



**Blueprint objective**    **3. A health workforce that exists to serve and meet population health needs.**

**Case example**            **Increasing workforce capacity in aged care through student placements and stronger links with universities**

**What is the community need or problem being addressed?**

- Workforce need in aged care
- Capacity to provide student placements in aged care and other settings of workforce need outside of public hospitals

**What is the approach being implemented?**

University-service provider collaboration to better link education and training to workforce need in underserved areas such as aged care.

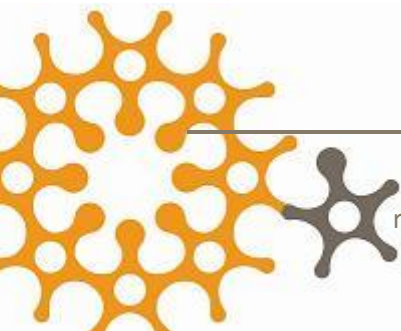
Helping Hand, a South Australian (SA) Aged Care provider, developed a Student Participation Unit to coordinate and enhance student opportunities across different sites and services. The unit collaborates with education providers such as UniSA to design student placement opportunities that enhance both resident outcomes and student learning.

The university-aged care partnership has collaboratively developed a wide range of clinical and non-clinical student placements which contribute to service delivery and develop students' skills in working with older adults. In 2016/17, Helping Hand hosted more than 400 students from the following professions and qualifications: Registered Nursing; Occupational Therapy; Physiotherapy; Medicine; Exercise Physiology; Podiatry; Speech Pathology; Dietetics; Diploma of Oral Health (Dental Hygiene); Enrolled Nursing; Certificate III Individual Support (Ageing); Diploma of Fitness; Masters of Engineering; Social Work; Interior Architecture; and Certificate II in Health Support Services.

The placements have also resulted in new approaches and programs. For example, the introduction of an exercise prescription approach for residential clients with moderate to severe cognitive decline. This approach has demonstrated notable functional and social improvements for clients within the memory support unit. Occupational Therapy (OT) students have also helped deliver Cognitive Stimulation Therapy groups for older adults living with mild to moderate dementia. In 2016, OT student placements provided 326 additional group engagement opportunities for the 40 residents participating in the program. It also built students' knowledge and skills of the aged care sector and working with older Australians and enabled students to experience working in interdisciplinary teams which is essential to quality outcomes for residents.

Helping Hand also actively recruits from student placements and uses systems to provide a conduit for successful students into employment. Of note, six (50 per cent) of Helping Hand's 12 Physiotherapy staff and two (66 per cent) of their three Exercise Physiology staff undertook a student placement at Helping Hand prior to their subsequent employment there.

The ongoing resident and recruitment outcomes demonstrate the value of the Student Participation Unit within Helping Hand.





**What have been the key enablers to the success of this approach?** Key enablers have been:

- The development of a strong collaboration between the university and the aged care provider, Helping Hand;
- The value that Helping Hand and UniSA place on the contributions students make to aged care clients and the beneficial impact of this on future aged care workforce development;
- Embedding structured learning activities into the placement experience; and
- The appointment of a lead clinical educator to lead placement model development and coordination. This has been essential to success.

**What have been some of the challenges to the success of this approach?**

- Challenges have been around how to support supervision of multiple disciplines on placement within Helping Hand to ensure appropriate competencies are developed. While Helping Hand funds the coordinator, universities are challenged to provide supervision funding.

**What is needed to scale-up the successes?**

- Funding of educators to oversee student activity in line with aged care service priorities would make an enormous difference.
- Wider promotion and understanding of the benefits of students to health and aged care services.
- Coordination and accreditation support for interprofessional supervision.

**More information** [Student participation at Helping Hand Aged Care: taking clinical placement to the next level](#)

**References** Loffler H, Barnett K, Howard S, Van Emden J, 2018, 'Student participation at Helping Hand Aged Care: taking clinical placement to the next level'. *Journal of Research in Nursing* 1 – 16. [journals.sagepub.com/home/jrn](http://journals.sagepub.com/home/jrn)

