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Title

Agents of aspiration: the (often unintended) benefits to university students working in outreach programmes / Michele J. Fleming and Diana M. Grace

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Abstract

Background: Universities in many countries increasingly deliver outreach programmes to raise aspirations and encourage participation in higher education. At the University of Canberra in Australia, these programmes target schools that have been identified as having a large number of students from rural/regional, financially disadvantaged and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds – groups that continue to be underrepresented in higher education. Involved in the delivery of these programmes are current university students – at the University of Canberra termed ‘Aspiration Agents’ – many of whom come from similar backgrounds to the students with whom they work. Although not the focus of the outreach programmes, the Aspiration Agents themselves also derive benefits from the experience. Purpose: This research aimed to explore the reasons why students choose to become Aspiration Agents, and the perceived benefits of the mentoring/ambassador role. Sample, Design and Methods: The data collection comprised two small-scale exploratory questionnaire studies ($N = 12$; $N = 20$). Qualitative methods were used to investigate participants’

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self-reported motivations for, and experiences of being Aspiration Agents. Findings: Findings suggest that students perceived benefits in personal, student-related and future professional domains.

Dominating all these areas, however, was the recurring theme that the students were both motivated to, and derived satisfaction from, helping others. These findings are discussed in terms of the specific role of the Aspiration Agent and how this form of employment can positively, rather than negatively, impact on the student's own university experience. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)