

AN ABORIGINAL SOCIAL WORK CADETSHIP WITH NSW HEALTH? HOW DOES IT LOOK AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The overall aim of Aboriginal Allied Health Cadetships is to increase employment of Indigenous Allied Health professionals in the NSW Public Health Sector.

The program began for Social Work in the Sydney Local Health District (SLHD) in 2015.

WHAT IS IT?

FINANCIAL SUPPORT WHILE STUDYING

WORK PLACEMENT (12 WEEKS PER YEAR)

ABORIGINAL MENTORING

ONGOING EMPLOYMENT

THE CADETSHIP SO FAR

- I am currently enrolled in a Bachelor of Social Work (Hons) at the University of NSW(UNSW). I have completed my third year of study, and am heading into my final year.
- I am one of 2 Aboriginal Social Work Cadets with the Sydney Local Health District, and have completed 2/3 of my rotations since beginning the Cadetship in 2015
- My first rotation was with the Social Work Department at RPAH (Royal Prince Alfred Hospital), Sydney - Providing me with the opportunity to develop an understanding of the way in which hospitals function, and what the roles of Social Work and other Allied Health Professions are.
- My second rotation was with SLHD Drug and Alcohol Unit. This allowed me to further develop my social work skills, and engage with on the job learning. Here I was able to develop my skills in brief interventions and education with clients over the counter and increase my knowledge around BBV transmission's, long term care/support and treatment.
- My third rotation will be with the Concord Centre for Mental Health (beginning in November 2017). I look forward to assisting with a research project, and further developing my social work skills on the wards.

IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

Mentoring - To improve this aspect of the program it is important to ensure it is implemented from the beginning with close collaboration from Cadets

Potential for partnerships with organisations such as IAHA who already have Indigenous Allied Health Professionals signed up at mentors. This resource could be utilised to ensure Cadets receive the most appropriate support possible.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

As I head into my final Cadetship rotation and final year of my degree, I look forward to the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. In order ensure the success of programs such as this, it is imperative that a holistic approach is taken to ensure the safety and security of cadets, to allow us to gain as much knowledge and on the job experience as we possibly can, whilst feeling safe, secure and supported as professionals in our health organisations.

My first hand experience has shown me that institutionalised racism is still very much a part of the organisational culture of health and this is an issue that needs to be addressed. Actively bringing more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Allied Health Professionals into the system is a start. However more needs to be done to change the archaic structure of health, so that cadets like myself can focus on learning and training rather than deciding whether or not to defend ourselves, our people or identities from willfully ignorant professionals and processes.

I speak frankly about racism in health because it is there and should not be ignored, I speak openly about my experiences because I want programs like this to succeed. I have felt so fortunate to be able to be a cadet during my studies, the financial support, knowledge building and partnerships have been invaluable, I want others to experience it.

Being an Aboriginal Social Work Cadet with the Sydney Local Health District has been a highlight of my degree, with appropriate support it is possible to achieve your goals and navigate the system. However for this program to be even better, it is paramount that significant changes happen to wipe out racism and discrimination from the organisational culture of Health.



NELLIE POLLARD-WHARTON
ABORIGINAL SOCIAL WORK CADET
SYDNEY LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT

MY EXPERIENCE

Overall the Cadetship program provides an invaluable opportunity and the experience is an overwhelmingly positive one. The professional and indeed personal connections I have made with Indigenous and non-Indigenous professionals and community members has been an absolute highlight of the program.

The combination of the insight and practical learning that happens on the Cadetship rotations, coupled with course work during semester at University have complimented each other beyond my expectation. I feel engaged with my learning by being connected to the "real" world.

Shortly before beginning my first Cadetship rotation, I signed up to join Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) which introduced me to the world of Indigenous Allied Health Professionals. This was exciting for me and could not have complimented my Cadetship and university studies any better. Participating in two IAHA Health Fusion challenges and being an IAHA SRC member in 2016, allowed my confidence to grow. The combination of all these areas of learning and opportunities for professional development, whilst overwhelming at times, provided me with so much essential knowledge that I feel prepared and excited for when I enter the workforce as an Aboriginal Allied Health Professional.

Unfortunately on occasion my positive learning experiences were marred by what I consider to be institutionalised racism and discrimination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Some practices and processes I observed left me feeling helpless, angry and hurt. As an Aboriginal Social Work Cadet I'd often feel powerless to change or work amongst these embedded processes. However this is now what drives me to continue. If we get out of the game, we can't change anything, but if we stay in it we can try.