

DEVELOPMENT STUDIES GRADUATE

EMILIE WIGGERS

**CURRENT ROLE: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER,
LAKE MACQUARIE CITY COUNCIL**

PREVIOUS ROLE: SUPPORT CO-ORDINATOR, NEW HORIZONS

**DEGREE: BACHELOR OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE**



Emilie entered the Bachelor of Development Studies with an interest in global poverty and international development issues. During her degree Emilie realised that those issues were a large-scale manifestation of the challenges of community development locally. This interest led her choices through her degree and to her career today.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO SINCE GRADUATING?

When we last spoke with Emilie four years ago, she had just started her role as Community Development Officer for Lake Macquarie City Council. Four years on and Emilie is still working with Lake Macquarie Council and incredibly happy in her job. Her role involves a wide variety of tasks including supporting community organisations, running projects and networking events while also being a face and name that community knows.



Image: Emilie loves working for the community of Lake Macquarie. Image taken on site at the Museum of Art and Culture.

Emilie is also involved in longer-term projects addressing mental health, multiculturalism and homelessness within the City of Lake Macquarie. [The Homelessness Plan](#) Emilie is working on will be the first of its kind in the Hunter region. Speaking to stakeholders, sending surveys, researching and hearing from people who care about and have lived experience of homelessness has built community engagement into the Homelessness Plan from the outset.

Although Emilie and her team have been working in the area of homelessness for years, the Homelessness Plan will provide definite actions with time frames and accountabilities. This involves balancing whole of council social plans and community plans for the future, as well as facilitating events and activities that respond to issues now.



Image: Emilie co-ordinates an annual Harmony Day event to celebrate multiculturalism in Lake Macquarie. Pictured here with Emilie's sister Nicole and brother-in-law Adrian.

To ensure she is responsive and effective in her role, Emilie tries to remain flexible. She understands that people and their lives are constantly changing and by being flexible and changing her tasks she can better help those around her.

Emilie appreciates her role, her team and the level of support and genuine care for the lives of the residents and visitors in the community within Council. She works to ensure capacity is available to support vulnerable people.

Emilie initially started her career with volunteering in the not-for-profit (NFP) sector with [Northern Settlement Services](#). Emilie volunteered as a tutor whilst studying and helped high school students build their English language skills by

assisting with their homework. Emilie found the volunteering experience incredibly rewarding and really enjoyed interacting with people as well as experiencing a taste of a professional work environment. Emilie gained a number of paid positions with Northern Settlement Services, before moving onto [New Horizons](#) working on a mental health program for refugees and humanitarian arrivals.

Emilie's experience and the relationships that she created in the NFP sector are still beneficial now. As Council is reviewing their [Multicultural Plan](#), Emilie is still in contact with the people she used to work with at Northern Settlement Services and New Horizons.



Image: Emilie overlooking the views of the city in Gothenburg, Sweden.

The Development Studies degree taught Emilie how to be open minded and critique yourself. When looking at a particular issue in her work, Emilie keeps her mind open and forms her opinion by researching and listening to the evidence.

“Looking at things from so many sides is what Development Studies teaches you.”

ADVICE: VOLUNTEER AND MAKE FRIENDS

Gaining practical experience was important during Emilie's degree. Emilie did this through volunteering opportunities and studying abroad. Through these experiences you will develop friendships as well as developing your professional network. Emilie is still in contact with people that she volunteered, worked and studied with during her degree.



Image: Emilie (centre) alongside Board members of Awesome Lake Mac.

With the resources available in Council, Emilie has been able to work on projects from the ground up. A project that has been a highlight for Emilie is [Awesome Lake Mac](#). The project is supported by a volunteer board of Lake Macquarie community members who contribute cash towards \$1000 micro-grants. The grant is for anyone within the community who has a great idea and needs a bit of a cash influx to get it off the ground. The latest grant was awarded to [80's Skaties](#) which is a family friendly gathering on Friday nights at Speers Point Park, for anyone on wheels. Emilie has loved seeing Awesome Lake Mac grow.

HOW RELEVANT HAS YOUR DEGREE BEEN SINCE YOU GRADUATED?

For the last year of her degree, Emilie decided to go on student exchange to Gothenburg, Sweden. Emilie wanted to gain as much practical experience as she could. That desire lead her to studying in Sweden which she was able to do via an [iLead Plus](#) scholarship. The main benefit of studying overseas, for Emilie, was meeting so many people from all over the world. Emilie wanted to go through the challenges of studying abroad to help her grow as a person as well as building her CV. Emilie strongly encourages students to participate in the iLead program. It will help you meet other like-minded people and you will able to develop your own leadership capabilities at a young age.

As a student, it can be difficult to escape the pressure of feeling that you need to achieve good grades. Through her working career, it has been obvious to Emilie that who she is as a person, how much she cares about what she does and the desire to continue increasing her skills is what is most important now.

“You definitely keep learning when you complete your studies.”



Image: Emilie celebrating Youth Week with colleague Maree Edwards, fellow graduate Faith and Shane from Up&Up.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

When Emilie applied for her role in Council, she was initially applying to gain the application and interview experience. Her expectation at the time was that she would be in a similar role, but later down the track with more experience under her belt. Fortunately, Emilie found herself in her dream role a few years earlier than she expected. At the moment, Emilie is incredibly happy with her job, the people she works with and in being able to facilitate positive changes and provide support to her community.

To find out more about Emilie and our other Development Studies graduates please visit; uonblogs.newcastle.edu.au/ges/graduate-profiles/ facebook.com/DevelopmentStudiesatUON/

For more information about the [Bachelor of Development Studies](#) you can contact:

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