



Working With Women Who

Working with women who have rheumatic heart disease

Dr Geraldine Vaughan, CQ University



Geraldine Vaughan's background includes a long-term interest in and advocacy for women's reproductive health. From her initial clinical nursing - mostly in women's and sexual health - she has moved into public health research and tertiary education.

Her most recent project was as Coordinator on a large bi-national study of maternal morbidity (the Australasian Maternity Outcomes Surveillance System (AMOSS) study).

Geraldine has a particular interest in the impact of rheumatic heart disease on women and girls. She recently led the chapter on women and girls in the 2020 Australian Guideline on 2020 Australian guideline for prevention, diagnosis and management of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease. She is co-convenor of the Australian Public Health Association (PHAA) Women's Health special interest group.

Renee Highfold



Renee Highfold is 33 year old woman, from the Arrentre (Alice Springs) Wirringu (Ceduna, S.A) tribal groups, and is living and studying (Primary Health Care) in Adelaide since her diagnosis with rheumatic heart disease (RHD) back in 2017. Renee is a mother of two boys aged 17 and 14 and is currently 28 weeks pregnant

with her third child.



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Renee's journey began after she expressed her concerns to her current health team in South Australia about the misinformation she received and distrust she gained after a health service in Victoria stated they didn't realize ARF/RHD still existed in Australia. As a result, she started to refuse treatment. This led to an invite to a secondary prophylaxis (Benzathine Penicillin G (BPG)) injection technique workshop which are delivered by the South Australian RHD Control Program. Shortly after she became one of two people who self-inject BPG, out of roughly 7,000 plus patients living with RHD in Australia.

Renee is very active in the RHD community and attends nearly every workshop delivered from the SA RHD control program. Renee is an advocate for patient focused care and support and is also an active member of the Champions4Change program, spearheaded by Vicki Wade at RHD Australia. Renee has quickly become an advocate for people who are on a similar journey, with a key focus on self-empowerment and self-determination. At the core of this passion is a need to educate and encourage more community-based resources targeting Strep A infection and more broadly acute rheumatic fever and RHD preventative measures.

Zahri Sultan



Zahri is a 28-year-old woman from the Luritja (Kings Canyon) and Kaytetye (Barrow Creek) tribal groups based around central Australia, currently living in Darwin, Northern Territory.

Zahri is currently working as a Personal Care Assistant in aged care whilst studying her Certificate 3 in Individual Support, she is involved in community sporting events and indigenous art. Zahri has two daughters aged 8 years and 15 months.



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Zahri's interest began in 2012 after being diagnosed with acute rheumatic fever. With no understanding of the condition and lack of communication with her doctors, Zahri had a reoccurrence of the Strep A infection and was extended another 10 years on her secondary prophylaxis injections. Zahri endured both her pregnancies with rheumatic heart disease, this is what motivated her learn more about RHD.

After contacting Vicki Wade at RHDAustralia, Zahri has been become an active part of the Champions4Change team. Zahri hopes to raise awareness and create support groups specifically based around living with RHD and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.