

## Sophia Garlick-Bock, Research and Evaluation Coordinator - Transcript

**Denise:** OK, today I'm talking to Sophia Garlic-Bock. She studied a dual degree, Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Advanced Science, did her psychology Honours at UNSW. She's now working as a Research and Evaluation Coordinator at ReachOut and her research focus and passion is youth mental health. Alright, so hi Sophia, thank you for joining me.

**Sophia:** Hi, thank you for having me.

**Denise:** Yeah, it's my pleasure. So, you have had a really interesting path through psychology study and in your current job. Let's start right at the beginning with when you started studying psychology. So, when you started, what drew you to it and what did you want to do with it at that time?

**Sophia:** I studied a science and arts degree and one of the main reasons is because I love that combination between science and arts. I think psychology perfectly combines those two things, and so that's what really drew me into the idea of psychology and to learn more in that sort of overlap space. From there, just went through uni and my other degree in arts was criminology, so really got to learn a lot about psychology of you know particular groups and that sort of thing. And so many different learnings in the actual degree itself that I never thought of, or didn't really predict that I would learn about statistics one day, or neurobiology the next day, or vision science the day after that. But you know, like it's just things that I had never expected that would come from that degree.

**Denise:** What did you enjoy most from all of those different aspects of psychology? What did you enjoy most about studying it?

**Sophia:** I loved the variety, really. Loved the variety, loved the different things that I just didn't predict. To try new things and being challenged in new ways and sometimes it was quite challenging. You know the notorious one that everyone says is Statistics, but I really am glad that I got to try such challenging things that I would never have put myself in without it.

**Denise:** But would you say you *enjoyed* Statistics, Sophia?

**Sophia:** [laughing] I use it a little bit now I have to say yes, I have to be kind to it. But I think I also really enjoyed being able to choose a lot more of the electives in later years. I liked a lot more of the freedom to try these more challenging, and also really just different areas that I wouldn't have tried, and getting to try electives from different subjects. What did I do? Shakespeare one subject, one semester. I was able to go and exchange which was amazing as well, so having the variety and just the real range of opportunities was ideal for me.

**Denise:** Yeah, absolutely. And did you think at the time that you wanted to go into clinical psychology, did you think you wanted to get the kind of research job that you have now, or have you been surprised with the path that you've ended up taking?

**Sophia:** I think it was a very surprising path. I think I didn't really realize what was on offer when I started to sign up to psychology in my first year of university. I kind of just knew of the that I like the content and really think much of the career. I guess I knew of the clinical career as one pathway, but didn't know what else was out there. Multiple times throughout my degree I thought I might enjoy the clinical pathway and....

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**Denise:** Hi Sophia, I'm gonna have to interrupt you. I just have an ambulance going by...

**Sophia:** Oh my gosh, that's so funny...

[We realise we live next door and didn't know, amazed laughter ensues, then we get back to it...]

**Denise:** So, when you started your psychology studies, did you actually think that you would be doing what you're doing now? Was this always your plan?

**Sophia:** No, not at all. I knew that there were those like clinical options, and that's kind of all I knew that would could come out of psychology. I don't think I really knew much else. I've known some people have done social work and I assumed you could kind of do those sorts of jobs with psychology as well. But once I started getting into the degree and learning about research, how you conduct experiments and what that involves, I really enjoyed that element, and I think I really started to follow that path. And so, I'm just wanting to find out more about how you can do that and what sort of things are involved.

**Denise:** Yeah, so how did you find out about this job? What the bridge between doing your psych Honours and doing the work you're doing now? How did this happen?

