



NATIONAL RURAL  
HEALTH  
ALLIANCE INC.

**9<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference**  
**Albury, 7-10 March 2007**

## **Media Release**

**13 February 2007**

### **Des Murray Scholars: the rural future is in good hands**

Three winners have been chosen for this year's Des Murray Scholarship and they provide exciting evidence of the quality of commitment and service that rural communities can expect from the next generation of health and community service workers. All three winners will find inspiration, new friends, and information about some of the best contemporary service models in rural and remote areas when they are guests of the NRHA at the 9<sup>th</sup> National Rural Health Conference next month.

Des Murray Scholarships are awarded in memory of a great friend to the rural and remote community who, after long commitment through the public service, worked for the Alliance towards the end of his life. Winners are selected for the scholarship on the basis of their age, their rural locations, and commitment to the health and wellbeing of people in their area.

Robyn McKinnon is a community worker with Northern Tasmania Development, an award-winning company owned by eight Northern Tasmanian Councils. It identifies and facilitates worthy strategic economic, community and environmental initiatives in Northern Tasmania.

At 23, Robyn already has a remarkable record of youth support and counselling in schools and by telephone, and is also a trained counsellor for women affected by abuse. The Brekkie Club she initiated and now manages enables volunteers to provide an early morning meal for schoolchildren in need and, through this, wider support for them and their families. Robyn has also designed an after-school mentoring program for young rural girls that focuses on building self-esteem and healthy lifestyles.

Rue Kwedza arrived from Zimbabwe six years ago and trained in Queensland in dietetics. Like so many first-time-out allied health graduates, Rue has ended up with a first job that covers a vast geographic area and calls for all of her wit, resilience and determination.

Rue works for the Mt Isa Community Health Service and covers an area from Dajarra to the south, to Karumba in the north. About 16 per cent of Rue's time is spent travelling. Once safely arrived, she provides clinical services on a one-on-one basis (especially to patients with a chronic disease) and community nutrition support through her work with outback stores and schools.

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The third winner is Lani Newton, 23, a youth worker with the Eastern Eyre Health and Aged Care Service in South Australia. Lani is Youth Development Coordinator, serving the towns of Cleve, Cowell and Kimba – a combined population of 4,475 in 11,500 sq. kms.

Since she started in the job at the end of 2005, Lani has worked in the three Area Schools to provide information and support on a range of topics allowing local children to make safe and informed choices about their own health and wellbeing. Activities include youth advisory groups, ‘drive to live’, school health expos, and alcohol and drug information through Party Safe Days. She serves on the Cleve Youth Advisory Committee. While at the Conference Lani will display a poster on the Getting Out Project - a young person’s guide to becoming independent. Lani and her colleagues will drive for 16 hours to be in Albury for this major national rural health event.

The Des Murray Scholarship will enable all three of these young people to attend the Conference.

**The winners may be contacted directly for interviews:**

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Ru Kwedza (0427 077 280);  
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