

Partnership with the Community: Forty–Five Years of Social Work Field Education at RMIT

Edited by **Ronnie Egan**



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Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to the Field Educators and Task Supervisors who have provided RMIT Social Work students with placements over forty-five years.

The RMIT Social Work Field Education Team, Linette Hawkins, Judy Williams and Stephanie Chong have contributed to the development of this book. Their role is gratefully acknowledged.

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Foreword

**Professor Charlotte Williams, Associate Dean,
School of Global Urban and Social Studies**

Partnerships between the academy and community organisations are fundamental to the delivery of social work education. These partnerships provide not only the context for field education to take place as part of students learning experiences but enrich the whole program delivery. At RMIT we have been working closely with our partners to deepen our relationships in advancing field education, developing partnered project work for student learning and assessment and leveraging up collaborative research effort. I am delighted therefore to introduce this text which showcases some of these developments.

It is timely for us to take stock of the outcomes of some of our partnerships and to consider the ways in which we can reimagine the field education element of our programs. Placing our field education delivery on a sustainable footing in an era of unprecedented student growth has been one element of this reimagining. However, it has also been a challenge to *rethink* the fundamental model that has underpinned social work field education for decades. Innovation, without compromising quality, is implied. The apprenticeship approach so favoured in social work practice is under revision at RMIT. The demand for social work practice in new settings and contexts is evident, as is the inextricable pull of inter-disciplinary working in responding to complex needs. We are acutely aware that the bedrock skill set of the contemporary social work graduate requires recalibration to meet these new demands and that our field education is the primary site where these aptitudes are tested. What this text demonstrates is a partnership approach to social work education that goes well beyond the hosting of a student(s) on placement, to illustrate these as creative spaces and negotiated sites of practice development and change. Our partners invite our students to push forward alternatives in service design and delivery, to bring design thinking to their practice, to foreground and test new approaches, to develop research evidence to underpin practice and to produce tangible and relevant artefacts useful to the field. These experiences are characterised by exchange and reciprocities that reflect deep collaboration between the academy and its community and that have enduring value.

As we celebrate 45 years of social work education at RMIT, so we celebrate these partnerships in preparing students who are *Ready for Life and Work* and who reflect the very distinctive education that is RMIT social work predicated on our mission statement:

Thinking critically, acting politically: engaged and ethical professional practice towards sustainable alternative futures.

Why partner with the community?

Ronnie Egan

This motivation for this book comes from a commitment to represent the long-term relationships between RMIT Social Work and the field through field education and beyond. These relationships underpin the viability of social work education. Field education is integral to the delivery of Social Work programs and is identified by students as their most significant learning experience. Alongside this is the need to ensure the supply of quality field education placements. We also seek to showcase some of the excellent work being undertaken by students across a variety of settings. So, it is in this context we choose to honour and celebrate our ongoing commitment to the collaborations with the field historically, currently and those anticipated in the future.

This book highlights the relationship RMIT Social Work has with its external stakeholders, primarily through its field education program and the subsequent research, training and projects that emerge as a result of these long term relationships. We have created a publication in collaboration with our current partners to represent an artefact in time, not claiming to provide an historical overview of all RMIT field collaborations. We use a methodology which brings together twelve of our organisational partners to present a picture of their partnership with RMIT social work, describing their work, the history of our relationship and a chronicle of the work our students have undertaken with them. In many ways this represents the diversity of placements that have occurred with students over the forty-five-year history of Social Work at RMIT. It makes visible the integrated scholarship between social work education, field education and the field, illustrating a model for a sustainable approach to social work field education with deep community- academic partnerships (CAPs) at the centre. These create meaningful student learning and workforce development in the human service sector. We have used a book to collect, reflect and disseminate examples of field work emerging from the teaching and learning that occurs on placements. This method has implications for how universities engage with industry and communicate the values informing viable and sustainable partnerships.

Beginning in 1973 the Department of Social Work was established at Phillip Institute of Technology (PIT). In 1992 Phillip Institute amalgamated with RMIT and now the social work programs operate within the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies in the College of Design and Social Context. Since its beginnings, PIT saw field work as integral to the curriculum. In year one when numbers

were small, all students attended field visits integrated with classroom curriculum where they were familiarised with field experience as an essential aspect of the program. They had the opportunity to observe various agencies in practice. In year two students were placed in groups of four and were involved in a community project for 10 weeks, four days a week. Third year placement was focussed on direct practice and the final year placement students undertook macro projects such as community work, social policy analysis and/or formulation, research or organisational development.

PIT led the way in offering innovative and 'atypical' placements outside traditional welfare settings, deliberately to test the concept of generic social work in the field (RMIT, 2013). These included placements in politicians' offices, women's refuges and sexual assault services. The field education staff were given high priority within the program and a highlight was their annual sit-down "three course lunch with wine!" with the field educators (RMIT 2003) This history had social work staff actively involved in community activities with these connections generating high quality field education programs, pursuing its dedication to innovative and progressive practice. All staff were actively part of the liaison team and this was seen as integral to maintaining current and innovative practice examples to translate into the classroom. This remains true to this day.

The curriculum of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, like today, had a commitment to social justice, social reform and the belief that social change needs to be actively pursued by challenging structural and institutional barriers. The programs encourage students to develop the ability to critically analyse the cultural, economic, political, social and psychological factors which help structure human welfare. The programs also offer appropriate skills and strategies with individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities to facilitate social change.

The commitment evident in the PIT history is reflected in the current approach to field education with key contextual differences. These are student numbers, competition for placements, increased numbers of social work programs in Victoria, increasing numbers of international students, increasingly complex student cohorts and an increasingly bureaucratised University predicated on a managerial model with risk averse systems. This environment is not unique to RMIT, it is evident nationally and globally (Rollins, Egan, Zuchowski, Duncan, Chee, Muncey, Hill, and Higgins, 2017). This historic shift has led to an urgent need to find alternative ways of providing field education in social work.

Field education is in crisis reflecting sector constraints and emergent economic imperatives in higher education. Sector constraints facing field education programs include challenges such as a shortage of accredited placements that offer viable learning and skill development opportunities for students (Neden, Townsend and Zuchowski, 2018; Crisp and Hosken, 2016; Bogo, 2015; Smith, Cleak and Vreudenhil, 2015; Baretta, 2007), including culturally-focused placements, and a shortage of qualified social workers

to provide on-site supervision (Kalliath, Hughes and Newcombe, 2012; Chinnery and Beddoe, 2011; Healy and Lonnie, 2010). While simultaneously facing these deficits in supply, universities are experiencing an increasing number of student enrolments in social work programs (Zuchowski, 2015; Cleak and Smith, 2012). This dilemma between a deficit in supply and an increase in demand renders a tenuous future for social work field education programs. This threatens the long-term viability of social work programs.

Economic imperatives facing universities are having an impact on field education programs including the phenomenon of programs paying industry partners to provide placements (HWA, 2011), the increasing numbers of international full fee-paying students being enrolled (Zuchowski, Hudson, Bartlett and Diamandi, 2014), and the casualisation of field education staff that primarily perform the field liaison and/or external supervision role during placements (Danis, Armenta and Linseisen, 2015; Rollins et al, 2017). These current contextual factors impact on RMIT social work and differs substantially from the environment which existed when the program started in 1973.

In 1973 RMIT had 28 students to place, in 2012 this number was 223 and in 2018 there are 357 students to place. Responding to the crisis in increased student enrolments and decreasing placement opportunities required substantial rethinking. The traditional one on one internal supervised placement have been superseded. A variety of strategies have been used to increase the placement pool in the preceding six years. These included 'in kind' resources in relation to formal and informal partnerships with several agencies and placements in education settings (primary, secondary, public and private schools) or specialist field of practice forming the major 'cluster' model for off-site supervision. Pilot partnerships with a number of agencies, with multiple students were undertaken in 2011. However, the crisis continued, and creative solutions were required which incorporated the field in the response.

In keeping with the RMIT history of developing innovative solutions to field education, a project to obtain an overview of changes in the NGO sector with implications for RMIT's Social Work Programs was undertaken in 2011 (Hawkins, 2012). The aim was to explore potential changes in the structure of RMIT social work programs to accommodate field education strategies and models appropriate to the major stakeholders over the next three to five years. In 2011 at least, half of RMIT placements were with NGOs, so consultation in this project was undertaken with NGOs, peak bodies and recruitment organisations. Unlike most other Schools of social work in Victoria, which sit within health faculties, RMIT sits proudly within a School of Social Sciences which meant less reliance on paid clinical placements, greater commitment to community agencies and an emphasis on innovative solutions.

The 2011 consultation produced important insights regarding workforce development with most organisations seeking work-ready qualified experienced staff. Recruitment in the sector was being taken more seriously, with high demand areas for positions

in aged care, child and family services, services for refugees and, more recently, in the areas of mental health, disability and housing/homelessness. Changes in the structure and standards of services, particularly aged care, led to increasing requirement by NGOs for case managers with tertiary qualifications. Participants' suggestions regarding field education included placements in the workplace for experienced but unqualified employees wanting to upskill, different placement options beyond a strict 70-day requirement, group placements, apprenticeship model approaches, university led external supervision models when onsite social work supervisors were not available, internships, payment for placement and partnerships for multiple students. Field education has been identified as a key vehicle for employability in social work (Bloomfield, Chambers, Egan, Goulding, Reimann, Waugh and White, 2013).

RMIT pursued the following strategies:

- partnerships accommodating substantial numbers of students at one time in one organisation (across different sections / sites)
- multiple placements for which RMIT provides off-site supervision using specific RMIT off-site supervision
- increased placements in schools and aged care sectors and other new sites

Using the suggestions above, consultation occurred with organisations that had historically provided multiple student placements to RMIT, about specific ways of increasing student numbers further. The consultation results included the provision of off site supervision, financial contribution for the provision of onsite supervision, better access to university resources in the form of data bases, training/professional development, building research capacity and accessing resources for research, evaluation and social action projects. It was from this consultation that a partnership strategy was developed, informed by the literature critiquing community-academic-partnerships (CAPs) and highlighting elements of successful CAPS. Most CAPs have been developed for research purposes.

Ideally CAPs are characterised by equitable control, a cause(s) that is primarily relevant to the community of interest, and specific aims to achieve a goal(s), and involves community members (representatives or agencies) that have knowledge of the cause, as well as academic researchers. (Drahota, Meza, Brikho, Naaf,

Estabillo, Gomez, Vejnaska, Dufek, Stahmer and Aarons, 2016: 192). However traditionally research CAPs have progressed in one direction, without plan for sustainability of the partnership, where universities have identified the community as sources of data and information. Such an approach to research fails to translate from university-based to "real-world" settings and program implementation. Community stakeholders report a lack of investment in the research, with needs different from those being addressed by the researchers (Warr and Williams, 2016; Ostrander and Chapin-Hague, 2011).

Increasingly universities have recognised the need to engage and partner with communities with one of RMIT's key strategic goals is "Connected with industry and community throughout the student journey" (RMIT Strategic Plan, 2015). The challenge is how do universities genuinely operationalise aspirational goals such as these. While the literature highlights key processes that characterise effective CAPs including trust, respect, shared vision/goals, longevity, positive and equitable relationships, effective and frequent communication, clearly differentiated roles and effective conflict resolution (Meares, 2008; Ostrander and Chapen Hague, 2011; Dulmus and Cristalli, 2012; Giffors and Calderone, 2015 and Drahota et al, 2016), sustained CAPs remain elusive. There is substantial contribution in the CAP literature from social work because the identified processes creating effective partnerships are foundational to social work values, ethics and education. These include sensitivity to community perspectives, often difficult to find in a research culture, the capacity for engagement, the development of empathic relationships, the capacity to make assessments and plan interventions, the long term and sustainable commitment from universities to the field because of placement requirements, a history in practice-based research and support for social justice outcomes with marginalised communities. Hence it is this perspective that informs the RMIT Social Work partnership strategy and continues the historic RMIT social work tradition of finding innovative ways of providing transformative learning experiences for social work students beyond traditional one on one placement opportunities.