**Sophia:** Yeah, I was lucky. I signed up for any Research Assistant job I could find in the psychology faculty. So, I volunteered for a bunch of them over the winter holidays, sometimes in the summer holidays sometimes. I would love to just try and be involved with any other labs I could. Whatever came up, I would try. I didn't mind if it was paid or unpaid, I just wanted to find out more and try and learn about it. Originally, I did it for, you know, work experience of some description or just you know to put on my CV, but I really did enjoy going to see these different environments, different labs, and how they do research differently. From there, I did my Honours degree and so throughout Honours again, learned a little bit more about research and about how that process works. And after Honours, or during the end of my Honours, I knew I didn't want to jump into postgraduate research or a postgraduate degree. I just, I think I wanted to see a bit more of what work was like. I had been studying for so many years in a row as well, and I think I just really wanted to try what life was like outside of study, which was great. And yeah, so when I finished my Honours degree, or just before I finished my Honours degree, I just looked online to find as many research assistant jobs I could find. I literally just put the term 'research assistant' into job searches and would just apply for whatever I could, and got rejected a couple times and then fortunately was successful for a job at the University of New South Wales, not in the Psychology faculty. And then from there I've gotten other research assistant roles at a different university. I was a research assistant for two years at a different university and learnt so many different things I'd never thought I'd learn as a research assistant, so very different to the sorts of things they had at the School of Psychology at UNSW, which was great to see to the breadth of what you can do in research. And then from there I have fortunately come to this job. So, it's very similar, but I get to be a bit more independent in it. And that's without a PhD so far. So, it might be something that's in the cards in the future for me, but I'm only three years out of my degree.

**Denise:** It sounds like going into work experience was really what you wanted, and also something you're still happy that you decided to do.

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**Sophia:** Yeah, yeah, definitely.

**Denise:** It also strikes me that you've done research now in very different contexts because the university context I imagine would feel and be quite different from what you're in now with ReachOut and that not-for-profit space, is that right? Is that a very different kind of experience?

**Sophia:** Yeah, I had worked in university settings only, pretty much exclusively, and then it's my first time working in this environment, and it is a little bit different. I'm still doing very similar research work, but the research as a broader thing is very different. It's not so focused on grants. They're much smaller, quicker studies rather than maybe some of the bigger RCTs [randomised control trials] that I'd been on previously. So yeah, the not-for-profit world is a little bit different. At least the experience I'm having right now. It's kind of quicker succession compared to the maybe some of the more giant RCT studies or pilot studies that I'd been on previously. At ReachOut, the research I do is often just around how effective are the things we're doing. What sort of things do we need to react to in the world, you know? With COVID, what sort of resources do we have to make and why? And we want to make sure that they're effective for young people and the research is around that, and evaluating that, whereas, for the research I've done previously has been much more planned and for interventions in schools or workplaces or that sort of thing.

**Denise:** Both really important, but very different. Can you describe a little bit of what it's actually like for you to go to work, to do your work at ReachOut as a researcher? So, maybe think of it in terms of what's a typical day like, what kind of things do you actually do?

**Sophia:** Yeah, so it could really consist of a lot of things from the very beginning of the research process to the very end. So, if we think about it, we may be given a research topic, or maybe there's a focus in the organization of let's say for example connecting with the queer community and what sort of work we can do there? And maybe the gaps in the knowledge that we have currently or the services we can provide better basically, for a certain community or certain group of young people, or again in reaction to certain events like COVID. So, we might go from anywhere from the beginning of the research process, so saying you know we need to do a survey or something like that, to figuring out what exactly is needed, or what young people are feeling right now. Or, I could be doing the next sort of stages which is planning and developing. The next stage is sort of more the analysis part. So, I do a lot of quantitative and qualitative work, hearing the really great insights from young people themselves. And then at the end, how to communicate that information is the biggest thing that we're developing a lot. How do we effectively communicate research for a range of different audiences?

**Denise:** So, it's a lot of start to end, all of the different parts of the research process, yeah? What drives you to do this? I can tell that you're very motivated to do this work generally, but also specifically with ReachOut and with youth mental health, what's burning that fire?

