

## True heart and soul belongs with ageing rural communities

Nicole Brooke<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Whiddon Group, <sup>2</sup>University of Tasmania

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Nicole Brooke is the Research and Development Manager for The Whiddon Group, large regional and rural focused residential aged care provider in NSW. Nicole has submitted her Doctorate of Philosophy at the University of Technology, Sydney. Her PhD focused on case management in residential aged care. She has worked in aged care for more than 15 years and has held many senior management positions across aged and community care including Director of Nursing and Operations Manager, as well as Director of Clinical Practice and Senior Lecturer at UTS. Nicole holds a Clinical Senior Lecturer Title with the University of Tasmania and continues to engage in academic leadership roles. Nicole has further qualifications as a registered nurse and Masters of Adult Education, and Certificates in Workplace Safety, Training and Education, Research Commercialisation, and Immunisation. Current positions include; Joanna Briggs Institute for Best Practice Reviewer, on National Advisory Council for Ageing Forgotten Australians, and reviewer for Australasian Journal for Ageing. Her current position with The Whiddon Group enables her to undertake research activity and promote the successes of residential aged care, particularly in rural and remote areas.

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With little resources, little staff and little money, rural residential aged care facilities speak to the heart of Australia. Their staff are some of the most committed, dedicated and passionate people around!

The Whiddon Group is a large not-for-profit aged care provider in NSW with facilities as remote as Bourke and rural as Wee Waa and Condobolin. These facilities are very familiar with the threat of fire and flood evacuation and the challenges of providing aged care in more remote areas, but they continue to be highly regarded in both their local communities and by national accreditation bodies.

A recent quantitative survey of Australian residential aged care facility managers provides further insights into the contemporary challenges of aged care in rural and remote communities. Rural facilities are more likely than their city counterparts to be not-for-profit and have religious affiliations. Rural care workers are more likely to be undertaking clients' daily documentation compared to non-rural staff where the RNs and managers predominantly perform this. Additionally, facility managers indicated that the rural care staff members are highly effective at documenting clients' care. The results of this survey confirm what is reported in the literature about the special challenges of recruiting and retaining sufficient health care and aged care professionals in rural facilities.

The Whiddon Group is recognised nationally as an employer of choice and received a national mature age workforce award. Some of the main strategies it uses to overcome workforce and other challenges will be discussed, including the use of electronic client records, a focus on a wellness model, an evidence-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy, a new graduate/transition program, developing collaborative partnerships with universities, and funding innovations.

This presentation is about sharing strategies for moving forward despite the challenges and barriers we face!