

Jane Moyle's Graduation Speech 2010

It seems a world away since I first began my Graduate Diploma in Adolescent Health and Welfare at the start of 2007. Since then, I have experienced some significant life changes; I have changed careers, bought a new home and had a baby, amongst many, many other things.

I began the course hoping it would facilitate the beginnings of a new career. During 2007, and prior to this I was working in an independent secondary school as a VCE Legal Studies teacher and junior SOSE teacher. After working in a youth refuge in London briefly just prior to beginning the course, I was hoping to gain some qualifications to assist me in working in a similar position with disadvantaged young people in Melbourne.

I remember finding that first year very challenging in terms of time management. In fact, I recall that that was the overriding challenge for the entire course really. Teaching year 11 and 12 with all the marking involved whilst also having your own assignments and readings each week was exhausting! The online seminars for one of the first year subjects I found to be a really useful way of getting to know the other students, where they were at and their opinions and judgements about various topics. It was a struggle to write academically again but I think I soon got used to that after the first couple of very average attempts. I remember learning about risk and protective factors in our very first study seminar and then having it hammered into our heads over and over throughout the whole course! At the time, I have found this perspective, along with the social determinants of health to influence both my academic work but more importantly, I believe, my practice. To be able to view a young person with respect to their back story and circumstances has been a crucial aspect to my learning which has heavily influenced, and I believe benefited my practice.

It is difficult to highlight the things I have learnt from the course in isolation as much of my learning also occurred alongside that career change I was hoping for. At the end of 2007 I was offered a 'social worker' role working with the Salvation Army Crisis Centre in St Kilda, working for the Young Women's Outreach program. As a housing outreach support worker, I was required to case manage up to 12 young homeless women, most of whom had children themselves, working toward long term housing whilst also dealing with a variety of other complex issues including family violence, child protection, mental health and drug issues. I am not entirely sure that I would have been employed by the Salvation Army if I did not have the Grad Dip on my resume as something I was completing, as a pre-requisite of the job was a degree in social work or its equivalent. I am very pleased they took the risk on me!

I took a semester off in order to have some time to settle into this new role. Upon returning to study in semester 2, 2008, I enrolled in Drug Issues and the Adolescent Health Project. I found the Adolescent Health Project to be of particular benefit in the course. I won't say highlight, as the negotiations required with the workplace and too-ing and fro-ing by my employer around ethics etc, made it a difficult experience but it was all part of the learning

process. The complexities around putting a youth project together was surprisingly difficult. With the assistance of a group of homeless young people at the Salvo's refuge in St Kilda, I put together a brochure for young people who had found themselves without a home for the first time outlining the multiple options available to them and where they were able to go for assistance. This came out of my own experience as an educated worker entering the homeless sector and finding it difficult to navigate the language and processes around obtaining appropriate housing. I couldn't imagine how a young person with potentially less confidence, educational background and language skills finding themselves homeless for the first time could even possibly manage to figure out this complex system.

The subject which I enjoyed most and which certainly influenced my practice to the greatest extent was the summer subject, Adolescent Sexuality and Sexual Health, run by Hennie Williams. It was during this week that I was particularly impacted by how the content of the course directly related to my profession. Working with young homeless mothers who continued to fall pregnant and continued to have terminations over and over again profoundly impacted me during this week because of the content of the course. Ironically it was also during this week that I found out I was pregnant! Anyway, I took much of the knowledge, passion and frustration that I had learnt during the week back to my work place and set up a sexual health workshop for this very vulnerable cohort of young women. Our program had never before done any workshops or group sessions with our clients and only worked in isolation, one on one. I was also convinced that this was not ideal, as I learnt, through my studies, that the benefits of bringing these women together to support each other through their circumstances, far outweighed the potential negative effects and issues of confidentiality that past workers were convinced would occur. I liaised with the sexual health nurse and homeless young persons' outreach worker at a local large community health organisation who shared my passion. This resulted in our own Sexual Health Workshop where we were able to bring together a chaotic group of young women who find it difficult to commit to turning up to anything, let alone a whole day of talking sexual health! We arranged child care for the women and lunch and snacks and, although it ended up being a small group, the discussions that occurred were fantastic! It became a safe space very quickly where the young women were able to dispel sexual health myths, discuss some specific and challenging cultural sexual health issues and were able to find out where to go for help. It was a real highlight for me of incorporating my learning and my practice. I feel as though I shared this passion and frustration gained during this week to my colleagues as since that first workshop, the program has run twice more in co-operation with several other community organisations.

So I completed my studies mid last year and then gave birth to our little Matilda Grace in October. The future for me in terms of my own work with young people is a little unknown as I am almost entirely a full-time mum. I am currently on maternity leave from my position with the Salvation Army, but I will need to return full-time in September if I wish to keep that role. In the meantime, I am doing a day a week of emergency teaching and have just

applied to be a mentor for a young DHS woman through the YWCA Asista program, run by one of the graduates of this course, in fact.

The type of distance learning offered in this course requires much self discipline which the course forces you to learn at an early stage. Many times throughout the years I wished there was more contact with tutors and students and I felt very isolated in my study. Throughout the course, I particularly enjoyed the academic challenges posed by Paul Badcock and his high expectations of our academic work as well as the ongoing support provided by Louise Scaffidi throughout the entire course. Her holistic knowledge of working with young people effectively and her ability to encourage and communicate effectively with her students has been extremely beneficial. The Centre for Adolescent Health is involved in some brilliant research and I am pleased that I can now have on my resume that I have completed a course run by both the Centre and by Melbourne University. I hope the Centre can continue to be such an important hub of research and a key point of influence for many schools and youth based programs.

With so many of the graduates working full time, often managing a family whilst also being expected to spend around 10 hours each week on each subject is an extremely demanding lifestyle. I would like to congratulate the graduates who are here today and those who are not for managing to balance this chaotic period of their lives and I hope this learning had positively impacted your practice with young people and much as it has mine.

Jane Moyle
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