

Aspiring Indigenous teacher turns mentor after 'light bulb' moment

Kayden Edwards was born, raised and educated in Western Sydney.

At 21, he is now four years into his dream degree at university and is giving back to his community on the road to becoming a primary school teacher.

"The first time I thought about university as a real option for me was after meeting James Bourke, an Indigenous officer at my high school. To this day, he remains a real idol of mine."

It was through James, who leads an Indigenous engagement initiative at St Dominic's College in Penrith, that Kayden first connected with the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) and realised the power of mentorship and learning.

"AIME provided support, tutoring and a connection to culture that motivated me in my final years of high school," he said.

"With encouragement from the program and James, I started thinking about what my future could hold as a teacher and it was exciting — and a little scary."

When Kayden received an early offer to the Bachelor of Arts (Pathway to Teaching Primary) at Western Sydney University, his family, particularly his dad, were chuffed.



Kayden Edwards is studying teaching at Western Sydney University and is an ambassador for the Pathways to Dreaming program.

"I applied through the uni's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pathway Program. After sitting the literacy and numeracy assessments, I received an early offer which relieved loads of stress around the HSC period."

"I'm the first in my family to attend university, so it was a proud day when I got accepted into my degree for all of us."

"Now I get to pass on what I have learned through the experience. I'm able to support

my younger sister and brothers to reach their goals."

In his early uni years, Kayden helped run a before-school pick-up program through the Diocese of Parramatta for students experiencing disadvantage in the Mount Druitt area.

"The program was eye-opening for me. I realised kids coming to school with a smile on their faces weren't necessarily happy at home."

"It was an important grounding for me as a future teacher and an experience I will never forget."

Kayden has continued striving to empower others to consider further education ever since, including fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

"I'm now a Student

Ambassador for Western Sydney University and I work with primary and high school students to let them know about the many options available to them."

"We visit students at school, bring them onto campus and we're now accessible online. It's all about helping them feel informed and supported in their dreams and passions."

"I'm really proud to be an ambassador for the Pathways to Dreaming program in particular — to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

across Year 8 to Year 12 to see higher education as a viable option, so they too can have the 'light bulb' moment I had in school."

Kayden said growing up alongside Western Sydney University and seeing its impact on the region, made the decision to study at the university an easy one.

"The degree was everything I hoped it would be.

"While studying and working two jobs, it's been great to have access to eleven campuses and to drop by the Badanami Centre for Indigenous Education — even if it's just to see a familiar face, make use of the many resources it provides or to reconnect."

Western Sydney University's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pathway Program provides an alternative pathway into Western's undergraduate degree programs.

We accept applications throughout the year with assessment workshops scheduled in May (2021 mid-year commencement), August (2022 commencement) and November (2022 commencement).

For more information or to apply visit westernsydney.edu.au/pathwayprogram

Success for regional students at Macquarie University

Moving to Sydney to study from a regional area, away from family and country can be a daunting and overwhelming experience. However, Brooklyn Paulson and Elijah Smyth have grabbed the opportunity with both hands and have exciting futures ahead of them.

Brooklyn Paulson a proud Worimi and Biripi woman from Forster has just begun her first year of a Bachelor of Psychology. Brooklyn is the first person in her family to attend university but somehow always knew that it was the path for her.

Elijah Smyth, a Wiradjuri and Bundjalung man originally from Casino, grew up in Orange and had great support from his family and teachers to pursue tertiary education. Elijah is in his third year of a Bachelor of Human Sciences.

We caught up with Brooklyn and Elijah to talk about their university experience so far:

BROOKLYN

What inspired you to study at Macquarie University?

I chose to come to Macquarie University after attending Camp Aspire at the start of 2020

(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 11 and 12 students). I really liked the area and the accommodation at Dunmore Lang College.

It was great to see the different teaching styles and see firsthand what my classes might look like.

How did you find moving to Sydney to go to university?

I was nervous about moving to Sydney and it was a big adjustment being away from my family and friends. Thankfully, I have felt very welcomed and supported by Walanga Muru and Dunmore Lang College.

What has ensured your successful transition to study?

The First Year Advisor program

offered by Walanga Muru has been particularly helpful in ensuring my smooth transition to university life.

ELIJAH

What inspired you to study at Macquarie University?

I had great support from my stepmum, my family and my favourite teacher at school.

I then met a guy (at a local Careers Expo in Orange) who was so engaging and supportive of my future study plans. He explained the Bachelor of Human Sciences and made uni seem like a great option for me.

How did you find moving to Sydney to go to university?

It was a big deal moving to Sydney for my studies, at the beginning I felt like a small fish in a big pond, but the guidance from Walanga Muru and the First Year Advisor program were invaluable.

You are now in your final year, what can you share about your experience with other students considering going to university?

Moving to Sydney for further study pushed me out of my comfort zone, and I feel as though I have grown a lot since being at university.

I have gained independence and feel a lot more confident to embrace opportunities that come my way.

Walanga Muru provides academic, cultural, professional and social opportunities in a culturally affirming space, ensuring a positive and successful student experience.

To find out more about being part of our community please go to mq.edu.au/walanga-muru-pathway or email wmpathways@mq.edu.au



Studying at Macquarie University are Wiradjuri and Bundjalung man Elijah Smyth, in his third year of a Bachelor of Human Sciences, and Worimi and Biripi woman Brooklyn Paulson, who has just begun the first year of a Bachelor of Psychology.