

# SUPERVISION TIPS: LINKING STUDENTS INTO THEIR RURAL COMMUNITY SHOW NOTES



## SUMMARY

This podcast explores the ways you can link students into their rural community as research shows that connection to community is a key element of choosing to work in and stay in a rural community.

## TAKEAWAYS

- Even short placements can include community immersion
- Consider the events and experiences in your local community you can link students to

## CHAPTERS

- 00:00 Introduction to Rural Health Conversations
- 01:02 Rachael Tane's Journey to Rural Health
- 03:07 Immersion Placements in Kalgoorlie
- 06:00 Community Integration and Student Involvement
- 09:14 Exploring the Goldfields Region
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- 15:20 Unique Opportunities with RFDS
- 17:17 Positive Impact of Community Engagement

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- Links to the four UDRHs of WA who co-produce this podcast:
  - Website of [Goldfields UDRH](#)
  - Website of [Majarlin](#)
  - Website of [UDRH SW](#)
  - Website of [WACRH](#)

## TRANSCRIPT

Helen Trunfio

Welcome to Rural Health Conversations, a podcast exploring the people, places and perspectives shaping health professions, education in rural and remote Australia. We pay our respects to the traditional owners of the lands on which we live, learn and work and to elders past and present. We recognize that First Nations people have been caring for country, community and culture for tens of thousands of years. Each episode will explore the experiences, insights and innovations that make rural health professions education so vital to supporting and developing our rural workforce.

From practical strategies to inspiring stories from the field, this is your space to connect, learn and celebrate the essential work you do in preparing healthcare professionals for rural and remote practice. I'm Helen Trunfio, Allied Health Program Manager at the Goldfields University Department of Rural Health based in Kalgoorlie. And today I'm coming to you from the Goldfields region of WA, home to 17 distinct language groups. And in this episode, we're talking about the ways we are linking students into their rural community and what that means for their clinical placement experience.

I'm delighted to welcome Rachael Tane, field work and admin officer at the Goldfields UDRH, joining us from Kalgoorlie, a name believed to be derived from the local Aboriginal name of the native silky pear, gargola. Rachael has worked in this role since the launch of the Goldfields UDRH in 2023. Rachael has over 25 years experience in tertiary education student support roles back in New Zealand. In her current role, she welcomes all the allied

health and nursing students to the Goldfields and ensures they feel well prepared and supported. Welcome to Rural Health Conversations, Rachael.

Rachael Tane

Thanks for having me, Helen. It's great to be here.

Helen

Rachael, can you please give us your 30 second story on what led you to working in rural health?

Rachael

Sure, well if you asked me back in 2022 what my five year plan was, it was never to uplift my family from New Zealand and come to the vast rural desert out back of Australia and live in Kalgoorlie. We came on holiday for three weeks to visit family and celebrate a nephew's 21st and in typical rural fashion over beer and cake, my husband got offered a job.

So now having lived here for nearly three years, I see that as so typical of rural life, so spontaneous, surprising and full of opportunities. I don't come from a rural background, but as you mentioned in the intro, I've had over 25 years in tertiary student support roles in New Zealand. I love being part of students educational journey and as much as driving a dump truck at the super pit would have been cool on my resume, helping people is more important to me. And that is what really attracted me to the job. I know the importance of health services in our communities and in particular access to those in rural and remote areas. So if I can play a part in encouraging students to consider living and rural living, living, living, living, living, living, living, living, living,

Helen

Thanks Rachael. What an interesting journey to get here. One of the key areas of the Goldfields UDRH is to immerse students in the local community. What does an immersion placement look like in Kalgoorlie?

Rachael

For us, immersion placements see students come to Kalgoorlie for four weeks. As a rural immersion student, they participate in full-day orientation, which includes educational opportunities that enhance students' cultural awareness and safety. We take them on town tours, highlighting local service providers, and of course, they meet the team who come from varying health backgrounds and many with great local knowledge who can add valuable support and insight to the local community.

Immersion also means shared accommodation, which is fully subsidized for our students and within our program. And shared accommodation, especially when we mix up our disciplines, really fosters interprofessional connection through everyday living. To us, immersion looks at the whole experience, not just the clinical placement. We really encourage students to be involved with the local community and experience all that the gold field has to offer.

Helen

Why do you think this is so important, Rachael?

Rachael

It's important because being immersed helps our students understand and get to know their clients in the community that they're working in. It also helps them to get to know one another and their other disciplines within health. And it can also help students really get to know themselves, their strengths, their weaknesses. It can really open their eyes to something different. Immersion gives them the opportunity to get the most out of the placement.

And the Goldfields really does offer such a unique placement experience, showing students what the region has to offer and breaking down any preconceived ideas students may have had is really important to us. It also helps enrich their skills and their learning experiences. And at the end of the day, immersion and an enriching placement is important because we want them to consider returning to work one day.

