The photo on the left was taken at a team gathering in February during the HDR intensive school attended by the CRN PhD students.

The CRN team has expanded considerably in 2012. We have now appointed 11 Postdoctoral Research Fellows and 7 PhD students across the three CRN thematic areas.

In this issue we will summarise achievements to date, introduce our new starters and outline their areas of Research.

Already the CRN team has been very busy submitting several grant applications in the first part of 2012. Our Postdocs are also keen to gain teaching experience and several opportunities are currently under discussion.

We are currently planning a launch of the CRN program on 4 June 2012 and welcome all interested colleagues to attend and network with the team, including our high profile partner researchers.

The CRN is growing both the capacity and capability of UNE research, and it is hoped that many new and exciting collaborations will evolve throughout the CRN project.

Next steps and upcoming milestones

MILESTONE: Interim Report due to DIISRTE 30 May 2012.

Major activities for March—May 2012:
1. Finalize research topics
2. Draft research plans including future grant application schedule
3. Prepare for June CRN official launch
4. Complete refurbishment of building to provide team environment

“This CRN project is supported by the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education”
Thematic Area A: Self-care & mental health within regional communities

The CRN team comprising academics at UNE (Rafat Hussain & Myfanwy Maple), USYD (Gwynnyth Llewellyn) and UoN (Brian Kelly) have worked collaboratively over the first eight months of the CRN to identify and recruit PhD students and Postdoctoral Fellows for the various thematic areas encompassing the overall theme of “Self-care and mental health within regional communities”. All the allocated positions have now been filled with the appointment of four postdoctoral fellowships and seven PhD students. A brief profile of each of them is provided below. Additionally, the project team has also been actively mapping various research projects that can be undertaken in partnership with CRN researchers at USYD especially the Australian Family and Disability Studies Research Centre (AFDSRC) and UoN including the Centre for Rural & Remote Mental Health (Orange), and the Centre for Gender, Health & Aging which co-hosts the Australian Longitudinal Study of Women’s Health. Additional networks include the National Centre for Farmer Health, Victoria and other emerging collaborations which will be reported in the next issue of the newsletter.

Leadership team from left to right: Rafat Hussain (UNE), Brian Kelly (UoN), Gwynnyth Llewellyn (USyd), Myfanwy Maple (UNE)

Kathryn McKay - Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Kathy has joined the CRN for Mental Health and Wellbeing as a postdoctoral research fellow supervised by Associate-Professor Myfanwy Maple. Her specific area is suicide in rural Australia. She is also interested in how suicidal behaviours are perceived within families and communities, especially regarding bereavement, resilience, social capital and capacity building.

Stuart Wark - Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Stuart is a postdoctoral research fellow in the CRN for Mental Health and Wellbeing, with a particular focus on the issues of living with an intellectual disability. He is currently involved in a number of research projects looking at community living and integration for people with intellectual disability in rural areas. He is specifically interested in the support roles played by family members, carers and service agencies for people ageing with an intellectual disability.

Virginia Mapedzahama - Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Virginia is currently developing projects within UNE CRN Stream A that look into: 1) immigrant experiences in rural areas, focusing specifically on mental well being among African migrants and refugees in rural areas (proposed project title: Mental Well-being among African immigrant Communities in Rural and Regional Australia: An exploratory Study); 2) work life experiences of rural health workforce, focussing specifically on the emerging but growing phenomenon of: Fly-in, Fly-out health workforce.

Kent Patrick - Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Dr Patrick has joined the UNE Collaborative Research Network (Mental Health and Well-being in Rural Communities) as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow to work on the theme ‘self-care and mental health within regional communities’. More specifically, he is focussing on projects investigating the recruitment and retention of the rural mental health workforce.

Catherine Cosgrave - PhD Student
Cath commenced her PhD in February 2012 and the focus of her research will be on building rural mental health workforce capacity. Cath is investigating the ways in which rural mental health professionals experience their work and the ways in which retention is achieved, particularly in the areas of self-care and resilience. She is supervised by Rafat Hussain, Myfanwy Maple (UNE), Kent Patrick and Virginia Mapedzahama.
Rachelle Coe - PhD Student
Rachelle is interested in participation of children with disability - what children need and want to do within their many environments and how they experience childhood. Linked to this, she is also interested in children’s understanding and experience of well-being in rural areas.

