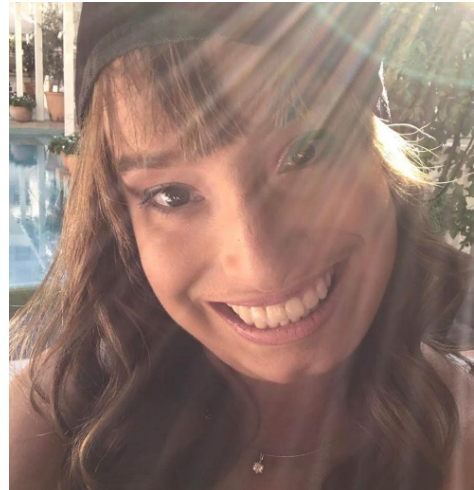


Chantelle's Story

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I feel my journey to becoming and growing as an early career nutrition professional has been quite an unconventional one, full of unexpected, wonderful yet challenging twists and turns.

My interest in studying nutrition, stemmed from my love of Food Technology as an elective subject in high school. It sounds corny, but I couldn't think of pursuing a better career that involved food, health and helping people all-in-one! Having just missed out the marks for the direct undergraduate entry pathway into dietetics, I enrolled in a Bachelor of Science (Nutrition) at The University of Wollongong in 2013, which later turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

I learnt *very* early on that the saying, "follow your gut", couldn't be truer! One of the first jobs I scored as a nutrition student was to manage the online and social media communications for The Gut Foundation Australia. This role not only solidified my love for nutrition science, but it also gave me insight as to how vital it is for nutrition professionals to be trained as effective health communicators. While I was a nutrition student, I was also fortunate enough to intern and write for a popular print publication, Australian Healthy Food Guide magazine.

It suddenly felt right to take a little detour from the world of nutrition and dietetics, a Master of Health Communication at The University of Sydney from 2016 – 2018, and I feel it was one of the most exciting and bold career moves I have ever made. I learnt everything from how to develop and evaluate mass media and social marketing campaigns, to health policy, journalism, community health promotion, crisis communication and so much more!

While studying, and after I completed my master's degree, I had the opportunity to work and volunteer in a variety of different roles which complimented my knowledge and skills gained from both degrees. Some of the interesting work and types of organisations I have been immersed in include; a boutique healthcare public relations agency, running nutrition and food education workshops in schools, working in a food service department in a hospital, and working in non-profits improving food security outcomes in the community.

I seem to be very drawn to working with children and young people, and find it incredibly rewarding working towards improving health and nutrition outcomes within vulnerable and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. I get a lot of energy when actively engaging with and using my public health and nutrition communications "brain", especially when these two worlds collide. Taking notice of these trends has allowed my true passions to surface and see the bigger picture.

Fast forward to today, and I am excited as ever to be pursuing a Master of Nutrition and Dietetics in 2021 to level-up in my career and continue to push myself out of my comfort zone. I recognise, now more than ever, that it is invaluable for nutrition professionals to be accredited with a leading professional body. The opportunities for dietitians and nutritionists to make a positive impact is greater and more abundant than ever before. As a bigger picture goal, I would love to pursue a cross-disciplinary PhD in food education or nutrition communications. I feel learning the ropes in clinical dietetics, will indeed be challenging, but also open a lot of new possibilities I have not yet considered in my career and I am excited to see where this leads me. I therefore feel it is fitting that I am growing and evolving as 'The Visionary Nutritionist', as I am constantly dreaming about where the nutrition profession should be headed next, while striving to make this a reality on the ground.

My three greatest career lessons so far:

- 1) Don't be afraid to detour and wonder off on a different path for a while *outside* of the familiar world of nutrition and dietetics. The status quo is safe and boring. Our profession is evolving at such a rapid pace, that we won't all survive and thrive pursuing the same traditional roles as we have in the past. Life is also full of adventure, and the best opportunities are not found where you would most expect them to!
- 2) Seek out multiple mentors! To figure out who could be a suitable mentor for you, spend some time thinking about your career goals, career stage, and interests e.g. growing your private practice, working in paediatrics, or improving your nutrition communications skills. Introduce yourself to those you admire either in person, via email or on social media, think about what you can offer them, as well as how they might be able to help you get to where you want to go.
- 3) If it doesn't challenge or scare you, it doesn't change you. Leaning into discomfort and fear can actually feel incredibly liberating when you acknowledge that you *are* more capable of doing hard things than you realise, and often, these challenges are bringing you one step closer to achieving your biggest hopes and dreams.

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