In the history of field education at RMIT the implementation of the current partnership model is an extension of initial approach to field education. The model developed in response to the contextual crisis in field education that has occurred over six years, it continues to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of placement provision and future partnerships. The strategy has increased the provision of local placements to at least ten per partner annually across multiple organisations, substantially increasing the placement pool. These organisations represented a range of sectors and an overview of the nature of their collaborations with RMIT will occur in the remaining chapters. This strategy combined with the development of the Northern Territory placement program and an expansion of the India placements through New Columbo Plan Scholarships has grown numbers further. An increase in placement numbers in schools and the aged care sector through such partnerships has grown placement numbers in sectors traditionally not taking many social work students,

and with the potential to offer more. One of the outcomes of the 2015 RMIT Social Work program reaccreditation process was our partners' request to restructure the programs to enable placements to occur across the full academic year. This request has been accepted and acted upon, the change being introduced in 2018. This responsiveness to the field characterises the partnership model where the longer-term goal is to create a sustainable CAP, demonstrating processes that lead to effective CAPs and ensuring the social work program can provide adequate placement numbers into the future.

As the number of partners grew so did the commitment to the model and interest from other organisations and in 2015, at the instigation of the group of partners, the RMIT Partnership Reference Group was convened. The group remains keen to monitor and input on processes to improve placement provision, grow their organisation's involvement with the university and improve reciprocity between them and us. Joint funding applications between the partners and RMIT Social Work were successfully developed for events and projects through internal RMIT funding aimed at promoting industry-engaged networks. These grants allowed for the development of training/professional development opportunities, assistance with research capacity building and access to university resources to create a sustainable community of practice and demonstrate a commitment to partnerships ensuring the longevity of a model for placement provision. The first of these events resulted from the reference group interest in building organisational research capacity.

The Social Justice Research Forum was a day event hosted in 2016 to build collaborative research capacity for our partners using the expertise of RMIT academics. There was a diversity of research capacity across partners, therefore a consultation process was designed to respond to this difference in planning and facilitating the day. The outcomes of the day included access to knowledge about building research capacity in community organisations. More specific results included the planning of joint funding grant applications at different levels of the university, the development of a consortia of partners to work on a collaborative project and steps to develop adjunct positions and future training plans. In 2017 a Co-design Masterclass was facilitated for partners with the purpose of demonstrating the use of co-design strategies/tools through using an organisational challenge faced by one peak organisation partner. It was through this real-life application that the partner's Board of management was able to progress a problem faced by them. The building of an external facing online RMIT social work portal occurred in response to partner's request for greater access to university resources. The aim is to provide more immediate access to these resources for our partners but also for field educators generally. This combines with a monthly professional development series aimed at all field educators taking RMIT students on placements as well as targeted partner training or access to RMIT facilities for partner events. The reciprocity evident in the partnerships is demonstrated in the diversity and innovation of the placements

provided which go beyond the traditional one on one placements

The partnership model does not offer a homogenous approach to placement provision, rather each organisation provides placements in different ways across the continuum of traditional on site one-on-one placements to a variety of offsite group and individual supervision models with small and large groups of students, as required by the AASW accreditation standards (AASW, 2012). Students might be based in one or different sites at one or multiple organisations, with supervision arrangements managed according to the partnership. Students may work on one project, that continues across multiple student cohorts over time or work on direct practice work and projects simultaneously at the one organisation. Students work in the Northern Territory and in India, working in groups on projects identified by these organisations. The innovation in the types of placements offered across the partnership network are presented in the remainder of the book and continues the social work approach to field education that has occurred over forty-five years at RMIT.

The future of social work field education lies in closer relationships between universities and the field and the RMIT Social Work partnership model provide some insights into the operationalisation of this. It works towards confronting the crisis in finding enough social work placements and producing quality and transformative learning experiences for our students. It offers organisations ways of addressing their workforce development challenges through the employment of work ready and orientated graduates. Further the innovations evident across the partnerships address real world problems confronted by human services working with some of the most disadvantaged communities, whilst challenging the structural inequalities facing them. Student effort and enthusiasm is harnessed via partnered projects tackling domestic and family violence, poverty, homelessness, mental health, incarceration, aged care, culturally diverse communities, marginalisation, disability and access to education.

The RMIT Social Work partnership strategy has gone well beyond just the education and training of students through increasing placement numbers. The strategy has demonstrated how universities engage with the field and create sustainable and collaborative relationships that set the stage for deeper and more meaningful relationships between communities and universities.

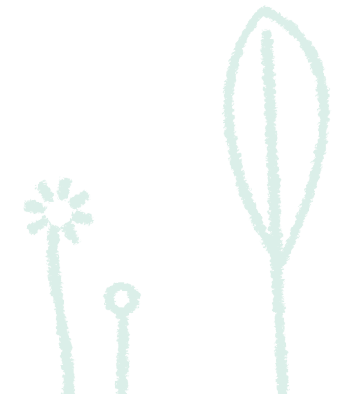
The following chapters provide the story of the RMIT partnership strategy through the partner perspectives who describe their work, their relationship with RMIT social work, present the work that the students have undertaken and other developments that have emerged from involvement with us. It celebrates the added value garnered when communities and universities work together for social change.

History and Value of the Victorian Arabic Social Services – RMIT Social Work Placement Partnership

Established in 1986 as a network of workers who met regularly to discuss the welfare of the Arabic community, the Victorian Arabic Social Services (VASS) has grown rapidly over the years to develop into a state-wide community based organisation that delivers culturally appropriate services to Arabic Speaking Background (ASB) communities. The work undertaken by VASS is underpinned by community development principles which aim to develop the citizenship status of disadvantaged members through increased access to services, decision-making and civic participation, education and employment, and enhanced community safety programs. Though specializing in working with people of ASB, VASS is an inclusive organisation, open to all people regardless of background, and operates on a 'no-wrong door policy'. VASS is a not-for-profit organisation managed by a Board of Management elected by VASS members at the Annual General Meeting each year. VASS has a current charitable status which includes Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status.

VASS has a long history of student placements, having hosted Social Work Placements from RMIT University since 2004. In 2015 VASS and RMIT formalized this relationship into a partnership, a recognition by both parties of the value of the placement experience to students and the sector. This partnership has benefitted VASS by having increased support from RMIT GUSS WIL, a dedicated liaison person, access to resources and placement-related workshops.

VASS now takes 10 Social Work placement students per year from RMIT. VASS takes students from Bachelor, Honours and Masters of Social Work degrees as well as the Social Work/ Psychology double degree, doing a mix of first and second placements. Students have been placed across all departments of the VASS Head Office in Broadmeadows, doing activities as diverse as direct practice with 'drop-in' clients to research projects and writing



funding applications for new projects. Students have helped clients of diverse backgrounds with settlement needs, housing, employment, financial hardship issues and access to services. Outcomes for clients seen by students include access to long-term, affordable housing, engagement in education and employment, access to vital health services and improved emotional and social wellbeing.

Students have also undertaken a range of interesting projects that have had great outcomes for the wider community. For example in 2015, a BSW student doing his first placement, worked on a project called Living Safe Together. This project came about in response to growing feelings of marginalization experienced by young people of ASB in Broadmeadows and aimed to address this by using a community development approach to building harmony in the local community. The student co-organised sessions involving young people of all backgrounds from Broadmeadows and members of the Broadmeadows and Australian Federal Police. The student facilitated conversations between these groups, enabling an open exploration of the issues of 'radicalisation' and what could be done to prevent it. The sessions fostered greater understanding between the groups as well as a sense of social inclusion and greater community harmony. The discussions also generated useful ideas for action that informed future research and projects undertaken at VASS.

As a grassroots not-for-profit agency, the efforts of the Social Work Placement students have been immeasurably valuable to VASS. Not only do they provide their time and services, but many bring expertise from their study and prior work experience that broadens the knowledge and resources of VASS to provide services to the community. VASS feels we sometimes learn as much as the students do! Having enthusiastic, passionate students who are eager to learn and contribute has been immensely for agency morale.



Salvation Army Crisis Services Network

Sally Coutts

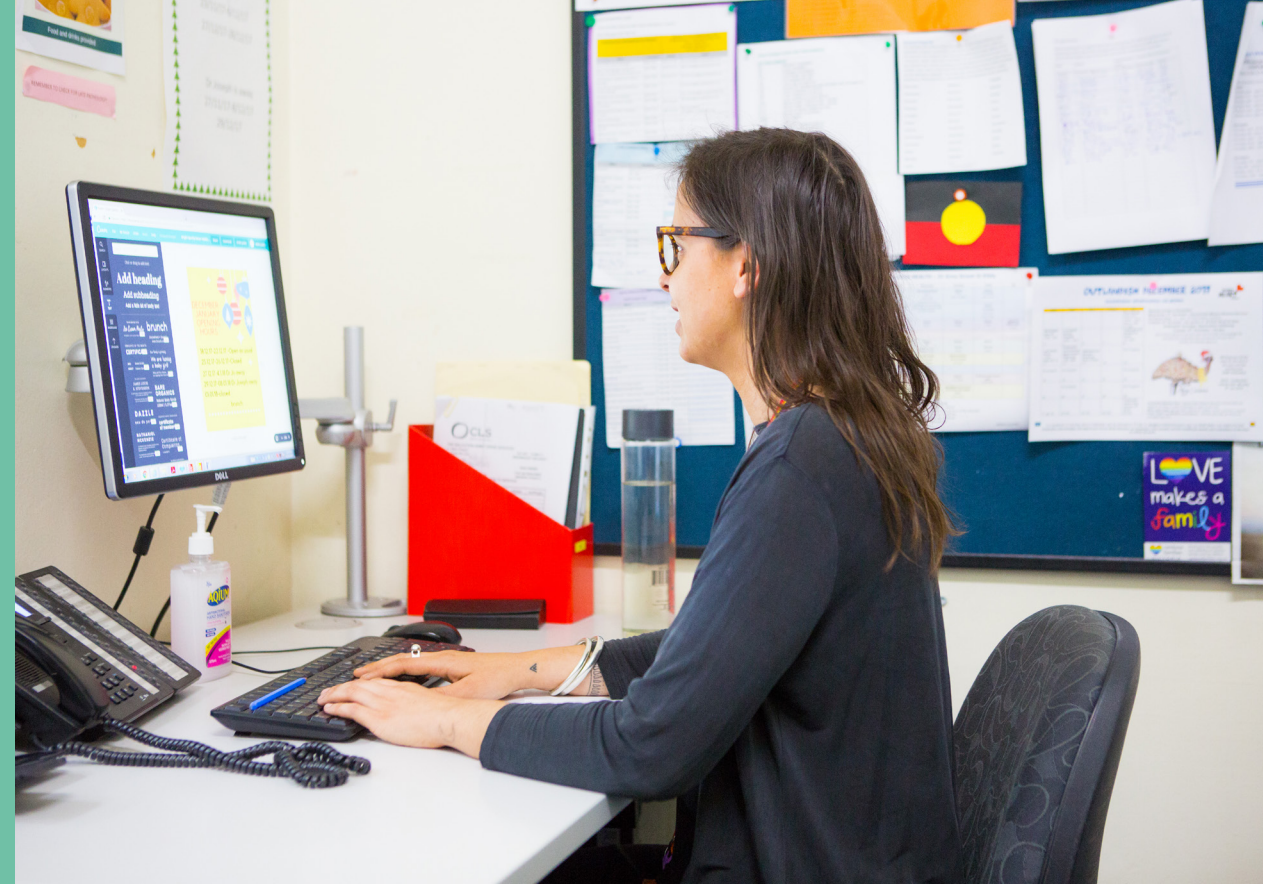
The numbers and rates of people experiencing homelessness continue to increase, despite government and sector initiatives (ABS, 2018). While structural problems in the housing market continue to dominate the policy debate it is the situational factors such as violence, drug abuse and mental illness which present challenges in service delivery. RMIT has partnered with the Salvation Army Crisis Services Network to provide students with the opportunity to better understand and become better advocates in addressing homelessness as a key Australian social policy issue.

