



Work-Integrated Learning in the Centre for Research and Social Change at Anglicare Southern Queensland

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Abstract

Anglicare Southern Queensland (Anglicare) is a not-for-profit organisation that delivers community and human services. With a long history of hosting applied student placements in aged care, social work and community services, mental health and wellbeing, youth support, and nursing and allied health, Anglicare has in recent times begun to expand our hosting of work-integrated learning (WIL) relating to research and evaluation, advocacy, and community outreach. Proceeding from the principle that different types of WIL are advantageous to social science and humanities students at all levels, we currently host a variety of industry research projects, student placements, and internships. These arrangements encompass everything from formal assessment to projects that are co-designed between student/s and supervisor/s. The benefits of hosting WIL include supporting the future careers of emerging professionals while simultaneously expanding our capacity in research, evaluation, and advocacy. As working with students who are new to a corporate workplace can also be time intensive, WIL programs need adequate university staffing to support students' engagement with industry hosts and moderated timelines for assessment and reporting requirements. In this practitioner reflection, we discuss how Anglicare's Centre for Research and Social Change establishes and manages community engaged WIL partnerships, welcoming undergraduate and postgraduate students in all areas of the social sciences and humanities.

Keywords

work-integrated learning, employability, community sector, social sciences, humanities, research, evaluation, advocacy

Introduction

Anglicare Southern Queensland (Anglicare) is a not-for-profit organisation that delivers community and human services relating to aged care; youth support, including foster and kinship care, and youth justice; counselling; family support; and housing and homelessness. With a long history of hosting applied student placements in aged care, social work and community services, mental health and wellbeing, youth support, and nursing and allied health (Anglicare Southern Queensland, 2026c), Anglicare has in recent times begun to expand our hosting of work-integrated learning (WIL) relating to research and evaluation, advocacy, and community outreach. In this practitioner reflection, we discuss how Anglicare's Centre for Research and Social Change establishes and manages community engaged WIL partnerships, welcoming undergraduate and postgraduate students in all areas of the social sciences and humanities.

Research, Evaluation, and Advocacy at Anglicare Southern Queensland

Anglicare's Centre for Research and Social Change works to meaningfully inform positive social change through research, evaluation, and systemic advocacy which includes campaigns and government submissions. Our team works in partnership with universities to 'generate and facilitate rigorous research and evaluation that contributes to our understanding of how we support individuals and communities to flourish' (Anglicare Southern Queensland, 2025b, p. 2). Anglicare's Centre for Research and Social Change Roadmap 2026-2027 (Anglicare Southern Queensland, 2026b) provides a framework for these undergraduate and postgraduate WIL projects, complementing and supporting WIL frameworks that contribute to community-engaged learning (Brabazon et al., 2019) and a social responsibility agenda that includes alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (i.e., Wright et al., 2022). Alongside our attention to current, emerging, and long-term horizons, the Roadmap identifies key areas of focus as: supporting young people to thrive; walking with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; ageing well; strengthening our workforce; alleviating the impacts of the housing crisis; increasing social connection; and reducing violence (Anglicare Southern Queensland, 2025b, p. 5). With the aim of advocating for and contributing to a more just society, our community engaged WIL provides undergraduate and postgraduate students with insights into the variety of professional opportunities in the community sector.

We proceed from the principle that different types of WIL are advantageous to social science and humanities students at all levels. WIL is described as 'an umbrella term used for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum' (Patrick et al., 2008, p. v). The student workplace learning hosted within Anglicare's Centre for Research and Social Change includes industry research projects, structured and unstructured student placements, and internships. These arrangements encompass everything from formal university-based assessment to project outcomes that are co-designed between the student/s and Anglicare supervisor/s, reflecting the variety and imprecision of what constitutes WIL in the literature (i.e., Patrick et al., 2008; Stewart, 2021). Our WIL experiences introduce students to a corporate environment with professional expectations around respectful communication, timely responses, staff consultation, planning for approval channels, and mutually agreed deadlines. Key stakeholders include university students (domestic and international); Anglicare staff, management, and leadership; and university-based academic and professional staff, including long-time research collaborators.

