

# Aspiring actor follows his dreams to study at top New York institute

Y away from Luke Hodge – an aspiring actor, director and producer who took a chance on an audition of a lifetime halfway around the world.

A proud Dughutti man, Luke is a third-year student studying a Bachelor of Communication (Screen Media) at Western Sydney University and is a future New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts (NYCDA) international student.

After three months of gruelling interviews and auditions, Luke was accepted into the conservatory to study an Associate Degree in Film and TV.

"This is a dream come true for me, and as I look forward to the future, my goal is to venture into the film and video game industry as an actor, creative director and producer creating cinematic masterpieces for the next generation," said Luke.

"I also dream to be a local voice representing my proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community on a big scale. Through film and TV directing, producing and acting, I aim to provide a spotlight to our

Proud Dughutti man Luke Hodge is studying a Bachelor of Communication (Screen Media) at Western Sydney University.



strong cultural heritage that brings a remarkable amount of pride to my family and myself every day."

An avid storyteller, Luke is a passionate leader and advocate for Western Sydney and beyond. He was awarded the 2022 NSW Aboriginal Land Council

Educational Scholarship.

Luke was shaped by his upbringing in Western Sydney where he grew up on Dharawal land – Campbelltown – and attended John Therry Catholic College.

"From a young age, I have

always been inspired by the arts. I vividly remember watching my favourite films and reciting dialogue and performing impersonations in front of the mirror. Cinema has been an integral part of my life and it helps to propel me," he said.

Luke's transition from high school to tertiary education wasn't a clear path. At the age of 15, he was diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder, Behcet's Disease.

"At such a young age, my diagnosis changed my outlook on life and affected me in more ways than I ever thought it would. Despite this, I was inspired to motivate and inspire the people around me. I became school captain, though within my HSC I spent three to four months in hospital. Because of such a long absence, I was unable to continue an ATAR pattern of study."

"I knew that I was capable and confident that university study was for me. As the first member of my family to attend tertiary education, I worked hard and despite all the challenges I faced, the University's Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander Pathway Program gave me a chance. Because I believed in my academic ability, I was able to make my dream a reality."

The experience left a lasting impression on Luke, motivating him to help other students to achieve their goals and give back to his community.

"My mantra is if I'm not outdoing myself on my previous attempt or I'm not learning, then I'm not growing as a person. I always wish and want to better my best so I can help others to better their best. Like my ancestors before me, the ability to advocate for what I believe in and for the people I care about is an honour."

During his final year of studies at Western Sydney University, Luke hopes to continue inspiring and connecting with others before relocating to New York to start his next chapter.

"Every day I'm driven to inspire my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers and communities to recognise we are much stronger than we think we are."

# Career in nursing: Casey is helping and healing

Casey Dodd chose a career in nursing because she wanted to help and to heal. As a young mum of four children she had completed a Certificate III in Aged Care but wanted more. So, she applied to Charles Sturt University to study a Bachelor of Nursing.

"I had completed a Certificate III while I was raising my children and I thought, 'why not take it further?'. I wanted to see how far I could go. I've always been interested in health."

Healthcare let Casey help people and build connections. Nursing, in particular, meant she could make a real difference – especially to First Nations people.

"I feel nurses are one of the most important parts of a person's health journey. They're with you from start to finish. And as a First Nations person, I see the healthcare issues First Nations people face: the gap in life expectancy and the lower health outcomes. I wanted to be a part of closing that gap for my own people."

## The Charles Sturt nursing experience

Studying with Charles Sturt opened up a world of possibilities for Casey.

"My goal was to build clinical knowledge and skills, in the hope that I could one day make a difference for First Nations people. But something else I really enjoyed about Charles Sturt was that I experienced so many different areas of healthcare. I realised that my future could hold so many



Studying at Charles Sturt University opened up a world of possibilities for Casey Dodd.

different prospects and I'm definitely open to them all.

"And Charles Sturt was great, especially when it came to work placements. When I put forward ideas, my preferences, of what would work for me and my children, they were happy to accommodate that."

For Casey, that flexibility was vital because the Bachelor of Nursing involved more than 800 hours of clinical placement. (After all, getting hands-on is what we do at Charles Sturt).

## Casey keeps moving forward

Thinking of heading to Charles Sturt to get a qualification and land your dream job?



Charles Sturt University offers degrees in nursing.

Casey offers some great advice.

"My best tip for someone starting university or thinking about starting would be to just keep moving forward. Don't give up. There are definitely plenty of times that will test your motivation and your will to keep going, but it does get better if you

stick it out. It's so worthwhile in the end.

"Charles Sturt University has helped my self-worth in the sense that I've done something I never saw myself doing. The hard work I've put in has given me more passion to be good in my career. I definitely want to do some postgraduate study."