

INDIGENOUS SUCCESS PODCAST RAQUAL & ROBYN

Voiceover

Welcome to “Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, being it”, with Dr Katelyn Barney and Professor Tracey Bunda.

Dr Barney

Hi, I’m Katelyn, and welcome to our podcast series, “Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, being it”. We’d like to start the podcast by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we’re recording this, and pay our respects to their ancestors and their descendants and acknowledge that we’re recording this podcast on Aboriginal land.

The podcast series focuses on what works in outreach programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students. The series is part of a suite of resources developed from an Equity Fellowship that I undertook in 2020 that was funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education and it focuses on success factors that are based on key findings from the Fellowship. Each episode is an interview with an Indigenous staff member or university student about aspects of effective outreach programs. I’m a non-Indigenous woman born and raised on Jagera and Turrbal Country and I’m joined by my co-host and colleague, Professor Tracey Bunda who was part of the Indigenous advisory group on the Fellowship.

Dr Bunda

Thanks, Katelyn. Hi, everyone. I’m a Ngugi/Wakka Wakka woman and I’m the Academic Director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland. Katelyn and I decided to call the podcast series, “Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, being it” because there are multiple understandings of “success” in this context: what are the influences within our life that enable us to move towards success, what are our life experiences and how do they influence our understandings of “success”, where we’re located – that’s an important one to think about in terms of our success, and how do cultural matters influence the type of success that we want to be able to have?

It’s important for us to be able to think about these practices, particularly because we are working with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and they may want to come to university. Also, you’ll hear Katelyn and I use the terms “Aboriginal” and “Torres Strait Islander”, “Indigenous”, maybe “First Nations” in this podcast, and we want to acknowledge this and note we are aware of the diversity and the different perspectives on the use of these terms. We hope that we’ve been inclusive.

Dr Barney

We also hope that the podcast series is useful for outreach practitioners working with Indigenous students, but we also hope the podcast is useful for anyone with an interest in student equity and student success in higher education more generally.

Our guests today are Raqual Nutley and Robyn Donnelly who are part of the outreach and engagement team in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland. Welcome.

Dr Bunda

Would you like introduce yourselves in whatever way you are comfortable?

Raqual Nutley

My name is Raqual Nutley. I'm an Yiman and Mununjali woman, and I've lived in Brisbane my whole life. I've been at the University of Queensland since 2018.

Robyn Donnelly

Hi, my name's Robyn Donnelly, and I'm a proud Bidjara woman; I come from Central Queensland. I come from a really small town that's got a population of about 160 people. So, I've got a lot of life experience to pass on to young people. I work in the Outreach and Engagement Team and I've been there for four years now, and absolutely passionate about what I do.

Dr Barney

Thanks, Robyn and Raqual. Can you tell us a bit more about your roles in the university?

Raqual Nutley

I am currently the Senior Leader of the Outreach and Engagement team. Previously to that, I was the Outreach and Engagement Officer, and I worked heavily within the regions of Cairns, Townsville, and Central Queensland, as well as Toowoomba. Really passionate about this work, have really seen the life of a student from high school to university, now to graduation so that has been a real highlight of this role.

Robyn Donnelly

I'm a Senior Aboriginal Engagement Officer. Our job is to work with high school students, engaging with them, those that are on a pathway to university, and we run camps, we run tertiary experience days. So, it's a really exciting role because I absolutely love meeting these students, and seeing them go on to those next steps and really succeed in life.

Dr Bunda

Rob, you were talking about the camps and the other programs that you offer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are thinking of coming to the university. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Robyn Donnelly

Yes. We run five of these camps throughout the year and they're always in the school holidays; in the January holidays, we run the senior engineering and the junior STEM consecutively, and then in the June/July holidays we have the health science camp, and then in the September holidays, we have the spring camp which is more of a taster camp for those students that are not really certain about what they want to do - that encompasses business, economics, and law. And then we've got a brand new camp this year that we're really excited about and that's the humanities and social sciences camp. As we've been going around the regions and talking to the students, they seem to be very, very excited about that camp.

The other things that we do of course is tertiary experience days. This year, we had over 100 students on campus from Hymba Yumba, the independent school in Springfield. So, we've got a brand new program for the tertiary experience days that Jackson designed and it's called the "Great Race" and it's about getting students to go around the campus, finding certain

locations via their own means, so they have to figure out how to do it and so they're able to navigate their way and see what's around the university. That's been very exciting.

Dr Bunda

Raqual, you've been working these camps for a long time now. What have been the highlights of those camps for you?

Raqual Nutley

The highlight for me has been seeing the students connect and keep that connection post-camp, and then into school, and then post-high school. It's been really fun to see them connect with each other if they're from the same region. For example, if they're both from Cairns, connecting there, or even if they're both interested in the same degree. For example, they will come to health science camp and a couple might be really interested in nursing so they'll create that connection and hopefully study nursing together in the long-term. Another highlight has been seeing them get a glimpse of the degree that they have potential interest in, and then seeing if that's exactly what they want to do or if they don't want to do it. For example, a student could come in really interested in nursing or midwifery but then they do a session on camp with dentistry and they're like "Actually, dentistry is what I'm really interested in".

So, just giving them that opportunity to explore a range of disciplines within a faculty has been really exciting to watch.

Dr Barney

Raqual, before you mentioned that you've enjoyed seeing students transition from school and into university, and, you know, beyond the program. An aspect of the fellowship that people talked about was that they'd like more post-engagement, so, students talked about beyond the program they'd like more engagement with staff and also staff talked about it was something that they can improve. What have you guys been doing in the post-engagement space.

