

Judith Boswell Scholarship 2018
Reflection Essay by Sally Jane Walz

I was thrilled to receive the inaugural Judith Boswell Scholarship for Audiology students undertaking a rural or remote placement. The scholarship gave me the opportunity to complete my 2nd year 5-week block placement in Alice Springs with NT Hearing and Alice Audiology. These placements are an integral part of the Flinders University Master of Audiology and provide students with a supportive environment to really hone their clinical skills and gain valuable insights into working life as an Audiologist.

I benefited greatly from choosing Alice Springs as my clinical placement destination. Not only did I get to experience working life in a completely different community setting than the one I have lived in for my entire life, I got to meet people from one of the world's oldest living cultures. Placements in Central Australia are coordinated through the Centre for Remote Health. During their 'Introduction to Central Australian Aboriginal Cultures and Context' I was privileged to learn about the traditional knowledge that is passed down orally through generations, about Arrente kinship systems and the history and survival of Arrente culture in Alice Springs. Armed with this information I felt more prepared to hopefully bridge the culture and language barriers that could arise in clinic.

There were certainly many memorable experiences I gained from 'going rural'. One moment I look back on fondly is when I was at Alice Springs Hospital helping to assess patients for the ENT clinics with my fantastic supervisor Bec from NT Hearing. She recognized a client she has known for some time in the waiting area, a foster carer with three children to look after; two were young babies in their strollers. We could see the foster mum would have her hands full during the appointment, so we offered to take the babies for a stroll around the hospital to help settle them and so mum could go in to see the ENT with her older child with fewer distractions! It was a proud moment for me to be part of a small act of kindness in a rural community setting. I have since reflected that perhaps it is not something that would come up all that often in a metropolitan setting, and that in smaller communities the strength of your relationships with your clients really is everything and will ultimately build a strong foundation to give continuous quality care where it is needed most.

From a more clinical perspective, I cannot stress enough the invaluable learning experiences I was exposed to. There was a vast array of clinical presentations; everything from foreign bodies, Otitis Media, perforations, cholesteatoma, post-surgical follow up, congenital deafness and much more. I was exposed to diagnostic ABRs, hearing aid fitting, routine testing and assessing more challenging cases. Practicing my clinical skills in a challenging environment really helped me to quickly solidify my existing knowledge, but also helped me to learn when to ask for help (and that it is something that should be done often and unashamedly when one is learning the ropes!). I was also thrilled to be able to scrub in and observe a myringoplasty surgery at the Alice Springs Hospital, and view the surgeon's work through the second magnifying scope. These experiences have given me so much confidence in my clinical and interpersonal abilities, and also strengthened my problem-solving skills in high pressure situations.

A few final words about rural clinical placements; I urge any student audiologist to take up the challenge and be adventurous! While it is tough being away from family and friends for weeks at a time, I gained so many new friends, contacts and working relationships while I was away. I am of the strong opinion that a rural placement is the best way to gain exposure to a very broad range of clinical presentations, skills, interesting people and to get a feel for community-based practice.

I am so glad to have had the experiences I did in Ailce Springs and am indebted to Independent Audiologists Australia for making my clinical placement possible through the Judith Boswell Scholarship.