

A tale of two nurses: a story of state-distanced learning through the Transition to Practice Program

APNA Transition to Practice Program Team

APNA's Transition to Practice Program provides nurses with the support they need to help traverse the tricky landscape of primary health care nursing.

With COVID-19 in full swing in July 2020, APNA's Transition to Practice Program (TPP) was getting used to moving everything on-line, just like everyone else.

However, that didn't stop Marie Bottolfsen and Tahnia Ah Kit from forming a long-distance mentor-mentee relationship during the program. With Marie mentoring in Darwin and Tahnia being mentored in Mt. Isa (1,600 kilometers apart for those of you wondering), the relationship was always going to start off and stay virtual, COVID-19 or no COVID-19.

The APNA TPP is a 12-month program for new primary health care nurses, comprised of multiple elements such as mentoring, education and more, funded by the Federal Government Department of Health. For Marie Bottolfsen, this program wasn't around when she started working as a primary health care nurse and there was no one to ask for support or advice. She used a textbook brought from the United Kingdom.

That's partly why she's taken up a role as mentor in APNA's Transition to Practice Program, tailored to provide new primary health care nurses with the benefit of her experience and support. Marie is in a position now to answer the sort of questions she had when she started primary health care nursing 15 years ago.

"A lot of nurses who start in general practice in the NT are new graduates without a lot of experience...There's no real support or training program in place to

assist with this transition from a university course to 'real world nursing'. APNA has come a long way in providing that."

Meanwhile, in Tahnia's case she had just started working in child health within the largest single community Controlled Health Service provider land area in Queensland and was feeling she lacked the in-depth knowledge needed to fully care for her patients.

Tahniah, who identifies with Waanyi, Kalkadoon, Ngadjon and Kuku Djungan tribes, was raised in Mount Isa, a small

town in rural Queensland. For Tahnia, connecting with community in rural and remote health settings, is what it's all about. Her grandmother was a registered nurse, her dad's mum was a full-time carer for her granddad who was a paraplegic and her mum was a health care worker. Tahnia knew the difference good care could make to a person's life

"I loved watching them help and care for the people in a way that I would like to be cared for. I saw what a health worker could do in their job and how it changed families' lives when they came into contact with them."

So, when Tahnia heard about APNA's Transition to practice program, she applied straight away.

Lucky for Tahnia, Marie was perfectly positioned to provide answers to the kind of things new nurses need to know. Based in Northern Territory, with over 35 years' experience as a Registered Nurse and 15 years' experience in Primary Health, Marie understood how isolating it can be working in a primary care and rural/remote environment.

As well as helping her fill knowledge gaps, Marie provided practical advice in dealing with her workplace dynamics. Marie gave Tahnia tactics and a language to voice her concerns in a clinical manner that couldn't be argued with. She helped her to gain back confidence in her ability and encouraged her to trust her instincts. Mostly, she showed her that there was no such thing as silly questions and



Marie Bottolfsen, NT.



Tahnia Ah-Kit, QLD.

that there were supportive nurses out there wanting to help.

“Marie gave me the education to assert myself... to clinically prove my concerns and worries, to show the rationales behind what I wanted to do... Sometimes you need that fresh eyes to look into a situation and Marie always was that person for me.”

The education modules helped increase Tahnia’s knowledge in areas that were more specific to her role. They provided her with an introduction to family health care and the child health system which gave her technical know-how and confidence to do her job.

Marie sees her role as more than just remote learning. Her role can range from coaching nurses how to deal with administrative issues to building self-esteem and leadership skills.

Throughout the program, nurses draw on all their skills – organisational, communication, interpersonal, negotiation and conflict resolution. They build leadership and professional recognition as well as increase clinical expertise and knowledge of primary health care.

“The clinical education is mainly from APNA and I can help with that, but I have been more of a coach as well,” she says. *“We talk through things like taking the emotion out of something, being professional, which avenue to take, how to go to the right person in the right place to achieve a professional outcome. Because I’m outside looking in, there’s no politics.”*

Marie has begun training to be a nurse practitioner, adding to a degree in psychology and a postgraduate degree

in diabetes education. Achieving that will be a concrete step towards caring for patients with chronic diseases, an area that is prevalent in the NT. While Tahnia is much more relaxed about her role these days she sees value in her job and loves connecting with her community, advocating for health promotion and providing patients with education to better manage their own health.

“I love primary healthcare... I love connecting with my community, going out into the community, obviously advocating for health promotion and giving them health education. I find that so important to continue to Close The Gap...”

For more information on APNA’s Transition to Practice Program, visit www.apna.asn.au/education/transitiontopractice 🌱