

Early this year I embarked on an adventure I never would have anticipated – a seven week occupational therapy placement in Broken Hill, New South Wales. Rural NSW is a far cry from my ‘normal’ – living on the busy, bustling Gold Coast. I am extremely grateful to NAFEA for the scholarship I received – your generosity was paramount in making my goal of undertaking rural placement a reality.

I was lucky to have the opportunity to be part of the Allied Health in Outback Schools program, which aims to address the high demand for allied health services for children living in rural and remote communities. The program assigns students from a variety of disciplines to local schools, where they provide service to students (including occupational therapy, speech pathology, physio, social work, nursing, and nutrition and dietetics). Participating in this program really highlighted how unmet the need for allied health professionals in rural communities is – which is why I believe the Allied Health in Outback Schools program is an amazing initiative that I would love to see implemented wider.

I was assigned to the distance education school – meaning the majority of students lived on extremely remote farming properties. The bulk of schooling was done via satellite phone and delivered by parents or governesses. This fostered some rather unique difficulties for service provision and I was challenged to be very creative to overcome them. As I was working with the preschool children (~5 years old), most of my work was focused on supporting development of fine motor and visual perception skills that would enable them to successfully engage in school and play. I do not believe I am remiss in saying that it was not a typical placement experience!



Living in Broken Hill was an adventure. I made a fantastic group of friends and we enthusiastically immersed ourselves in everything Broken Hill had to offer. Every weekend was a new adventure; demolition derby, the races, stargazing, the Silverton challenge, picnics at Mundi Mundi plains and hiking in the bush. Drag Bingo at the Palace and a subsequent 'Priscilla, Queen of the Desert' movie night was particularly memorable (a must do in Broken Hill, where part of the movie was filmed). Broken Hill also had some of the most spectacular sunsets I've ever seen – vividly coloured skies atop red dirt dotted with kangaroos and emus.

Once again, I would like to thank the NAFEA team for their generosity and support. Your financial assistance was indispensable and facilitated learning, professional growth and experiences that I will not forget. I encourage everyone considering a rural or remote placement to take the plunge.