

2020 Regional Scholarship recipient: Rachael Laing (WA Centre for Rural Health)



About me

In high school, when I pictured my future I always saw myself in a career where I was helping others to be the best version of themselves, which led me to enrol in Bachelor of Science at UWA majoring in Psychology. After completing my degree and pondering what to do next, I realised Clinical Psychology wasn't for me. I took 18 months off and worked, to give myself some time to focus on my other passions and figure out my next move, which is when I came across Public Health. I'd never heard of it before and was pleasantly surprised to discover that there really was a career where you could help people with their health in a non-clinical role. I then completed my Master of Public Health and UWA, where I fell in love with Health Promotion.

Having grown up in Karratha, I chose to relocate back to the Pilbara to undertake my Masters Dissertation, which ended up being one of the best decisions I've ever made. This is what led me to apply for the Australian Health Promotion Association Scholarship to enable me to apply the skills I learned during my Masters in a practical setting in remote WA.

About my Scholarship Project

I will be working with the WA Centre for Rural Health in Karratha. The scholarship project I'm working on is the Gettin' On, Gettin' Going (GOGO) program, which, during the scholarship funding period, we will develop, implement and evaluate as a pilot. In Phase 1, I will consult with local service providers and local government to audit the community resources and spaces available and identify any potential barriers to their use, taking into consideration their suitability in the summer heat. Phase 2 will focus groups/yarning sessions with both Aboriginal older adults (50 years and above) and non-Aboriginal older adults (60 years and above) to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of physical activity and to 'road test' potential strategies to increase it throughout the year. In Phase 3, we will develop, in partnership with local Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists, a draft program. Phase 4 will involve program implementation and then an evaluation of the pilot program.

The overall goal of the GOGO program is to create opportunities for older Australians in Karratha and surrounds to increase their engagement in physical activity. The health benefits of this increase in uptake will include the prevention of onset and progression of chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and stroke. The focus of the program will be to create opportunities that are fun for older people and their families, and thus an increase in uptake of physical activity also has the potential to facilitate social inclusion and family connection.