



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA



Graduate Profile: Sarah Cutler

Graduating from a Bachelor of Development Studies followed by Honours has led Sarah Cutler to pursue a career working with refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and abroad. Sarah currently works in community mental health for Neami National.

Sarah believes that Development Studies is a broader, foundational degree, with possibilities for moving into diverse roles.

“It’s more of a way of being and thinking that can be transferred into other areas of work and study afterwards... it teaches you to think critically and universally, using a strengths based focus.”

During her degree, Sarah completed volunteer work with refugees at Northern Settlement Services in Newcastle which helped further develop her skills and her passion for working with vulnerable people.

Her interests in care practices and community development led Sarah to complete her Honours year. Sarah’s research involved finding out what it was like living and working in rural areas through interviewing rural community health workers. Sarah reflects that she developed highly transferable skills through Honours, including *“critical thinking, engaging with literature and sharpening my writing skills...there’s always one selection*

criteria about report writing, case notes or evaluation in any job application.”

After she completed her degree, Sarah wanted to travel, and thought she could contribute overseas by teaching English. To prepare, she completed an online course called Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Although TESOL was not essential, it provided her with confidence and creative ideas for teaching young people.



Figure 1 Sarah and students from a NGO school in India

Following graduation, Sarah learnt about Social Action for Children and Women. Based in Thailand, the organisation assists

displaced women from Burma experiencing crisis. Sarah travelled to Thailand to volunteer with the organisation. Once there, she networked and found additional opportunities to work at schools. Sarah then moved to India for six months and continued teaching English at a school, while learning Hindi herself.



Figure 2 Sarah (back row, top right) teaching at social action for women on the Thai Burma border.

Returning home to Australia, Sarah's travels confirmed her desire to work with vulnerable people. Landing a job with Wesley Mission, Sarah worked as a support carer for young asylum seekers released from detention centres, *"like youth work, but with asylum seekers...it was an amazing job."*

Sarah's studies have given her the tools necessary for her work which involves empathising, supporting and conceptualising the experiences of people from places of disadvantage, racial conflict, religious wars and political systems. Continuing to expand her knowledge, Sarah has completed a Master of Philosophy (Social Work). Sarah recommends the Aurora Project internship,

which she completed whilst doing her Masters. As part of the internship, Sarah was placed in the Northern Territory into a women's safe house in an Aboriginal community.



Figure 3 Sarah on her internship in an Aboriginal community.

"It opened my eyes to the fourth world conditions in Australia and allowed me to relate some of the theories I've learned in a practical space."

Sarah enjoys volunteering in her own time, and encourages other students to try this. Volunteering enabled Sarah to engage with a diverse range of people and expand different skill sets, *"it's hard to get that experience if you're not in the volunteer space."*

For current and future students, Sarah notes that one of the great things about Development Studies is that you can use aspects of your study in everyday life and you'll meet a lot of likeminded friends along the way. *"We were able to really engage our lifestyle with what we were learning, in terms of community gardens, buying from co-ops given its values of social justice, and environmental sustainability."*

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