

Career Development Grant 2022: Report

Alexandra Ridgway

In 2018, I was fortunate enough to be awarded an Ernst Mach Grant (Eurasia-Pacific Uninet) to spend six months at the University of Vienna under the supervision of Associate Professor Elisabeth Scheibelhofer, a renowned migration researcher and methodologist. I was in the third year of my PhD through the University of Hong Kong and had used Associate Professor Scheibelhofer's Problem Centred Interviewing (PCI) technique to collect data for my thesis. At the University of Vienna, I was able to learn from her firsthand and, under her guidance, my knowledge and skills in qualitative methods blossomed.

The fellowship was designed as an opportunity to learn from expert scholars in our field of interest and to share our doctoral research findings with Austrian audiences. Yet, it also gave me time away from teaching and thus the space to undertake an additional small research project, also using problem centred interviewing. During my six months in Vienna, I interviewed migrant women about their views of the city and experiences as newly arrived residents and asked them to take photographs which they felt reflected their perspectives. The data was rich, and I was excited about publishing from it.

Then everything changed.

One morning I received a life changing call letting me know that my father had died. While I chose to remain in Vienna, inspired to continue the research which my father had so passionately supported, I struggled to retain my focus. Then, six weeks later, I found out I was pregnant with twins. The medical complexity of my pregnancy meant I now had to return to Australia and so my husband and I made our way back home and I found myself struggling through my days, beset with grief and morning sickness.

During the remainder of my pregnancy my focus was on completing my PhD and the interviews from the research project in Vienna sat tucked away in a folder. Somehow, I successfully completed my PhD, submitting my thesis two months after the birth of my children. After this point, however, my research work stalled. Life with newborn twins was hectic and I found myself racing about, sleep deprived, trying to care for two babies and occasionally finding the time for a shower and a sandwich. Then COVID arrived and we faced multiple lockdowns, and my focus became keeping us healthy and safe. During these years I was in pure survival mode.

Occasionally, I thought about those interviews and wondered how I would possibly find the time to transcribe them amongst the nappy changes and bottle feeds. It felt impossible.

Then at the start of 2022 as my experience of motherhood eased, I saw that I could apply for TASA's Career Development Grant to cover the costs of transcribing. Thrilled at the idea that I might finally be able to return to the Vienna project, I applied for the grant and was lucky enough to be one of the successful recipients.

Over the past year, a friend of mine who is a transcriptionist has slowly made her way through the interviews, transcribing them in the free moments that she finds in her own motherhood journey. They are now a complete set, and I cannot wait to start analysing them and writing them up into publications.

I am so very grateful to TASA, the Equity and Inclusion Portfolio Leader, Heidi Hetz and, of course, the Executive Officer, Sally Daly, for their support. Because of the Career Development Grant, the stories of the women which I collected in 2018 can now be told!