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## **Opening minds to life outside the city limits**

A self-confessed city slicker who spent time living in Singapore growing up, Dr Joshua Briotti was initially drawn to the Kimberley by the promise of adventure.

In his second year of medical school, Josh put his hand up to participate in The University of Notre Dame's six-week block placement program in Broome.

"The heat and humidity of Broome was very reminiscent of Singapore, but obviously a very different pace of life," Josh said.

"The community was very welcoming. I joined the local footy team and I made some wonderful connections during my six weeks.

"Later that year, I returned to the region as part of Notre Dame's annual Kimberley immersion placement."

As part of The University of Notre Dame's Kimberley Remote Area Health Placement Program, second year medicine students spend ten days in August living and working alongside Kimberley people in family-owned and community organisations, such as cattle stations, schools, radio stations, local shires and small business.

Running since 2006, the program has improved the students' responsiveness to the needs of rural patients, helped them to establish future networks and has given Kimberley people an opportunity to influence the future careers of student doctors.

Josh had a childhood dream of becoming a cowboy and had hoped to be placed on a station as part of the immersion.

"Instead my placement was at Mimbi Caves, which was different than what I had hoped, but gave me insight into the strengths and limitations of healthcare in remote locations. The placement really helped us to experience the different facets of rurality and I valued the deep understanding I gained of kinships systems and traditional lore.

"However, I have to admit I was pretty jealous of the students who were placed on the stations when they regaled us with their stories and I was still keen to get a taste of that life myself."

The following year, Josh spent his third year of medical school at The Rural Clinical School of WA in Geraldton. On a trip with friends to Exmouth, Josh made the decision to pursue his childhood dream and take a year out from medical school to work as a station hand.

“During my year in Geraldton, we got to discussing a mutual friend who was working on a station. Another friend commented that I looked so excited while talking about the opportunity and suggested that I give it a shot.

“I was one of 100 people who applied for just 10 positions with Kalyeeda Station, which is about 2 hours from Derby.

“I had not such much as ridden a horse before applying, however the Camp family prefers to take on people they can teach and mould – so I got the gig.

“Through studying medicine, I’ve come to realise that I don’t know everything and that everyone can teach you something; so I think they appreciated that attitude.

“I gained so much from that experience. While I learnt about agriculture, I learnt so much more about friendships, team work and leadership – and they are traits that will be invaluable in my medical journey.

“I also learnt to ride – horses and bulls – and rode in a few rodeos (to Mum’s disapproval) and the Derby picnic races.

“However, I have to admit that I thing I never mastered was changing a tyre; I’m still as awful as I ever was!”

Since graduating medical school, Josh worked in Perth, Bunbury and Kalgoorlie before returning to Broome earlier this year.

“Every location gives you a new perspective and a different experience. All of these opportunities have helped me develop as a clinician and to understand a little more about patients from rural and remote backgrounds”

“Broome has been incredible and I’ve had opportunities I simply wouldn’t have experienced had I remained in Perth this year. I’ve been involved in emergency medicine, paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology and lots of mentorship.

“I’m close to completing my emergency medicine certificate (Josh is sitting his exam next week). If I had stayed in Perth, I would not have had enough exposure to paediatrics to be in this position.

“At the moment, I’m on rotation with Royal Flying Doctor Service and Kimberley Aboriginal Medicine Service heading out to Beagle Bay and the communities of the Fitzroy valley. These really remote communities challenge your clinical reasoning as there’s little to no diagnostic equipment. It really sharpens your clinical skills.”

Josh said his experience in the Kimberley had really helped to push him out of his comfort zone.

“I think all medical students and doctors should get a taste of rural medicine. It really opens your mind to what life outside the city looks like – and that makes us better doctors and better people.”

“I really encourage families and organisations in the Kimberley to embrace this opportunity to host a medical student when they visit in August.

“It’s great to get them doing anything and everything. Medical students are by nature quite inquisitive, so this is a chance to nurture that curiosity and create memories that are often fondly remembered even after medical school.

“I hope everyone gets behind it once again this year.”

The 2023 immersion will take place from Monday 14 August to Saturday 19 August.

The University of Notre Dame and Rural Health West are seeking community hosts for this year’s immersion.

Hosts are asked to:

- provide meaningful work for two students in their organisation, school, business, community or station
- provide accommodation and cooking facilities for students to cook or invite them to contribute to household meals and routines
- provide transport to and from their place of work, if not within walking distance
- involve students in usual leisure activities
- provide a safe, secure place for students to sleep and store their belongings.

For further information, contact Rural Health West.

**ENDS**

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*Rural Health West aims to improve access to quality healthcare for rural communities through the provision of a highly skilled, motivated and sustainable medical and allied health workforce. We are a not-for-profit organisation primarily funded through the WA Country Health Service and the Australian Government Department of Health.*