Raqual Nutley

Post-engagement has been interesting for our team. I think Covid really allowed us time to look at what we do post-engagement, and to see what has worked, what hasn't worked. I will be honest and say we haven't been great at it, but this year we've really started to implement some strategies on post-engagement, and in particular, engaging those that are in Grade 12. Robyn can probably speak a little bit more in-depth on activities that we've been doing.

Robyn Donnelly

Yes, certainly. Some of the things that we've started doing intensely is following up post-camps, getting out to those students, and the schools, and their parents, sending them information about the university and making sure they've got that on hand when they need it. And also, following up later on down the track just to make sure that we're staying in contact and answering any of the questions they have, and especially making those relationships with the schools as well, and making sure that they're aware that we're there when they need us, give them any information they may require. So that's been really great. And one of the things that we've been doing too is while the students are on camp, we've been taking photographs, and then we'll send those through to both the students, the parents, and the schools, and that's been great for the schools as well because they end up putting it in their newsletters.

And so, that's another part of our post-engagement that's just really, really good. We're starting to really up the ante and really engage with those students.

Raqual Nutley

We have also been targeting those schools. For example, if a student is at a school up in Cairns, we will go and visit that school when we're in that region, so it creates that connection again and again. It's also a benefit when we present to that school that those students see that another peer of theirs has been to a camp, in particular when we show photos in the presentation and they can see students that they know, and if we show videos and that they can see students that they know in those videos having a great time. So, while we're doing post-engagement, we're also doing promotion at the same time, so it's two-fold.

Dr Bunda

It sounds really simple doesn't it – those strategies for connection, but they are really quite critical. I also know that you have been conducting – your team has been conducting – alumni events for those students who are now at university, but came to university through the camp programs. Would you mind to talk about that a little bit?

Robyn Donnelly

So, we've started our first alumni event this year, the inaugural one, which was a great success, because it was really great to see those students coming; the very first camps from 2014 – we had a couple of students and we had some new students as well. We had two twins from North Queensland who started at the University of Queensland this year and it was really great to see them building relationships because we've got them to talk about what degrees they're doing, what camps they were at, and so then they started talking to each other because they were doing similar degrees, they had similar interests, and one of the big aspects of that as well was talking about our ambassadors on camps. So, we were able to engage with them and tell them about that as well. It's been really successful because it's about building relationships, and staying engaged with them.

Dr Bunda

Sounds like building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families so that those families of university students with common interests can stay together and help each other and support each other. Particularly in really large universities where our student numbers are small, it's good to be able to look across the Great Court and see a group of another Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Raqual Nutley

Just to add on to that alumni event, we had a lot of students in attendance that were a part of the program before me and Robyn had even been working in the team. For example, we have students that had come to a 2014, 2015, 2016 camp. We didn't realise that while sending out this broad email to all of these students that had been on a camp that we were going to get students from years ago; we thought we would have gotten more recent students but it was really surprising for us that it still works.

Dr Bunda

The podcast is called "Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, being it". What does "Indigenous success" mean to you?

Robyn Donnelly

To me, Tracey, it means seeing these students that we work with in camps go on and be inspired to take those next steps and go to university. And it's all about seeing them grow – you know, they come in very shy first year, and they gain more and more confidence as the years go by, and then gradually seeing them graduate. To me, this is important because a lot of them want to take that degree back to their communities, and so, it's about not only them building confidence and when they get their jobs, making more money, but it's about helping their families out as well. I think that's really important – “Being it doing it, thinking it” sums it up I think because that's what it's about. When they come to the camp, they're doing it, and when they gain that knowledge that we give to them, they're thinking about it, and they take that back home, and then seeing it is when they eventually come to university. So, I think that pretty well sums it up.

Raqual Nutley

Yeah, Robyn really summed it up in her answer. Just to add on it, I think the driving factor of these camps is for the students to see the opportunities as well as connecting with each other, and I think for me, “success” is just being in a space that you want to be in and achieving the goals that you've set for yourself because “success” can mean a lot of different things for a lot of people, and I think we just really want the students to see what life they want to live, what opportunities they want to take and where they want to go post-school.

Dr Barney

Thanks so much, Robyn and Raqual. Are there any other things around post-engagement that you'd like to mention?

Raqual Nutley

One thing I really want to highlight is that we do these camps in partnership with Faculties and Schools, so it's not just the job of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to hold these camps. These are our camps and we do run the program, but we work very closely with the Business School, the School of Economics, Engineering, the Faculties within Health Sciences, we work with them to create the best possible program for the students. In addition, we do get funding from them as well, so there is an economic contribution from these schools and faculties because if we're honest, we want to increase Indigenous engagement and Indigenous enrolment across the university. So, I think it is a great thing when we're all together and involved in creating these programs.

Another thing I want to just add on the post-engagement – I think it's a very fine line between engaging and forcing engagement, particularly for those students that have come to a camp, have graduated high school and then don't come to UQ. We still try and keep engagement but we don't force it.

Robyn Donnelly

It's up to them – they might want to come to uni later.

Raqual Nutley

We are very aware that there is gap years; students might go to TAFE, students might go to another university, and then they'll come here, or they could do a bio-medicine degree at QUT and then do a doctor of medicine at UQ. We are aware there's so many different pathways but our job is to still create that space for alumni to be a part of.

Robyn Donnelly

Just to add to that as well, we take very seriously what we do. We're always getting feedback and we're always refining what we do so that we can do it better and better each time.

Dr Bunda

That's a good point. Thanks, Robyn. Katelyn and I both want to thank you for joining this podcast series "Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, and being it". If you've got any questions about this podcast or any of the other podcasts that you may have listened to, please contact Katelyn on her email address – "k.barney..." – that is B-A-R-N-E-Y – k.barney@UQ.edu.au. Thank you very much, and we hope that you'll join us in the future.

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