

Kadega and Teaghan: Nursing

Kadega is interested in studying a Diploma of Nursing and working near her home, in Shepparton. Teaghan is an enrolled nurse and a personal care assistant in Shepparton. She shares her study pathway from VCAL to a Diploma of Nursing to a Bachelor of Nursing.



Photo: Kadega, Year 12 VCAL student, McGuire College

Kadega: Where are you currently working and studying?

Teaghan: I completed a Diploma of Nursing at GOTAFE, so I'm an enrolled nurse. At the moment I'm working as a personal care assistant and studying a Bachelor of Nursing at La Trobe University to become a registered nurse. I got credit for my diploma at university, so I started my degree halfway through.

The difference between an enrolled and registered nurse is the training, pay and responsibility. Registered nurses need a Bachelor of Nursing and are sort of like the bosses of the enrolled nurses. They guide you when you're working.

There are opportunities for me to work as an enrolled nurse, but I've been in my personal care assistant job since I was 18 and I love it. Also, I don't want to take on too much work while I'm studying. Nursing is more responsibility and more work. I want to make sure I leave myself enough time to study and for exams and placements. Where I work, they help with that. They'll give me the time off that I need for placements.

So personal care assistance is not a nursing job, but it's in a related field, which is a good thing as it's helped me understand medications more and personal hygiene and lots of other things I've been studying.

Kadega: What got you interested in becoming a nurse?

Teaghan: When I was in Year 10, I did a fast-track health class, because I loved the health field. I just didn't know what I wanted to do. I went to a careers day when I was in Year 12. And they had an area for nursing. I didn't realise that there were so many different areas of nursing, and different things that you can do as a nurse. So that really intrigued me, and I realised I wanted to do that.

Kadega: What did you study in Year 11 and 12?

Teaghan: I started off doing my VCE, but it became extremely overwhelming for me. I didn't feel like I was doing well, I started to get anxiety and I didn't feel like I was coping. I actually left school at the end of Year 11.

Then I went and spoke to the coordinator at the Academy of Sport and Health Education (ASHE). They run a program to help people who want to go into nursing. She recommended that I finish the year off, and that I do my VCAL. Some of my credits from VCE went towards my VCAL.

When I started doing VCAL I became less stressed and I enjoyed going to school. I was doing really well with my work and I was able to keep up with all the assignments and stuff that was due. I think it was the best decision for me because I've been able to go on and study in the career that I want to do, without having to suffer through the VCE.

Kadega: What did you have to do apply to study at GOTAFE?

Teaghan: I had to go in and do a basic literacy and numeracy test. The next step was to go in for an interview with the coordinator of the nursing section. She asked me questions like, "why do you want to do nursing?" I passed my interview. And then it started from there.

Kadega: What was TAFE like?

Teaghan: I decided to do full-time study. That's four days a week, and it usually runs from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. I loved TAFE because it's really personal. You're in a classroom a lot more than you are at university and it's more hands-on. You're there a lot, and they're great people.

You have different units to study. For example, there's one that's all about wounds. You get to learn how to take out stitches and staples. They gave us little foam pads that we get to practise on. But when we're on placement, we get to practise on people.

Kadega: How is studying at uni different?

Teaghan: It's extremely different. You only go for five-week blocks. So you're there about two days a week for five weeks. And then you're off for a long period of time, like a few months. In that time, you do your placement, and there might be an exam. Whereas at TAFE it's like normal school. You're there all the time, you get a couple weeks off for holidays, and then you're back into it. At university, it's more self-learning. And you're not there as much.

I think the learning at university is more in-depth. You have lectures and you have workshops. So, you listen to the lecturer talk about a topic and then later you have a workshop, where it's more hands-on, and you work in a group on a case scenario.

The essays at uni can be daunting, but I've got a lot of help from the university with doing academic writing. The writing standards are high, and I just needed a little bit of help to make sure I was doing what they wanted. The literacy support centre is there to help with that. They sat down with me and showed me what a good piece of writing looks like. They also helped me understand my assignments and they helped me with referencing and everything. They made it so much easier and it wasn't as hard as I thought. Now I don't have any problems.

Kadega: What's an average day on placement like?

Teaghan: When you're on placement, you start with a handover, with the nurses on the shift before you. They'll go through each patient: what they're in for and what changed over their shift, if the patient had any medication changes, which patients are going to be discharged, who might have to get x-rays, or have surgery. You also do bedside handover and meet your patients for that day—so it's more personal.

Then I go with my buddy nurse and do a plan for the day: taking blood pressure, medications, giving breakfast, showers, changing beds. You might have diabetics that need blood sugars taken throughout the day. We'll write up a plan so we know what we've got to do by each hour. It's all planned out. Then at the end of the day, you give a handover to the staff on the next shift.

How important is it to be a good team player as a nurse?

Teaghan: Over my placements I've noticed that if you're struggling with getting everything done in time, other nurses—if they've finished all their stuff—will come and help you to make sure everything is done. They all work so well together.

Are you planning to specialise in your nursing career?

Teaghan: I want to become a midwife. You have to have at least 12 months experience in the field to do midwifery. When I finish this year, I'm going to apply for a graduate year of nursing and then go on to study midwifery.

Nursing is diverse. You can do mental health, paediatrics or surgical nursing. And if you don't like working in the actual hospital, they have district nursing, where you go out to people's homes and nurse them from there. There's so many different areas of nursing, and that's what I like about it.



Photo: Teaghan Morrow, enrolled nurse

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