

I would like to congratulate Shannon Nott on another successful 'Rural Appreciation Weekend' (RAW 2008). And thank his family (Daniel, Stephen, Daphne and cousins) and the RAW team for organising the activities for the entire weekend. Thanks also to our administrator Kay Kent for giving me this opportunity to attend this year's RAW, Rowen our bus driver and other SHARP members who helped out in preparing food + other odd jobs and keeping myself out of trouble. Thankyou everyone for making this year another wonderful memory for my remaining undergraduate degree.

We arrived Saturday on the farm and found we were just in time for lunch. 130 happy campers packed into the familiar looking barn, having lunch and enjoying each other's company. I didn't expect RAW to grow so large within a short time of a year. Seeing the turnout, you can't help admire the hard work put in by Shannon and his team. Seeing the number of attendees at the event shows that our rural health clubs/societies and the NRHN are all taking a positive step towards rural health.

It began to sprinkle after lunchtime, also meant time for the next round of activities. Since I missed this morning's activities I was allowed to choose what group I could join. I decided to take Shannon's farm tour so ended up being tightly packed into the backseat of a 4WD. Somehow I feel glad I choose the 4WD... After seeing the complications the other vehicles had in the wet weather, I was not prepared to get out and push my vehicle. Oakfield farm has changed since my last visit. The landscape was much greener then the dry, harsh yellow we saw last year in one of the longest draughts in NSW history. The tour reminded me how large the Nott family farm was. It showed me how integral the weather was to farmers. Life out here can be very harsh and very rewarding at the same time, it makes you wonder why these people stay and push on.

On Sunday Morning after breakfast, we had a GP, who communicated to us his experiences and the challenges he faced integrating himself into a rural community. Being a rural doctor you need to be able to handle a wide range of patient scenarios and be a part of the community. It does seem to be a challenge to get established within a rural community but the lifestyle and rewards associated with the change maybe all worth it to whoever is willing to take it. Our second speaker Louise Lawler is a nurse currently working in Dubbo in the school system. She talked about her travel experiences and the challenges she is faced with in Indigenous health. The main point I took away from her talk was, the best way to manage indigenous health is to educate these people. Shannon himself finally gave a brief presentation on rural health and the current problem rural communities face in terms of diminishing amounts of health workers as well and reduced government funding.

Another highlight of the weekend came in the form of team based activities organised for us by the RAW crew. We were split into our club teams, just to make the games more competitive. Since our team had a shortage of members, we became the 'Supa Group' a combination of Canberra, SHARP and one MIRAGE student. The activities came in the form of; a maze, stockmanship (sheep), fencing, the electric wire and setting up a tent - blindfolded... I can't help feel a sense of achievement after knowing our group had won most of the events that night it was

announced. It began to rain during our last night, I wasn't able to help the sinking feeling of not bringing anything close to water proof on this trip. I could just imagine the panic that followed the next morning, even though I was lucky enough to get out of spending another night down at the campsite.

The final day came and we all said goodbye to each of the health societies who made it this weekend. I come away with a greater appreciation for our farmers and with the knowledge that there is a wealth of opportunity in rural Australia. I encourage anyone who has not had the opportunity to attend this year to ATTEND. You can have a rich and full life out here in the bush so why not come for just one weekend next year?