ONE woman's generosity and a vision for community engagement brings together past, present and future with the 'Virtual Samford' project.

In 2002, a property bequest from eminent Queensland entomologist, Dr Elizabeth Nesta Marks AO provided QUT with a unique living laboratory—the Samford Ecological Research Facility (SERF)—on the proviso that the University liaise with an advisory board of local community members about how the property was to be used.

However, needing to share the resource with the community without compromising the ecology of the area presented some challenges.

“We were thinking how can we get people involved in what we’re doing but without actually bringing them on site?” Project leader Michelle Gane, from QUT’s Institute for Sustainable Resources, says.

The project team immediately arranged a meeting with the advisory group, which is made up of local members of the local Samford Historical Society, a volunteer organisation run by retired community people who also run the Samford Museum.

“Straight away there was a strong community link and a desire from the community to be involved with the project,” Michelle says.

The Engagement Innovation Grant provided an opportunity to develop a valuable resource for the whole community.

Working with postgraduate students, Michelle’s team came up with the concept of ‘Virtual Samford’.

“We took some students from the Creative Industries Faculty out to the property. They had morning tea with the community and worked with them on design concepts for the website,” Michelle explains.

The clinic aims to address wound healing in the area of chronic wound healing she found that there was nowhere in Australia providing additional fund for clinic materials.

Michelle Gibb, noticed the need for more to be done in the area of chronic wound healing. She determined to improve the situation for those suffering.

Two years and an Engagement Innovation Grant later, the QUT Wound Healing Clinic has developed into a collaborative hub – linking existing wound care services, health care professionals, best-practice and proven research findings, and members of the community.

The clinic provides comprehensive assessments and cost-effective evidence-based treatments and interventions.

Equally important to the program is delivering education courses for nurses.

“We knew that we wanted to be responsive and meet the needs of practitioners and patients alike, but without the Engagement Innovation Grant to help keep the service off we would not have been able to do what we have to address this problem,” Michelle says.

Michelle has won the 2010 Bob and June Trickett Churchill Fellowship to explore how a multi-disciplinary wound care model would enhance wound healing services in Australia.

“People just didn’t have the skills and we found that there was nowhere in Queensland for nurses to get this sort of training,” Michelle adds.

The clinic also offers the opportunity for undergraduate nursing students at QUT to get first hand, practical experience in wound and patient care.

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asked what advice she would offer to those considering a similar project Michelle doesn’t hesitate to emphasise the importance of fostering good community relations.

“I would say it has to be community engagement right up front. The important thing for the locals was being able to put a name to a face. We gave them our business cards and told them if they have any questions to call us,” Michelle recalls.

“When we had to build a driveway to the property we did a letter box drop so everyone knew what we were doing and who to talk to if they had concerns. It’s these little things that make a big difference and have helped us become part of the local community.”

The SERF team hold information sessions annually and morning tea on site to inform locals of the latest activities.

EVERYBODY NEEDS GOOD NEIGHBOURS

An Australian first, the community-based clinic runs three days a week, servicing 30-40 patients, treating wounds associated with leg ulcers, pressure and diabetic foot ulcers, leg swelling, eczema, dermatitis, wounds resulting from injury, and non-healing surgical wounds.

It also runs training workshops for nurses to learn wound healing bandaging and other advanced wound healing techniques, with the education course fees providing additional fund for clinic materials.

Michelle says the emotional burden of a long term wound can be as bad, or worse, than the physical condition, significantly affecting patients’ quality of life. Fortunately, with the high quality of care provided the clinic sees rates of depression improve significantly with treatment, as well as the physical wounds themselves.

The clinic aims to address wound healing in a holistic way, educating patients on lifestyle aspects such as nutrition, physical activity and hygiene, as well as managing and preventing reoccurring wound problems – vitally important for the 50% of patients who live alone and manage their own care.

“We have to build a rapport with each person and learn about their journey so that we can determine what the next best course of action for them is to turn things around,” Michelle says.

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