

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

WORK WITH PURPOSE – PUBLIC SECTOR UNEARTHED

EPISODE #4

A REGIONAL HUB TO CALL HOME WITH LIBBY BEATTIE AND
OLIVIA SICE

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BROCK PHYLAND: Hello everyone. Before we get started with this podcast, we'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today, the Ngunnawal and the Ngambri people, and pay our respects to their elders past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this beautiful region. We'd also like to acknowledge the custodians of all the lands from where anybody listening to this podcast is also joining us from.

OLIVIA SICE: I have some lovely close friends of mine who have now seen that it is possible to be a mom and to be a working person and take on or go back and finish that degree that you haven't finished. Or I have a best friend who, it's always been her dream to be a paramedic, and now she's decided to take that on because she has the support of the CUC.

LIBBY BEATTIE: For all of our team, it's our favourite part of the job, is hearing all the amazing stories from the different hubs all across Australia and the successes that they're having.

BROCK PHYLAND: Welcome to Public Sector Unearthed, a Work with Purpose spin-off series about the people who drive grassroots change and reform in Australia's public sector. My name is Brock Phyland and I currently work as a director at the Department of Veterans Affairs, and I'm back as your host today. On Public Sector Unearthed, we're putting people, and their stories front and centre. Our guests talk about their journeys in the public service and how they're making a difference through their work, mentoring communities of practise, diversity inclusion networks, and the effective promotion of the values and purpose of the public sector. Just now you heard from Libby Beattie, Assistant Director in the Higher Education Division at the Department of Education, and Olivia Sice, who is currently interning at the Far West Local Health District and who is a student in the Masters of Health Service Management with Griffith University, and she's doing her studies based at the Regional University Study Hub in Broken Hill.

Libby works on the regional policy team who leads the Regional University Study Hubs Project, which provides study facilities and student support services to students in regional areas. Growing up in a regional area herself, Libby is passionate about creating better education services for people in Australia, wherever they are. Olivia is currently loving her time studying at one of these hubs and tells us her story of how she got there and the great community she's found at the Broken Hill Hub. Libby's work and Olivia's experience are great examples of the APS reforms focused on putting people and business at the heart of policy and services. It also showcases the positive impact that public servants have on communities as you're going to hear in just a second. Let's jump right into that conversation now.

All right, good morning. Welcome, Libby and Olivia. We're so excited to have you on Public Sector Unearthed. To Libby first, can you tell us a bit about where you grew up and how this motivated you to join, I guess, the public service and then work on regional policy?

LIBBY BEATTIE:

Yeah, sure. So, I grew up in Wagga Wagga in regional New South Wales. I went to school there. After school, I did a journalism degree and then got my first job in Bathurst, also in regional New South Wales, working as a radio journalist there. I did that for a few years, really loved it, but decided it probably wasn't my long-term passion that I wanted to continue. So, I guess in trying to find my feet and decide what I wanted to do, I joined the public service, did a few different roles. Started off in communications, did a few different things and after a few years, a position came up in the regional policy team in higher education, which sounded like something, obviously, having spent a large part of my life in regional New South Wales, was something I was really interested in.

After joining the team, I learned a lot more about some of the issues with higher education for regional Australia, the huge disparities that exist for people in regional Australia in obtaining university degrees compared to metro areas. So, it was something I was

really interested in working on to try and improve and learning about all the different policies and programmes that were kind of on the cards to try and fix that issue. So joined the regional policy team. I've been there for a few years now, and yeah, it's definitely a passion of mine and something I want to continue.

BROCK PHYLAND:

I love that. We love Wagga Wagga, we love Bathurst on the show, so represent. So, I can obviously hear that regional policy is clearly obviously just such a passion project for you. So, the Regional University Study Hubs seems like a pretty natural project for you to work on, but can you tell us a bit more about the hubs and how you contribute to running them?

LIBBY BEATTIE:

Yeah, sure. So, the Regional University Study Hubs programme, formally called the Regional University Centres programme. So, some people might know it by its former name. It started off as a pilot programme in 2018 and has just expanded rapidly since. So essentially the hubs are placed in regional or remote parts of Australia who don't have easy access to a university campus or any kind of higher education. So, people who live in that community, if they study online, they can use the hub almost like sort of to get that kind of replacement of a campus experience. So, they're great little communities with lots of students studying. They get things like academic support, pastoral support, that kind of real wraparound support that they're not going to get from just sitting at home in front of a computer and studying.

So yeah, as I said, started in 2018 with only 16 centres. We've now got 34 across Australia and the government's recently announced another 20. So, it's really just gone gangbusters and it's such a positive programme. It's a really nice programme to work on in the public service. You really only hear positive things about it, which is great.