Rachelle is based at the University of Sydney (USYD) within the Australian Family and Disability Studies Research Collaboration. She is supervised by Professor Rafat Hussain (UNE), Associate Professor Myfanwy Maple (UNE) and Professor Gwynnyth Llewellyn (USYD).

Gina Dillon - PhD Student
Gina is based at UNE and will work in collaboration with the University of Newcastle, utilising data from the Australian Longitudinal Women’s Health Survey, a nationwide study of women’s health spanning the past 15 years. Gina’s study is aimed at identifying differences in the health status of urban and rural women and will have a focus on issues of self-care and resilience, especially in relation to experiences of partner abuse. Supervisors are Prof. Rafat Hussain (UNE), Dr Saifur Rahman (UNE) and Dr Deborah Loxton (UoN).

Alison Kennedy - PhD Student
Alison’s recent work with Deakin University and the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) has inspired her to endeavor upon a PhD with the Collaborative Research Network (CRN) at the University of New England. The focus of her work will be the bereavement experience of farmers following exposure to suicide or sudden death. Alison will maintain her base at the NCFH and be guided by a supervision team comprising Myf Maple (UNE), Kathy McKay (UNE) and Susan Brumby (NCFH).

Miranda Cannon - PhD Student
Miranda commenced her PhD in March 2012 and is based at UNE. She has been working in a variety of support roles within disability services in rural NSW. Her research project focuses on the impact of care giving on rural families of people with intellectual disability who are ageing. Miranda will be supervised by Prof. Rafat Hussain (UNE), Dr Stuart Wark (UNE) and Prof. Trevor Parmenter (USYD & UNE).

Warren Bartik—PhD Student
Warren Bartik is a clinical psychologist and has worked with young people and mental health for over 20 years. This work has been largely in the public sector with NSW Health where his last role was as Senior Policy Officer - Youth Mental Health and Early Psychosis. He also manages a part-time private practice based in Armidale. Warren completed an MBA in 2007 and a Master of Psychology (Clinical) in 2010 and commenced a PhD with the University of New England in 2011. His PhD research follows on from prior research completed at UNE with Dr Helen Edwards and Dr Myf Maple, investigating the bereavement experience of young people who have lost a friend to suicide.

Sarah McFarlane-Eagle—PhD Student
Sarah’s PhD research is focused on stigma reduction towards mental health issues in Australia. Specifically, she is interested in exploring the narratives of people who are currently or have previously actively contributed to changing attitudes towards mental health issues, as role models within their communities. The purposes of this investigation are to potentially be able to provide people affected by mental illness an alternative view to the current common one, that mental illness is confined to bringing only suffering, and secondly to ascertain an understanding of the perspectives of those playing an active role in stigma reduction.
The research team has been working on several projects, with grant applications submitted. These include: two grant applications submitted to BeyondBlue in collaboration with our La Trobe University and University of Newcastle partners. One of these projects (involving also James Cook University) aims to investigate GLBTI student well-being in regional higher education settings, the other aims to assess the community and family support for older rural men after involuntary mental health admission. In addition, we have been invited to participate in a research project led by the University of British Columbia in Canada that investigates mechanisms to incorporate the theoretical and empirical categories of oral health values, beliefs and well being in the sociodental indicators sensitive to Chinese, Punjabi and Korean elders, with a grant application submitted to the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR). Two internal seeding projects have been initiated: one that investigates UNE student awareness of sexual health services and their availability on campus, and the other that explores older Shona-Zimbabwean women’s understandings of sexuality and ageing in Australia. A third internal seeding grant has been gained to support a larger project that will investigate involuntary mental health admission in rural communities. We are also working to put together a multidisciplinary international research team (with La Trobe, The Kinsey Institute and other partners) to study ways in which Natal women use their bodies to express their gender identity choices as males, a largely under-researched subject, that will be an ARC Discovery application in 2013.

