

Dancing to her own beat

As a performer, Taryn Beatty (Drummond) has travelled to all corners of the globe, dancing and sharing her culture in North America, Europe and many other places. But it was at an intimate performance in Sydney that she had an encounter that would change her life.

It was NAIDOC Week in 2017, and Taryn's dance group Beatty Clan Crew (formerly known as InDidgDance) was performing for ACU's Yalbalinga unit, the on-campus hub that provides support to Indigenous students.

"We had arrived to dance for the students, and I was surprised to see so many of our mob there," says Taryn, a Torres Strait Islander and Wuthathi woman. "I was told they were studying to be schoolteachers, and I thought to myself, 'Oh wow'."

Teaching had long been at the back of Taryn's mind, right back to her school days on Gimuy Country in Cairns. Intrigued, she asked for more information.

"I had a yarn to the staff and Indigenous students, and before I knew it, the following year I started a teaching degree. I just thought, 'Why not give it a go?'"

Six years on, she's on the verge of graduating with her Bachelor of Education (Primary).

"The support from Yalbalinga has been key," says Taryn, who currently teaches at a school in Sydney's west.

"It's not just the academic support, it's being around other mob, always coming together, always pushing each other. There's always some connection and always support when you need it."

Years ago, when Taryn completed high school, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were vastly underrepresented in higher education.

"To be honest, I never thought I'd go to university," she says. "I didn't think I had the capacity, and there wasn't much support back then."

She forged a career as a performer, moving to Sydney in 1993 to study at NAISDA Dance College. Taryn is among a group of esteemed NAISDA alumni including Christine Anu and Stephen Page.

"I see dancing as movement that can be therapeutic, but even more than that, it's sharing culture and sharing knowledge," she says. "It gives us a way to tell our stories."

Since starting her teaching degree, Taryn has juggled work and study through ACU's Away from Base program, which enables Indigenous students to blend online learning with intensive residential blocks twice a semester.

"It's suited both my learning and my lifestyle," says Taryn, who was one of four Torres Strait Islander performers in the Force Majeure production of Gurr Era Op.

While teaching is now Taryn's main gig, she'll keep performing as long as she can.

"I didn't think I could do it, but here I am – a teacher," she says. "Still dancing, still moving and still learning."



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