**Transcript - Guidance Officer Week 2025 podcast with Daniela Ballhause**

**Announcer:** This is a Queensland Department of Education podcast.

**Claire Norton:** Guidance Officer Week, celebrates the important work that guidance officers do in supporting students and the community.

Now, imagine that your job requires you to soar into the air and fly around the beautiful islands of the Torres Strait. This is reality for Daniela Ballhause, a guidance officer who works with remote communities at Tagai State College.

 Hi I’m Claire Norton from the Department of Education, join me as I talk to Daniella about her role as a fly in and a fly out guidance officer.

 Thanks for talking to me Daniela.

 What inspired you to become a guidance officer?

**Daniela Ballhause:** Well, I’ve always been passionate about helping people particularly the young people navigating challenges. Growing up, I noticed how important it was for individuals to have someone to guide them, especially in difficult times. I was originally drawn to teaching but as I gained experience in the schools, I realised that I could have a deeper impact, in a more supportive role, so I decided to pursue a career in guidance officer. This is where I could combine my skills in counselling, mentoring and problem solving to help students in achieving their personal and social and emotional wellbeing goals.

I am working at Tagai State College, it services 17 islands and I’m currently a guidance officer for 7 of those.

**Claire Norton:** So tell me a bit about your journey to becoming a guidance officer?

**Daniela Ballhause:** In my later years, I started teaching and I loved that process of you know, supporting the children in the classroom and seeing their lightbulbs came on and it was just so rewarding to me. So, I always had a passion of learning myself and with that I started my Masters in Education of Guidance Office and Counselling. I started teaching in the independent sector on mainland, South Brisbane and loved that. After that of 15 years teaching there, I ventured into the public sector, which I saw a calling for me. Like it was just a beautiful moment for me to be able to see how I could assist children in the public sector.

With that, I had children of my own and always wanted to do a regional stint but needed to know it was the right time for me and the family and as they became older, I thought right, this is the time that we could start this venture. And yeah, selecting the place, it wasn’t really hard for me to decide to come to the Torres Straits. Seeing the environment and the nature up here and the children up here was a game changer for me. It was like, yeah, this is where I was meant to be.

**Claire Norton:** What do you love about the Torres Strait?

**Daniela Ballhause:** Oh wow.It’s so incredibly unique up here. The vibrant culture, the strong sense of community, the opportunity to work in an area that really needs support in terms of education and emotional guidance. They were my main key factors for it, but also the warm and welcoming and resilient communities that I find just so inspiring.

**Claire Norton:** What makes working at Tagai State College so special?

**Daniela Ballhause:** I think within my role I’ve been so blessed to be able to fly to different islands and see how each community, getting to embrace myself within that culture and understanding what support networks are needed, is so beneficial for me.

**Claire Norton:** What do you love working rural and remote?

**Daniela Ballhause:** I feel that this is a real opportunity for me personally because it enables me to be able to not just see this beautiful countryside, which a lot of people don’t know about, it also helps me become more resourceful in the resources that I can gain for these communities.

**Claire Norton:** Are there any particular challenges working rural and remote?

**Daniela Ballhause:** Look, there are a lot of challenges and it doesn’t matter whether you’re on mainland or in rural and remote communities. However, being rural and remote does give you that extra challenges in connecting the health system and services, because some of these islands are so remote that they are only helicopter access. So, ensuring that I am connecting the community and the students’ needs with the resources possible and being able to liaise and collaborate with a whole network, whether it’s through teams meetings or whether it’s through organising island visits. So yes, there is a lot of complexities around the location of the area but I feel if you have a passion for it, nothing’s a challenge.

**Claire Norton:** What does a day in the life look like?

**Daniela Ballhause:** A day as a guidance officer can vary a lot. Multitasking is always a priority. Each week I start my travels and I find myself soaring over the waters in a cessna or helicopter, touching base on an island and starting with morning meetings with students, the Head of Campus’, welcoming parents within the classrooms or settling into meetings with parents as well, to discuss any concerns they might have about their children or the teachers about their students.

I spend time with students, one-on-one, to provide counselling as well and also doing cognitive assessments. This could include helping them working through personal issues or discussing future pathways or even just lending an ear, so they have someone to talk to. In between those sessions I link in with parents and care givers to organise the connections to the community health clinics and NDIS (National Disability Insurance) providers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, paediatricians. A day in the life of a guidance officer is different every single day and no 2 days are the same. The thing I love about my role is that there’s such variety.