**Sophia:** That's a great question. For a long time, I just wanted to see better research done with young people. I love that we do a lot of co-design and collaboration with young people directly and a lot of the work I've done has been very co-design focused. And I'm just on the edge of being a young person. Just 25 now, so I also really appreciate when I see research work that's being done effectively and so you

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could apply that to any community, any minority group, and who has research done with them and how important having good research that is representative of the needs and wants of their community. So, I think having met people who can really advocate for better research quality as well really good communication of research is something that also really drives me.

**Denise:** So, Sophia, what's something that has surprised you about your pathway in psychology? So, from the point you're at right now, what's been surprising to you in this journey?

**Sophia:** Yeah, I think I just didn't know what was out there, outside of psychology. You know, in the sort of university setting, we see a lot of the sort of topics we get to cover, so I was very familiar with that, but I didn't realize how much else could be covered by learning psychology, as well as didn't know what sort of jobs and how you can implement the learnings you have in the Honours to other things. I didn't know what that looks like in the real world or what that looks even like in a in a full-time job.

**Denise:** You know, listening to your story, Sophia, one of the things that I'm most inspired by, is that it sounds like you've found a way to use skills that you learnt in psych, your research skills, in a context that you're really passionate about that's still around mental health. And you can do all of this without even having a Masters, which is pretty amazing.

**Sophia:** After I got my first RA role, Research Assistant role, full-time, I was so excited to learn all those things, but kind of in the back my mind I was a little bit worried that I wouldn't be developing my career enough without a PhD or Masters. And since then, have seen a lot more opportunities open up without a PhD or Masters. Talking to people about what their pathways have been, talking to people at conferences and seeing their sort of pathways, or even just seeing people in the online world of their pathways from psychology onwards without a PhD. And I think that's really been something I need to remind myself: there's a lot of things [you can do], and I can always go back and do a PhD and still continue that research.

**Denise:** That's right. Obviously, you would develop even more research skills doing a PhD, but you know, it's interesting to me to hear you say that because it sounds like sometimes you're still getting a little voice in your head that says, 'oh, maybe I should be doing this, I should have a Masters or PhD,' but that pressure might not be coming from the real world around you. It might actually just be coming from your own inner voice. You know, it sounds like you're already doing, things, really interesting things that you care about, without even having that further study.

**Sophia:** Yeah, yeah, and it's so easy for myself to just rush into the next stage of my career, but I'm really trying to learn how to slow down and really enjoy and learn the things I need to learn now and then if that slows down at all, then I can go to the next stage of my career.

**Denise:** If you could, at this point now where you are now, turn around and look at yourself when you were just starting in psychology with your dual degree. What kind of advice would current-you give to past-you?

**Sophia:** Just try all the things you can do at university. I did a lot of volunteering and I learned so many skills and a lot of those things have also been things that employers have pointed out, or even just being

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things on my CV that I've really being proud of. So, like not just the completing the academic opportunities you have at university, but the things outside of that. There's lots of volunteering in sports that sort of stuff. I think those are the sorts of things I did that shaped me, who I am now. I was very worried about what the future could bring, and I think there's a lot of things that are unknown and it's okay for it to be unknown. And I wish I could remind myself of that a lot more when I was that age.

**Denise:** Yeah, it's hard. We all live with uncertainty at every stage in our life, but I think you know starting out, studying, and looking ahead at jobs after school is maybe the hardest time where that happened.

**Sophia:** So hard. And I think the only the only thing I would add as well is getting to hear these sort of different roles, see what a role that might involve and see if it's something that you would be interested in. You know, it's a little bit hard to figure out how you can get there from when you graduate, but at least you know maybe who to talk to next. And unless you know exactly the kind of area you'd like to try, it doesn't have to be the area you're gonna be in for the rest of your life. It's just something you'd like to try next. And it can be something you have an amazing time working in for the next couple of years, and then you can try something else.

**Denise:** I 100% agree with that. Alright, well thank you so much for talking to me today. This has been really helpful. I hope you enjoyed it.

**Sophia:** Thank you, thanks so much for having me.