CROCFEST 2007 Report by Teesha Downton

Before the trip, I had only briefly heard of CrocFest. I had heard that it was a great event for children in rural and remote communities, so I didn’t hesitate when the opportunity came to get involved and experience the festival first hand.

The CrocFest trip was my first to Dubbo, and the coach trip reinforced how remote Dubbo and other towns along the route such as Orange and Mudgee are, and how they lack the convenience and availability of services taken for granted by people living in more regional and metropolitan areas.

The CrocFest was a great opportunity to interact with students from other universities who too are studying medicine or allied health disciplines, and have interests in promoting good health; as well as better get to know fellow SHARP members.

On the Wednesday and Thursday, we set up our tent with the various activities of the different clubs. There was ‘Tools of the Trade’, ‘Gutsy Guts’, Face-painting, Apple coring and peeling, and plastering. I got involved with the face-painting and plastering and it was great being able to talk to the kids about which schools they’ve come from, what they’ve been doing at CrocFest, and their interests. The kids loved the plastering and coming up with stories to tell their family and friends. On the Thursday, our tent was the last to finish packing up because a mass of kids came rushing over wanting to have their arms plastered.

On Wednesday night, we went to watch school kids from remote communities all around Australia perform. I was surprised by how far some of the kids had travelled, and their immense talent and enthusiasm. The students and their teachers had definitely put in a lot of hard work and it was great to be able to go and show our support to them. The performances are clearly a great way for the students to develop their self-esteem, confidence, teamwork, and creativity.

I was fortunate to take part in a high school visit to St. John’s College on the Thursday with Maggy Wong (MIRAGE), Shannon Nott (RAHMS) and Michael O’Halloran (SHARP). We showed a group of year 11 students a 15 min DVD about the life of a rural GP. Each of us also introduced ourselves, described a bit about our degrees and universities, and encouraged the students to consider a career in rural health. The students were very enthusiastic and Shannon said that our visit was the first time the students had had people come in and talk to them about university. So I think we made a big impact, enhancing their awareness of employment, training and career prospects out there, and how they can realise their dreams.

I feel it was a great privilege to be involved with the CrocFest and meet many wonderful people. A big thank you to SHARP and the NRHN for the opportunity and I look forward to getting involved in more events like this in the future.