**Claire Norton:** How does the job make a difference in the community?

**Daniela Ballhause:** I feel like I’m able to make a real impact by helping students see their potentials. Not only that, building a connection between the community and the outside service is a huge benefit for the community. I work with them to create action plans, whether it’s for a student’s social or emotional wellbeing or academic journey. Being consistent, positively present in their lives helps them feel supported.

**Claire Norton:** How do you build that connection with the students?

**Daniela Ballhause:** Look first point of building is listen. You always have to listen first. Understand their personal experiences and their challenges that they’re having, their goals and how I can support them in that. And making sure that I’m present, making sure I’m just not there in body but in heart, as well.

**Claire Norton:** What would you say is a highlight of your job?

**Daniela Ballhause:** Wow.There are so many highlights of my job, like I said before, I’m just so lucky to be in this position. One key highlight is that I have been able to strengthen the link between the community and third-party allied health providers. Accessing to support services in the Torres Straits, like I said, can be challenging, and being able to bridge that gap has been one of my most fulfilling achievements.

Witnessing the positive impact on students and families, also reinforces the importance of my networking and my connections with the community. The biggest highlights for me has seen the growth in the students.

**Claire Norton:** Is there an experience you would like to share?

**Daniela Ballhause:** One experience, I think that every island that I have been able to build that connection and be part of that community and be accepted by the Elders is a huge, huge benefit for me and also a privilege, which I don’t take lightly. I really do value that. Every student that I’ve supported has seen growth in some way, and whether it be a student that has in our eyes, hurdled a small challenge but has seen success in themself is a success story. Whether it’s a student that has had major challenges and a lot of complexities and has become resilient and built on that and well rounded, that’s a success story. So for me, any success story whether it be small or large, seeing that achievement that the children have recognised they have achieved, is a success story for me.

**Claire Norton:** What would you say to someone considering becoming a Guidance Officer in a rural/remote community?

**Daniela Ballhause:** I’d say, go for it. It’s challenging, but it’s rewarding. Working in a rural and a remote area means you get to be part of the community, that is really grateful for your support. The relationships you can build are so much deeper, because they’re part of a smaller close-knit environment. And yeah, it’s tough at times.

The work you do as a guidance officer, truly does matter. We’re helping and shaping the student’s lives and futures, including the entire community, and I feel so privileged to be a guidance officer. It’s not just a job, it’s a chance to make a real difference, and I don’t take that for granted, and for me, that’s what makes it worthwhile.

 And I think that it’s really special to be successful in your guidance officer role, that you have a great knowledgeable Senior Guidance Officer. I think that’s the key to this and also leadership. You have a knowledgeable leadership that you can go to and you can work collaboratively with your Senior Guidance Officer, your leadership and the head of campuses. Because then that just gives a whole holistic approach on anything that you do with, for the students and their families.

**Claire Norton:** Why is Guidance Officer Week important to you?

**Daniela Ballhause:** It brings awareness to the role. A lot of people don’t really, realise what Guidance Officers’ do and it actually brings awareness not only to the staff that are in the school but also to the parents and the wider community, that we’re here for the family the students to be able to support and, yeah, I just have to end with saying, I have never been so fulfilled in a job, in all of my career. Every day I wake up and I just feel so blessed to be part of this community, to be part of this college, which has got such a great supportive network in the executive building, in the teachers, in the teacher aides and within the community as well. So I just feel so blessed every day that I’ve been able to score such an awesome job.

You know, I heard like scary stories about working in remote and rural and I can say, hand on heart, this has been the most fulfilling and amazing step in my career that I have ever made, if only I knew, I would have made it earlier. You think that because you’re only there once a term, that you don’t get to build those connections, but you really do and those students remember you. So being fly in and fly out, definitely adventurous, definitely amazing in the landscapes that I get to see and witness every time, but also enriched in the community, understanding all the islands and how they interconnect but are so unique on their own as well. So FIFO (fly in- fly out) has given me that amazing experience to be able to explore all these amazing islands and all these amazing communities and Elders and students that are so resilient. And without this opportunity, I would never have known this.

**Claire Norton:** Thank you so much for your time, Daniela.

**Daniela Ballhause:** No problem at all.

**Announcer** You have been listening to a Queensland Department of Education podcast. The Department of Education acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands from across Queensland. We pay our respects to the Elders, past and present, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.