

Research bridges past and future for Woppaburra women

By TIAHNA FIDDLING

What began as PhD thesis has become a life-changing experience for CQUniversity's Julie Rogers who is fulfilling her ancestral duty, connecting with culture, and creating better health and wellbeing outcomes for her people through research.

Her thesis, titled *Yilum: Cultural Continuity and Wellness Among Woppaburra Women: A Model of Recovery, Rediscovery, Reconnection, Regeneration, Resilience and Resurgence* (The 6 R's), serves as a model for how culturally informed research can address injustices and support Indigenous communities.

The study explored how utilising 'The 6 R's', could address the historical and contemporary challenges faced by Woppaburra women, from the impact of colonialism to systemic racism, and gendered health perspectives.

As a proud Woppaburra woman from a line of strong matriarchs and community activists, Dr Rogers said her heritage was a key motivator for the study, drawing from her lived experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"Woppaburra people are the sovereign custodians of the Keppel islands on the Central

East Coast of Queensland. In 1902, my ancestors were massacred down to 17 people and forcibly removed from our sea country," Dr Rogers explained.

"I believe culturally, I had an ancestral mandate from my great grandfather to bring our people together by connecting women with our cultural heritage — bridging the past and future in the present."

Dr Rogers research has already brought significant benefits to the Woppaburra people in terms of engagement and impact.

By employing an Indigenist research framework and culturally responsive methods, Dr Rogers has not only been successful in contributing to academic knowledge, but in fostering cultural continuity and wellness, promoting a more inclusive and respectful understanding of First Nations women's roles and contributions.

"Indigenous knowledge is not just a paradigm within Western Academia, we have our own knowledge systems, and they should be valued and respected," she said.

"The study has brought together Woppaburra women, some of whom had never met their family members before,

enabling them to foster connections and the sharing of cultural knowledge. As a result, these women are now experiencing an enhanced sense of connection and pride in their cultural identity.

"I was able to identify fundamental cultural domains within the Woppaburra worldview, including Country and spirituality, Lore and ceremony, family and kinship, men's and women's business, totems, art, dance and song, language, and relationship entities like weather, flora and fauna, food, medicines, and implements.

"However, the biggest achievement is having the opportunity to have four generations of Woppaburra women and children on Country. This has occurred a minimum of three times during my PhD and this has not happened since our removal in 1902."

Looking to the future, Dr Rogers plans to continue her work with First Nations cultural capability, joining CQUniversity as Senior Research Officer at the Jawun Research Institute.

"My whole PHD was a spiritual journey and at times when I thought I should defer or quit, I believe my ancestors put things in my way to get me back on track. Along with the support of my



Dr Julie Rogers

family, friends and research supervisors Professor Jenni Judd and Professor Bronwyn Fredericks.

"My passion for social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and overall wellness for my people has only continued to grow," Dr Rogers said.

"I plan to proceed with more language revival and establishing regular women's activities, such as Welcoming new Woppaburra descendants on Country to

resurge our cultural lores, values and practices.

"Through my role at CQU I am also currently involved in two projects that aim to improve the health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."

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