The team has also been commissioned by The Conversation to write two articles: one that stems from a lecture given to third year medical students at UNE about homophobia and its affect on individuals and health care provision; the other that examines the assumption that men think frequently about sex and the consequences of this myth on identity and well being. In addition Professor Victor Minichiello and Professor John Scott are editing an international book on the sex industry to be published by Harrington Park Press, New York. This book will provide the first comprehensive overview of the male sex work industry and includes coverage of psychological and physical health of male sex workers and their clients. The book brings together over ten leading sexuality researchers from four continents, and several chapters will be written by members of the CRN team that will focus on the well being of clients and escorts.

Several papers were presented at international conferences. A paper titled, ‘Epidemiology of HIV in Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population: A review’ was presented at Bio Integration Technology 2nd Annual world AIDS Day Conference in Beijing on December, 2011 (Saifur and Minichiello) and another paper titled, ‘Telecommunications Impacts on the structure and organization of male sex work’ at the Erotic Cities Special Section of the Association of American Geographers Conference in New York on February 2012 (Scott and Minichiello). Another paper titled, ‘STI Epidemiology in the Global Older Population: Emerging challenges?’ will be presented at World HIV/AIDS Online Symposium on April 13, 2012 (Minichiello and Saifur). The team has also been working on several invited papers for international Special Issues, one that focuses on healthy ageing to be published in Perspective in Public Health, the other on male sex workers to be published in the Annual Review of Sex Research.

Data collection for two ARC funded projects has commenced with several Postdocs working on this project with Professors Victor Minichiello, John Scott, Marian Pitts and Associate Professor Gail Hawkes. One project investigates the meaning of sexual intimacy for older women; the other project investigates the life experiences of male clients who use the services of escorts.
Thematic Area C: Biomedical Science to support Rural Mental Health

The team led by Professor Jim McFarlane and Dr Pierre Moens have overseen the installation of a Mass Spectrometer for analysis of biological samples from depressed patients. This enables us to make significant contributions to the other themes’ research projects, as well as undertake our own work in this area. We have established an exciting research project with Professor Perminder Sachdev (UNSW) on biomarkers of depression in people who have experienced a recent bereavement, and our Postdoctoral fellow Dr Arezoo Asserah, who is situated at UNSW, is working hard on this project. We have also commenced discussions on collaborations with Professor Brian Kelly and some of his colleagues at University of Newcastle, and will be exploring several projects with them in the near future.

**Professor Chris Sharpley (UNE)**

Chris’s involvement in the CRN is as Advisor to Theme C (Biomarkers for Depression), and he leads the “Bereavement and Depression” project with Professor Perminder Sachdev from UNSW. He is also involved in CRN projects on depression with staff from University of Newcastle.

**Dr Joelle Coumans-Moens — Postdoctoral Research Fellow**

Joelle’s work within the CRN will be to establish a moderate regional mass spectrometry facility at UNE for shared use of the biomedical team. Joelle will also be involved in the identification and quantification by mass spectrometry of protein biomarkers for prostate cancer.

**Dr Linda Agnew (UNE)**

Linda’s research expertise, immunological and stress responses in health and disease, will be applied to projects within the CRN to assist in elucidating the role of the immune system in depression. Her initial project involvement surrounds the potential value of a reliable biomarker for depression.

**Dr Suresh Kumar — Postdoctoral Research Fellow**

Dr. Suresh Kumar Athiappan Palanisamy joined the School of Science and Technology, at UNE in November 2011. Suresh is currently working on analysing HTTLPR polymorphisms in Australian rural population to study mental health and depression with Dr. Jim McFarlane and Dr. Chris Sharpley.

**Professor Vicki Bitsika (Bond University)**

Vicki is an Adjunct Professor in Physiology at UNE and has joined with staff to undertake joint research within the Brain-Behaviour Research Group. She is involved in the analysis of biological and behavioural indicators of depression.

**Dr Peter Wilson**

Peter will be involved in a search for anatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological correlates of abnormal behaviour in newly developed animal models of anxiety and depression.

**Dr Arezoo Asserah (UNE based at UNSW)**

This research will plot the trajectory of anxiety and depression in persons who have suffered a recent bereavement. Both psychological (anxiety, depression) and biological (genetic aspects, HPA-axis indicators, immune responses) will be used to track each person's responses to their bereavement and also to test the effects of psychological resilience as a "buffer" against anxiety and depression.