

higher education 2026

YOUR GUIDE TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HIGHER EDUCATION

Turning compassion into a career



FOR Tamara Solien, a proud Torres Strait Islander woman with connections to Badu Island, returning to study after 11 years as a stay-at-home mum was a leap of faith.

"The idea of returning to study and work was so scary after being out of the workforce for so long, so I wanted to make sure I was pursuing something I was passionate about," she said.

"If I was going to be stepping back from being a fulltime mum, it needed to be worth it."

After witnessing her brothers struggle with their own mental-health, the 37-year-old wanted to learn more so she could gain insights into what her brothers were going through. So when she saw the opportunity to study the Certificate IV in Mental-Health (CHC43315) through TAFE Queensland, she knew it was time to invest in herself, and her future.

Tamara studied online and was able to access Fee-Free TAFE funding to help cover the cost of her course. The flexibility

of online learning made it possible to balance study with parenting and everyday life.

"The online space was great and enabled me to have my youngest with me while I studied," she said.

"While it was hard work, I could catch up on classes and do it at my own pace, which was perfect. I would even play my class recordings and listen to them while I was in the car driving."

Tamara credits her teachers for helping her stay on track and importantly, building her confidence.

"The teachers were amazing. If I didn't understand something or needed that extra guidance, they were always so supportive and helpful," she said.

After years away from formal education, Tamara had doubts about her ability to succeed. But with encouragement from her teachers and support from her family, she found her voice and her strength.

"Being a mum myself and going back to study, I lacked confidence in myself and worried I wasn't smart enough,"

she said.

"I wanted to support other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers who felt the same."

Tamara's placement at Staying Deadly Hub, a First Nations mental health service, led to a job offer before she even graduated. Now working as a mental health wellbeing support worker, she helps clients feel safe and supported during appointments with psychologists, psychiatrists, and care teams.

"I'm like the in-between bridge so our clients aren't so overwhelmed when they come in seeking support," she said.

"Seeing someone leave a session in a lighter mood and better headspace, and knowing that I helped, is just so rewarding."

Do what feels right for right now

Whether you're returning to study, changing careers, or building on lived experience, TAFE Queensland is here to help you succeed – on your terms.

Call 1300 308 233 or visit tafeqld.edu.au to start your journey.



TAFE Queensland student Tamara Solien is turning her compassion for others into a rewarding career.

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