Helen

Absolutely. Thanks for those insights, Rachael. There is a lot of research out there now showing us the importance of the sense of belonging, especially for students on placement. We know that the clinical elements of these placements are crucial for student learning, while the social integration really enhances students' experiences. Sounds like placements in the Goldfields really see the importance of combining clinical and social experiences. So how do you ensure the students are immersed in the local community and getting the most out of their placement?

Rachael

Well, it starts well before they arrive with communication, pre-placement planning and checking in to ensure they're coming well prepared. We want them to know that they will be supported throughout their placement in their time here in the Goldfields and that is that sense of belonging and that they are not just a tick and flick placement stat. At orientation, we supply them with Goldfields specific information and knowledge that can help them feel comfortable to immerse themselves and practice safely in our local communities and our unique on-country experiences really gives them a hands-on experience and helps cement their understanding and that cultural context. We encourage community involvement and promote volunteering opportunities for students. In the students' merch bags, we supply vouchers to local eateries and tourist attractions such as the free entry to the Hannon's Tourist Mine to really encourage them to get out and about and support local businesses. Whilst they're here on placement, we send weekly emails of what's on in Kalgoorlie and the surrounding areas and really encourage them to go out and explore. The UDRH also has camping equipment available for use, bicycles so they can get out and exercise as well as explore the town. And sports is such a huge part of Kalgoorlie and we really encourage students to link in with their preferred sport or club. The students that are also staying here in Kalgoorlie are invited to weekly campus events and student accommodation activities such as barbecues, food nights and games. This also encourages the health science students to interact with the WASM students who stay on campus as well.

Helen

Can you tell us who the WASM students are?

Rachael

WASM is the WA School of Mines, part of Curtin University. Kalgoorlie has a long history with mining, metallurgy and engineering and currently there are 600 WASM students enrolled in the Kalgoorlie campus with about 220 staying on campus accommodation as well. So our students do cross paths. In fact, some of our students have been invited by the WASM Wombats to try their hand at some of the mining games and the mining games are part of the international collegiate mining competition which started back in 1978 and consists of seven events involving traditional mining techniques like airlegging, mucking, hand-stealing, swede saw, survey, gold pan and track stand and the WASM Wombats compete against other teams from all around the world including USA, UK, Europe, Brazil and Australia. And in fact, the Was and Wombats Men's A-Team took home our national championship this year in 2025, which was held in September, which was really cool.

Helen

Wow, that does sound like a very unique Kalgoorlie experience. So apart from mixing with the Blossom students, do you find the students on placement are interested in getting involved with the local community?

Rachael

Yes, we find that most students are very keen to explore the local community and get involved with as much as they can. We know from post placement surveys and focus groups that students enjoy opportunities to get involved with the community outside of placement. One student told us in their post placement interview that each regional and rural location is so different. You can't know the area until you've spent time within it. I think I have achieved getting to know the gold fields. I definitely have a good feel of Kao Guli. We've been quite active in doing things which has helped. We did park run every week and went to community and social events. My goal was getting to know the area which I feel I've done.

Helen

Well, that's fantastic to hear how keen the students are to integrate into the community. Can you tell us some of the ways you encourage involvement with the local community?

Rachael

We encourage students to participate in community events, particularly through volunteering. We help link students up with volunteering opportunities through some of our own connections and activities, as well as the Curtin Volunteers Program. We've had students involved in volunteering opportunities in Kalgoorlie, like the big annual charity ball, clean up Kalgoorlie days and the annual Aboriginal footy carnival. We've also had students help the UDRH staff run stalls at community events like WA Day, Science After Dark during the National Science Week. We have career taster programs for the high school students to promote health careers and pathways for further education. We've even had students take up umpiring duties at Saturday Netball and join some of the local footy teams. One student joined a local women's footy team whilst here on an eight-week placement in semester one. And when she requested a second placement here in semester two, her return aligned perfectly with the grand final. They unfortunately didn't win, but she and her team was stoked and she was able to be part of it. So that was really cool for her.

Helen

That's absolutely awesome. They sound like great opportunities for the students and would really help immerse them in the local community. I know the Goldfields covers a huge area and has such a wide range of landscapes within it. Do you find that students are also keen to explore the wider Goldfields region while they're here?

Rachael

Yeah, definitely we find students that are here for longer placements and when they're here with a larger cohort, they tend to encourage each other to get out and about and involved. Even if they didn't know one another before they came, students have become great friends. Camping and four wheel driving are popular. Pastimes in the Goldfields with a wide area to explore. Lots of students have made the most of this while they're here.

