

NEW INTERNSHIP PROGRAM AT THE SPRC

BY SARAH PARKER AND OFIR THALER

A new comprehensive internship program is currently being developed at the SPRC. It will enable students both nationally and internationally to undertake placements in a multi-disciplinary policy research environment. The SPRC will be hosting senior undergraduate and Masters students from a variety of disciplines including social work, social sciences, government, international relations and Indigenous policy. Interns are offered unique opportunities to gain an understanding of social policy in a research environment, gain practical policy research and evaluation experience, and develop their research and analytical skills.

Internships can be anywhere from one month to five months in length, with students undertaking a wide variety of tasks. These could include: literature reviews; drafting of reports and tenders; designing research instruments (e.g. surveys); undertaking fieldwork (e.g. interviews, focus groups, observation); data entry and analysis; attendance and/or participation at policy seminars/conferences. Currently the SPRC is hosting two interns: Hanna Leena Myllarinen, who is undertaking her Masters of Social Sciences at the University of Turku in Finland and will be at the SPRC full-time for three months; and Ofir Thaler, who is doing his Bachelor of Social Sciences at the University

of Sydney and will be at the SPRC part-time for three months.

For further information on this program please contact Sarah Parker: sarah.parker@unsw.edu.au.

EXPERIENCING THE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM – OFIR THALER, UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

As part of my Bachelor of Social Sciences Degree at the University of Sydney, I am currently undertaking a 10-week internship at the SPRC. I chose the SPRC because during the course of my studies in social policy I came across many SPRC reports and articles written by SPRC researchers that were central to much of my academic research and general studies – especially in relation to issues of poverty and welfare policy. Therefore the SPRC seemed an obvious first choice for my internship, and in my short time here this has proven this to be a good decision.

Over the past month, I have had the opportunity to assist on several research and evaluation projects, which represent the different styles of policy work undertaken by researchers at the SPRC. The topics of the projects have included: supported living for people with disabilities, personalised service provision for people with mental health issues,

sustainability of funding for non-governmental organisations, and early intervention programs for vulnerable families. Specifically I have undertaken literature reviews; observed and taken notes for focus groups and interviews with key policy stakeholders; assisted with piloting a questionnaire; and have provided input regarding my impressions of the processes and group dynamics during stakeholder meetings. An integral part of these tasks were frequent consultations with SPRC researchers and staff. I have also had the opportunity to present at an SPRC postgraduate seminar, as well as attend a number of internal and external presentations by policy experts.

During the course of my internship thus far, I have gained valuable insight into the wide scope and complexity of the work done here at the SPRC. I have been able to acquire an in-depth understanding of the various challenges posed by different methods and styles of policy research, which has helped me comprehend the large amount of work and care that goes into producing a well-researched, reliable and useful piece of policy analysis or evaluation. I am grateful for this opportunity to experience first-hand the process of professional policy research in what has been referred to in my classes as the 'premier social policy research facility in Australia'.