

DEVELOPMENT STUDIES GRADUATE

CAITLIN GANZER



CURRENT ROLE: POLICY OFFICER, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (DSS)

PAST ROLE: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT WORKER, MISSION AUSTRALIA

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

Caitlin currently works at DSS which she loves due to the continual variability of the work available.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO SINCE GRADUATING?

Caitlin's first role after completing her undergraduate degree and honours was a role with [Mission Australia](#). The program Caitlin worked on was called [Newcastle Community Development](#). She worked on all sorts of things like playgroups, family support services, managing a community hall in Newcastle and community events. Caitlin provided a supportive role, connecting people with existing resources in their community.

Caitlin's next role was working as an Ability Linker on the [Ability Links](#) program with the St Vincent de Paul Society. In this role Caitlin connected people with disability, to different areas in their community to support them to meet their goals.

Caitlin finished her role with St Vincent de Paul when she gained a graduate position with the Department of Social Services (DSS) in Canberra. Caitlin's advice for students applying for graduate positions is to practise. Practising the types of questions, such as logic tests will help to prepare you for the application process. Caitlin noted that her previous experience with Mission Australia and St Vincent de Paul also helped her to stand out.

“They want to know that you have some on the ground experience.”

Since working at DSS, Caitlin has worked in many areas such as grants, legislation, the National Redress Scheme, the [National Disability Insurance Scheme \(NDIS\)](#) and family programs. Currently Caitlin is working on the management of an intensive family support program for families in the Northern Territory and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands in South Australia. In her role, Caitlin is continually altering the program to meet changes in circumstances, researching how to improve the program, consulting with states and territories, as well as focusing on delivering and measuring outcomes. The nature of Caitlin's work can involve challenging areas and topics, however Caitlin feels incredibly supported within her workplace.

HOW RELEVANT HAS YOUR DEGREE BEEN SINCE YOU GRADUATED?

Caitlin enrolled as a Development Studies student with an environmental sustainability major, after resonating strongly with a sociology course on climate change. Further into her degree, Caitlin discovered her interests were in social policy.

During her degree Caitlin completed a [Work Integrated Learning \(WIL\)](#) course. Caitlin approached [The Family Action Centre](#) who were at the time working in partnership with Mission Australia on community development work. During her placement Caitlin worked with Mission Australia on strengths-based assessments of different resources in the community that were available for families.

After completing her undergraduate degree Caitlin decided to enrol in honours. She approached her supervisor to discuss potential research projects. Caitlin's case study was [Beanstalk Food Cooperative](#), a cooperative that offers fresh organic produce to its members. Caitlin used a mixed methods approach; interviewing members of Beanstalk, participant observations and researching their historical documents to determine how Beanstalk came to make different decisions over time. At the completion of her honours, Caitlin continued with Beanstalk volunteering on the board as their secretary.

After Caitlin completed her honours Mission Australia, where she had completed her WIL placement a year prior, approached her about working for them. Caitlin accepted and she filled in for her previous supervisor at Mission Australia for just over 12 months. This opportunity highlighted to Caitlin the importance of maintaining the relationships within her network.

Caitlin has found that the skills she gained throughout her Bachelor of Development Studies are transferrable and have been incredibly relevant to all of her roles. Strengths based approaches, are core to what Caitlin achieves in her role every day. Caitlin found that her honours year improved her ability to communicate, an essential skill in her line of work. She learnt how to target her writing for a particular audience, effectively approach community consultation and bring out the strength within a community or individual.

Caitlin has completed a [Graduate Certificate in Policy and Data](#) which focused on key areas such as public administration, public policy, economic policy and data analysis. Caitlin found the certificate interesting and is interested in pursuing additional study.

ADVICE: BUILD NETWORKS AND BE CONFIDENT

Caitlin stresses the importance of not only building your networks, but then maintaining connections with them. Keep in touch with your network, just to let them know what you have been up to. They may be able to offer you an opportunity when you need it.

Most importantly, be confident and do not underestimate yourself. You may not think you have the relevant experience for a particular role when you first step out of university as a recent graduate however, many of the university projects you have completed will be an invaluable addition to your resume as you begin your career.

“Appreciate the resources you have available while you are at university. The staff are a great source of guidance.”

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Caitlin is thoroughly enjoying her work within the family support services with the DSS. Caitlin envisions herself continuing working in this area and anticipates she will specialise her skills and focus with further graduate studies.

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

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