

# Contribute to the gains in mental health?

Rebecca Graham started her career as a nurse at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

She then trained in Intensive Care including renal and cardiology and studied towards a Health Science degree at Flinders University.

Rebecca then completed her Masters of Health Science Management so she could move into management roles.

## Making the jump from clinical practitioner to policy maker

After spending time in nursing positions across both The Queen Elizabeth and Lyell McEwin hospitals, Rebecca moved to a policy role within the Department of Health, which enabled her to use her general health expertise in the mental health area.

“That gave me exposure to national policy and I worked with Margaret Tobin, who was an extraordinary person and really influenced me to become involved in women in leadership. Working with her changed my life unquestionably. My career goals were very clear from then onwards – I wanted to make a difference in mental health.”

Since starting her career in mental health in 2001, Rebecca has been involved in every major reform in the field, which has allowed her to fulfil her ambition of improving outcomes for those with a mental illness.

“Some of my achievements include being involved in policy decisions and then making them operational in the health regions, investing \$25 million in non-government mental health in South Australia is one example which provides opportunities for people to live in the community - to help consumers to fulfil their capability.

“To be able to influence policy change from an institutional model to a community model was really important to me.”

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## Moving into an executive position

"In my previous position with SA Health, I was the Director of Planning and Redevelopment for the new Glenside Health Services.

It was fantastic to be in a role where I could see the project come to fruition. The results were positive and we set the benchmarks for inpatient unit facility design. We really did push the envelope when it came to creating a modern design for a mental health service and it is one of the best in Australia.

"I then moved into my current position with Country Health SA as Executive Director, Mental Health. While it is fantastic to be running a project, there are a lot of great things about running your own service because you can shape the service and its culture, you can influence and develop the staff, and ultimately your role is about providing a great mental health service to all country South Australians."

## A passion for positive change

Rebecca is driven by a desire to create real and lasting change in the mental health sector and to improve the lives of those living with or recovering from a mental illness.

"My driving motivation is to make a big difference to the people who are disadvantaged, and those who are suffering a mental illness can be amongst the most isolated in our communities.

This can occur more so in rural and remote areas and there is often stigma associated with it. It's a real issue for country South Australians."

## A commitment to professional development

A key benefit of working for Country Health SA is the ability to invest in your own personal development. Rebecca has benefited from a range of opportunities and feels lucky to be part of a 'learning set,' which is held quarterly.

"Every three months I am involved in a 'learning set' including leaders from Australia and New Zealand, which is where you go and look at other hospitals and solve difficult challenges in health. You learn so much from others in the team and it gives you perspective about your own service."

## Positive psychology in the workplace

Rebecca's interest in leadership and positive psychology and its impact on wellbeing has also shaped her professional development experiences.

"I believe that positive psychology and wellbeing is as important for our workforce as it is for our mental health consumers.

This is where you focus on the strength and ability of consumers, rather than on their diagnosis or disability.

This is a mind-shift in our sector that I believe is really important."

## Supporting women to become leaders

Rebecca's experiences within Country Health SA have given her a passion for supporting women to take up leadership positions and to grow their leadership skills within the organisation.

"I'm also very involved in the Women in Leadership mentoring program at SA Health, which is responsible for more than 42,000 staff. We recently did a survey for women working at SA Health, where we asked them about their perceptions and experience and we had such a great response. It was really positive.

"Women were saying that they aspire to leadership and executive positions but they are concerned about the impact on work life balance and their families. We are taking on the responsibility of empowering South Australian women – many of who said they perceive executives as coming in from interstate.

"The fact that I have had a chance to lead something across the State which is gaining great momentum is really rewarding."