

MARC PhD Network interview with MARC member Dr Annette Peart



Q1: Tell us a little about yourself. What was your PhD project, what are your research areas of interests, and the projects you're currently involved with?

I am a registered occupational therapist and a little late to academia! I haven't followed a traditional path, but my clinical and work experience to date helped with completing my PhD. For my project I looked at the experiences of clients and clinicians in a Hospital Risk Admission

Program at Monash Health. This was a qualitative project focused around client-centred practice – to use an occupational therapy term – also known as patient or person-centred care. The relationships that clinicians built with their clients was pivotal to improving health and related outcomes for people who lived with multiple chronic conditions. I am still invested in the concepts of client-centred practice, and use those principles in my current research projects. Through my PhD I also became interested in the concept of access to care; this also drives a lot of the projects I work on for people experiencing addiction to be able to access the treatment and support they are seeking.

Q2: Did you find difficulty transitioning from being a PhD student to working full time at Turning Point? Can you tell us a little bit about your experiences in your working environment?

I didn't find a lot of difficulty with the transition, as I was working as a lecturer while completing my PhD at the time. But I still have difficulty reading for leisure now, as I gave that up when I was studying, and I haven't been able to transition back to fiction just yet.

Q3: What motivates you to work at Turning Point?

We all know someone who has struggled with alcohol, other drugs, or gambling, yet the stigma associated with a person putting their hand up for help is a huge barrier to accessing care and support. Reducing that stigma is one of the primary motivations for me.

Q4: Can you think of a time when you had challenges with your work at Turning Point, and how did you overcome these?

As researchers, we like to design our studies in detailed ways, but sometimes that gets in the way of the practicalities, and we can get frustrated if we have to amend our processes. A way to overcome some of these challenges is to get out of the office, visit key stakeholders in the project, talk to them about some common benefits, and making sure your research task isn't too difficult for them to undertake, and can fit into usual care. Being flexible in how things can be done and coming up with a compromise is important, to maintain the integrity of the research process as well as ensure others see the benefits.

Q5: How important is it to you to work in a collaborative environment? Can you provide an example where you needed to work collectively with others to complete a task at Turning Point?

Every day! My current projects all require stakeholder involvement at different levels and a team approach to undertaking the research. Having worked in multidisciplinary teams as a clinician has certainly helped, and knowing it is impossible for me to be able to do everything to a high standard and I can call on my colleagues for help, is really important. I regularly defer to my quantitative colleagues for help with calculating an effect size, explaining a type of analysis, or confirming what I think might be happening.

Q6: What sources or skills were the most helpful to you during your PhD study that you can apply into your current work?

A shout out to the team at the Department of General Practice at Monash University, and particularly to Associate Professor Chris Barton who coordinated the Graduate Research Group. Honours, Masters, and PhD students, winter and summer scholars, met fortnightly for informal professional development and Shut Up and Write. It was in those meetings where we could share our successes, and learn from each other. I have started a similar group at Turning Point, the StAR program, which stands for Student Addiction Researchers, whereby students can ask their questions and share their experiences, and learn about some of the research processes that aren't necessarily taught directly.

Q7: What suggestions would you like to give PhD students who are considering addiction-related work or research in a practical setting?

There is such a variety of addiction-related research. For example, at Turning Point we are involved in clinical trials, intervention studies, social and cultural contexts of addiction, evaluations, digital health, workforce development, public health and surveillance data, looking at the experiences of treatment and care ... the list is quite long! I would suggest visiting the Turning Point website for more information on the available PhD projects <https://www.turningpoint.org.au/research/available-projects> and contacting us. We are always up for a chat about the work we are doing.