



# Creating change

By DARBY JONES

Thanks to the generous support of The University of Queensland (UQ) scholarships, **Jaala Ozies** can pursue her passion for helping people.

Through her Master of Social Work at UQ, she aspires to create change within her local community.

Jaala is a Djukun woman from Broome, Western Australia.

When I caught up with her recently, she had just returned from a visit and was eager to tell me all about it.

## A long way from home

“Djukun Country is wild Country,” Jaala said.

“It’s geographically remote and isolated ... there are so many beautiful colours – the turquoise waters and the red pindan dirt.

“It’s the barrgana (cold weather) season at the moment and the Lirringgin (soapbush wattle) are in flower, which means the stingrays and mullets are fat.”

Jaala has made the long journey from Broome to Brisbane to study a Master of Social Work.

She has always had a passion for people.

This passion led her into hairdressing – a career she worked in for many years before pursuing an undergraduate degree in community development.

“My hairdressing career helped me realise that I wanted to work with people

on a deeper level – to help them and advocate for them.”

Jaala has chosen a Master of Social Work to hone her skills even further before taking everything she has learned back to her community.

She aspires to create a positive change in the realm of human rights and social justice.

She claimed that her decision to come to UQ felt like a natural progression.

“It’s a big adjustment, but there are so many supports in place.”

## The power of scholarships

Jaala spoke of the support she has received through UQ scholarships, which has not only helped her move to Brisbane, but take time off work to focus on her studies.

“It has made a world of difference,” she said.

“It would have been a lot harder for me without it ... I would have had to defer until I could relocate interstate and I would probably still be in Broome trying to work and save up to get back here.”

Instead, Jaala has been living on campus, where she is able to devote the time to engage deeply with her program.

Reflecting on what she has learned so far and how much she is enjoying it, she said that UQ’s Master of Social Work is honing the skills that she developed throughout her undergraduate studies.

## Extracurricular opportunities

In addition to developing her professional skills, Jaala is making the

most of her time on campus by engaging in UQ’s extracurricular programs.

Since arriving at Kev Carmody House in February 2023, she has taken part in numerous extracurricular opportunities, such as UQ Ventures’ Curiosity program, which is designed to teach students business skills and build a network of like-minded entrepreneurs across all areas of UQ.

“I had a fantastic time and I learned so much about the business world,” Jaala said.

“We’ve got great opportunities here at UQ, so many wonderful opportunities to help you grow and learn.”

Another opportunity Jaala valued was UQ’s Winter School, where she attended a one-week intensive course on Indigenous Language revitalisation, held by the UQ School of Languages and Cultures.

After identifying that the Djukun language wasn’t on the list, one of the course lecturers offered to help her record it.

Coached by her uncle, Jaala and her course lecturer recorded 50 Djukun words from a 120-year-old Djukun language list.

“It was a fantastic opportunity I couldn’t refuse,” she said.

Jaala has learned some exciting facts about Djukun Country during her time at UQ.

Recently, she met Associate Professor Steven Salisbury from the UQ School of the Environment, whose work on Djukun Country over the last decade has helped

showcase the area’s spectacular fossilised dinosaur footprints.

Jaala was so grateful for the opportunity to meet a researcher who could help her explore the links between these tracks and her own cultural heritage.

Jaala spoke of how the support she received to relocate has enabled her to pursue passions outside of UQ, and how these have helped her to learn and grow.

She spoke eagerly of a book writing workshop in West End, where she would hone her writing skills.

Inspired by her experience with the School of Languages and Cultures, she is in the process of writing a children’s book to teach Djukun to the people in her community.

## Words of wisdom

Perhaps one of Jaala’s fondest memories of her time at UQ is a yarnning circle at Kev Carmody House.

It was there that she met award-winning singer, songwriter and activist Uncle Kev Carmody, who offered her some words of wisdom.

“Uncle Kev told me, don’t lose heart. Don’t give up. Just go for it.”

When asked if she had any advice for people who were considering coming to UQ, she said:

“UQ is all about creating change. When you come to UQ, you can create change. Don’t talk yourself out of it before you begin. You have to start somewhere. From little things, big things grow.”

“My hairdressing career helped me realise that I wanted to work with people on a deeper level – to help them and advocate for them.”  
– Jaala Ozies



Jaala Ozies is a Djukun woman from Broome. She is studying a Master of Social Work at UQ.