So, in terms of my role, I'm in the regional policy team and we have the primary programme management role for this programme. I've done all different things over my time in the team. Back in 2019 when the programme was being expanded, I worked on some of

the policy development. I've done some of the programme management in terms of the day-to-day management with the centres, and now I do a few different things. Because the programme has expanded so rapidly, we really had to revisit how the programme is managed. When it was only a few centres, it could be managed by a couple of people in the team, but now with it being so vast and expanding so quickly, we've got a network that's run out of Curtin University who kind of oversees all of the hubs and provides things like webinars and training. So, I've got a lead role with the network.

We're trialling some new partnerships funding. So, some of the newer hubs are going to receive funding to help them form partnerships with universities and TAFEs and local industry and that kind of thing to support students. So that's another role I have. And we're also doing some work on, at a policy level, really trying to measure the success of the programme. Again, because it's quite new and all of the anecdotal evidence we have is that it's doing amazing things, but obviously if it's something that we want to keep expanding and keep running, we have to show the success. So doing a lot of work in collecting data and all the things that sound really boring but are really important in terms of showing how many students are using the hubs and what impact they're having on participation and attainment and that kind of stuff.

So yeah, as I said, I'm just obviously one person in a very dedicated and hardworking team that manages this programme. And then obviously in terms of the running of the hubs, that's all done on the ground. So, this programme wouldn't work without the amazing people who work at the centres, the centre managers, the learning skills advisors who are all locally based and just pull their heart and soul every day into running the centres. They're the success story. We do all the behind the scenes, keep the things running, and obviously it wouldn't work without all the stuff in the background, but yeah.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Brilliant. Well, firstly, Libby analytical evaluation is never boring. So, let's count that out.

LIBBY BEATTIE:

I didn't say it was boring. I said it sounds boring.

BROCK PHYLAND:

It does, but it's hugely important. So, thank you for taking us through that. It obviously is such a fantastic initiative and it's great to hear that it's expanding as well. And that sort of brings us a little bit to Olivia.

So, Olivia, you are studying a Master's of Health Service Management from Griffith University at the Broken Hill Hub, but before I guess we talk a little bit about that hub, just want to hear a bit more about you and your own journey. So, what brought you to the space you're in now?

OLIVIA SICE:

So, I've grown up in rural and remote areas my entire life. I started life out on sheep stations and my educational journey really started online in a sense, through School of The Air in the early '90s. So, the big old radio boxes and dialling in that way, then moving into town, going to the local schools and everything there. But my mom was very, very much an advocate for us country kids and fighting for secondary and tertiary education allowances and avenues for us because it was extremely difficult if you didn't have the money to send to because it's just not the cost of just university, it's moving out, it's supporting us in a city. So yeah, really fighting for those, almost those essential needs for further education and being able to go and make something of ourselves back then.

I attended a country university in Whyalla in South Australia and did my bachelor's degree, so that was in person and not online. And then started out, and I've done 12 years as a registered nurse in rural and remote areas, so in South Australia and then I've moved to Broken Hill about eight years ago. And then I was approached with the opportunity to undertake this internship in higher management, which I nearly didn't take because of the university masters that was attached to it because I really haven't had such a positive learning journey, and that is a lot to do with access and almost a lack of understanding of different learning styles and things like that. So, it was quite a challenge for me to decide to take this route. When I did decide to, I was pointed towards the CUC, so

the Country Universities Centre here in Far West, and it's all gone from there. The support that I've received to know that I can actually do this and that it's possible. And yeah, it's been invaluable. Really, really invaluable.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Brilliant. Thank you so much for, I guess taking us through the human element of what education regionally looks like there, Olivia, and what it really means in terms of the challenges that are associated with that. So, I really appreciate you taking me through sort of your journey and I really want to know, I guess what the hub at Broken Hill looks and feels like. What makes you excited to study there?

OLIVIA SICE:

So, I really thought about this and how to articulate it properly, but I can't go past saying it's like a big warm hug. It really is.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Oh, stop it.

OLIVIA SICE:

You walk into this place, and I was a mess when I first came in. I was so nervous about undertaking postgraduate education. Like I said, I hadn't had positive experiences before and there was the element of pressure of like I'd been chosen to do this internship and I'm a pilot programme out here in the Far West for this higher management internship as well, so I was a little bit riding on it. I wanted something to be accessible for further upcoming managers later on to have the access to further education to be able to be supported in a management pathway. So, I wanted to do well.

So, when those assignments landed, I almost had a little mini mental breakdown, but I came in here and it was okay. I was understood. I was made to feel that I wasn't alone, and it was right, let's sit down and really put together, what am I scared of, what are going to be the barriers and what are the barriers with being in an online environment for the first time for tertiary education. I have a lot of travel within the internship too, and it's a full-time work environment as well.