Today's university students face many challenges while completing their degrees. Consistent with Anglicare's service delivery and advocacy surrounding young people experiencing housing and homelessness, we acknowledge the 'placement poverty' and precarity that students may experience while completing mandatory WIL (Morley et al., 2024; Grant-Smith & de Zwaan, 2023; Stewart, 2021). Anglicare welcomes the Australian Government's Commonwealth Prac Payment, introduced in May 2024, to alleviate these financial challenges for university and vocational education and training students completing degrees in nursing, midwifery, social work, and teaching (Department of Education, 2024). We note, however, that this does not cover all degrees that require WIL, with ramifications for young people experiencing the brunt of the cost-of-living and rental affordability crises (Stevenson & Wood, 2025).

The employability agenda and 'job readiness' can also conceal the responsibility that employers have to train and support employees, including graduates. Introduced in 2020, the Morrison government's Job-ready Graduates Package (JRG) has had deleterious implications for student equity through steep increases to student fees across the Society and Culture field of education, which includes most disciplines in the social sciences and humanities (Patfield et al., 2025; Williams, 2026). Recent research points to a contradiction wherein some disciplines, namely English literature and linguistics, have been exempt from these funding increases, potentially due to perceived connections with frontline work in the human services and care sectors (Thompson & Gerard, 2026). From Anglicare's perspective,

however, innovation to support service delivery and sector advocacy directly benefits from applied theoretical and practical research insights from disciplines in the broader social sciences and humanities (Stevenson, 2025). As an organisation that is committed to staff development, we concur with the recent emphasis in higher education commentary that a university degree alone is not expected to ‘produce complete professionals’ but rather ‘capable graduates ready to enter practice’ (Laidlaw, 2026).

Our team prioritises WIL experiences that are embedded within university coursework or, where possible, schemes that ensure students receive a stipend. In the early 2010s, Anglicare was fortunate to work in collaboration with academics, students, and community organisations through the then-Community Engaged Learning Lab at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). The Lab allowed stakeholders to work together on mutually beneficial interdisciplinary projects using a participatory action research framework (Smith et al., 2014). This experience clarified the benefits of creating WIL opportunities where research can directly impact Anglicare’s advocacy and service delivery. The Australian Government’s Commonwealth Prac Payment and Research Training Program (RTP) Industry Internships have since created new opportunities at the postgraduate level. Over time, we have welcomed greater engagement with university-based WIL through Anglicare’s Centre for Research and Social Change. Below, we draw on key examples from recent WIL projects in research, evaluation, and advocacy.

Undergraduate WIL

We currently facilitate undergraduate industry research projects for groups of students at The University of Queensland (UQ) and undergraduate placements for individual students at QUT. Industry research projects align with a project work approach to WIL (Patrick et al., 2008), as well as a more tailored WIL model wherein groups of social work and youth work students have worked together in community services (Harris et al., 2010). Undergraduate groups largely complete their WIL offsite, with the option to visit Anglicare corporate or service delivery sites, where appropriate. Placements, in turn, have long been identified as a common approach to WIL (Patrick et al., 2008). Undergraduate placement students complete hybrid WIL in Anglicare’s corporate headquarters, with partial work-from-home options that are consistent with our corporate workplace policies.

In 2019, Anglicare began to partner with UQ’s Bachelor of Social Science and, more recently, Bachelor of Criminology and Criminal Justice to design industry research projects for undergraduate teams to complete within applied research coursework across two semesters. Although industry research projects may diverge from core WIL models, we consider this to be WIL because commissioning and conducting industry research projects in collaboration with universities is central to the work of Anglicare’s research and evaluation staff. With close mentoring from an Anglicare industry supervisor and an academic who is assigned to each group, these WIL students develop specific research questions and undertake comprehensive literature reviews, human research ethics applications, data collection, data analysis, and final reports. Students have explored complex rental tenancies, digital engagement amongst young people, participatory record-keeping for children in out-of-home care, and digital scams targeting older people.