The Salvation Army Crisis Services Network (CSN) has more than twenty five years of experience providing student placements across its programs which include a mix of homelessness, family violence and AOD/ health services. Prior to 2005, placements were arranged on an individual ad-hoc basis, and student's experiences would vary depending on how much time and energy was invested in the planning and support of the placement by the individual supervisor.

The changes to the approach for having students began in 2005, through a series of discussions with RMIT, based on the idea of building organisational capacity for student learning and providing a more consistent experience of placement for all students and staff. The student model has evolved over time with iterative feedback from stakeholders, to now include two groups of social work students twice a year. A formal partnership was formed in 2006 between RMIT and CSN, to recognise the relationship around student placements and the mutual interest in achieving their respective strategic objectives of community engagement and improved social justice. There have been over one hundred students on placement at CSN since the model commenced, with many students later being employed as staff and managers within the network- an unexpected benefit of a successful long-term program.

Costs/ Benefits

Running a student group has some obvious costs in terms of staffing hours and infrastructure, but it also provides much efficiency, such as students undertaking a shared induction and weekly supervision and reflective practice as a group. As well as the weekly student unit and group lunch, students are encouraged to plan and attend external agency visits together. Students are also able to attend training and other professional development activities that are on offer to all staff. The peer support that comes from being part of a



group also adds value for students as they share their experiences and build an understanding of the whole of the organisation and broader service system, rather than just the program they are situated in.

The student model has also helped build a culture of learning and reflection for the organisation. All staff and managers are expected to be involved with students in some capacity, which demonstrates the organisational commitment and value students are perceived to bring to the workplace environment. The student coordination role is undertaken by the manager of research and program development, who facilitates the weekly student group and provides an interface between students, staff and the University. Each student is also assigned a supervisor or task supervisor who provides individual weekly supervision. All staff are encouraged and supported to take on these roles. In some areas this is more difficult to organise, where there is a smaller pool of staff, or where staff are part time. This has led to some creative arrangements of sharing supervision between two staff, or sharing students between two program areas, so the work load is shared more equitably. This offers students a diverse experience of having two support people or an insight into two different practice areas, which can enhance their learning.

One of the other benefits of the student unit and the successful partnership with RMIT is the active contribution students can make to research and CQI activity within the organisation. Over time students have undertaken a range of discrete projects, or have been involved in larger research/evaluation projects during their placement.

Some examples of student led projects include:

- The development of a training package for Police on Family Violence issues – to increase the awareness and understanding of some of the issues that women and children face and improve the responses.
- A snapshot survey through the Needle Syringe Program on people’s patterns of drug use and behaviours.
- Co-facilitation and evaluation of mother and baby groups for families who have experienced family violence.
- Client exit interviews and satisfaction surveys which align with organisational continuous quality feedback processes

Students can provide ‘fresh eyes’ and robust methods to a project without the same level of competing demands that some staff face. Through this kind of research activity they also learn how to manage time and resources to deliver a project in a planned and accountable manner.

Value-adding

Students are integrated into staff teams from early on and are encouraged to be involved in the full range of activities that staff are provided with. Staff and managers also benefit from their work with students. Aside from the supervision opportunities, it also helps staff to reflect on their own practice and professional growth as they work alongside students and respond to the questions and queries that students present them with.

The value of the partnership between the organisation and RMIT has been discussed and promoted in a range of ways- through both academic publications and community sector forums and by the development of a practical ‘how to’ guide in 2012. This work was funded by DHHS for other community services organisations to learn from. The student model and partnership approach relies upon open and regular engagement and input from staff, students and university staff to continue to improve and grow the model and for future collaborative opportunities.

“The placement has definitely exceeded expectations. I have been exposed to an array of opportunities which have enhanced my skills as a developing practitioner. Would recommend this placement to any student.”

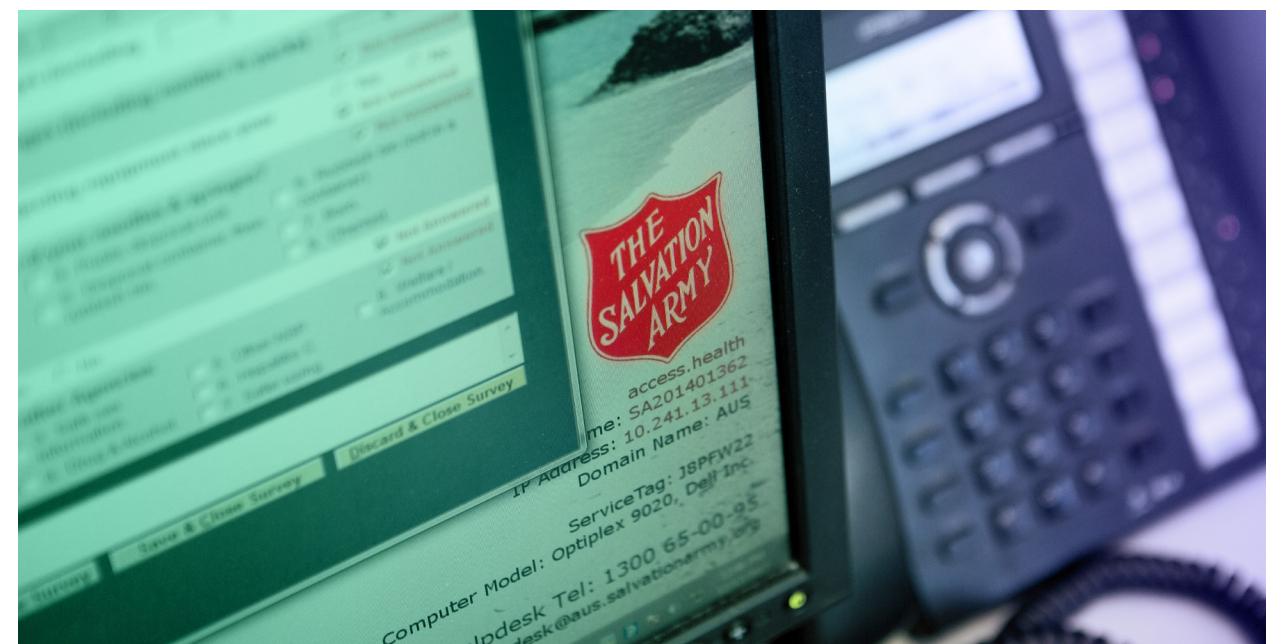
“Initially I thought that my placement would be very structured and I would be closely supervised, however I had a lot of independence and worked collaboratively with my supervisor in structuring my week. Although my supervisor worked part time, I found when my supervisor was in the office I did a lot of my learning and the time she wasn’t there I gained a lot of confidence through working independently.”

“The ideas that had formed about what a Social worker’s role entailed at University lived up to the reality of the role that I experienced practically.”

“I believe student unit has been one of the most rewarding parts of placement. It is something I looked forward to every week as I furthered my learning and had a chance to reflect on my week.”

“I have been very well supported throughout my whole placement. There was always someone to speak with and give me advice. Supervision was really important to me as it gave me an opportunity to speak about issues that were concerning me.”

“Yes, all the staff at CC were very supportive and openly shared their knowledge and resources with me. I felt that I was able to approach any of them if I had any issues. Supervision has been really useful for me to consolidate and reflect critically on my role as a Social worker.”



Community Information & Support Victoria student placement program: building capacity on multiple fronts

Kate Wheller

As a peak body, Community Information & Support Victoria (CISVic) actively looks for new & creative ways to build the capacity of the community organisations it represents. CISVic recognise that young people, and more specifically, social work students, are the future workforce. Much is to be gained by offering them rich placement experiences which while meeting their learning requirements provide the opportunity for them to deliver tangible value to the organisations hosting them. CISVic's student placement model, characterised by its group supervision model, delivered in partnership with RMIT University, focuses on building capacity – for students, for hosting local centres and ultimately, the service users.

Established almost 50 years ago, CISVic represents 61 local community information and support services across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. CISVic's local centres assist people experiencing personal and financial difficulties by providing information, referral and support services including Emergency Relief (ER). As a peak body, CISVic provides operational support, sector development, representation and advocacy. CISVic liaises with local, state and federal governments of behalf of our local centres providing advocacy and expert advice. The sector is volunteer driven; the collective workforce comprises around 320 paid staff and over 3000 volunteers. Volunteers undertake an accredited training program and ongoing professional development. While anyone in the community can access CISVic services, the main work is with the vulnerable and disadvantaged. During the last financial year, collectively, the sector had close to 430,000 contacts with the community. Many of the service users are experiencing personal and financial hardship.. They are struggling to meet the rising costs of daily living and often present with a range of complex issues. Increasing demand and increasing complexity of client issues have spurred innovation and the evolution of the CISVic Student Placement Program (SPP).



CISVic and its local centres have been offering one off placements to RMIT for many years. However it was in 2013, after 2012 student placement pilot, that a more formalised partnership occurred between RMIT and CISVic to increase placement numbers with a contribution to the funding of the on-site supervisor. The successful 2012 pilot demonstrated that CISVic and its local centres offered unique learning opportunities for students while building organisational capacity and enhancing client outcomes.

The CISVic SPP is a unique model, where the sector's peak body facilitates and support student placements across a range of member organisations. CISVic employs a dedicated Field Educator to provide on-site individual and group supervision to students, liaison with RMIT and agencies and support, guidance and mentoring to task supervisors. Each member organisation provides a task supervisor to provide daily guidance and support. A feature of the model is its ongoing evaluation for continuous improvement which has driven the development of the research scholarship project with RMIT.

“I particularly enjoyed group supervision and believe that it allowed for group discussion and reflection, promoting many varied opinions to help inform my own”

Student, 2016

Since 2012, CISVic has provided:

- an onsite dedicated and highly experienced Field educator
- 55 field education 1 placements across 10 sites
- 11 field education 2 placements across 3 sites
- over 80 hours of group supervision
- more than 440 hours of individual supervision
- workforce development opportunities where a number of students have been successful in moving into paid employment

The CISVic SPP is critical to filling the need for emergency relief (ER) services to deliver early intervention services to complex needs clients. It is also critical to ensuring that the CISVic member agencies can continue to offer a range of supports for clients who are missed by a welfare and social services system under increasing strain. One student on placement can offer around 200 hours of additional case work – working with the more complex clients, meeting with them in a more formalised, goal orientated way. This work can reduce pressure on volunteers and achieve better outcomes for clients. As the system shifts and adjusts to a new service landscape, ER services are becoming more critical for vulnerable clients falling through the gaps.

The program continues to deliver outcomes for student learning and organisational capacity. It offers rich learning environments for students with the opportunities to work with a diverse range of clients experiencing an equally diverse range of issues. Recent changes to the community services landscape give cause for community agencies to re-think how they deliver services, and the relationships required to help complex needs clients not fall through service gaps. In an environment of targeted funding and reduced resources, the challenge is to ensure that early intervention services retain the level of flexibility and responsiveness required to provide a safety net for vulnerable people.

Fostering opportunities and partnerships is a critical role for CISVic, both as a peak body and an ER service provider. As the sector struggles with the challenge of decreased funding and a

“This placement was much more organised in terms of supervision and support. Placement tasks were highly relevant and the experience overall was extremely valuable”

Student, 2017

“I felt supported throughout my time at placement and had sturdy tasks given to me which helped me develop professionally”

Student, 2017

“My task supervisor was highly accomplished and generous in sharing her knowledge”

Student, 2017

“My task supervisor was a switched on and energised person. She made this placement into a deep learning experience”

Student, 2017

“This is an excellent model and the most supportive I have experienced”

Task Supervisor, 2013

social investment approach to the welfare state, our partnership with RMIT helps leverage resources to achieve outcomes for our clients and communities. The challenge for this program is to continue to broaden placements, offering appropriate support and resourcing to sustain placements in the longer term. The CISVic/RMIT partnership offers benefits beyond placements including the provision of CISVic staff training, access to RMIT Partnership reference group events and university resources such as the Social Justice Research Forum targeted at building research capacity for CISVic, the Co design workshop where CISVic was the key participant focus in developing solutions for future CISVic longer term organisational sustainability and ongoing collaboration in the development of a research consortia between member organisations, CISVic and RMIT for a research scholarship project.