I also have four children and a husband that works 7 on, 7 off underground. So, it was about having that support to really sit

down, make a study plan. There are things that I need to do within the college itself that I do the internship through as well. So, it's about prioritising all of those. I have pretty good time management skills, but from a nurse on the floor point of view, when it comes to sitting down and not getting distracted from the things around me, it's really difficult. So, the home environment for me is not really something that works for me. My youngest is three years old, so she just wants to be involved in everything. Walking into the hub, it's equal parts neat, tidy, very well planned with the layout. The staff are right there, they're accessible. There's your homely sense of there's a fully catered kitchen area that we can make food, we can share food with staff and other students.

I've made some really lovely friendships with other moms who are taking on postgraduate studies and we're kind of in the trenches together at the end of that semester period where everything kind of gets a little bit full on and we're trying to juggle that home life study balance. You walk into the hub and there's beanbags and there's comfortable places to sit or you can opt to have a separate room where you can just be in the zone. There's no other distractions. So, it's that equal parts, a study space, but it also has that homely environment that it's inviting and it wants you and you look forward to. I've gone from full-time studying last trimester to one subject this trimester, and I miss having to come here so often.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Wow, my goodness. Olivia, you speak so powerfully of the impact that it can have to have that space there especially and thank you for telling us about your family. Obviously, you're probably not alone in having those circumstances where you need somewhere to go like that. And I'll tell you, what doesn't resonate about a big warm hug. I'm feeling that even though we're doing this remotely, so...

OLIVIA SICE:

Honestly, I can't explain it any other way, and I have some lovely close friends of mine who have now seen that it is possible to be a mom and to be a working person and take on or go back and finish that degree that you haven't finished. Or I have a best friend who it's always been her dream to be a paramedic, and now she's decided to take that on because she has the support of the CUC.

She knows there's somewhere to come. She has two kids of her own and a husband that works full-time as well. There is that support and that access.

My brother-in-law's actually moved from interstate, from rural South Australia to be here to study his Bachelor of Accountancy because he has the support in the CUC and has seen the support that I have received. It's not support that he can access where he's from, even though he's only an hour from Adelaide. He doesn't have a car to access university in person in Adelaide. So being able to come here and be supported on an online environment and be given the confidence and have those study groups and things, and he can interact with others in a very more personalised sense. He's kicking goals. It's great.

BROCK PHYLAND:

I love that. I'm a big one for celebrate the wins. So, thank you so much for taking us through that, Olivia and Libby. Hearing how powerful that feedback is from Olivia, pretty easy to see why you love working on this project, but hearing that, how does that make you feel about the work that you're involved in and that you're doing?

LIBBY BEATTIE:

Yeah, it's just amazing. It's definitely for all of our team, it's our favourite part of the job is hearing all the amazing stories from the different hubs all across Australia and the successes that they're having. I think in the public service, it's sometimes unusual to have that really close connect to what you're working on. Often, it's long-term policy or that kind of thing. So, running a programme where we get to see it running on the ground and all the difference it's making right now to so many students like Olivia and all across Australia, it absolutely makes it very easy to be motivated to go to work each day and keep doing what we're doing.

BROCK PHYLAND:

I absolutely love that, Libby, and I guess Olivia, one final one for you. If you had one recommendation for someone considering studying at the hub, what would it be?

OLIVIA SICE:

Just do it. You're not alone. Don't feel like the barriers that you feel limit you, that you're the only one that has those barriers. Come in

and access the staff here. They have such a wealth of knowledge, and they get it. Their moms too, their parents too. They work, they undertake postgraduate studies. They get it. And what a better place to undertake something that makes you feel uncomfortable and puts you outside of that comfortable area and pushes you to reach your dreams and aspirations than connecting with people and with staff that get it and do have the tools to support you in a space like this.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Brilliant. Look, thank you so much, Olivia. Thank you so much, Libby, for joining in us on Unearthed today. It's been a real honour listening to your stories and the great difference that you're making for people in the public sector. Thank you so much both for coming on.

OLIVIA SICE:

Thank you so much.

LIBBY BEATTIE:

Thank you so much.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Listeners, it was a real pleasure talking with Libby and Olivia. What really stood out for me was the power of education access regionally, those real impacts on people's lives and hard to top the description of it being a big warm hug. So, what did you enjoy about this story? Let us know by leaving a comment on our social media channels or even better writing a review. We're on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, and many other podcast platforms.

Work with Purpose is produced in collaboration between contentgroup and the Institute of Public Administration Australia. ACT, supported by the Australian Public Service Commission, Public Sector Unearthed will return in about a fortnight, and this podcast is produced in partnership with contentgroup and the APS Reform Office. Thanks for listening. See you again soon.