**Rural and remote teaching podcast**

**Ellie Clark - Aurukun State School, Aurukun**

*Ellie Clark is a Year 6 teacher at Aurukun State School. Originally from Brisbane, Ellie loves the close connections with community that teaching in one of Queensland’s most isolated towns brings with it. Ellie has worked in Aurukun for the past two years and has fallen in love with it.*

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

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Queensland state schools offer variety of teaching experiences, including the opportunity to live and work in unique, rural and remote destinations. Hi, I'm Virginia Bowdidge from the Queensland Department of Education. In this podcast series, I talk to state school teachers living in unique corners of our vast state. Today, Ellie Clark joins me. Ellie is a year six teacher in Aurukun. Aurukun is an indigenous community in Far North Queensland, about 100 kilometres south of Weipa. Hi Ellie Clark, thanks for joining me today.

**Ellie Clark**: Hi, I'm really excited to be here.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: I'd love to start with, why did you choose teaching as a career?

**Ellie Clark**: Well, I initially started studying journalism and law, which is a big jump from that to teaching, even though I was studying in a different field, I knew that I wanted to help kids, learn with kids and watch them grow. My partner asked me a question one day and said, if you saw a car accident would you take a photo or help? I said help and he said, you should really think again about your degree. We got to talking and thought teaching would be the best option So, I decided to enrol and as I began, I knew straight away that this is where I belong. So, here I am.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What was your inspiration for becoming a teacher? And what was it about teaching that first attracted you to the profession?

**Ellie Clark:** I guess my inspiration initially was the conversation that I had with my partner, but as I was studying, I realised that there's so much more to teaching than just teaching the content. I really enjoy being around the children and helping them grow in all aspects of their life, not just learning. I just find that there's something special about watching a child have a light bulb moment. It just makes my heart so warm.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** How long have you been teaching?

**Ellie Clark:** I'm currently in my second year of teaching, so not long.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** How long have you been in Aurukun?

**Ellie Clark:** Well, Aurukun is my first teaching job, so almost two years at the end of this year, but I'm going to stay here for another year because I love it so much.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** And are you from the city originally?

**Ellie Clark:** Yeah, I'm from North Brisbane. So it's definitely a bit of a culture shock for me.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Were the logistics of the move difficult to navigate?

**Ellie Clark**: Not so much because I believe that my regional office was pretty good. They handled a lot of it for me so quickly. I put my expression of interest in, and then within like two weeks or something, I had offers from a couple of different places. I got my first job within a month of putting my expression out and then they just handled it so well and with so much ease.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Does the department offer any financial incentives for remote teaching?

**Ellie Clark:** Yeah, of course. The department pays for your uplift to the community and back, as long as you complete your contract that you have signed. They also provide you with a five extra RAIS (Rural Area Incentive Scheme) days, which pretty much just give you extra time off if you require going to the city, or like your closest city for doctor's appointment or whenever you need things that you can't access in community. There are a lot of incentives you just got to have to look into what community you're going to, where you fall within the incentive brackets.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** So, what is it about teaching remotely that has drawn you in?

**Ellie Clark:** So, at first I just felt like I wanted something different to metro areas. During my placements at uni, I went to a rural school in Kumbia (just outside Kingaroy) and I also went to Cherbourg State School. For me, both of those placements opened my eyes to the different opportunities out there in Queensland. I fell in love with the school and the community culture within Cherbourg. I knew that from that placement, it was something that I wanted and it was definitely somewhere that I wanted to go, but now that I am working here, it's the close connection with community that makes me want to stay. I feel when you get to know the kids and families on a more personal level, when you are in the community setting and the teaching becomes more than just curriculum, you participate in their way of life and learning and in my experience, I believe that it definitely helps you grow personally and professionally.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: What do you love about your job?

**Ellie Clark**: There's so much that I love about this job, but for me, it is the kids, their little personalities are just so amazing and every day is so different. Sometimes it is challenging, but it's also very rewarding because my school is so unique. I love that every day I get to come to school and I get to learn too. I learn about the students' culture, they teach me their language. We talk about their traditional ways of life and some elders coming to the classrooms weekly, just to tell the students stories.

I love just sitting in listening to their stories as well. I feel like a student when their coming in. But that, when they share their stories, that's my favourite thing that I've had so far this past year and a half, because I get to experience, I get to experience a different culture, I get to experience their culture. And I'm also so grateful for the close friends that I've made out here. I feel like when you become so close with your colleagues, they become like a mini family, and now that I have them for life, because we've got this unique experience together and it is something that we'll always bond us and we'll always have the stories of our period to share.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What have you found surprising about working in Aurukun?