To date, the broadening of student placement to new partnerships between RMIT University and CISVic members Doncare and DCAB (now SECL) demonstrate the crucial role of peak bodies in supporting members to build capacity that leverage off pilot projects.

Recognising all elements of value and capacity building that the SPP brings to the sector, CISVic have firmly embedded the program into their practice. RMIT’s welcomed introduction of placements across semester 1 and 2 will only strengthen student placement opportunities by cementing the opportunities, practice and culture across the sector.

Catholic Education Melbourne and RMIT Social Work

Doug Sandiford

There has been a long history of social work in schools but there has been little written about it (Lee, 2011). The AASW Practice Standards for School Social Workers (AASW, 2011) emphasise the role of schools in providing a quality environment that not only creates learning outcomes but also promotes the total development of the child and schools social workers attempt to mobilise the strengths of the individual child and their school environment. For this reason having students undertake their placement in schools provides an important learning experience about the connection between schools and their communities. CEM's relationship with RMIT has allowed social work students to have this opportunity.

Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) has collaborated with RMIT Social Work Field Work (SWFW) Faculty to offer schools the opportunity to host field work placements for students since 2007.

Catholic education seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, faith, hope and optimism to live meaningful lives and shape and enrich the world around them. We promote family school engagement so that together we can create informed, optimistic and resilient students with the knowledge and life skills, and sense of purpose, needed in an ever more complex world.

Wellbeing is integral to learning excellence and ultimately to overall health and life success. At CEM we recognise the contribution of the RMIT social work field education placement program for improved student health, social and emotional wellbeing and more cohesive social relationships. Catholic schools have welcomed RMIT students into their communities for the support they offer parents and students and for the skills, knowledge and networking opportunity that a social work student placement offers.

CEM's Student Wellbeing Unit supports region-based Education Officers and an extensive network of wellbeing leaders, teachers and school leaders to promote student health, child safety and strengthen their school practice. Working together CEM staff and RMIT provide these educators and health professionals with program information and advice through briefings, access to on-site and off-site supervisors and resources such as the Field Education manual to create the best possible experience for schools and social work students.

The Social Work in Schools (SWiS) project adopts innovative



approaches to wellbeing and delivers a range of prevention, early intervention and restoring resilience programs. A key benefit for schools is that Social Work students are able to make personal and on-going contact with families and contribute to building students' social inclusion and engagement. Through relational counselling and identifying needs for program development the students contribute significantly to support schools to address mental health issues such as anxiety, stress and disengagement.

Social work students offer a diverse range of skills that support schools to deliver health and wellbeing initiatives. These tasks include joint participation in counselling sessions with a supervisor, assisting to resolve conflict in variety of situations, support for students at risk with a range of behaviour problems and assisting improved classroom participation.

A snapshot of completion tasks indicates the Social Work students' capacity to support families, contributes to building social inclusion skills and access community agencies. These include:

- Case management with students and families e.g. arrange appointments
- Identify referral services in the community and direct families access to them
- Contribute to wellbeing policies with input from staff and students.
- Develop wellbeing programs for one or more of the following: dealing with anxiety, healthy eating / living, social skills, friendship groups for isolated students, conflict resolution
- Building collaborative relationships with students and their parents/cares

It is important that Social Work students get to know their school community and familiarise themselves with the issues affecting families and students. Field work students also need to understand the family – school – community partnership context in which schools operate and how they may negotiate the introduction of a project or social event with staff and parents. Similarly schools are encouraged to support the student by finding ways to interact with the community and understanding the wellbeing landscape.

These brief case studies highlight the practical and meaningful ways SW students engage with school communities.

One such successful partnership took place at Holy Eucharist Primary School, St Albans – a vibrant community represented by many different cultures and identities. The school hosted a field work student and was excited by the opportunities it created to support the emotional health of its children. An African student was able to bring a new dimension to community engagement and helped build trust between the school and his community. Former Student Wellbeing Leader at the school, Ms Robyn Tongue observed that:

“Field Work placements require flexibility, ability to understand different points of view, ability to stand back and objectively understand differing aspects of our cultures, and of course, a sense of humour”.

Holy Child's Primary School, Dallas has a mantra of 'Safe, Happy and Ready to Learn' that encapsulates a belief in the importance of supportive wellbeing practices. Holy Child is a school where all members feel valued, respected and confident as learners. Here the SW Field Work experience focuses on supporting and developing social inclusion through practical hands on skills and programs based on research and identified areas of need. Learning experiences led by RMIT students include the implementation of an after school sport competition and development of a school garden that allowed children to learn about nature, sustainability and socialise in a relaxed and harmonious environment.



Dennis Torpy, Student Wellbeing Manager at CEM said: "In a Catholic school young people are empowered through their faith, identity, connection and sense of belonging. The school examples highlight the positive impact of the social work program and how participants help foster parent engagement, develop pro-social behaviours in students and contribute to positive relationships within the school and community".



CEM is committed to forging genuine partnerships with parents, parishes and the community to actively support Catholic schools in educating students. The RMIT Social Work Field Work collaboration with RMIT has seen many schools continue and build their involvement year on year. As our shared knowledge of family needs grow and we better understand the role, skills and knowledge that SW students can contribute for improved wellbeing and community engagement, this collaboration will only strengthen in the years ahead.

India Partnership

Linette Hawkins, Aaron Deeben
Rajamani and Supriya Pattanayak

International social work field education placements pose considerable challenges for students, educators, universities and host communities. Students face major conceptual difficulties as international placements often occur in developing countries that rely upon collective rather than individual models of practice (Hawkins, Pattanayak, Hess & Martin, 2016).

Since 2002 small groups of RMIT final year social work students (approximately 45) have undertaken field education in Odisha, India, under the supervision of Dr. Supriya Pattanayak (Adj. Professor Social Work RMIT). The field of practice is mainly community education and development in Odisha, primarily a rural state where a significant minority of the population reside in tribal communities. The overarching learning goals for all students have been to gain an in-depth understanding of grass-roots community development practice and the application of social work theories alongside a critique of social work in the international context.

Pettys et al (2005) and Nuttman-Shwarz and Berger (2012) refer to four main models of international field placement. These are the independent/ one-time model, the neighbour-country model, the onsite group model and the exchange/ reciprocal model. Our experience has led us to identify a fifth model which we term the 'Relationship/Equitable Model' and which we consider most suited to international social work field education placements. This model recognises and acknowledges the differences in resources of the home country (usually a Western developed nation) and the host country (usually a developing country) and the importance of mutuality of purpose without the expectation that both countries will contribute equally. This model has been demonstrated in our field education partnership for placements in India during the past 15 years.

Between 2006 and 2015 Velugu Association and BREDS were the two major organizations in which RMIT students were situated. The uniqueness of this experience for western social work relates to the recontextualization of practice, students immersed in the rural village life, residing with staff in the organisations at which they have been placed in Odisha.

Velugu Association is a not-for-profit organization which works with marginalized communities in particular tribal villages within Andhra Pradesh to mobilize communities with a particular focus on empowerment, forestry, education, health, land and local issues. **BREDS** is a not-for-profit non-governmental organization (supported by funding from international aid agencies and Government) engaged with adivasis

(tribals), dalits and marginalized communities of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. BRED's vision is to build a network of autonomous village communities which are self-sufficient and self-reliant.

"We have reflected and reflected and reflected on whether there are elements which, as Mel Gray and Jan Fook suggest, 'transcend national boundaries and give social work a global face'"
(Gray & Fook 2004 p. 627)

This is an extract from a paper on the reflections of five students on placement in Odisha in 2013. The paper was presented at the Conference on *International Social Work: Crossing Borders, Building Bridges*, organised by the Department of Social Work and Human Services, James Cook University in collaboration with the Department of Social Work at the De Paul Institute of Science and Technology, India (5-8 November, 2013) at the campus of De Paul Institute, Angamaly, Kerala.

A meeting of the MSW and BSW Field Education Coordinators with the CEO of Velugu and 10 Velugu Staff (2015) elicited the following responses (some of which were via interpretation), about students on placement to date. Motivation for taking students relates to the opportunity for meeting people, sharing ideas, reflecting and setting directions for perspective planning. This provides an opportunity for Velugu to impart 'Participatory Rural Appraisal methods and Action Research training to students who can then replicate this in some of the projects carried out (e.g. Social/ resource mapping). There are opportunities for all parties to learn the languages, exchange ideas about different cultures, write proposals for grants, produce reports and case studies, correspond with donors, prepare brochures, update the organizational profile, and critically reflect on government programs to get a better understanding and learn together about these.

In 2015 **Centurion University of Technology and Management**, where Dr Pattanayak is Deputy Vice Chancellor, became the auspicing agent for student placements, as well as study tours, academic exchange and joint research. Established in 2010 Centurion University is the first multi-sector, private state university in Odisha, India.

The **Urban Micro Business Centre** which provided an auspice for one of the students on placement in 2013 is now hosting students each year. This Centre provides a centralized hub for collaboration between local government and private sector for joint implementation of entrepreneurship programs, integrative self-employment with women and child development services and mobilizing funds and training-cum-production by private partners. UMBC also provides a 'one-stop-shop' for skill development, business counseling, job opportunities, financial workshops and digital learning for children, youth, and adult men and women. In these ways it provides a bridge for linkage between urban poor communities and local entrepreneurs, self-help groups, business, banks, government and skill development organizations. (p.17 booklet)



One of the six students on placement in 2017 was invited to evaluate the application of the student wellbeing model operating in a rural school in Paralakhemundi, Odisha. **Centurion Primary School** was founded and is overseen by Centurion University, as a pathway for rural and ‘Tribal’ students to access the higher education provided by the university.

Student Wellbeing at the time was managed primarily by the principal as well as informally by staff. The RMIT student provided some basic knowledge to staff regarding student wellbeing and was able to implement a formal wellbeing structure, the continued running of which was tasked to a local social worker, with university provided funding and external training. The student created the wellbeing structure taking account of the implications of a large variety and languages and cultures being present in the school, including the unique challenges faced by boarding students from tribal communities. An Australian school wellbeing structure was modified to fit within the context of a collective and collaborative view of wellbeing that was already present in the school alongside a process for individuals to be referred to the social worker.

Future Potential

The Federal Government has placed high priority on promoting Australia’s relationship with India. Evidence of this is demonstrated in the offer of forty New Colombo Plan Scholarships (\$7,000) over a five year period (2016 until end of June 2021) specifically to RMIT undergraduate social work students eligible to undertake their final placement in India. Twenty-four of these scholarships are still available for the next three years.

Social Work and Ageing: National Ageing Research Institute

Betty Haralambous

Ageing remains an under-developed field of practice and research in Australian social work despite the fact that a whole range of social workers are employed in servicing older people (Hughes and Heycox 2010, Hughes et al 2016). A reading of the demographic forecasts in the Intergenerational report (2018) should quickly alert the profession to the growing demands of this sector and the need to consider how research, service infrastructure, policy and practice need to gear up to meet the challenges that the coming 50 years will place on older people. In order to address a perceived reluctance of social work students to specialize in working with older people an RMIT/NARI (National Ageing Research Institute) Social Work Placement Partnership formally commenced in 2015. This was a new initiative for both organisations and was initially undertaken as a staged pilot in the first 12 month period. Unlike partnerships with service delivery agencies, the RMIT/NARI partnership is unique in that it provides an environment where students can experience how health research and practice are linked as well as become familiar with issues confronting older people.

