



Careers in regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas

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What support is there for lawyers relocating to RRR areas?

I have worked in Goondiwindi, QLD/Moree, NSW & Dubbo, NSW as well as Brisbane & Newcastle in my 15 years as a lawyer. For those not familiar with Goondiwindi or Dubbo they are a nine hour/ five hour drive from Sydney respectively. As such, support for young lawyers heading out west is that from the NSW Law Society Mentor Program (which I did and loved), as well as the Solicitor Outreach Service. As I hurdled the “I’m not a young lawyer at 35 years old” stage in practice, our local Orana Law Society in Dubbo has been excellent. I jumped in and offered a hand for five years as treasurer and it was a great way to meet all the local lawyers and learn who was who in the zoo. The most relevant support I’ve had is the young lawyers who gather socially, either informally or formally.

Nothing beats that cold drink with others in the same shoes, chewing the fat over similar issues or challenges. I’ve also enjoyed heading to Sydney for the Rural Issues Conference and the TVED Annual Rural and Farming Law Conference, as well as their taxation and estate planning suite of annual updates. Support for lawyers living and practising in a RRR area is very much up to the individual – I’ve seen a few folks head west, not love it, and head back to the city. If you are looking at a country change, get in touch on the phone with a few lawyers, have lunch, attend every networking event and get amongst it. Before you know it, you will realise the support network is quietly there, but you must do the hard work in the early years to develop it.

What experiences will I gain from working in RRR areas?

I’ve recently completed my second round of maternity leave, which offers women that rare ability to look back on your identity as a lawyer and reflect on what work means, and how your work impacts others, your community, and the profession. I now know that working as a country lawyer means I am called to assist many in their time of need. Whether it is with complex commercial, agribusiness or private wealth matters, times of stress for a family or business or to assist the local Royal Flying Doctor Service fundraising branch, there is something of a “I’m here to help and guide” in your ethos and purpose which is very rewarding.

You will experience the true reality that you are a professional primarily, and then you are in private practice for profit. If you are very good at your work as a lawyer, you will be richly rewarded, both in terms of remuneration, but also in the variety of work that comes your way. These days, most of my work comes from other lawyers and accountants or financial planners who know I specialise in a certain area of law and have a specific approach with clients. I also love doing pro bono work, and the firm I work with, Duffy Elliott Lawyers, has been a pillar for 125 years in the Dubbo and Western NSW region and firmly supports the delivery of pro bono work.

You will also have the opportunity to live a life with fewer expenses, and this enables your personal life to be richly rewarded with an earlier entry into the property market, more time with family, children and your spouse – heaps of time for sport, gardening, the arts and if you are lucky to live close to an airport, to enjoy flying into Sydney to enjoy the Opera, Theatre, Stadiums, 3 Chef Hat restaurants whenever you want (normally either side of court commitments in Philip Street if you can manage it).

How will working in RRR areas elevate my career?

Ultimately, at 38 years of age, with only 15 years of practising experience under my belt, I still consider myself in the early stages of my career. However, because I have spent my early years in a RRR area, I have a broad knowledge base, both practically and substantively, but I also have a commercial understanding of what clientele in the RRR space want. They want great lawyers, who understand their clients, who are excellent in technical skills and have the humility and awareness to reach out to specialists or barristers for niche matters to deliver world class outcomes, in an RRR environment.

In which RRR area do you currently work, and how long have you been there?

Dubbo, Western NSW and succession/trust law across NSW. I have been based on a farm near Dubbo for nine years, and then Goondiwindi (near Moree, NSW) three years prior.

In which area of law do you practice and what elements of your practice do you think are unique to being in a RRR area?

Wills & estate, trust and tax law, estate and succession planning, agribusiness and farming law.

What is the most challenging thing about working in a RRR area?

People often think you wear RM Williams boots, chew on wheat stalks and vote for the Nationals. Being typecast as a country lawyer has been frustrating, as what I've found to be the true gift of practising in a RRR area, is diversity of fashion, thought, politics, generosity of spirit and comradery. We can usually achieve the same result for a client in Dubbo, with a small team of two or three lawyers, for less cost than larger firms. Clients are waking up to the benefits of engaging lawyers from RRR, particularly with changes ahead in consumer behaviour and in a post-COVID world.

To learn more about working in RRR communities and hear from other RRR lawyers, visit rrrlaw.com.au.