



“That little kid in the bush is well and truly alive in me. I walk into the Faculty of Medicine and I say to him: Look at what we’ve done. Look at what we’ve created. We did this.”
– Cameron Callope

Cameron Callope is a Gkuthaarn Thanikwithi man from the Gulf of Carpentaria. He is studying a Bachelor of Health Sciences at UQ.

Listen to your heart

By DARBY JONES

Cameron Callope is a Gkuthaarn Thanikwithi man from the Gulf of Carpentaria who, at the height of a successful music career, leapt into the unknown to pursue a Bachelor of Health Sciences at UQ.

I had the chance to sit down with him to talk about kinship and Country, his pathway to UQ, and how he had the courage to listen to his heart, embrace a massive change in his life and pursue a career in medicine.

Dream big, then dream bigger

Cameron began our chat by telling stories about his childhood home on Gkuthaarn Country.

He reflected on what it was like to grow up surrounded by his old people in a remote Indigenous community, sitting and yawning around the campfire.

“When they spoke, they spoke of connection,” he said.

“Of pain, excitement, magic, culture, wonder ... all the stories were of wonder and imagination and how we were a part of that – that that is who we are.”

It was these early experiences that taught him the power of imagination.

“I can’t emphasise enough the importance of imagination,” he said.

“I always return to a quote from Einstein: Imagination is the highest form of intelligence. Imagining what you could be in your life, where you could go, and the opportunities that are open to you.”

Cameron’s capacity for imagination has served him well throughout his life, helping him build a successful career

in the music industry as a rap artist and even work with international stars like Snoop Dogg.

“That life was everything I dreamt it would be,” he said.

“But I felt like there was still so much more out there.”

Taking the leap

It was this feeling that, at the height of his music career, inspired Cameron to pursue a career in medicine through a Bachelor of Health Sciences at UQ.

Cameron described how it felt arriving to St Lucia campus for the very first time:

“When you look at satellite pictures of Australia during the wet season, floodwater reaches out in all different directions,” he said.

“Eventually, it makes its way down to the main river system where it’s supposed to be.

“On my first day at UQ, I felt like I’d finally come down into that main river system where I was always supposed to be.”

Cameron spoke of travelling to UQ by bus on his first day and what it felt like to be among people who shared his ambitions.

He admitted that, as the bus approached UQ, he was overcome with joy.

He realised he had reached a place where he could create the life he wanted to live.

Pursuing your passion

Through his studies, Cameron has discovered a passion for public health.

He aspires to create positive systemic changes that will benefit his community.

“I think I could be of greater service looking at the social systems, public health, looking at ways in which we

could make a much more equitable society,” he said.

“One in which we understand that our differences as human beings are our strengths.”

When asked if he had any advice for people who were considering changing their career through tertiary study, Cameron was eager to share the following:

“If you’re not sure about what you want to study and where you want to go in life, that’s okay, that’s normal.

“One thing you realise when you get here, to UQ, is that everybody is finding their way, finding their feet.”

He reiterates that there’s nothing unnatural about this feeling, and he encourages students not to stall their momentum because of it.

“The best thing you can do is keep putting one foot in front of the other and move forward,” he said.

“Eventually, you’ll find that your heart will tell you which way to go ... that’s probably the best way to direct yourself, really.”

The power of philanthropy

Cameron is also an advocate for scholarships and expresses gratitude for the support he has received while studying at UQ.

“I’ve been fortunate to receive scholarships through UQ,” he said.

“For me, scholarships help to lessen the social stressors – accommodation, bills.

“They allow me to study in a safe, comfortable environment and be the best that I can be while I’m here at UQ.”

Cameron is the proud recipient of the Geoffrey Huey Sattler Indigenous Scholarship.

This scholarship was established in 2019 by a donation from the Estate of UQ Alumnus Geoffery Huey Sattler to support First Nations students in their studies at UQ in perpetuity.

He is also the recipient of the Fiona Kennedy Memorial Scholarship, which was established in 2020 by a donation from Professor Fred D’Agostino to honour the life of his UQ colleague.

“That scholarship was special to me because I know that Fiona was a member of staff at UQ,” Cameron said.

“I did my research after receiving it, and the significance of that scholarship wasn’t missed on me.”

While reflecting on his journey at UQ and how far he has come in his life, Cameron once again recalled that little boy from the bush.

“That little kid in the bush is well and truly alive in me. I walk into the Faculty of Medicine and I say to him: Look at what we’ve done. Look at what we’ve created. We did this.”

Darby Jones is a Kamilaroi writer and editor whose work has been featured in *The Jacaranda Journal*, *Beyond Queer Words*, and *Lemonade: Letters to Art*. He studies a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Writing, at UQ where, in 2022, he won the Kingshott Cassidy Poetry Prize. His manuscript-in-progress, “Unintelligible Bodies”, recently secured him a Varuna First Nations Fellowship for 2024.



Explore the pathways, scholarships, support and opportunities available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at UQ.

study.uq.edu.au/join-our-community