The National Ageing Research Institute (NARI) was established over 40 years ago as a centre of excellence in Australia for research into ageing and improving the quality of life and health of older people. NARI is Australia’s only independent medical research institute focusing on research in the area of ageing. NARI aims are to improve health outcomes and aged care practice, as well as guide policy to improve the quality of life and ageing experience for Australia’s older people. NARI’s translational and applied approach focusses on the whole person and the social, clinical, and psychological issues which impact on them. A dynamic, experienced team with a broad range of research expertise, consultancy skills and strong knowledge of the health and community sector support the students on placement. NARI employs staff/researchers from a range of disciplines including social work, physiotherapy, sociology, psychology, medicine, to name a few. Staff at NARI undertake a broad range of research activities, including older people’s mental health, elder abuse, falls and balance research,

research into pain, service evaluation and development, research about carers and how best to support them. Research also focuses on exploring and addressing the specific needs of diverse groups of older people.

Social workers at NARI have a range of roles including:

- Institute Director with a strong research and clinical background.
- Deputy Director with extensive management and health expertise.
- Research Fellow and Cultural Diversity Stream Leader, with extensive management and research expertise in translational research in the area of cultural diversity.
- Senior Project Officer/Research Fellow with strong policy expertise as well as strong clinical expertise in a hospital setting.

NARI prides itself in having strong expertise in the area of social work and ageing. NARI is also proud to showcase the diverse roles of social workers in the ageing and research field. It is this passion that drove NARI to formally engage in a partnership with RMIT Social Work in 2015/16. Prior to that time, NARI social workers supervised students on an ad hoc basis. The partnership aims to provide a systematic and co-ordinated approach to building capacity in social work and ageing in research and across the aged care policy and service sectors. The partnership model centres on NARI supervising 3-4 students some of which may be located with an external agency. In addition another 6 placements are brokered in other external organizations where social work supervision is provided in place (making a total of 10 placements per year). All students are brought together at least three times across the life of the placement to share experiences in working in an ageing field and gain knowledge in research methods from expert presenters. Recently NARI has made links to direct practice placements which have diversified the mix of skills developed by social work students in ageing. The partnership offers unique opportunities for students both within NARI and within its established partner organisations. In addition to their placement tasks students can thrive in a culture of regular reflective practice sessions in a group setting as well as

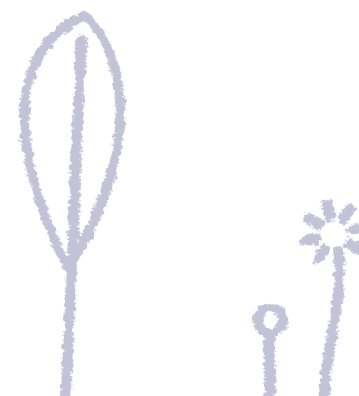
their individual supervision; have access to weekly research and clinical seminars on site at NARI; join in its academic forums, conferences and workshops; and have access to experienced psycho-social researchers from a range of discipline backgrounds.

Since commencement, NARI has sourced a total of 23 placements. The target is to source 10 placements per year across a range of agencies who focus on areas of ageing including direct practice, policy and research. Partner agencies have included Council of the Ageing (COTA), Fronditha Care, North West Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS), Meaningful Ageing Australia and many more.

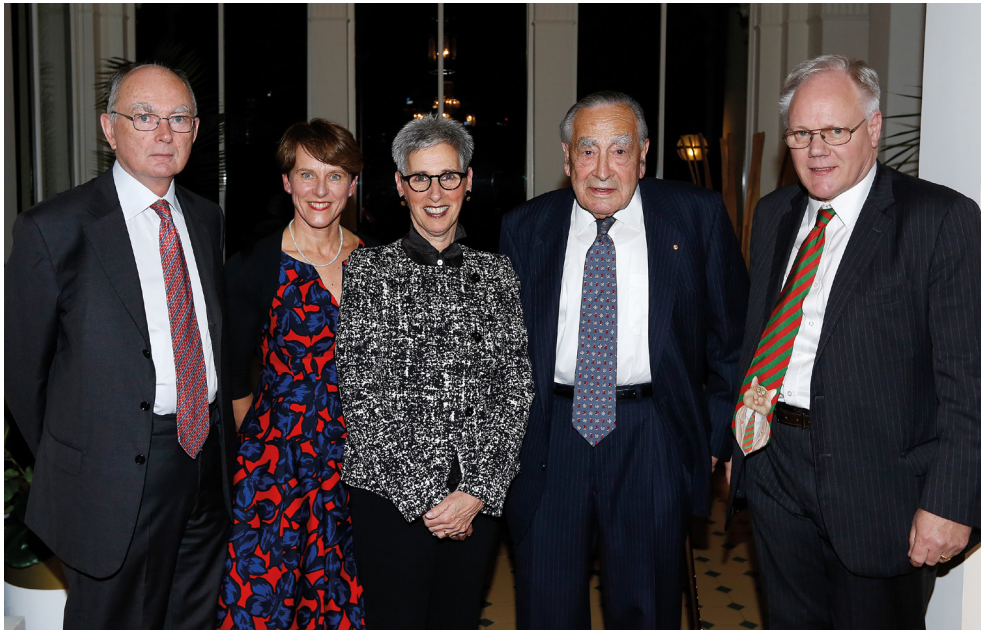
Encouraging social work students into ageing practice

A long-standing relationship with RMIT Social Work was cemented this year with a Memorandum of Understanding put in place to formalise student placements. The MOU focuses on placing social work students within NARI to introduce and encourage them to consider working in a range of settings with older people. These range from clinical services through to policy and research. The pilot program works with final year Bachelor and Masters students, enabling students to take part in research or policy placements. Six students undertook their social work student placements at NARI and associated organisations over the last twelve months.

(NARI Annual report, 2016)







Students have been involved in a range of Projects/tasks including:

- Direct practice such as assisting on agency helplines and Assessments for aged and community care services.
- Gap analysis of dementia educational resources.
- Producing a Short film about spirituality and ageing.
- Various literature reviews in areas of ageing.

Outcomes include capacity building, which is one of the main goals of our partnership. Whilst a formal evaluation has not occurred in this instance, one ethno-specific partner has employed many of the students on completion of placement as has NARI and one of our students has continued to work in the field of her placement and produced a book related to ageing. These positive outcomes have helped us to achieve one of our main goals – that is encouraging graduate social workers to consider working with older people as their preferred field of practice and particularly focus on vulnerable older groups.

Doncare

Ian Clark

Increasing numbers of individuals and families presenting to generalist services with multiple complex issues find it more difficult to access specialist services such as mental health services, disability, employment, housing, gambling, family violence, alcohol and other drug services and often receive fragmented support. Generalist services are often left to manage the immediate crisis which does not address the underlying cause/s and symptoms of chronic disadvantage or entrenched social exclusion and the associated lack of civic participation. Research has found that a case management focus and individual capacity building can help to reduce the 'long-term reliance of clients experiencing financial hardship' (Nguyen, 2011, p. 12) on emergency relief services. Doncare provides generalist services and has partnered with RMIT to implement their case management service model.

Doncare was established in 1969 when five ministers from different denominations shared a vision to help isolated residents in the newly developed areas of Doncaster and Templestowe. Doncare is an independent community services organisation that has provided support to families, the aged, youth and disadvantaged in the City of Manningham for 48 years. We effectively combine professional staff, RMIT Social Work students and a team of 500 trained volunteers to provide a broad range of services to families with young children, emergency financial relief, counselling, support programs for women experiencing family violence, social support for the elderly/ isolated, and volunteer recruitment and placement. We assist the community on three levels: providing assistance, prevention through support and education, and enlisting community involvement.

Doncare prides itself on responding to the growing and increasingly diverse needs of the local community. As the major welfare organisation in Manningham, it is our responsibility to advocate on behalf of the most marginalised residents to ensure they are supported in the same equitable way as all other community members.

Doncare's Information and Emergency Relief (I&ER) program has been an integral part of the organisation since it began in 1969. Although it plays an essential role in many clients' lives through the provision of emergency support in times of financial and emotional crisis, due to its short term nature it can often be difficult to help clients with long term and complex issues. In the previous few years, staff within Doncare's I&ER program began to notice an increase in this client group. These factors initiated an investigation into the possibility of establishing a Case Management Unit within Doncare with the aim of closing the gaps that other Doncare services were unable to meet.

Doncare has regularly been approached by universities to

accommodate students on placement. Through the dedication and determination of the CEO, who passionately believes in supporting and training students, Doncare, was able to secure funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation to run for two years. The next step was to establish a formal relationship with a Social Work department within a Melbourne university in order to offer placement opportunities to social work students. This relationship was successfully established with RMIT University, and a funding agreement with Community Information and Support Victoria (CISVic) was reached to ensure the appropriate external supervision was provided for up to ten students from late 2013 to late 2014. This was ideal in Doncare's case as it fitted with the proposed partnership with RMIT and its social work students who were required to complete a 70 day placement. With the guidance of the CMU's manager, the first two student case workers commenced their placements in September 2013 and began working with the CMU's first clients. The Senior Case Worker conducts ongoing client assessments and assists with the mentoring and support of university students who largely deliver this program. Since this time Doncare

“I will remember my time at Doncare as a time when I grew in my understanding of how to best help and support people. The program showed me how to work with clients to work out the best way forward to make their lives better in a planned way.”

provides placements for 12 RMIT students annually with RMIT now providing the off site supervision for these students. A number of these students have been employed by Doncare after graduation and some have continued in a volunteer capacity post placement.

Doncare has successfully implemented an innovative case management service model and thus has been able to offer intensive support to assist people to move beyond their immediate cycle of disadvantage. This project has also been extremely effective in strengthening working relationships and partnerships with other local service agencies who have enthusiastically endorsed this model of service delivery for its multiple benefits to clients. Increased awareness of, and reliance on, Doncare's case management service is evident in the increase in the number of referrals being received from a wider range of agencies and services as well as requests for information on the process for implementing this approach.



The project provides an opportunity for social work students to undertake a high-quality direct practice placement to really hone their craft. This in turn contributes to the quality of the future community sector workforce. The Doncare model enriches the community through training RMIT students to assist people in times of hardship. Doncare established a strong partnership with RMIT University to implement this service model and has subsequently ensured increased access to qualified students. Our partnership with RMIT extends beyond placement provision and provides professional development opportunities, research capacity building consultation and ongoing access to University resources for strategic development projects.



South East Community Links

Jinny McGrath and Ellenor Vellev

Responding to the needs of local Australian communities where over half the population is born overseas is critical for social and economic inclusion (ABS, 2017). The South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne are one of Melbourne's highest multicultural areas. Placements in this area provide students with the opportunity to increase their understanding of cultural diversity and inclusion and to ultimately contribute to better social and economic outcomes for people in our community. South East Community Links (SECL) provides students with this chance.

SECL was formed in 2015 as a result of a merge between Springvale Community Aid & Advice Bureau (SCAAB) and Dandenong Community Advisory Bureau (DCAB). Later that year Southern Ethnic Advocacy and Advisory Council (SEAAC) joined SECL. SECL is the culmination of five decades of history and commitment, working across the south east of Melbourne to achieve better social and economic outcomes for people in our community. SECL currently operates out of three sites, Dandenong, Springvale and Noble Park, with a combination of staff, volunteers and students.

SECL delivers a wide range of services to meet the needs of people in our community including emergency relief, case work, housing support, microfinance, youth and family services, financial counselling and resettlement services for refugees and asylum seekers. Our service model is based upon ensuring people in our community are provided integrated services, linking services to client needs. As disadvantage has many root causes, only an integrated understanding of these causes can support people to achieve their social and economic goals. In turn, these achievements contribute to economic and social development in our community.

