dignity of risk', which is used by some health advocates to articulate that it is a normal part of life to take risks. Sometimes people are denied that opportunity. Our program adheres to the idea that there is dignity in risk, and provides low-levels of risk that help people feel human and restore their dignity. DIGNity was established in late 2016 with a grant

from the Tasmanian Community Fund, allowing the Centre for Rural Health to roll out the program at Neighbourhood House gardens in Nubeena, Dunalley and Dodges Ferry.

A crowdfunding campaign has been underway to support its continuation, with the State Government also committing a further \$70,000 over the next two years. The initial funding enabled DIGNity to become a well-established and successful model of nature-based preventative healthcare. More information about the DIGNity crowdfunding campaign can be found by visiting: www.communities.bendigobank.com.au/projects/dignity



Further information

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> Epilepsy peers connect

Launceston mum Skye*, says her daughter Savanna's epilepsy came out of the blue. Savanna was 11 years old when she had her first episode at school.

"When it happened, she couldn't speak or move," Skye says. "She couldn't count to ten, she thought she had five brothers when she's the eldest of four. Her mind was completely shut off, she looked like she'd had a stroke. It was horrible. Initially they thought it was a one-off, something to do with migraines, but eventually they diagnosed her with absence epilepsy."

One in five Tasmanians are affected by epilepsy in some way, either with a personal diagnosis or in supporting a family member or friend.

For Skye, learning how to manage Savanna's condition really took a toll on her own mental health.

"I rang Epilepsy Tasmania one day in tears, I was not coping; everything was just falling apart. They suggested I try Epilepsy Connect to talk with someone over the phone who had been in the same situation."



> Melody, Skye and Savanna

Epilepsy Connect is a telephone-based peer support service established by Dr Simone Lee from the University of Tasmania's Centre for Rural Health and run by Epilepsy Tasmania.

Supported by the Tasmanian Community Fund, it connects people living with or affected by epilepsy with a trained peer volunteer who has had a similar experience.

"When I spoke with the volunteer, it was like somebody had turned on a light in a dark room. She had been through the same thing – she shed light on medication, on doctors, on all the emotions I was feeling, on how to cope. It was a massive relief."

"At the end of each conversation she'd say 'hang in there, you're doing a good job'. It might not sound like much, but when somebody who's gone through this tells you you're doing a good job, it means more and it encourages you."

Joanne Parr, Education and Training Coordinator for Epilepsy Tasmania says Epilepsy Connect has had a great first year and they are looking forward to continuing the program. The organisation has partnered with a research team led by Dr Lee to evaluate the service and better understand its impact for Tasmanians, and there is hope that it might expand across Australia.

For more information, visit www.epilepsytasmania.org.au or contact Joanne Parr on 6344 6881 or visit joanne.parr@epilepsytasmania.org.au



Further information

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*Skye and Savanna's surnames have been withheld for privacy reasons

Based on an article first published in Primary Health Tasmania's Primary Health Matters magazine. Reproduced with permission.

> **Complex topographies: Dementia-inclusive landscapes**

Towards the end of 2017 I received a grant through the Culture Creativity Society theme group of the University to undertake research with Dr Helen Courtney Pratt and Ms Marina Campbell, on the topic of dementia-inclusive landscapes. Inclusivity is conceptual and attitudinal, but also, importantly, spatial. Living with dementia and caring for someone with dementia, are both inextricably linked to the spaces in which the people involved live, work and socialise – and to the multiple social, physical and cultural components that comprise those social and therapeutic landscapes.

This work extends my research, which has been ongoing in community gardens that host the DIGnity Supported Community Gardening project. Despite not specifically targeting people living with dementia (PLWD), DIGnity has become particularly appealing and therapeutically beneficial to PLWD and their carers. The focus of our most recent qualitative inquiry was to explore the elements of DIGnity that engendered dementia



inclusivity, from the perspectives of the participants in the program.

The research is still in draft form, but initial analysis reveals three themes: Place (outdoors), People (respectful intersubjectivity), and Balance (risk and support). We conclude that dementia-inclusive landscapes are multi-faceted combinations of elements that are philosophical, spatial and social. In short, two significant features lie at the heart of the dementia-inclusive landscapes:

1. Genuine participation with people living with dementia in ways that enhance community knowledges, understandings and acceptance of PLWD; and

2. Negotiation of the complex rights and citizenship issues affecting PLWD in the community.

We conclude that a meaningful response to the rising incidence of dementia is to build upon social and geographical attributes of community spaces. Recognising and accommodating the multifaceted nature of a dementia-inclusive landscape will enable authentic engagement with and rights-based support for PLWD.



Further information

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Events and conferences

> **'Nutrition Solutions for a Changing World'**

26 – 29 NOVEMBER 2017 / ADELAIDE, SA

Dr Katherine Kent attended the 10th Asia Pacific Conference on Clinical Nutrition. This international conference incorporated the joint Annual Scientific Meeting of the NSA and the NSNZ, and offered an exciting and rigorous scientific program regarding the latest advancements in



nutrition and dietetics. Katherine presented the findings of her recent publication "Dietary flavonoid intake in older adults: how many days of dietary assessment are required and what is the impact of seasonality?" This work represents a collaboration between Katherine and Simone Lee and Jon Mond from the CRH, with

Karen Charlton and Joanna Russell (University of Wollongong), Paul Mitchell and Vicki Flood (University of Sydney). This international conference was a highlight of the nutrition conferences held in Australia and provided an invaluable occasion for networking and reconnecting with peers in the nutrition field.



Further information

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Director's report

> Tony Barnett (Director)



> Centre for Rural Health December 2017 Planning Day

We were very pleased to submit our second annual report under the new Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) Program.

The report was a combined report from the CRH and the Rural Clinical School, including the rural student placement 'expansion' program associated with our current round of funding from the Commonwealth Government Department of Health.

We were able to report significant progress to our targets against all 'core requirements' of the program including a significant growth in student placement numbers. Over the 2017 calendar year, we supported a total of 2875 weeks of clinical placement in rural areas of Tasmania for nursing and allied health students and reported positively on

activities undertaken across all seven program 'parameters'. Significant achievements were posted in rural health research. In 2017, we attracted over \$1.2m in competitive grants and produced 49 research papers published in international peer-reviewed journals – a wonderful effort by all RHMT staff, students and industry partners. Over the year, CRH staff supervised a total of 13 PhD students, one of whom graduated during the year and another two submitted their thesis for examination.

Toward the end of the year, we held our annual planning day to take stock of what has been achieved and what is still needed to be done over 2018 in preparation for the development and submission to extend the program over the 2019-2022 period.

This year, we have increased the level of support provided to allied health students choosing to undertake a period of clinical experience in rural Tasmania. From a rural workforce perspective, this has become especially important across those allied health disciplines that

are not included in the suite of courses offered by the University of Tasmania. In the absence of a 'domestic' supply of new graduates, it is in these areas that there is more likely to be a workforce shortage.

In September this year, we look forward to hosting a regional meeting of the ARHEN Board. This will be the first time a meeting of the Board and its associated special interest groups and networks has been held in Tasmania. We are very much looking forward to the event. There must be something in the air here, because the 10th Australian Rural & Remote Mental Health Symposium will be held here in October and early in 2019, the NHRA will be holding its 15th national conference in Hobart. All great for rural health (and tourism) in Tas!