



GRASSROOTS NURSING IN THE TOP END DELIVERING CARE TO ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND CHILDREN

In her native New Zealand, Registered Nurse Anna Curtin (pictured) worked across a variety of settings including aged care and an acute surgical ward.

In 2016, on the hunt for a new challenge, Anna decided to take the plunge and move to Australia in search of fresh opportunities.

She had already gained accreditation with Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC), an Australian Government funded program that actively recruits urban-based health professionals to boost limited primary healthcare services across remote Indigenous Northern Territory communities.

Anna's first call-up as part of RAHC saw her head to Tennant Creek in March 2016.

"I had to Google Tennant Creek because I hadn't heard of it before,"

she recalls.

"The staff at RAHC had said it was a nice place to go for the first time; it's a big clinic and not incredibly remote."

Tennant Creek is the fifth largest town in the NT and situated about 1,000 kilometres south of Darwin.

It boasts a stunning landscape and half of its population identifies as Indigenous.

"My first impression getting off the plane was it's very hot and this adventure is really about to begin," Anna says.

"I felt really excited. I felt I had made a good decision and I was keen to have a look around and understand where I was. It's obviously very different to Christchurch. It was a bit confronting."

The demands of the role included wound care, chronic disease care, children's health, women's health, renal treatment and health promotion, and even dealing with a meningococcal outbreak.

"You need to build trust and gain rapport," says Anna.

"People are very interested to know what your story is your background. It's how they work out if they trust you or not."

Anna says the clinical and educational opportunities afforded her were unique and valuable.

"It's an honour working with and learning about another culture. It blows you away. It's very special."

Following her initial short-term placement, Anna took on a full-time position focused on women's health and delivering care to the Aboriginal



women and children of Tennant Creek.

She reveals witnessing a variety of problematic issues, including many young women battling drug and alcohol issues, but says with support change can occur and that some have undergone rehab and come out the other side to find employment and turn their lives around.

"One thing I really like, that I'm really passionate about is educating and empowering women.

"There's lots of domestic violence and sexual violence. It's important to educate women that this isn't normal and shouldn't occur."

After working in the community for almost two years, Anna says she remains alarmed by the ongoing health disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians.

"I understand the issues are multi-faceted, but it's very confronting. I was blown away when I first got here that there are people younger than me who have heart failure, or are on dialysis and waiting for transplants.

"It's not good enough and I hope to see and be a part of the change during my time here."

Anna says moving to Australia reignited her nursing career and she hasn't looked back.

"I enjoy the country life and fun that comes with it. There's nothing more amazing than the desert sky, day or night.

"It's amazing just how much there is to be involved in; sports, arts, culture and community."

Anna, who credits her initial short-term placement through RAHC with giving her an insight into Tennant Creek's issues and challenges, encouraged health professionals looking for a change to give it a try.

"Just do it, live your life, enjoy new challenges and adventures. Prepare to be challenged clinically, learn a lot about yourself and make some unforgettable memories along the way."

For more information on Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC) visit:

www.rahc.com.au