In July 2015, DCAB commenced a new student placement approach because providing the social work supervision required with limited trained social workers within our small service created challenges. Rather than employing a qualified case worker, undertaking two days per week of case work, we employed a qualified social worker, with experience supervising students, as a student supervisor, while carrying a small case load. This allowed the social worker to provide group and individual supervision to students, mainly from RMIT, while another worker, who co-ordinated volunteers, provided task supervision. Through this approach, we were able to provide up to 10 student placements per year for a mixture of Field Education 1 (FE1) and Field Education 2 (FE2) placements. This model allowed the organisation

“For me, the most satisfying part of the experience was the opportunity to have face to face interaction with clients and helping them to achieve their goals, I wish I could have stayed longer to help more clients.”

This year we further strengthened our links with RMIT who provide most of the Social Work student placements for this program. This strengthened partnership has resulted in 12 student placements, all of whom have found the experience rewarding and have achieved great results with their clients.

(Doncare Annual Report, 2015/2016)



Every person counts
Every system fair



Achieving better
social and economic
outcomes for people in
our community



to undertake more generalist casework with 3 to 4 students increasing capacity with case work services provided 4 to 5 days per week.

When the organisations merged in October 2015, DCAB and SCAAB had different methods for student placements. In order to develop a common approach across the newly merged organisation, consultations occurred with staff – particularly practitioners and managers – regarding the best student placement model to implement. This led to a hybrid model during 2016 and 2017, whereby some RMIT students were provided to us by our peak body CISVic – who provided the students with field education supervision. In addition to this, SECL took on students from other universities – with the universities providing supervision.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, SECL had 36 students on placement each calendar year; half of those students were from RMIT, with 40 paid staff members and only 3 qualified to provide field work education, 2 of these in management positions, providing supervision was difficult. The need to develop a sustainable, reliable and consistent model of student supervision is critical to the longevity of the SECL student placement model. In 2018 we are piloting social work placements from RMIT only, with RMIT providing Field Education supervision and SECL providing task supervision. RMIT has provided training for our task supervisors and our student allocation processes are improving. SECL has been working with RMIT and other CISVIC member organisations to develop an industry scholarship opportunity to research the consolidation of the student placement model.

SECL values students and sees them as an integral part of the organisation. Students bring new knowledge and perspectives into the organisation, increase the capacity to deliver direct client services and undertake vital research, policy and project work that would otherwise not be undertaken. For the last four years, students have taken on the task of designing and undertaking our annual volunteer survey. The literature research on volunteer satisfaction and standards has helped inform our planning for volunteer recruitment, retention and training. We also undertake staged projects with students – one group undertaking the initial phase of a project, then subsequent students working on the next phase and so on. For example one research project occurred across 3 stages over 18 months with the first phase researching food distribution models, the second surveying and consulting with clients about best practice regarding food distribution, and the third phase developing and evaluating a pilot model for food distribution.

The Salvation Army Adult Services

Caitlin Coleman

Homelessness is currently one of the key social policy issues in Australia. We believe that all Human Service professionals should have an understanding of its causes and effects, its interactions with mental health issues and substance misuse, and be empathic to the experiences of people who are homeless. The work of the Salvation Army Adult Services in addressing homelessness is fundamental to RMIT's motivation in partnering with them to ensure students have the experience of increasing their awareness about homelessness, one of the key social policy issues in Australia currently.

The Salvation Army Adult Services is a network of approximately 17 programs in Melbourne's central, northern and western metropolitan areas. Adult Services aims to prevent homelessness; alleviate disadvantage experienced by people who are marginalised and to empower people to achieve meaningful participation in community.

The network is committed to providing high quality and innovative service responses utilising flexible approaches that are responsive to individual needs and to changes in those needs as they occur.

Services are delivered from nine sites and include: residential services; community outreach; intensive case management support; drug and alcohol dependency programs; justice / correctional services and aged care.

Student Unit

Our Student Unit provides a structured approach to placements, employing a (part-time) coordinator to plan, facilitate and support placement of social work students at Adult Services. Operating since 2012, we host approximately five social work students each semester to complete a 70 day placement in our programs. Students undertake a placement focused on direct practice (casework) and/or a project (research), under the close guidance of their Task Supervisor (usually the team leader) and Field Educator (Student Unit Coordinator).

Opportunities on placement with our Student Unit

To add to and enrich the learning that occurs within their program, students meet regularly for group supervision sessions, facilitated by the Student Unit Coordinator. In this supportive learning environment,



students present and discuss issues and incidents in their work, critical reflections, self-care strategies and their professional identity.

Students also visit each other's programs, and attend presentations from our program managers on common practice issues.

Mutual Benefits

For Adult Services, the primary goal of the Student Unit is recruitment of a qualified, proven, network orientated workforce. This goal has been met, through the subsequent employment of 23 out of 60 students who have undertaken placement with us.

A student's contributions to the program where they are based can be significant. Students undertake a range of projects which always assist program development. Examples have included: researching trauma informed recreation in a supported accommodation facility, updating program manuals, documenting and evaluating program models, community participation planning, reviewing assessment procedures and undertaking client experience surveys and focus groups.

The benefits for the students include participating in a well-structured and supported learning environment, peer learning, opportunities for a variety of learning experiences and potential employment subsequent to a successful placement.

By partnering with us, RMIT has close knowledge of our organisational structure, our values, activities and supervisory capacity. This assists on-going planning for RMIT and us, as we hold a common understanding of placement requirements and expectations.

As this snapshot shows, our Student Unit provides benefits to the workforce capacity of our programs, the homeless sector, students, tertiary institutions, and ultimately, the health of our clients.

Feedback

We routinely ask for feedback from students, supervisors and RMIT Social Work Field Education team, which informs and reforms practice in the Student Unit. Excerpts are below.

Students' Experiences:

... on undertaking placement

"I had real life day to day experience with clients and the benefit of having time to reflect on this experience and think about it in relation to different theories. I found that making time to actively think about different theories when at the office meant that they were more clear in my head when with clients."

"I could have an entire learning plan written on the occurrences of today."

"I have loved my placement here; it has flown, yet I feel like I have been part of the team forever."

"My team's biggest strength is their ability to be critically reflective, and through exposure to their stories I have been able to learn from their experiences. As a student you always hope to be in a team that provides you with the opportunity and encouragement to grow as a social work student, and this I can say I have received during the last 70 days of my placement. My team's support of me as a student has provided me with great confidence and allowed me to overcome several challenges during my placement."

... on the Student Unit

"The student unit gave the opportunity to develop and learn alongside other students, which assisted in reflecting on our roles as social workers within a community welfare organisation. We were able to share experiences, suggestions and discussions from a social work perspective."

"I think it is good to have a group of people that you can share your placement experiences with and compare notes. There are some things that you can only say to people who are going through the same thing as you, and it is nice to know that other people are experiencing similar difficulties, frustrations or excitement."



... on group supervision

"Conversing with students would often help put some of my concerns at ease as others were experiencing what I was. The open space for communication really encouraged students to discuss areas of confusion/contention and the discussions that stemmed from these were valuable."

"Group supervision sessions were an excellent time to breakdown the practical day to day tasks we had been undertaking, and engage with the theory and skills we had learnt at university in a critical way, in relation to these practical tasks."

Supervisors' reflections on our Student Unit:

"It's good to have the help from student unit co-ordinator with all the paperwork."

"Hard (to offer enough supervision) when there's lots of other work demands, but these go up and down."

"Need to ensure students are mature, able to cope with challenges."

"Most task supervisors feel their students are moving steadily through the placement to the point where the student will eventually be of net benefit to the program, though there is some willingness to forgo hopes of a net benefit."

"I would happily recommend (ex-students as employees) to other programs/agencies as dedicated, knowledgeable, hard-working and professional. They came to us knowing the client group and just stepped into the roles - which was great for us."

RMIT's reflections on our Student Unit:

"The feedback from both students and supervisors in liaison visits was positive because the planning arrangements with the Coordinator supported the overall placement experience."

"The Coordinator has done an outstanding job in developing, managing and consolidating the work of the Student Unit."

"It is clear there are reciprocal benefits for all parties: students, field educators, staff, organisations, university and clients. Potential task supervisors are now requesting a placement student for their programs."

Swinburne wellbeing clinic for older adults

Mark Silver

The role of Social work within age care settings in Australia, outside of hospital and health services, remains largely absent despite its presence in this context several decades earlier. Acknowledging the potential contribution of social work with its emphasis on "person-in-environment" was behind the Social Work student Units that have developed as part of the The Swinburne Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults (SWELCOA).

SWELCOA was established in 2011. It grew out of the identified joint needs for training of Mental Health Practitioners in aged care on the one hand and the need to address the unmet emotional wellbeing issues faced by older adults on the other hand; especially those living in residential care.

The Psychology Department at Swinburne already has an established clinic open to the community for some years, so it was easy to locate the SWELCOA within this structure. However such a program required an outreach approach, where instead of clients coming to the clinic, the clinic would come to them; meeting clients on their own terms in their own homes, in their own culture and most importantly, in their own definitions of the problems they faced. Partnerships were soon developed with Age Care providers and students were able to be placed at several facilities. Initially Post-Graduate Clinical Psychology students were placed but then it grew into other universities and included social work and counselling students as well.

The psychology and counselling clinic placements were initially up to a day a week, seeing individual clients and facilitating group programs. In an attempt to expand the presence of students in age care facilities and to explore the potential different role for social work in age care residential facilities, Swinburne worked with RMIT Social Work to pilot a model whereby Social Work students, were offered placements for 3 days a week. This "embedded" placement allowed for a more systemic approach; where clients were not only seen individually but the facilities were viewed as communities in themselves. An exploratory approach was used where students worked collaboratively with the older people, their families and staff from various disciplines to generate different ways of working. Interventions could then be developed within several layers: ranging from the individual micro level to the larger environmental structural level involving families, staff and group work. Piloted first in 2015 the program has led the way in defining roles not only for the Social Work students but also for Social Workers working in such settings themselves.

The students have been involved with a number of areas:

- Seeing individuals & families
- Running groups such as reminiscence & carers groups
- Life story work – including intergenerational work with schools (e.g. life stories shared through digital storytelling)
- Advocacy work
- Supporting staff – both nursing and lifestyle
- Conducting research into issues faced by the client group, as well as into the Social work role.

The placements work as student units; with at least 2 students per site. Supervision alternates between group and individual. There is also the opportunity of learning from the other disciplines as some supervision includes psychology, counselling and social work students mixed in together. The Clinic also offers fortnightly seminars on various aspects of mental health and ageing.

A glimpse into the relevance of learning opportunities in this environment to concepts studied on campus is evident in the comments of a student on placement in 2017: “I was given scope to try and put theories into practice like: effective groupwork facilitation, therapies like reminiscence, CBT, music and narrative. I got to see how social work puts into practice values like: a non-judgmental approach, anti-oppressive work, identifying power imbalances meet real life situations in aged care.”

The partnership – RMIT Social Work & Swinburne Psychology

The partnership between Swinburne & RMIT has been of mutually significant benefit and has provided added dimensions to both the service provided as well as the knowledge and experience gained and shared. This can only improve and increase.



Multidisciplinary practice at the Centre for Innovative Justice and Mental Health Legal Centre

Kat Ogilvie

BACKGROUND

RMIT University's **Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ)** was established in 2012 to look at innovative ways of delivering justice and promote a fairer, more accessible justice system. Not long after, a partnership was formed with the **Mental Health Legal Centre (MHLC)** which now co-locates with the CIJ at RMIT University.

The MHLC (which celebrated its 30th birthday in 2017) is a community legal centre that provides legal and social work support to people in Victoria experiencing legal issues that have mental health issues or been labelled with a mental health diagnosis. Support is provided through legal advice, representation, education, case work, information and referral, and systemic reform advocacy.

The work of the CIJ and MHLC has been strongly supported by RMIT students since the partnership was formed, mostly by RMIT law students initially. However discussions began in 2014 about the possibility of a multidisciplinary practice (MDP), which would firstly involve social workers and social work students. The CIJ formed a further partnership with RMIT's Social Work School to develop the MDP further.

