



UNIVERSITYof
TASMANIA

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Social work partnership provides new level of COVID-19 support

Creative thinking about providing practical professional experience for social work students, while maintaining social distancing, has resulted in a unique partnership between the University of Tasmania and Red Cross.

Faced with the reality that social work students would not be able to undertake the normal face-to-face workplace learning required for them to become accredited, teaching staff at the University looked to the sector for opportunities to provide this experience in a way that supports the community's recovery from COVID-19.

One outcome of this is a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the University and Red Cross, under which initially one-third of final year students will undertake telephone wellbeing checks of Red Cross volunteers across Australia who are supporting people in quarantine.

The Head of Social Work at the University, Dr Sonya Stanford, said identifying placement opportunities in the midst of a pandemic had begun as a challenge due to social distancing and other restrictions.

"We are excited about how we have managed to change the structure and organisation of placements to work with the community to respond to the coronavirus," Dr Stanford said. "We want to maximise the contribution our students can make to the COVID-19 response now and the recovery into the future.

"The students will work in teams – in virtual student units – and will have the guidance of both the University and Red Cross as they undertake this work. We feel very fortunate to be able to provide this extra layer of support in what is a very difficult time for many people."

The Director of Red Cross in Tasmania, Sharon Wachtel, said her organisation saw the MOU and support for the COVID response as the first step in a long-term relationship between Red Cross and the University's social work program. "This is a way for us to work together to engage students in undertaking humanitarian action," she said.

Dr Stanford said working in tandem with an organisation such as Red Cross was invaluable to students at this point of their learning. “This allows them to fine-tune the skills they have gained in the University program and acquire first-hand understanding of the contexts they are likely to encounter in their professional career.

“We are delighted to be able to establish such a meaningful link between academic education and industry practice.”

**To interview Dr Stanford or speak with social work students in this program:
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