
NAFEA SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

The year of 2020 has been a tumultuous one for me, filled with an equal measure of excitement and worry. Being a final year Medical Laboratory Science student at QUT, it has always been my goal in my career to work in the most fascinating and challenging of locations, and I could not think of many places that fit those requirements more than Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. Working with mostly First Nation peoples and experiencing their challenges of combining their traditional culture and history with modern life was an eye-opening experience. In addition, being present within the community during the worst weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic was a learning experience I will never forget.

The challenges of working in a pathology lab in such a remote setting gave me a unique set of skills that I had never thought of. I was exposed to extremely rare conditions and diseases while undertaking my placement at Thursday Island, conditions I would never have seen in my clinical career had I remained in Brisbane. I was expected to work under a strict schedule that revolved around twice, or even once-daily, air freight for sample transport, which mandated excellent time management skills. The emergency of COVID-19 forced me beyond my comfort zone, requiring me to learn quickly and efficiently, to contribute to the sudden increase in testing workload at the pathology lab.

I lived with a local family during my entire placement and I was there during their most stressful of times. I was able to witness first-hand their fear of a potentially devastating spread of local transmission, as their children returned home from abroad to be with their families as the global outbreak unfolded. I also was there during times of celebration, joining locals on weekend long fishing trips to outer Islands and celebrating with those who had come home safe. I learned of the friction between native people and mainland workers and the struggle of the healthcare system in caring for First peoples. These experiences have allowed me to appreciate the challenges faced by First Peoples living in Australia's most remote locations, allowing me to truly understand a desperate need to close the gap between them and the non-Indigenous population.

Travelling to the tip of Australia and living with a local family for 5 weeks was a massive decision and required a lot of personal sacrifices to be achievable. I would not be able to work, lean on my friends or family for support or even be able to enjoy the things I normally like to enjoy during my downtime. The NAFEA scholarship lifted a giant weight off my shoulders and allowed me to focus on learning everything I could while on placement. The scholarship was able to cover my plane flights, as well as my rent for the entire time I was there. Without the scholarship, the stresses brought about by financial constraints, the looming pandemic, as well as the sudden increase in workload, would likely have negatively impacted my learning experience whilst on placement. Now that I have returned to mainland Australia from such an unforgettable experience, I would like to extend my gratitude to those who made my placement possible to begin with.



Spearfishing and camping with friends during the weekend.



Home away from home for five weeks.



My view from the hospital looking out over the Strait.