EARLY DAYS

The first social work placements offered by CIJ involved two Field Education 2 students, who undertook a scoping project to address the feasibility of implementing a MDP within the MHLC. The students researched and produced a report about the importance of working collaboratively in multidisciplinary teams, particularly when working with vulnerable members of the community. The students wrote about how addressing co-occurring issues in a holistic manner is a more effective method of providing assistance than siloed support services that fail to address the interrelated nature of problems. The report acknowledged the challenges of operating a MDP, however it was advocated that many of the risks

are preventable, and that the unique benefits are likely to outweigh these risks. Importantly, the report also highlighted the importance of placement students in building the capacity of community agencies.

Shortly after the completion of the successful scoping study, two Field Education 1 students were placed within the MHLC to pilot how social work might operate in the context of the community legal centre. These students spent time on placement supporting the women's prison program, Inside Access (discussed in more detail later), as well as the Night Service telephone legal advice line.

Around this time, the CIJ engaged another Field Education 2 social work student to assist with some law reform and research work, in particular to support the CIJ's submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria). This submission included the results of a student-led file review of legal prison clinic files looking at the prevalence of women in prison experiencing family violence.

Through the social work student involvement and the development of strong relationships between the stakeholders, it became apparent that social work and legal support provided collaboratively was invaluable in the MHLC and CIJ context. The CIJ was able to secure funding for a social worker to further establish the multidisciplinary law and social work "MDP" practice (with the view to expanding to other disciplines), which was formally launched by RMIT's Vice Chancellor in June 2016. Below is an indication of the fantastic contributions that social work placement students have made to MHLC and CIJ.

"I am happy with the progress I feel I have made throughout my placement at the MHLC. When I first started placement, I had 3 years of theory and study behind me, but still somehow felt completely unequipped to start practicing due to a lack of experience working in the sector. In the beginning, I lacked confidence in my capabilities and it took some time to adjust to the practice setting as well as the multidisciplinary context at the MHLC, which at first was somewhat intimidating to me. Field Ed 1 has been challenging in many ways, as expected, but I feel that my time at the MHLC has allowed me to develop confidence in my practice skills, and has reinforced the theoretical knowledge I have gained so far throughout the BA of Social Work."

FIELD EDUCATION 1

Since the launch of the MDP to now, June 2018, eleven Field Education 1 placement students have supported the service delivery work of the Mental Health Legal Centre. The work has predominantly been within the **Inside Access** prison support program, which provides civil legal and social work support to people with mental health issues or cognitive impairment, mostly within the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre women's prison.

Students have been involved with providing holistic assistance to people in prison and people after release from prison, to help break the cycle of incarceration and recidivism. Alongside lawyers and law students, social work students have provided support for issues

such as lack of housing, tenancy advocacy, access to and contact with children, post-release support and being linked to services in the community. The support provided has resulted in women having a better chance of integration into the community after their period of incarceration. Along with the privilege of supporting resilient criminalised women, students have also gained increased knowledge of and capability to identify systemic injustices impacting on people experiencing mental health issues and issues related to incarceration.

Social work placement students have also supported the telephone legal advice **Night Service** at MHLC, which provides confidential legal advice and social support over the phone. Many people who contact the MHLC seeking legal advice have overlapping issues associated with their legal issues, such as mental health, housing, employment, family violence and financial hardship. Students assist with intake calls for the legal team, bringing a trauma-informed and strengths-based perspective to their information gathering when speaking with people who have complex support needs, many of whom receive compulsory mental health treatment in the community or in an inpatient context.

Students also have an opportunity to observe hearings with Mental Health Legal Centre lawyers, such as **Mental Health Tribunal Hearings** and to deliver support services after building rapport with the person at their Hearing.

In addition to the aforementioned client-facing work, Field Education 1 students have assisted in **developing best practice approaches to multidisciplinary support models**, as well as providing essential feedback in conversations with those active in the research sector to address and advocate around systemic issues for vulnerable people in the mental health or justice system. The service delivery work of the Mental Health Legal Centre is stronger and more responsive because of the support and capacity building of social work students.

FIELD EDUCATION 2

A number of important pieces of research or project work have been undertaken by social work Field Education 2 placement students with CIJ and MHLC.

Evaluation of Mental Health Legal Centre's Night Service

Social work students on their final placement were engaged by MHLC to design and implement an Evaluation of MHLC's Night Service, which as previously mentioned, provides telephone legal assistance to people with co-existing mental health and legal issues. The Evaluation was designed to look at the effectiveness of the service and provide an opportunity for clients, volunteers and staff to provide feedback, through interviews and surveys. The final Evaluation report provided invaluable feedback for the service and has contributed to best practice approaches in providing an accessible, responsive and effective service for people accessing and volunteering within this service.



"I have found this placement invaluable to my development as a social worker. It has helped to fully underpin to me the impact that research has upon social work practice and how the joining of research and direct practice experience is a great tool. It has also helped to demonstrate how multidisciplinary work can occur."

I am also incredibly grateful for the opportunities that this placement has given me... It has also been great to get to work on a piece of research that I believe in and that will add value to an important field of work and personally feel is rewarding work to get to contribute too.

Probably the biggest take away from this placement for me is that being involved in the CIJ, getting to meet a wide range of professionals in the field and getting to observe professional focus groups has confirmed to me that social work in relation to the justice system is the main area of work that interests and inspires me and that, crucially, it is very possible to practice critical social work within this setting, including in areas that traditionally are controlled environments."

VALS Police Complaints Report

Field Education 2 students undertook their placement at the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS), in partnership with CIJ. The students were asked to complete a research project that looked at the Victoria police complaints processes for Aboriginal people. As part of this, the students did a literature review of best practice for responding to police complaints both domestically and internationally and spoke to a number of key stakeholders in this area. The students also reviewed a large number of police complaints files at VALS and provided a detailed analysis of the outcomes of the complaints processes. The students made a number of crucial recommendations in their report, which significantly, VALS used in their submission to the Victorian IBAC Parliamentary Committee in 2017. For more information about VALS submission to IBAC, please see https://vals.org.au/assets/2017/09/VALS_PoliceComplaintsSubmission_IBACCttee_-2017.pdf

PIPA Project

Field Education 2 students were recruited to support the important research work of CIJ on the PIPA Project (Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home). The PIPA Project is looking to highlight the complexity faced by families living with adolescents who use violence. The social work students worked closely with the research team to complete tasks such as file reviews of a significant number of files from the Children's Court of Victoria, as well as Youthlaw community legal centre files. This allowed CIJ researchers to better understanding the narratives of the young people that were presenting at Court, or in need of legal assistance. This work assists CIJ to engage policy makers and practitioners as they work through the challenges and opportunities for responding to the next generation of individuals who use family violence. For more information about the PIPA Project, please see: <https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/news/positive-interventions-for-perpetrators-adolescent-violence-in-the-home-pipa-project>

Advanced Statements Research Project

Most recently, the Mental Health Legal Centre engaged Field Education 2 students to support a qualitative research project that ultimately documented the experience of people who had completed and used their Advance Statement. Advance Statements were given a higher profile in the Mental Health Act 2014 (Victoria), however not many people in the mental health system have developed an Advance Statement. Students were engaged to undertake a literature review about Advance Statements (and similar processes worldwide) and then organise a number of interviews with people who had completed an Advance Statement with the Mental Health Legal Centre. Students observed these interviews and transcribed and analysed the data, contributing to a report about the findings of this study. Not only will this important information will



"I've been able to learn a great deal about the social services sector while being on placement at the MHLC, and have thoroughly enjoyed the multidisciplinary nature of the organisation. Although it was a bit of a learning curve to wrap my head around the organisational processes and procedures of the MHLC, and how social work fits into the broader structure, it has been so interesting learning about the legal element of the client's files. In terms of social work, and being aware of the person in their environment and additional factors that are impacting on them, I feel it's essential to be aware of their legal issues, especially when it impacts their social work needs. It's been eye-opening (and rewarding) to see the positive outcomes that can be achieved through multidisciplinary practice, and providing the client with holistic support."

"As a fresh social work student, with no prior knowledge or experience with the social services sector, the MHLC has been an ideal place to complete my first placement. I have received a lot of support, training and encouragement from my supervisor, my task supervisors and my fellow social work students. It has been invaluable having other social work students on placement with me, especially as they have come from both the MSW and the BSW, and are a combination of both FE1 and FE2 students. It has been so helpful having the opportunity to discuss social work theories and approaches to practice in peer supervision, and debrief about experiences... Field Education is challenging, given the length of time and other commitments that we have to juggle over the course of the semester; so having other students on placement with me was a great help."

be used by MHLC to inform the broader discourse relating to Advance Statements, the Mental Health Act and the Mental Health Tribunal, it has also been transformed in a journal article which was recently published. Please see more here: <http://www.mdpi.com/2075-471X/7/2/22>

FROM HERE

The value of the partnership (between CIJ, RMIT University's Social Work School and the Mental Health Legal Centre) has been significantly beneficial and through the establishment of the MDP, has confirmed the importance of innovative and multidisciplinary practice, with the valuable support of RMIT social work and law students.

At the time of writing, more than 190 Mental Health Legal Centre clients have been assisted by a social worker and Field Education 1 social work students alone, in just two semesters of placements. There have also been immense benefits to research projects driven by MHLC, CIJ and other community agencies. There is substantial value in integrated legal and social work services for client outcomes, staff wellbeing and long-term economic savings through the prevention of legal and other issues arising in the future.

There are plenty more exciting projects in the pipeline for CIJ and MHLC and we look forward to building on the partnership with the Social Work Field Education team and continuing to highlight innovative and holistic approaches to addressing legal and social need and producing graduates from a range of disciplines who successfully adapt to and promote innovation. Multidisciplinary practice is clearly the way of the future to support vulnerable people with complex support needs. Social work and the law are very complementary disciplines and RMIT social work students have been an integral part of embedding a new and integrated way of thinking and doing.



Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program

Carmel Simpson and Maree Corbo

Traditional approaches to field education have had limited success in being able to offer student opportunities to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, colleagues and clients.

Zubrzycki, Green, Jones, Stratton, Young, Bessarab, 2014, p.47

Developing collaborative and respectful partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and universities requires reciprocal relationships where universities offer opportunities to organisations in return for student learning experiences where genuine 'two way learning' can occur. RMIT has been working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in the Northern Territory since 2014. This chapter discusses the partnership between Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs.



History of Tangentyere Council

Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation is a community-controlled grass-roots not for profit organisation delivering human services and social enterprise activities for the benefit of Aboriginal people from Central Australia. Tangentyere Council has 16 Town Camp corporate members, over 600 individual members and provides services to in excess of 10,000 people from a region that covers approximately 873,894 square kilometres. Tangentyere Council was originally a Community Housing Organisation and while housing continues to be major source of advocacy, Tangentyere has now expanded to include a broad range of Human Services including the following:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1) Child safety; | 5) Family services; | 9) Chronic Diseases; |
| 2) Aged and Disability; | 6) Alcohol and Other Drugs; | 10) Family Violence Prevention; and |
| 3) Youth; | 7) Community Safety; | 11) Social Enterprise Development. |
| 4) Employment and Training; | 8) Secretariat Support; | |

Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program

The Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program (TFVPP) began operating late 2014 and now consists of 4 programs including the:

- Tangentyere Women’s Family Safety Group (TWFSG) (Primary Prevention and Early Intervention)
- Tangentyere Domestic Violence Specialist Children’s Service (Early Intervention/ Response)
- Tangentyere Men’s Behaviour Change Program (Response)
- Men’s Outreach Assessment and Referral Service (Response)

The Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program (TFVPP) acknowledges the high risk nature of Family Violence in Town Camp communities and at the same time recognise range of additional contributing factors that impact on men’s use of violence, such as physical and mental health issues, homelessness, housing overcrowding, alcohol and drug issues, education and employment issues plus socio economic and historic disadvantage often contributing to serious harm in their relationships. The program acknowledges that these factors adversely impact on the relationships that men have with their partners, children and in their community and as a result the TFVPP’s response to Family violence is holistic recognising the additional intersectional barriers and oppression many of the families we work for experience.

