



Lisa Roe is studying her Bachelor of Early Childhood Education through Swinburne Online, supported by the Moondani Toombadool Centre.

The journey from the cattle station to the classroom



LISA Roe grew up in Geraldton, living and working on a cattle station. For a long time, she assumed this was where her future lay. But deep down, she knew it wasn't what she really wanted.

"Living and working on cattle stations, I met so many people from all over the world and all walks of life," Lisa said. "I started reflecting on my life and what the future was for me."

Lisa had a growing sense that there was more out there for her, so she made a brave decision. She left Geraldton and moved to Derby, away from family and everything she knew, to forge her own path.

Lisa immediately felt at home in Derby. She found work at the local Derby District High School as an education assistant and quickly discovered just how much she loved being in a learning environment. She watched the way her colleagues taught and began to notice how each student responded in the classroom. She was interested in the children's behaviour and the different ways they engaged with learning.

"I am like a sponge that soaks everything up and still wants to gain more," Lisa said. "I just want to fill my curious mind."

While raising her own children

and working at the school, Lisa enrolled in an education support course through TAFE, attending classes in the evening. But, she still wanted to learn more. When she came across an ad for online study, she decided to give it a go. She rang the number and enrolled in Swinburne's Bachelor of Early Childhood Education.

At first, it felt like a leap into the deep end.

"Earlier in my studies, I tried to balance it all on my own, and I was falling into a place where I was finding it hard to take control of my journey," Lisa said.

She was juggling work, study, and caring for her family, all while trying to navigate university systems on her own. Online learning gave her flexibility, but it was also isolating at times. Lisa felt lost and like she was "swimming through muddy water".

Things started to change when Lisa discovered the Moondani Toombadool Centre, Swinburne's dedicated support service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. That first phone call changed everything.

"Once I found out there was an Indigenous support centre and I reached out, that was the real

start of my journey and achievements," Lisa said.

Established in 2018, the Moondani Toombadool Centre is responsible for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters at Swinburne, including Indigenous student support and success services, teaching and learning, research, staff, culture, engagement and governance.

The Moondani Toombadool Centre prides itself on helping to create real connections and strong relationships with mob studying at Swinburne. The team gave Lisa practical support, helping with enrolment, assignments, deadlines and communication with the university. Just as importantly, the team provided Lisa with connection, community and encouragement throughout her studies.

"The Moondani Toombadool Centre gave me the direction to believe in myself, and anything is possible if you believe in yourself," Lisa said.

As Lisa progressed through the course, she found herself learning more than just the curriculum. The early childhood education course explores innovative teaching methods and introduces students to unique units on nature play, social justice, sustainability and Indigenous knowledges. Lisa found herself deeply engaged with the content and even more

determined to put her learning into practice.

Lisa's confidence began to grow. She remembers one subject where she had to film herself speaking on camera about the importance of reading in early childhood.

"I was terrified about my appearance and if I was talking properly, if my English was good," she remembers.

But she did the assignment and slowly, those little moments of doubt gave way to small wins, another passed subject, a kind word from a tutor, a goal achieved. Each one added to her confidence.

The flexible learning environment gave her space to study on her own terms. The course structure, designed for people working or with family responsibilities, meant she could balance study around the realities of life in a remote town.

With the support of the Moondani Toombadool Centre and her colleagues, Lisa kept going. She found that "those muddy waters became clear".

Today, Lisa is still working at the Derby District High School. Watching the children she supports greet her with easy smiles and cheeky banter, it is clear she is deeply respected and valued in her role.

She's now in the final stages of

her degree, with her sights set on becoming a teacher. Her goal is to keep working with young people in her community and help guide them in their own learning journeys.

Looking back, she says she feels very different to the person who first signed up.

"Looking at where I was and where I am now is incredible. I have grown so much. Anything is possible," Lisa said.

When asked what advice she has for someone interested in studying at Swinburne her answer was simple.

"Do it," she encouraged. "It is worth the laughter, the tears and the achievement."

Whether you're studying online or on campus, the Moondani Toombadool Centre is here to support you. Contact indigenoustudents@swinburne.edu.au for a friendly yarn about how the Moondani Toombadool Centre team can help you to achieve your study and career goals.