



Wiradjuri woman, Millie Mills engaging with students on her professional experience placement.

# Millie's pathway to becoming an inspiring teacher and making a change in community

The University of Newcastle is leading transformative change in rural and regional education, which is one thing that attracted proud Wiradjuri woman, Millie Mills, to the University.

Millie relocated from Wellington, in country NSW, and is currently in her second year of studying Education (Primary), something that she said is thanks to the Wollotuka Institute's Yapug program.

Yapug is a pathway program designed to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people gain skills for entry into undergraduate degrees at the University of Newcastle.

This year marks 25 years for the successful pathway program that has helped thousands of students gain an insight into university life as well as the skills they need to complete a degree.

Millie said becoming a teacher was never something she considered but doing the pathway program helped her figure out exactly what she wanted to do.

"Yapug was the best decision I ever made - it helped me find my calling as a teacher!" Millie said.

"The program definitely changed my mind set and helped me develop more skills to become a better learner and educator.

"One of the subjects I studied through Yapug was Aboriginal education. During the assignment, it broke my heart when I read the stats about the lack of education in our

rural Indigenous communities.

"Our kids aren't getting the support they need - and I want to change this and make a difference.

"I always say education is the key to all, and I want to be able to use my knowledge to help my community. When I finish my studies, I would love to go back to Wellington; they have given so much to me, and I want to give back to my community.

"I can't wait to be able to inspire our young people to be their true selves. I want them to know it doesn't matter what road you want to take, what career pathway you want to take, what education pathway you want to take - just as long as you are true to yourself, then that's the best you can possibly be," Millie added.

At the University of Newcastle, the belief is that every child deserves a quality education, and every teacher has the power to change lives, which is why the University has been leading the country in innovative teaching for 75 years and counting.

Millie attests to this and said she loves the teaching style and support provided at the University.

"I was anxious about attending Uni, not knowing what to expect and being away from home, but my teachers and the staff at Wollotuka have been nothing but supportive," Millie said.

"From the get-go, the place has been so welcoming, and I love it!

"The teachers are extremely helpful and approachable, and you can tell they care about what they teach; they're just so passionate about education.

"It's motivating to know you're being taught by the best and it drives my passion even more to become a teacher and inspire our young ones.

"I also love how the learning is a mix of online and face to face. I can watch lectures in my own time, as many times as I want if I need to catch up, and also maintain a study-work-life balance."

Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Strategy and Leadership and Head of the Wollotuka Institute, Nathan Towney, said teachers graduating from the University of Newcastle are in high demand as they graduate with globally transferable skills and qualifications.

"Our students graduate with the skills that make them highly employable. This includes ensuring they are culturally responsive and understand their role in our regions, communities and society," Mr Towney said.

"As proud Wiradjuri man and an undergraduate of the University, I can speak firsthand on the teaching style and support provided, especially to our Indigenous students which is a contributing factor as to why more Aboriginal teachers graduate here than at any other university in this country.

"The balance to learn the art of teaching, whilst also providing cultural support and reflection, as well as encouraging cultural identity as a strength, helped guide me to where I am today.

The Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle has supported more than 215 students through Yapug, with around 40 percent who have gone on to complete a degree.

"The Yapug program has been successfully running for 25 years, guiding many of our mob into careers and university degrees they never thought they could achieve," Mr Towney added.

"With the support of our deadly team here at Wollotuka, our students are constantly receiving the ongoing assistance they need. And for those who are living away from home, we try and make their stay feel as welcoming as possible - which is why we have the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled here."

If you're keen to take that step and enrol into university, but unsure what you would like to study, check out the University of Newcastle's Yapug program at [www.newcastle.edu.au/yapug](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/yapug) It allows you to explore your interest in different tertiary studies, prepare you for university and obtain a ranking to help you apply for a place in an undergraduate degree program.