RMIT Students

In 2015 we were pleased to welcome our first cohort of RMIT student Social work students which has continued since. The Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program (TFVPP) currently accepts up to seven students per year who are completing their final Social Work Placement and to date we have had 25 students. The aim of our placement program is to build a workforce capable of working in a culturally safe way with Aboriginal people as well as contributing to a workforce that is confident regarding their understanding of the dynamics Family Violence particularly in the context of Aboriginal people.

The Tangentyere Women’s Family Safety group describe our placement model as “two way learning”. The leaders of the TWFSG describe the intersection of two-way learning between workers and communities as:

Two way learning is Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people coming together to build a safe and strong community through working together.

The principle of “two way learning” is the equal sharing of skills and knowledge between our students and community members by developing future social workers who can genuinely participate, listen and learn from Aboriginal community while at the same time our students share their skills and knowledge to build the capacity of Town Campers.

Since 2015 our students have contributed to a wide range of exciting activities in the past four years focussing on the empowerment of Town Camp communities in relation to Family violence, including the “Putting Gender on the Agenda” forum, the development of a film project “Stories of Hope and Healing”, managing the fundraising campaign to assist the Tangentyere Women’s Family Safety group attendance at Parliament House. Alongside these activities, our students have contributed greatly to literature reviews for tenders, the development of program manuals as well as casework and advocacy.

The partnership between RMIT and Tangentyere Council continues to be mutually beneficial supporting students to experience a placement that has diversity of location and experience and allows for the Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program to increase its capacity for operational and/or project work during student placement times. The collaboration with RMIT ensures proactive support for both the students and Tangentyere staff which have been invaluable to the ongoing development of our placement program. Most importantly the students are welcomed and supported by Town Camp community members and in particular the Tangentyere Women’s Family Safety group who are consistently enthusiastic, supportive and encouraging of our students and our placement program. Six students, after placement, have gone on to work in the Northern Territory with us, other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and/or mainstream organisations, while a number of students returning to Melbourne are working in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations indicating the workforce implications of our program.

“One thing that I have found that enables me to be an advocate and ally for Aboriginal people and address systemic injustices is the two-way learning that is highly valued and practiced at Tangentyere, which is particularly evident in the TWFSG. There is a strong sense that we all need to work together and bring our various strengths and skill sets to be stronger together. This has been comforting for me to know that there is a place for non-Aboriginal workers in Aboriginal services.”



“Undertaking my final placement at Tangentyere has provided me with an incredible opportunity to genuinely practice from a grassroots, community development approach within a context of two-way learning and respect.

This has not only provided me with a framework for future engagement within a cross-cultural context, it has reinforced the importance of recognising that individuals/communities are the experts in their lives and their voices need to be central in order to effectively work alongside them.

Another key learning for me has been the importance of practicing from a critical social work approach, especially within the context of Aboriginal services. This theory has been crucial in order for me to look to wider social structures and policies as an explanatory framework for social injustices, rather than problematising individuals’ circumstances.”



“I am always striving for best practice and I have learnt so much from spending time with the TWFSG, both from informal interactions and observing and being apart of TWFSG meetings. The women are open and honest about their backgrounds and experiences and are willing to teach and share their knowledge. Small things like learning to use silence has been helpful for me, even though sometimes it makes me feel uncomfortable. I have also asked Shirleen and Barbara how to best approach certain situations on Town Camps, or about respectful engagement more generally. They have been incredibly helpful and I feel fortunate to be able to learn from them and work beside them.”

“The TWFSG works from a strong community development approach. By working alongside the women in the TWFSG, and Carmel and Maree, it has become evident that the women are empowered at every stage of the process. This involves engaging and valuing the insights of the TWFSG, and being led by their knowledge and experience even though this is often a time-intensive process. In addition, the assets and strengths of the TWFSG, and Aboriginal people more broadly, are constantly identified. By being immersed in this work practice I now have a much deeper understanding of the importance of valuing, prioritising and promoting community-led solutions to FV (and other issues).”



Forensicare: The Social Work Studio

Belinda Johnson and Lisa Wright

Forensic social work is a category of social work practice that encompasses interaction with the courts, involuntary treatment, risk of violence and assessment of risk and rehabilitation (Sheehan, 2012). Social workers working in forensic environments must balance the needs of protecting the public with their promotion of the quality of life of consumers. They need to identify, assess and manage risk; challenge discriminatory structures and practices; engage effectively in relationships with consumers and their families and carers and they must identify, develop and implement strategies for intervention. Forensicare (Victorian Institute of Forensic Mental Health) is Victoria’s leading provider of forensic mental health care and works to meet the needs of consumers with serious mental illnesses across the justice system, mental health sectors and the community.

Forensicare Social Work first took RMIT students on placement in 2010. For many years a small number of students undertook traditional clinical social work placements, working in various units of Thomas Embling Hospital under the supervision of individual social workers. In 2017 Forensicare established a formal partnership with RMIT Social Work. From the start of the Forensicare RMIT social work partnership, both partners were interested to explore new approaches to field education. Social work in the Forensicare setting faces some particularly complex issues. RMIT Social Work was well placed as a program within a social science school and a design university to contribute to developing new approaches in this complex environment. The vision for social work at Forensicare extends beyond one-to-one clinical social work practice. The social work team seeks to influence attitudes and practice across the agency to bring in social justice principles of respect and recognition of those in the Forensicare system and their carers. With the new partnership with RMIT, Forensicare Social Work recognised that social work field education could be part of a process to influence practice across the agency. Once the formal partnership was established in 2017, Forensicare became the site of a pilot project for a new approach to social work field education that was being conceptualised by RMIT Social Work called the Social Work Studio.

The Social Work Studio is a form of group project that draws from the studio pedagogy used in design fields such as architecture and other creative industries (Carpenter, 2013). In a studio approach, collaborative groups use design thinking and co-design to address



situated real-world problems (Crowther, 2013). The key purpose of a studio process is to find new ways to think about a problem in order to develop innovative ways to act in response to the problem. In this, studios take an exploratory approach, where the starting point for a studio project is understood as a trigger for inquiry rather than being a contained research question. Uncertainty is accepted as an important part of the studio project process. The co-design principle means that input from service-users or community is valued, and studio pedagogy also recognises the value of bringing varied disciplinary perspectives into the group. Design thinking brings a set of stages to the process – exploratory inquiry, consolidation/conceptualisation, prototyping and testing (Brown & Wyatt 2010; Both & Baggereor, 2009). Built into this process is the recognition that some things will not work, and repeatable loops are possible in this cycle of critique, new thinking and reworking.

Social work can bring many of its disciplinary strengths to a studio model of practice. The core social work ability to critically reflect is also crucial to studio practice. Studio work requires collaboration and resourcefulness which are crucial skills for student social workers to develop. A studio project also makes demands of social work students in new ways, asking them to engage in creative thinking and in interdisciplinary collaborations that can extend well beyond the more usual allied health arena. A studio project can also engage social work students in work on larger problems that may be hyper complex or be wicked problems – situations that are not easy or possible to entirely solve, or indeed, not straightforward to even understand with their myriad dimensions (van Ewijk, 2018). Social work can bring their established disciplinary skills and capabilities to a studio project – and be a site for students to develop and refine these capabilities – and studios also offer a learning environment to develop new sorts of capabilities that are useful in contemporary social work practice.

The social work team at Forensicare had identified a complex issue affecting their client group and the families and carers of these clients. The issue was the negative impact of mainstream media reporting of patients within Thomas Embling Hospital which is often highly sensationalised. These reports often distort the facts of an event in order to emphasise the idea that there is some danger to society. The social work team at Forensicare recognised that these destructive media narratives cause enduring distress to patients and their families. This issue became the trigger for inquiry for the pilot Social Work Studio for RMIT social work students at Forensicare. As a trigger, the issue was approached in the studio in an exploratory way even in relation to understanding the nature of the problem. Is this an issue of media engagement for the organisation, is it an issue of supporting or resourcing the carers and families to build their resilience when these media stories occur, or is it resonant of a bigger issue for this client group in having some control over the narratives that are constructed about their lives? The initial explorations in the pilot Studio followed all of these avenues of inquiry and studio participants remained open to the further possibility that other understandings of the issue may emerge through the studio process.

The pilot Social Work Studio project combined established and studio approaches into students' field education. In semester 2, 2017, six students from RMIT commenced their placement around the same time. They were each placed with different social workers for 3 days of each week, undertaking clinical social work placement in various units of the Thomas Embling Hospital setting. For the remaining 2 days of each week, students would come together to work on the studio project. In a key difference between a studio project and other types of group research projects, the studio project has a partially de-centred leadership. Project responsibility is ultimately held by key members of the Forensicare and RMIT social work groups. In the day-to-day operation of the studio, this project leadership supports the progress of the work but is not considered as holding the primary expertise that is useful to the project. As such, much of the students' studio work was self-directed. They met regularly with a senior social work consultation group from Forensicare when students would present their progress and the work would be critiqued. Students also arranged ad hoc intensive studio workshops facilitated by an RMIT social work academic who could guide them through the steps of studio practice.

Field education at Forensicare provides RMIT students with an enriched learning experience. Students develop their clinical practitioner skills within the traditional part of their placements. Their work in the Social Work Studio develops other capabilities including their ability to generate new ideas in complex practice settings and also developing a deeper understanding of their emerging professional self in relation to complex project work with others. The Social Work Studio also generates useful work for Forensicare in producing a substantial piece of work from a social work perspective. The end-point for the first Studio group was a report on practices in other forensic mental health settings across Australia and internationally. The report also showcased

projects and strategies that have challenged media representations and public perceptions of those in forensic mental health settings.

The RMIT students in the next Forensic Social Work Studio will use the first group's report as their trigger to shape new ideas of practice. In design thinking language these are the 'prototypes' to be trialled. Studio pedagogy explicitly looks to multi-disciplinary contributions (Sutton & Kemp, 2006). Discussions are underway in the Forensic Social Work Studio on the possibility of social work students working with RMIT Media and Communications students to trial ways that digital storytelling could be brought into clinical practice in Forensic.

The partnership between Forensic and RMIT Social Work has flourished. Through the partnership, strong working relationships have developed across the two organisations. The firm foundation of the formal partnership and the ongoing working relationships it has generated have created the basis for exploring new methods in social work field work education. The Forensic RMIT Social Work Studio offers a valuable learning experience to social work students and at the same time the Studio is a resource for Forensic Social Work. Together, Forensic and RMIT Social Work are creating new knowledge and practice in forensic social work and in social work education.



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This year we further strengthened our links with RMIT who provide most of the Social Work student placements for this program. This strengthened partnership has resulted in 12 student placements, all of whom have found the experience rewarding and have achieved great results with their clients

Doncare Annual Report, 2015-2016.

The strong relationship with RMIT Social Work continued this year with several student placements for final year Bachelor and Masters students. Six students undertook their social work placements at NARI. For many of these students, the placements were undertaken in conjunction with NARI and collaborating organisations, including COTA, Seniors Rights Victoria, Melbourne Health ACAS and TCP, Meaningful Ageing Australia and the Continence Foundation

NARI Annual Report, 2017.



VASS has entered into a partnership with RMIT to take on Social Work students. Our students bring a rich array of knowledge and experiences, which have had a great positive impact for staff, students and clients. They have been involved in many programs, events and projects. VASS is thankful for the contributions of students as they continue to expand the services we are able to provide

Victorian Arabic Social Services Annual Report, 2017.

CISVic offered a full Student Placement Program in this reporting period, with just 10 students placed across 7 agencies. Our Field Educator and Trainer Deborah Rosenberg continued to provide valuable individual and group supervision that complemented supervision by task supervisors at placements. CISVic is committed to delivering and growing this program over coming years, with our DSS funding, and RMIT support has enabled us to make this a permanent addition to our service

Community Information and Support Victoria Annual Report, 2016-2017.

