

## **CRH Research Student Canada trip**

When it was first proposed that I could go to Canada as part of my PhD in rural mental health, I thought I was dreaming and would suddenly wake up! However, in May of this year those initial discussions became a reality as I set off for a 10 week stay in Calgary, in the province of Alberta. During my stay, I met with many people around the province that were involved in mental health, which allowed me to better understand what some of the challenges are, both for people that use services and for those that provide them. Despite having difficult stories of social exclusion and stigma to tell, service users in Canada were open, warm and hospitable. They were also very excited to be included in research from so far away! Their willingness to open up and discuss their experiences left me feeling humble and full of gratitude.

During my final days in Alberta, I was also able to meet with the Mental Health Commission of Canada. This gave me a chance to present my research and to discuss some of the findings from Canada. As a consequence, the Commission have agreed to incorporate the findings from my research into their recommendations for remote and rural populations once the study is completed.

Being sponsored by UHI to go to Canada was an exciting and unforgettable part of my PhD. In particular, it allowed me the opportunity to go and experience a different culture for a while, and, in doing so, to understand where points of similarity meet and diverge between rural Canada and our own culture here in Highland, within the context of mental health. Such a unique opportunity will hopefully inspire others who are considering a career in academia that it's not all desk work!