Some industry research projects have provided foundations for future collaborations between Anglicare and university-based academics. One Bachelor of Social Science project exploring co-sharing housing for care leavers (Davenport et al., 2024) became interwoven within Anglicare Homeshare (McKinlay et al., 2026), a seed grant that Anglicare staff are undertaking in partnership with academics at the University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) (Stevenson & Wood, 2026). Another Bachelor of Social Science project examined key trends in how journalists frame youth crime in Queensland newspapers (Gu et al., 2024), an area of enquiry with salience for Anglicare staff who support youth justice clients. This research ultimately provided the foundations for a broader advocacy campaign through our Media guidelines: Reporting on children and young people (Anglicare Southern Queensland, 2025).

Research findings from these industry research projects influence the development of Anglicare's operational and practice models for service delivery as well as our advocacy and government submissions in support of our clients.

In 2025, a QUT Centre for Justice Professional Placement undergraduate student also worked with Anglicare staff to develop an Anti-Poverty Week Photovoice Project alongside the annual national campaign. Methodologically, photovoice is a participatory action research strategy that uses media to centre marginalised voices (Sutton-Brown, 2014). Inspired by an earlier Anglicare photovoice research project (Stambe et al., 2024; Stambe et al., 2026), the aim was to amplify the voices of people with lived experience by inviting participants to submit photographs that captured how poverty and cost-of-living pressures shape their daily lives. The project encouraged the student to move beyond the scholarly literature and provided a means to see the impacts of poverty in real world terms, making the connection between lived experience storytelling and policy dialogue more visible. The student gained insights into Anglicare's internal policy and procedures relating to marketing briefs, media consent, and framing writing that is tailored to an advocacy campaign, demonstrating the exchange between larger scale advocacy campaigns and individual organisations and their goals. This led to participating in a state-level event at Queensland Parliament during Anti-Poverty Week, providing networking opportunities and exposure to campaign events.

Postgraduate WIL

Recently, we began supervising postgraduate placements in partnership with QUT and PhD internships in partnership with UniSC. The Australian Academy of the Humanities acknowledges the need for research training that incorporates disciplinary training, professional development, and industry engagement (Glisic, 2019). Since a doctoral degree no longer guarantees a career in academia (Glisic, 2019), research suggests that the benefits of WIL are particularly acute for Doctor of Philosophy candidates in social sciences and the humanities (Valencia-Forrester, 2019; American Council of Learned Societies, 2024; Williams & Williams, 2025; Wilson, 2025). Our postgraduate placements and PhD internships for individual students align with an approach to WIL that simulates a future work environment, allowing students to experience the workplace with the scaffolding of an educational framework (Patrick et al., 2008).

To date, our postgraduate WIL students have been studying social work while enrolled in either a Master of Social Work (Qualifying) or a Doctor of Philosophy. The AASW Practice Standards identify the expectation that social workers will 'advance professional knowledge through research, evaluation, education, consultation and sharing good practice' (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2023, p. 13), which closely complements our work in research and evaluation. Like our undergraduate placements, these postgraduate students undertake hybrid WIL. In future, we are confident that there will be scope to supervise PhD internships for students whose theses are situated across the broader social sciences or humanities.

In 2025-26, a QUT social work placement student worked as a research assistant on a social impact evaluation of Brisbane's Thread Together, an Australian-based charity that makes new, unsold clothing available to people in need rather than ending up in landfill. This research and evaluation project aims to better understand the operations and social impact of the Thread Together Clothing Hub and Mobile Wardrobe for clients, volunteers, and the wider community (Anglicare Southern Queensland, 2026a). The student had the opportunity to engage with clients and volunteers, begin a literature review about clothing poverty, charity shops, and the psychological benefits of volunteering, and support data collection through a survey. The report from the broader research and evaluation project will inform the future direction of Anglicare's community outreach model, in partnership with Thread Together and St Andrews Anglican Church Indooroopilly, as well as our advocacy surrounding housing and homelessness.

