



Anita Fagg, a proud Darumbal woman returns to study at Swinburne University of Technology as a mature age student to complete a Diploma of Community Services.

Anita's returning to school to empower her community

Embarking on an educational journey later in life can be daunting, but for Anita Fagg, it's proven to be an immensely fulfilling experience. Anita, a proud Darumbal woman, made the decision to return to studies as a mature age student to complete a Diploma of Community Services at Swinburne University of Technology.

Anita works as a Community Connector for Family Services clients at the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). Having recently moved into a new role, Anita was encouraged by her employer to pursue a Diploma of Community Services at Swinburne, tailored to her workplace needs and cultural background through VACCA's partnership with Swinburne.

VACCA is a state-wide Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation servicing children, young people, families, and community members. Swinburne and VACCA's partnership provides inclusive and culturally sensitive vocational training in community services, fostering workforce capability and self-determination within Indigenous communities.

When Anita attended Swinburne Orientation week, it felt like "one of those scenes in movies" as she watched the vibrant campus life and the joyful commotion of clubs vying for new members. "It was so great seeing so many different cultures, activities and clubs to become a member of," she recalls.

The vibrant campus has been one of Anita's favourite parts of returning to study. "I really love going on campus," she said. "I

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often think of Billy Madison going back to school as a mature age student."

Anita quickly discovered she still loved learning just as much as she had when she studied youth work 10 years ago. She enjoyed the opportunity to engage with fellow students and colleagues from diverse backgrounds. She reflected that the mix of experiences amongst her classmates added "different dimensions to group work and discussions in the classroom".

Anita feels strengthened by the extra support available to Indigenous students at Swinburne. She reflected on the benefit of having workplace Support Worker, Aunty Lee Healy, in class adding cultural and individual support to students, which Anita has taken advantage of. Anita shared that when she was "feeling overwhelmed and confused, [Aunty Lee] checked in on me, which was really appreciated."

Anita was impressed by the facilities and support offered to Indigenous students at the Moondani Toombadool Centre.

The Moondani Toombadool Centre offers ongoing cultural and academic support for Indigenous students all the way through their Swinburne journey to ensure a positive, inclusive and successful experience.

Anita makes use of the Moondani Toombadool Centre tutoring service and has developed a great relationship with her tutor, Michelle. "Michelle has been an amazing support," Anita said. "Whether it's after dinner or a mid-morning coffee on a weekend. She guides me through my thought process to expand what I have started, without giving me the answers. This is extremely useful. We have a great rapport."

Anita appreciated the cultural spaces and places on campus, such as the Indigenous Student Lounge and the Indigenous Learning Circles, outdoor teaching and learning spaces that celebrate and inspire connection to Country and cultural exchange.

Like many of her classmates, Anita has to navigate balancing her study with her work and family commitments. "All of my class is working in the community service sector full time. A lot of us have kids and family," Anita said. She emphasised that it is important to "utilise the services and support offered, even just for a unit or two. This could be the difference between deferring or withdrawing and pushing through the tough units."

One of the game changers for Anita has

been the additional support with accommodation when she needs to attend class on campus. "VACCA support me and a few of the other students on the night before [class]. So I can walk to university in five minutes and leave my car at the accommodation. [The Moondani Toombadool Centre] provided me with an option to stay at accommodation the night after class so I can do work and look over what we learned that day. I have a husband who is visually impaired, who gets a support worker in on Wednesday nights to help with family chores. So this is a comfort for me."

Looking ahead, Anita sees herself continuing her role as a Community Connector for Family Services clients. She is excited to incorporate the knowledge and skills she has gained from her study into her role to further support her community.

For prospective students eyeing Swinburne, Anita encourages them to embrace the support systems in place. Whether it's seeking help from tutors, communicating with teachers about challenges, or tapping into the wealth of resources available, she emphasises, "they want you to pass. You have support all around you and communication is the key if you are struggling for whatever the reason."

If you'd like to have a yarn with the Moondani Toombadool Centre about your study options and what support we can offer you, please reach out at indigenoustudents@swin.edu.au.