Heading up north of Kalgoorlie, students have visited the historic town site of Gwalia and explored Lake Ballard near Menzies. This is where there are 51 statues by Sir Anthony Gormley scattered over 10 kilometres of the Salt Lake. 10 square kilometres of the Salt Lake. And it wouldn't be a trip to the gold fields without exploring the coastal areas around Esperance down south of Kalgoorlie. And we certainly know that the students take advantage of getting down to Esperance while they're here. One, because of the stunning coastline and two, it's the region. The region is a home to the Dubble people whose deep connection with country offers students a really unique chance to engage with local heritage.

We've even had students travel to the Nullarbor Muster in Rawlinna, which is approximately 400 kms east of Kal, something completely out of their comfort zone and they absolutely loved it.

Helen

Wow, there certainly are a lot of amazing places to explore and some things that they just wouldn't get anywhere else. You mentioned earlier about the orientation that the students undertake. Well, are there other opportunities provided by UDRH to enhance the students'

Rachael

Yes, throughout the year we organise on-country experiences with a range of partners and local families where our immersion students can participate in. We try and offer a range of activities depending on the season. As you can appreciate it gets very hot here so on-country experiences do need to be planned in the cooler months. This year the students have foraged for honey ants and witchetty grubs, cooked and eaten kangaroo tail and we've learned about bush medicines and the importance of being on country to our patients.

Helen

That must be an amazing experience.

Rachael

Yeah, it's definitely something the students always talk about in the post placement interviews. A recent quote from one of our students, the on-country experience enhanced my understanding of holistic care and herb medicines that Indigenous people use. An advantage of the experience was being exposed to a different culture. From the bush tour, everyone learned something, so it was really good exposure.

Helen

What a fantastic opportunity to really be immersed in local Aboriginal culture. You also offer some unique co-curricular activities and experiences during student placements. Can you tell us a little bit more about those, please?

Rachael

Yeah, allied health immersion students may have the opportunity to go underground and to a working mine, giving them insight into possible mechanisms of injury and common workplace conditions their clients may experience. We've had opportunity to take some of our students on regional study tours to see the challenges with access to health care in some of those more remote areas and see what nursing posts and regional MPS sites can offer. Local community. Our nursing students, they may also get the opportunity to shadow an RFDS remote community clinic either to the Eukilau or Nullarbor. This involves a full day clinic and they fly out on the RFDS plane with the team to experience remote nursing. This is such an awesome and unique experience that they may never get anywhere else. So they absolutely love it.

Helen

That sounds like an amazing opportunity. The work of the RFDS is so important in regional Australia and many people really only know about the medical retrievals for very unwell or injured patients that they do. For the students to experience a primary health clinic in such a remote part of Australia is extraordinary.

Rachael

Yeah, the feedback is always amazing, even if it's a really long day. Let me read a quote from one of our students. The RFDS clinic, that was the day that five year old me achieved her dream. It's not every day you get to be what your childhood dream job was. This is something I will never forget. I'm grateful for the experience. It was wonderful going to these locations, appreciating the service and the remoteness and the importance of everyone having the access to healthcare, a dream come true.

Helen

amazing. It sounds like the Goldfields UDRH provides such a wide range of activities for the students to get involved in. How do you know that this is having a positive impact on the students?

Rachael

We conduct post placement interviews with most of our students and the feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Many say that they were initially apprehensive about a placement in Kalgoorlie, but we're really surprised at how welcoming the community was. So many students comment on what an amazing experience they've had, especially those that have got involved in the community in one way or another. We've also had a number of students request to come back to Kalgoorlie to complete another placement often with a different host. So we know they must enjoy the community. We've also had students take up positions after graduation who never thought they would work regionally until they had this opportunity. So these are all the things that encourage us to keep building on what we offer and show us that our program is making a positive impact, not only on the students, but in regional health care.

Helen

Thanks for those insights, Rachael. Goldfield's UDRH seem to have a lot in place to support the allied health and nursing students that head to Kalgoorlie for their clinical placements. From extracurricular activities like the RFDS clinic and on-country experiences through to social and community events, there is a lot for the students to choose from. That brings us close to the end of this episode. Can you share with us your two or three takeaways for our listeners on immersing students in the local community while on a rural or remote placement?

Rachael

Yeah, firstly, as one of our students said, don't be scared, give it a go. Second would be have strong communication links with the students and share a variety of opportunities. There's always something for everyone out there. And thirdly, promote rural and all that it has to offer. When students feel part of the local community, they might just come back and work one day.

Helen

Thanks Rachael, there certainly is a lot out there and it is so important to link students into the things that interest them. Feeling like they are part of the community from the very beginning must have such a positive impact on their overall placement experience. That brings us to the end of this episode of Rural Health Conversations. A huge thank you to Rachael Tane for sharing your insights and experiences. If you're interested in learning more, check out the links in our show notes. If you enjoyed this episode, please subscribe and leave a review. This helps others find the podcast and keep, grow the conversation on rural health education in Australia.

Until next time, keep the rural health conversations going.