We also established our first Anglicare industry internship through an RTP Industry Internship with UniSC in 2025. Our inaugural PhD intern was tasked with writing a report grounded in a literature review about future-focused models for the aged care workforce, exploring the opportunities and limitations embedded within the gig-work model and digital platformisation across various sectors. In the context of the new rights-based Aged Care Act 2024 (Cth), with its emphasis on the importance of innovative, ethical workforce models that balance flexibility, security, and quality care with organisational accountability, this allowed the student to explore existing research relating to digitalisation in home and community care and residential aged care. Anglicare's Insight Series – a series of research-based essays written by Anglicare staff, as well as Anglicare-affiliated researchers and students – allowed the student to undertake knowledge translation around this project (Ghose, 2026). The report recommendations will inform Anglicare's future directions in aged care and community care services.

WIL Supervisor Perspectives

Existing research about WIL recognises that industry stakeholders have distinctive perspectives from university stakeholders. Successful partnerships require adequate and meaningful communication from universities (Patrick et al., 2008; Jeffries & Milne, 2014). Industry partners identify the need for clear expectations, ongoing university support, and resilience from students when receiving feedback (Peach et al., 2012). Professionals' understandings of 'graduate attributes' also diverge from academics, career advisors, and students (Rook & Sloan, 2021), who arguably have greater familiarity with university assessment terminology. These findings resonate with our own experience as WIL supervisors.

Student WIL projects provide opportunities to build supervisor capacity and establish longer-term streams of inquiry. At Anglicare, we value students' genuine enthusiasm, sincerity, and burgeoning expertise as emerging professionals. The projects we propose emerge directly from both our practice and research: they are carefully considered, real-world issues that often interface with research already undertaken or underway within the Centre for Research and Social Change. This approach aligns with a broader emphasis upon WIL's potential to foster community-engaged learning (Brabazon et al., 2019) and a social responsibility agenda (Wright et al., 2022). WIL can also expand our current research, evaluation, and advocacy capacity. With finite resources, our team needs to be smart and strategic about how to achieve our goals. Intentional and forward planning creates a pipeline where cumulative students' work supports the development of evidence and organisational knowledge over time. Student WIL projects provide foundational knowledge and form the basis for subsequent research, advocacy, or organisational initiatives.

Being a host also provides us with welcome opportunities to build new partnerships and strengthen existing research networks within the university sector and beyond. At Anglicare, expanded partnerships create opportunities for shared research agendas and collaborative responses to emerging social issues. The ongoing development of these relationships allows a meaningful merge of academic expertise and practice-based experience. These partnerships can also present future workforce development opportunities for the community sector (Patrick et al., 2008). Early exposure to career pathways that may otherwise remain invisible can contribute to strengthening future workforce pipelines and attracting graduates into areas experiencing workforce shortages or limited visibility.

Working with students who are new to a corporate workplace can nevertheless be time intensive. Reflecting widening generational differences within the workplace (Brough et al., 2023), young people come to the community sector with diverse professional experiences and varied communication expectations and styles. At Anglicare, WIL entails staff investing in a necessary level of close guidance and mentoring for students to build their confidence and capabilities. This, in turn, requires adequate resourcing for staff time and workload expectations (Parick et al., 2008). Hybrid work also requires an

additional emphasis on clear communication. Consistent with long-held concerns about managing expectations and improving communication and coordination to maintain mutually beneficial partnerships between employers and universities (Patrick et al., 2008; Jeffries & Milne, 2014), we reiterate that WIL programs need adequate university staffing to support students' engagement with industry hosts and moderated timelines for assessment and reporting requirements.

Conclusion

At Anglicare Southern Queensland, WIL relating to research and evaluation, advocacy, and community outreach introduces students to the breadth of roles in the growing community sector. For undergraduate students who may find it difficult to imagine their work futures when completing generalist degrees, WIL reveals the types of jobs where theoretical and practical knowledge in the social sciences and humanities can not only be applied but is already relevant (Stevenson, 2025; Thompson & Gerard, 2026). For postgraduate students, WIL facilitates exposure to the community-engaged practitioner knowledge that is increasingly valued in both academia and industry. These experiences also have the potential to highlight the opportunities and research environment within the community sector. Ultimately, Anglicare's WIL exposes social science and humanities students to the ways in which research and evaluation apply in real world scenarios and can contribute to social change that supports individuals and communities to thrive.

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