**Ellie Clark:** This one isn't about the teaching, but the lifestyle, I never knew anything about wet and dry season, which is what they have up here. Pretty much when it's wet season, you can't leave community because the roads are closed everything is flooded so you're kind of stranded depending on where your community is. For us we're two hours out from the closest community, Weipa, so you have to find different ways to entertain yourself and I was never into fishing. I was never a fishing gal or anything of the sort, but out here it's a way of life. So now I love it and I go fishing quite often.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: Has the reality lived up to your expectations?

**Ellie Clark:** I think I went in quite open-minded, not really knowing what to expect so I quickly fell in love with this place. I guess there are quite hard days and sometimes it can rock you because it isn't like a normal setting. You don't have your family and your friends so close to you, but I guess you learn different ways to cope because there are people that come out here that are so passionate about their jobs, making a change and helping to close the gap. You do start to bond with different type of people that you've never thought that you would meet before. For me, I think it has, I really love this place and I would recommend it.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Can you describe a typical day?

**Ellie Clark:** A typical day, that's hard because every day is so different. But as for a routine, we play games in the first 15 minutes of the school day. We start the school day at 8:30, so 8:30 to 8:45 we play quiet games or we play board games like with chalk or puzzles or a T-ball.

We also provide breakfast between 8:30 and 8:45 for the kids. This usually helps them wake up and get themselves ready for school, ready for learning time. After this, so at 8:45, we do a program called DEAR , which is Drop Everything and Read, which I love because my book collection is growing quite rapidly. Then we have a literacy block every morning from nine till 11, middle session is usually mathematics and at the end sessions are other KLAs like science or HAS.

We also offer art, technology and PE but they're specialist classes, so they vary each term, usually in the middle or end sessions.

I have Year 6, so a typical day with my students is quite energetic. They start off so calm but by the end of the day, they all ready for brain breaks or chill out time. They're also at an age where they're changing and transitioning into high school, so as you might know, they are very confident and like to remind me how cool they are. But that is fairly normal for this age and it's all part of the teaching experience, I think.

**Virginia Bowdidge**: What do you wish you knew before becoming a remote teacher?

**Ellie Clark:** Living wise, I wish I researched the community and the surrounding areas better, because as I said earlier, the closest town is two hours away. So just to do, a shop from Woolworths, I have to drive two hours, but sometimes you can't access that because of wet season. I would have purchased a four wheel drive way earlier and organize my holidays better so that I could explore Cape York because it is so beautiful up here.

Teaching wise, community connection is so essential and to make those connections almost straight away, that's something that I wish I knew before I came into the community. Like learning people's names, where they come from, who they're related to, because it can make your life so much easier. It also makes a world of difference when building those relationships in the classroom and they see that you are interested in them. This year, I really tried to work on community connection and I found that once I was closer with the family, the students just respected me so much more, which was great. But this connection, it starts in the school getting to know your local TAs and local staff members, because they can give you the rundown of almost every child. I did this and eventually I became quite good mates with some of the people that I work with and they've taken me under their wing. They've shown me on their country and they showed me their parts of life. So I feel like if I didn't make those connections, I wouldn't have the experience that I'm having now. I definitely wouldn't have had success with the classroom.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** It sounds like you're having a fantastic experience.

**Ellie Clark:** Yes. I love it out here so much and I would recommend going remote if you're up to it.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Would you recommend teaching as a profession?

**Ellie Clark:** Oh yes, absolutely. I love my job. I think teaching is easily one of the best and most underrated professions in the world. Although, people have to know that it isn't an easy eight to three job with holidays off. It is seriously hard work, but the rewards beat that by a long shot.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What advice would you give students studying teaching or thinking of studying teaching?

**Ellie Clark:** Do it. If your heart is in it, go for it. Firstly if you can, get a job in a local school and start those teaching connections. I didn't do this as much as I wish. I think if I had, I would have been a little bit more prepared when entering the classroom. Definitely offer the volunteer hours at your local school even if it’s only an hour a week

Secondly, this might be a no brainer for some but students aren't our friends. Maintain that boundary between teacher/student is so important. I remember in my first few weeks being a teacher, I wanted the kids to like me so badly, as bad as that sounds I really did. I made so many mistakes in that first term, I don't even remember teaching. I just remember behaviour managing, because I hadn't set those expectations in place early enough. So, from that, setting boundaries and staying firm on those expectations is important. On that note though, making mistakes doesn't make you a horrible teacher. It means that you were learning just like the rest of us and mistakes are so important in this profession. It helps us see where we are and where we want to be.

Lastly, I know they rave about sticking to the lesson plans in uni, but sometimes it isn't realistic. Sometimes you have to put that lesson plan down and do something else. Try it again another time, even though it probably took three hours to make, I've been there before, but don't force it. You will know if it isn't working and you have to trust yourself. Otherwise, you will stress yourself up and the kids.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Thanks Ellie that sounds great and it sounds like you're having a wonderful experience.

**Ellie Clark:** Yeah. I love it so much. Thank you for taking the time out to speak with me today.

**Announcer**: You have been listening to the Queensland Department of Education podcast.